Personality Correlates of Pain and Nociceptive Sensitivity: The Influence of Traditionalism

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Introduction
Traditionalism is a personality trait associated with conformity, conventionality, and authoritarian beliefs and attitudes. People who score high in Traditionalism also tend to endorse religion, oppose permissive attitudes, and condemn selfishness. The present study assessed the influence of Traditionalism on electrodermal pain threshold, pain tolerance, nociceptive flexion reflex (NFR) threshold, and subjective pain report.

Objective
- To determine if Traditionalism relates to measures of pain and nociceptive sensitivity

Participants
- 68 Healthy Volunteers
- Characteristics: 27 Men, 41 Women; White non-Hispanic (78%), single (73%), and employed (79%); average age = 28.14 yrs

Procedure
- Consent + Health Screening + Electrode application
- Multidimensional Personality Questionnaire administered
- 5 min rest: Heart Rate Variability Recording
- NFR recording electrodes - left biceps femoris muscle
- Stimulating electrodes - left sural nerve

Results: Correlational Analyses of Variables with Traditionalism
- NFR threshold correlated with pain threshold
- NFR threshold and pain tolerance
- NFR defined as biceps femoris EMG activity in the 90-150 ms post-stimulus interval (residuals baseline activity by 1.4 SD)

Questions
- Traditionalism and Social Desirability were assessed using the Multidimensional Personality Questionnaire Brief Form (Patrick, Curtin, & Tellegen, 2002).
- Participants rated the overall pain they felt during sensitivity testing
- Used to obtain MPQ-Sensory and MPQ-Affective pain ratings

Conclusions
- Results suggest Traditionalism was negatively correlated with pain threshold and tolerance, but unrelated to NFR threshold or subjective pain report (MPQ ratings, pain ratings).
- This suggests that persons who tend to be conventional, conforming, and authoritarian have a higher sensitivity to pain, an effect that is not likely due to descending controls because correlations with the NFR were non-significant.