



The surprising relationship between indecisiveness and impulsivity



Emily E. Barkley-Levenson^{a,b}, Craig R. Fox^{a,c}

^a Department of Psychology, University of California Los Angeles, 1285 Franz Hall, Box 951563, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1563, USA

^b Department of Psychology, Hofstra University, 135, Hempstead, NY, 11549-1350, USA

^c Anderson School of Management, University of California Los Angeles, Box 951481, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1481, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 22 September 2013

Received in revised form 12 September 2015

Accepted 10 October 2015

Available online 18 October 2015

Keywords:

Indecisiveness

Impulsivity

Maximizing

Decision-making

ABSTRACT

We explore the relationship between indecisiveness and impulsivity using a variety of individual difference measures for each construct. We observe a positive, rather than negative, correlation between traditional measures of indecisiveness and impulsivity. Further analysis demonstrates that standard measures of indecisiveness are positively correlated specifically with dysfunctional impulsivity, and negatively correlated with functional impulsivity. Moreover, indecisiveness is positively and strongly associated specifically with impulsive urgency and lack of perseverance, but not with impulsive sensation-seeking or a lack of premeditation. Finally, we find that particular forms of indecisiveness, including maximizing due to 'high standards' and various 'perfectionistic' behaviors, do correlate negatively with standard measures of impulsivity. These findings provide insight into the multi-dimensional nature of both indecisiveness and impulsivity, and suggest divergent underlying mechanisms producing different forms of indecisive and impulsive behavior.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

The capacity to make decisions quickly, confidently, and competently is important for personal and professional well-being. However, empirical research investigating (in)decisiveness and its relationship with other traits is relatively sparse. Indecisiveness has been defined as habitual difficulty making decisions across domains (Germeijs, Verschuere, & Soenens, 2006) and has been associated with hesitating to act (Frost & Shows, 1993). For the purposes of this paper, we focus on observable behaviors and define indecisiveness as frequent inability to make decisions confidently, quickly, and/or efficiently.

Indecisiveness and decisiveness have typically been measured through unidimensional self-report scales focusing on general decision-making tendencies (Frost & Shows, 1993; Germeijs & De Boeck, 2002; Webster & Kruglanski, 1994) or on a specific decision, such as a particular career choice (Cooper, Fuqua, & Hartman, 1984; Germeijs & De Boeck, 2002; Jones, 1989). Theoretical discussions suggest that indecisiveness and decisiveness are opposing traits (Van Matre & Cooper, 1984), rather than independent ones, and factor analyses on existing indecisiveness scales have identified factors containing both reverse-scored and regular items (e.g. Rassin, Muris, Franken, Smit, & Wong, 2007; Spunt, Rassin, & Epstein, 2009), suggesting that decisiveness and indecisiveness scales measure the same trait. Decision-making behaviors that prolong the decision process, such as buck-passing, procrastination and maximizing, have also been measured by self-report

(Mann, Burnett, Radford, & Ford, 1997; Schwartz et al., 2002), and are likely related to trait indecisiveness.

Theoretical explorations of indecisiveness remain limited. Trait indecisiveness has been related to high anxiety, low self-confidence and neuroticism (Germeijs & Verschuere, 2011; Germeijs et al., 2006). Additionally, Rassin, Muris, Booster, and Kolsloot (2008) identify several behavioral components of indecisiveness that are supported by experimental research. They cite evidence that indecisive individuals take longer to make decisions in a consumer choice task (Frost & Shows, 1993), and seek out more information before making a choice (Rassin et al., 2007) or focus their information search narrowly on the ultimately chosen option rather than on all possible options (Ferrari & Dovidio, 2001; Rassin et al., 2008). In addition, participants high in indecisiveness performed more poorly on a Stroop task (involving response competition) when feedback is absent, suggesting heightened sensitivity to uncertainty (Ferrari & Pychyl, 2007) and were more likely to interpret ambiguous stimuli as negative (Rassin & Muris, 2005), consistent with a relationship between indecisiveness and neuroticism.

In order to better understand what produces observable indecisive behavior in an individual, we can explore relationships between indecisiveness and other personality measures related to decision-making. For example, while impulsivity is defined in a variety of ways, both theoretical reviews and self-report measures of impulsivity frequently emphasize initiating actions quickly, on the spur of the moment and without forethought, as key aspects of the trait (e.g., Parker & Bagby, 1997; Patton, Stanford, & Barratt, 1995; Reynolds, Ortengren, Richards, & de Wit, 2006; Whiteside & Lynam, 2001). This starkly contrasts with the difficulty initiating action that characterizes many manifestations of indecisiveness. Similarly, high impulsivity (measured by self-

E-mail addresses: Emily.BarkleyLevenson@hofstra.edu (E.E. Barkley-Levenson), cfox@anderson.ucla.edu (C.R. Fox).

report) has been associated with impulsive decision-making behavior as measured by faster reaction times (and more errors) during cognitive tasks (Dickman, 1990; Edman, Schalling, & Levander, 1983; Gerbing, Ahadi, & Patton, 1987). This likewise contrasts with the association of high indecisiveness with longer reaction times during decision-making tasks (Frost & Shows, 1993). Based on this research, it follows that indecisiveness and impulsivity might represent opposite poles of a unidimensional decision-making continuum, with decisiveness located between these sub-optimal extremes. Self-regulation or cognitive control provides a potential mechanism for producing these opposing traits: excessive cognitive control could produce indecisiveness, while insufficient cognitive control produces impulsivity.

