Substance abuse among adolescents is a serious problem associated with several negative developmental outcomes, including criminal behavior, academic and vocational failure, and severe relationship problems (Moffit, Caspi, Harrington, & Mine, 2002). While there is some evidence that several treatments are effective in reducing the negative impact of substance abuse, at least in the short run, there is also evidence that relapse among adolescent treatment completers is common (ranging from 50-70 percent). The rate of relapse following substance abuse treatment may be partly related to the fact that many treatment programs take a "one-size-fits-all" approach, overlooking individual differences among adolescent substance users. Understanding the diverse experiences of substance abusing adolescents is an important step toward developing a more individualized approach to treatment (Ruden & Byalick, 1997).

This study was designed to examine the relationship between personality traits and the experiences of craving for drugs among adolescents in treatment for substance abuse. The hypotheses guiding this study were that (a) adolescents who were more impulsive and sensation seeking would report more cravings for drugs associated with pleasure seeking motivations and (b) adolescents who were more anxious/neurotic would report more cravings associated with the avoidance of emotional distress and anxiety. Results indicated that adolescents who had high sensation seeking and anxious neuroticism scores on the personality measure reported strong drug cravings associated with the wish to avoid emotional distress. This suggests some common ground in the craving experiences of adolescents with different personality profiles. However, results also indicated that adolescents who were more impulsive/sensation seeking were more likely to report cravings associated with pleasure seeking. This suggests there may be some important individual differences in how (and perhaps why) adolescents use drugs. Furthermore, these findings suggest that it may make sense to tailor treatment models to address these personality based differences. In the next phase of our research on individual differences in substance use, we plan to examine personality based differences in how adolescents cope with and manage their drug cravings.

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[84]