



Test of sensation seeking in a Chinese sample

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Abstract

Zuckerman's sensation seeking scales (Form V, 40 items) which were slightly modified in a French study with high loading items [Carton, S., Jouvent, R., & Widlocher, D. (1992). Cross-cultural validity of the sensation seeking scale: development of a French abbreviated form. *European Psychiatry*, 7, 225–234] were tried in a Chinese speaking area. Three hundred and twenty-two healthy subjects (204 women and 118 men) with a wide range of occupations attended this study and were divided into five age ranges. The principal component analysis detected 14 factors (components) with eigenvalues larger than one, the first 4 of which accounted for 32.1% of the variance. From the fifth factor on, none accounted for more than 3.5% of the variance. Therefore, we chose the four-factor solution analysis. Most items loaded well on target factors except one on Thrill and Adventure Seeking and another on Experience Seeking. Total and subscale scores were lower than those reported in Western countries. Thrill and Adventure seeking declined with age. Men scored significantly higher in Disinhibition and Thrill and Adventure Seeking subscales in any age ranges. Higher Disinhibition seekers were between 30–39 years of age in men, but similarly distributed between 15–49 years of age in women. There were few gender differences in Experience Seeking and Boredom Susceptibility. This study demonstrates the validity of the sensation seeking scales in the Chinese culture, and confirms that gender is affected mainly on the Disinhibition and Thrill and Adventure Seeking subscales. © 1999 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Zuckerman's sensation seeking scales; Principal component analysis; Item loading; Age effect; Gender effect; Chinese culture

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1. Introduction

Sensation seeking personality is characterized by the need for varied, novel, complex, and intense sensations and experiences, and the willingness to take physical, social, legal and financial risks for the sake of such experiences (Zuckerman, 1994). The experience is needed for subjects to reach their optimal level of stimulation required to maintain the optimal level of arousal. Based on this idea, the sensation seeking scales (SSS) were developed (Zuckerman, Kolin, Price & Zoob 1964). The SSS form V has the following subscales: (1) Thrill and Adventure Seeking (TAS), which expresses a desire to engage in sports or other physical activities involving speed or danger; (2) Experience Seeking (ES), represents the seeking of experience through the mind and senses, travel, and a nonconformist life-style; (3) Disinhibition (DIS) represents the desire for social and sexual disinhibition as expressed in social drinking, partying, and variety in sexual partners; and (4) Boredom Susceptibility (BS), represents an aversion to repetition, routine, and restlessness when things are not changing (Zuckerman, 1994).

On the other hand, the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1975) measures traits like Extraversion–Introversion (E), Neuroticism (N) and Psychoticism (P). Extraversion–Introversion also indicates attempts to maintain an optimal level of arousal. Nevertheless, sensation seeking has low to moderate correlations (0.3–0.4) with Extraversion–Introversion or Psychoticism (Eysenck & Zuckerman, 1978), it might lie between the two dimensions (perhaps closer to Psychoticism), and represent a different trait (reviewed in Zuckerman, 1984a).

Biometrics analysis in twins has shown that sensation seeking traits, especially ES and TAS have a relatively high heritability (Jinks & Fulker, 1970; Buchsbaum, 1974; Fulker, Eysenck & Zuckerman, 1980; Tellegen et al., 1988; Hur & Bouchard, 1997). Other biological correlates of SSS have shown that higher sensation seekers have stronger orienting reflexes, weaker defense reflexes and lower levels of monoamine oxidase and endorphin activities in the cerebrospinal fluid (reviewed in Zuckerman, 1984a). Moreover, the intensity dependence of component amplitude in visual or auditory evoked potentials, is positively correlated with the sensation seeking scales (reviewed in Carrillo-de-la-Pena, 1992). However, there are age declines in sensation seeking, especially in the TAS subscale (Zuckerman, Eysenck & Eysenck, 1978; Zuckerman & Neeb, 1980) and also in Venturesomeness, a scale similar to TAS (Eysenck, Pearson, Easting & Allsopp, 1985). In addition, sex differences have been found in sensation seeking, particularly DIS and TAS, which have been confirmed by several laboratories worldwide (Zuckerman et al., 1978; Zuckerman & Neeb, 1980; Feij, van Zuilen & Gazendam, 1982; Perez & Torrubia, 1986; Eysenck & Haapasalo, 1989; Bjork-Akesson, 1990; Carton et al., 1992; Toriki, 1993).

Sensation seeking has been confirmed in some psychopathic patients (Zuckerman & Neeb, 1979), alcoholics and drug abusers (Kohn & Coulas, 1985; Earleywine & Finn, 1991; Cernovsky, O'Reilly & Pennington, 1997). The SSS is positively correlated with the Mania scale in the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (Blackburn, 1969; Thorne, 1971; Magaro & Smith, 1981; Pederson & Magaro, 1982). That manic depressive subjects scored higher on the SSS might suggest that the behavior of manics represents a kind of uncontrolled sensation seeking (Zuckerman, Buchsbaum & Murphy, 1980).

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