An alternative possible relationship between indecisiveness and impulsivity is suggested by research in clinical psychology. Notably, both indecisiveness and impulsivity have been linked to obsessive-compulsive disorder (Frost & Shows, 1993; Lochner & Stein, 2006), in which compulsive behaviors develop as an attempt to ameliorate negative emotions arising from obsessive thoughts. In a similar vein, indecisive and impulsive behaviors may arise as alternative attempts to avoid feelings of anxiety or regret that may arise for some people in the process of engaging with a decision. This might suggest a positive relationship between the constructs.

To our knowledge, only two prior studies provide data concerning the association between impulsivity and indecisiveness (Rassin et al., 2007; Webster & Kruglanski, 1994). Rassin et al. (2007) examined a college-aged population, employing an indecisiveness measure that had been validated among adults (Frost & Shows, 1993) and an adolescent measure of decision impulsivity (ADMQ; Mann, Harmoni, & Power, 1989), yielding a negative but not significant correlation between impulsivity and indecisiveness. However, we note that adolescent and adult decision-making differs in many cognitive and behavioral respects (e.g., Reyna & Farley, 2006) and metrics designed for adolescents may not be comparable to metrics designed for adult populations. Webster and Kruglanski (1994) used the control (versus impulsiveness) subscale of the Multidimensional Personality Questionnaire (Tellegen, 1982) and the decisiveness subscale of the Need For Closure scale that they were in the process of validating, yielding a positive but not significant correlation between impulsivity and indecisiveness. However, we note that this study relied on a reverse coding of a measure of behavioral restraint as a proxy for impulsivity, which may have limited their ability to detect a relationship between these constructs.

In light of the sparse data and contradictory results from previous literature relating impulsivity and indecisiveness, and in light of the idiosyncratic measures used in these studies, the question appears to remain open. Thus, our first study sought to simply determine whether there is evidence for a systematic relationship between impulsivity and indecisiveness, using standard measures of these constructs.

2. Study 1

In our first study we sought to determine whether indecisiveness and impulsivity would be negatively correlated (consistent with the notion that the two traits represent opposite and maladaptive extremes of decision-making underpinned by differences in cognitive control), positively correlated (consistent with the notion that both are consequences of difficulty engaging with or regulating the affective response to decisions), or not significantly correlated (consistent with the null results discussed in Section 1).

2.1. Method

2.1.1. Participants

We recruited 119 undergraduate participants (85 female, mean age = 21.3, $SD = 2.97$) through a university subject pool to complete an online survey that included the present study and tasks used for validating the Decision Behavior Inventory that will be reported elsewhere.

2.1.2. Measures

2.1.2.1. Indecisiveness scale. Participants completed the IS (Frost & Shows, 1993), a 15-item scale that reliably measures general indecisiveness. Sample items are evaluated on a five-point scale and include “I often worry about making the wrong choice” and “I find it easy to make decisions” (reverse-scored).

2.1.2.2. Urgent impulsivity. Participants completed the 12-item Urgency dimension of the UPPS Impulsive Behaviors Scale (Whiteside, Lynam, Miller, & Reynolds, 2005). This scale characterizes “the tendency to experience strong impulses, frequently under conditions of negative affect” (Whiteside & Lynam, 2001). For example, the urgency subscale contains such items as “sometimes I do things on impulse that I later regret,” evaluated on a five-point scale.

2.1.3. Procedure

Participants completed an online informed consent document, and those who elected to participate completed measures in an individually randomized order. All questions within each measure were randomized for each participant. Following completion of the survey, all participants received \$15 credited to their university ID cards.

2.2. Results

Mean values were computed for indecisiveness and impulsivity for each participant (indecisiveness $M = 2.99$, $SD = .51$; impulsivity $M = 2.75$, $SD = .68$) following the scoring laid out by the authors of each scale (Frost & Shows, 1993; Whiteside et al., 2005). No significant correlations were observed with age ($r = .008$, $p = .934$ for indecisiveness, $r = -.103$, $p = .266$ for impulsivity) and no sex differences were observed ($t(116) = -1.03$, $p = .303$ for indecisiveness; $t(116) = -.032$, $p = .974$ for impulsivity). A parametric (Pearson) correlation revealed that indecisiveness and impulsivity were positively correlated with one another, $r = .312$, $p = .001$. Both scales exhibited good reliability (Chronbach's $\alpha = .85$ for 12 Urgent Impulsivity items, $\alpha = .71$ for 15 Indecisiveness items).

2.3. Discussion

We observed an initially counterintuitive finding: indecisiveness and at least one form of impulsivity are positively related to one another, and do not appear to be opposing tendencies. It is worth noting that items on the urgency subscale of impulsivity emphasize impulsive behaviors that appear as maladaptive affective responses (e.g., “When I feel bad I will often do things I later regret in order to make myself feel better now”), much like several items on the Indecisiveness Scale (e.g., “I become anxious when making a decision”). This suggests the possibility that both impulsivity and indecisiveness may reflect emotionally reactive decision behaviors. Indeed, research suggests that neuroticism exhibits the strongest correlation among the Big Five traits with a measure of indecisiveness (Germeijs & Verschuere, 2011). To better understand these findings, we next investigated the relationship between indecisiveness and impulsivity using a greater variety of measures.

3. Study 2

The goal of Study 2 was to replicate the finding of Study 1 that impulsivity and indecisiveness are positively related, and extend these findings by differentiating which aspects of each construct are driving this effect. Because impulsivity is a complex construct and a variety of scales have been developed to measure its various facets, we were interested in determining for which measures of impulsivity the positive relationship with indecisiveness would hold. In addition, we wanted to explore the relationship between impulsivity and alternative measures of

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/889820>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/889820>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)