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Reaction to punishment in extraverts and psychopaths: Implications for the impulsive behavior of disinhibited individuals

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Abstract

To explore the factors mediating impulsivity in the syndromes of disinhibition, we investigated the ability of extraverts and psychopaths to use signals for punishment to withhold maladaptive approach behavior under various incentive conditions. The results provide evidence that (a) in comparison to controls, extraverts and psychopaths fail to use cues for punishment to inhibit incorrect approach responses; (b) the deficient response inhibition of disinhibited subjects is specific to approach-avoidance situations; (c) under conditions involving monetary rewards and punishments, disinhibited subjects are less likely to slow down, and may even respond more quickly, following punishment; and (d) the tendency to speed up rather than slow down following punishment is associated with failure to learn from punishment. The results suggest that once focused

associated with failure to learn from punishment. The results suggest that once focused on obtaining reward, extraverts and psychopaths display an active (disinhibited) as opposed to a passive (reflective) reaction to punishment and frustrative nonreward. This reaction to punishment appears to interfere with learning cues for punishment and may underlie the poor passive avoidance learning and impulsive behavior that characterize the syndromes of disinhibition.



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