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# Hedonic deficit in anhedonia: support for the role of approach motivation

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## Abstract

Anhedonia is defined as the diminished capacity to experience pleasure. However, previous research comparing the response of high and low scorers on the Scale for Physical Anhedonia (Chapman, L. J., Chapman, J.P., & Raulin, M.L. (1976). Scales for physical and social anhedonia. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 85 (4), 374–382) to positive emotion-eliciting stimuli has not produced consistent support for hedonic deficit in anhedonia. Basing hypotheses on a neurobehavioral model of positive affect, the present study examined both hedonic experience and the proposed motivational substrates of hedonic experience in anhedonia. Specifically, to examine the linkage between anhedonia, approach motivation, and positive affect, 339 participants completed measures designed to assess these constructs. A subset of these participants, who were either high or low scorers on the Scale for Physical Anhedonia, also rated their affective response to positive, negative, and neutral sensory stimuli. Although anhedonia was associated with diminished general positive affect, diminished intensity of emotional experience, and diminished self-report of approach motivation, it was unrelated to participants' self-report of emotional experience to sensory stimuli. However, a measure of approach motivation was significantly related to self-report of positive emotional experience to sensory cues and stimuli, suggesting that approach motivation may be a better index of hedonic deficit than a commonly used anhedonia measure. © 2000 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

*Keywords:* Anhedonia; Pleasure; Appetitive; Consummatory; Motivation; Emotion

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## 1. Introduction

Hedonic capacity, or the ability to experience pleasure, is considered a personality characteristic which is normally distributed in the nonclinical population (Meehl, 1975; Myerson, 1923), with anhedonia falling at the lower extreme of this continuum. Anhedonia is a prominent feature of psychiatric disorders such as depression and schizophrenia (Andreasen, 1982; Bleuler, 1950; Kraepelin, 1971/1919; Myerson, 1923) and has been proposed as a risk factor for psychosis in the nondisordered population (Chapman, Edell & Chapman, 1980; Meehl, 1962, 1974, 1975; Rado, Buchenholz, Dunton, Karlen & Senescu, 1956), although there has not been strong empirical support for the link between anhedonia and the development of psychosis (Chapman, Chapman, Kwapil, Eckblad & Zinser, 1994). A number of previous empirical studies have found that high and low scorers on a commonly used measure of anhedonia, the Scale for Physical Anhedonia (SPA; Chapman, Chapman & Raulin, 1976), differ in their reported experience of positive emotion during both emotion-eliciting slides (Ferguson & Katkin, 1996; Putnam & Neale, 1996) and imagery of positive emotional scripts (Fiorito & Simons, 1994). Additional studies have indicated that anhedonic participants manifest impaired processing of positive stimuli, as reflected either by abnormal affective startle eyeblink modulation (Allen, Trinder, Rae & Brennan, 1995; Roedema & Simons, 1994) or by attenuated electrocortical activity in anticipation of a positive stimulus (Pierson, Ragot, Ripoche & Lesevre, 1987; Simons, MacMillan & Ireland, 1982). However, other studies have found no difference between anhedonic and control groups in reported experience of positive emotion (Allen, et al., 1995; Berenbaum, Snowwhite & Oltmanns, 1987) or in affective startle eyeblink modulation in response to positive emotion-eliciting stimuli (Putnam, 1996, personal communication; Roedema & Simons, 1994; Simons, Fitzgibbons & Fiorito, 1993, in: Roedema & Simons, 1994).

These apparently inconsistent findings may be integrated by considering hedonic experience as a function of the engagement of an approach motivational system. Several neurobehavioral models of hedonic experience, explicating the relation between reward and approach motivation, have been proposed to date (e.g. Depue & Iacono, 1989; Gray, 1987; Klein, 1984). Both Gray (1987), Corr, Pickering and Gray (1995) and Depue and Iacono (1989) have proposed that the expectation of reward engenders approach motivation and facilitates goal-directed behavior towards a rewarding stimulus. According to these models, ensuing goal-directed behavior results in engagement with the primary rewarding stimulus (via eating, drinking, sexual, social, or achievement-related behaviors). The activation of the approach motivational system is thought to be linked to individual sensitivity to cues of forthcoming reward. Notably, both Gray and Depue have related approach motivation to dimensions of personality. Gray (1987) has proposed that differences in activation of the behavioral approach system (BAS) may underlie individual differences on personality traits such as impulsivity, while Depue (Depue et al., 1994) has postulated a link between sensitivity to signals of incentive reward and trait positive emotionality.

A third model (Klein, 1984), similar to those of Depue and Iacono (1989) and Gray (1987) holds that the expectation of reward, elicited by a cue or signal of forthcoming reward, itself produces a positive feeling state, or *appetitive* pleasure. This positive emotional feeling state engenders the motivation to approach and pursue the rewarding stimulus. According to Klein, subsequent engagement with the stimulus is thought to produce a second, drive reducing

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