Risky business: gendered differences in the reward responsivity and inhibition subscales of the BIS/BAS predict money earned on the BART.

Kelsey L. Wolf and Sara M. Levens, PhD
Department of Psychology, University of North Carolina at Charlotte

Abstract

Risky behavior can result in either beneficial or detrimental outcomes. While most research focuses on the negative consequences that can result from risk-taking, risk-taking is equally important for achieving positive outcomes, such as starting a business and seeking promotion. Because risk taking is a critical component of both negative and positive outcomes, it is important to examine the underlying processes that may lead to increased risk-taking behavior and how they may differ as a function of gender. Past research shows that men engage in risk behavior more often than women (Byrnes, Miller, & Schafer, 1999), however, women were shown to be more responsive to reward (Carver & White, 1994). The goal of the present study is to analyze how gender interacts with reward responsiveness and inhibitory control to predict risk behavior and money earned on the Balloon Analogue Risk Task (BART). One hundred and seventy-eight participants completed the Balloon Analogue Risk Task, a computerized measure assessing risk behavior, and the Behavioral Inhibition and Activation System Scales questionnaire. Results revealed that lower reward responsiveness and greater inhibitory control predicted greater BART earnings in males, whereas in females, greater reward responsiveness, greater drive, and lower inhibitory control predicted greater BART earnings. Findings from this study have implications for understanding gender differences in achievement in the workplace and academic environment.