



What can we learn from the pervasive linkage of impulsivity and addictive behavior?

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A commentary on

Recreational drug use and impulsivity in a population of Canadian undergraduate drinkers

by Balodis et al., *Front. Psychiatry* 1:129 doi: 10.3389/fpsy.2010.00129.

Trait impulsivity is consistently linked with pathological aspects of substance use. This study extends this linkage to an undergraduate population, in which scores on the Barratt Impulsivity scale were found to predict frequent binge drinking and poly-substance use. As the authors note, the acute and chronic effects of alcohol and drugs can promote impulsive behavior by

impairing cortical executive functions. In this way, a preexisting tendency to impulsive behavior when coupled with exposure to psychoactive drugs could lead to a vicious cycle of frequent heavy use and a corresponding deterioration in executive functions. The authors observe that their cross-sectional data provide a basis to test this hypothesis in a longitudinal design. The data also raise a number of additional questions. First, what do the findings suggest about the role of screening and especially targeted *prevention* strategies in post-secondary institutions? More generally, what can we infer from the pervasive linkage of impulsivity and addictive behavior: Could trait impulsivity represent

a “pro-dromal” state that mimics the deficits of non-impulsive individuals who have already transitioned to pathological levels of substance use? That is, in a functional sense, are impulsive individuals quasi-addicted from the outset?

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