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The associations among the Big Five, Behavioural Inhibition and Behavioural Approach systems and child and adolescent adjustment in Russia

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Abstract

The associations among the Big Five, Behavioural Inhibition (BIS), Behavioural Approach (BAS) systems and adjustment measured by academic achievement and the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire were examined with parent-reports of 944 Russian 3–18 year old children and self-reports of 1013 adolescents. Personality was measured by the Inventory of Child Individual Differences (ICID), which assessed dimensions of the Five Factor Model; in addition, adolescents completed a short form of the Gray–Wilson Personality Questionnaire which assessed dimensions of BIS and BAS. BAS was negatively related to Agreeableness and Conscientiousness, and BIS was positively associated with Neuroticism and negatively related to Extraversion. Both BIS and BAS were associated with Negative Emotionality. Overall, all personality measures accounted for 11–25% of the variance in self reported adjustment measures, explaining more than 20% of emotional and behavioural problems. The predictive power of child's personality for parent reported adjustment measures was higher, explaining 28% of academic achievement and 32% of total psychological problems. The results are discussed in light of the possible role of BIS and BAS in shaping child personality and adjustment.

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1. Introduction

The link between biologically based individual characteristics and child adjustment was outlined by Thomas and Chess (1981). Since then, many attempts were made to check this assumption (e.g., Strelau, 1998; Windle, 1999). Most of the research was carried out in the area of temperament, although one might rightfully argue that temperament constructs and biological-based personality dimensions belong to the same domain (Strelau, 1998). Digman and Shmelyov (1996) explored the relations between temperament and personality dimensions in children. They found that the temperament measures fell within the scope of the Big Five and concluded that temperament is not only a major component of personality but may be its foundation. The analysis of different temperament measures provided empirical verification for the two factor psychophysiological model, Behavioural Activation (or Impulsivity) and Inhibition being most fundamental for the development of personality (Martin, Halverson, Havill, & Lu, 2003).

In Gray's (1973) personality theory Behavioural Inhibition (BIS) and Behavioural Activation or Approach (BAS) were posited as distinct neuropsychological systems sensitive to reward and punishment that control emotion, learning and motivation and underlie personality differences. The latest development of Gray's Reinforcement Sensitivity Theory (RST) viewed BIS and BAS as joint subsystems sensitive to reward and conflict between the approach and avoidance (Corr, 2002; Smillie, Pickering, & Jackson, 2006). In children, the influential work of Kagan and colleagues with the Behavioural Inhibition construct has examined the biological basis of temperament (e.g. Kagan, Reznick, Snidman, Gibbons, & Johnson, 1988).

Several different BIS and BAS measures have been proposed to date. Kagan and associates used extensive laboratory procedures to assess Behavioural Inhibition in children (Kagan et al., 1988). Several self-report scales have been put forward to measure traits that directly correspond to Gray's BIS and BAS systems (Carver & White, 1994; MacAndrew & Steele, 1991; Wilson, Barrett, & Gray, 1989) and a number of parent-reported measures have been developed (Bishop, Spence, & McDonald, 2003; Blair, 2003; Muris, Meesters, & Spinder, 2003). Colder and O'Connor (2004) used both laboratory and questionnaire assessment. In addition, some temperament and personality scales are used as proxies for impulsiveness and inhibition (or anxiety) (Jackson, 2002; Martin & Bridger, 1999).

In Gray's theory BIS and BAS were postulated to underlie the personality dimensions of anxiety and impulsiveness, thus clearly indicating the nature of the related adjustment problems. Indeed, the research has shown that BIS is a predictor of emotional problems while BAS (or Impulsivity) predicts behavioural problems in childhood (Biederman et al., 2001; Colder & O'Connor, 2004; Muris et al., 2003; Slobodskaya, Knyazev, Safronova, & Wilson, 2003).

The other line of research linked child adjustment with individual differences in the personality domain (Hagekull & Bohlin, 1998; Lamb, Chuang, Wessels, Broberg, & Hwang, 2002; Robins, John, & Caspi, 1994). The work with parental and teacher descriptions of children during the last decade demonstrated the robustness of the Five Factor Model (FFM) of personality development (Caspi, Roberts, & Shiner, 2005; Halverson et al., 2003; Kohnstamm, Halverson, Mervielde, & Havill, 1998). The Big Five framework for childhood personality has been validated using different instruments (e.g., Digman & Shmelyov, 1996; Lamb et al., 2002) and behavioural observations (Markey, Markey, & Tinsley, 2004).

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