Reinforcement sensitivity phenotypes as determinants of various motivational styles of alcohol drinking: craving for reward and searching for relief

Many people drink alcohol, but their reasons for doing so can vary greatly. Some drink for pleasure—to enjoy the rewarding feelings it brings—while others drink to cope with stress or negative emotions, using alcohol as a form of self-medication. These two groups, often called '*reward drinkers*' and '*relief drinkers*', don't just differ in their motivations but also in their levels of stress, anxiety, and how well they respond to certain drug treatments. For example, people who drink for pleasure tend to be less stressed or anxious and respond well to a medication called *naltrexone*, which works on the brain's reward system to reduce the positive effects of alcohol. On the other hand, those who drink to relieve stress or negative emotions often feel more anxious and achieve better results with acamprosate, a medication that helps balance the brain's stress-related systems. Despite these insights, there is still much we don't understand about why people fall into one group or the other and how these differences develop. This project aims to dig deeper into this question by studying not only humans but also animal models to uncover patterns and mechanisms behind different drinking behaviors. By using advanced methods such as online testing, monitoring emotional and physical responses, and running long-term behavioral experiments, we hope to better understand these drinking styles.

The long-term, indirect goal of our project is to use this knowledge to develop more personalized and effective treatments for people struggling with Alcohol Use Disorder.