Abstract

A family of theories has become popular in psychology that assumes two simultaneous modes of processing experience, one older, more basic and reactive, the other newer, more deliberative, and planful. This presentation will relate those ideas to the functioning of the serotonergic system. The serotonin system has been studied for decades. Variation in serotonergic function relates to psychological and behavioral variability of several sorts, including impulsive aggression, borderline personality disorder, and depression. Dual-process models suggest a way to conceptualize these effects of serotonergic function: Specifically, serotonergic function may influence the balance of influence between the lower-order system that responds quickly to cues of the moment and the higher-order system that responds reflectively and planfully. This hypothesis has a number of implications, both for normal variation in personality and for views of disorder. An underlying theme is that psychological models can provide important insights with respect to what appears at first to be purely biological information.