

## Are Individuals with Certain Personality Types At Risk for Negative Health Consequences?: The Self-Focused Personality

The present study examined the influence of self-focused personality on health and health behaviors. We found that individuals reporting higher levels of self-focus also reported more physical and psychological health problems, disordered eating patterns, obsessive exercise, body image dissatisfaction, perfectionism, low self-esteem, and utilized less effective coping tactics.

In today's self-centered society, many individuals have become consumed with perfecting their self-image. However, focusing on the self can serve as a very adaptive behavior, as it directs our attention (Bargh, 1982; Broadbent, 1977), enhances memory performance (Rogers, Kuiper, & Kirker, 1977) and aids in the recognition and cessation of unproductive behavior patterns (Cantor & Kihlstrom, 1987). Unfortunately, chronic self-focused attention, as we see increasingly in society today, can also be negative (Pyszczynski, Holt & Greenberg, 1987). It can lead to perfectionism, self-blame, frustration, depression and anxiety (Ingram, 1990), has been linked alcohol abuse (Hershenson, 1965; Hull & Young, 1983), binge eating (Heatherton & Baumeister, 1991; Heatherton, Polivy, Herman & Baumeister, 1993) and has been suggested as a factor in exercise addiction (Baumeister, 1989). The present study investigates the possibility of a self-focused personality type. Individuals who chronically focus on the self to the exclusion of other things are hypothesized to exhibit more negative health behaviors (e.g., drinking, smoking, obsessive exercise, disordered eating patterns), report more physical and psychological health symptoms, and utilize less positive coping tactics (e.g., using

alcohol as a way to cope). Four hundred four individuals (67% female) from a large, state university were recruited to participate in the study. Approximately 90% were Caucasian, with an average age of 22.35 ( $SD = 7.30$ ). Students were asked to report basic demographic information, exercise and nutrition habits, alcohol use, smoking, disordered eating patterns (e.g., anorexia, binge eating), body image dissatisfaction, perfectionism, self-esteem, physical and psychological health problems, and their coping tactics. As hypothesized, individuals reporting higher levels of self-focused personality traits were more likely than those reporting low levels of self-focus to report physical health symptomology,  $r = .19$ ,  $p < .01$ , as well as psychological ailments, such as excessive fatigue,  $r = .36$ ,  $p < .001$ , anger,  $r = .32$ ,  $p < .001$ , anxiety,  $r = .57$ ,  $p < .001$ , and depression,  $r = .48$ ,  $p < .001$ . They were also more likely to report more negative health behaviors such as body image dissatisfaction,  $r = .27$ ,  $p < .001$ , disordered eating habits,  $r = .32$ ,  $p < .001$ , low levels of self-esteem,  $r = -.37$ ,  $p < .001$ , and perfectionism,  $r = .34$ ,  $p < .001$ . However, individuals reporting higher levels of self focused attention were no more likely than those with low levels of self focus to report daily cigarette usage,  $r = .21$ , frequent alcohol consumption,  $r = .07$ , or frequent intoxication,  $r = .01$ . Finally, individuals reporting higher levels of self focus were more likely than individuals reporting lower less to utilize less effective coping tactics, such as denial,  $r = .20$ ,  $p < .001$ , using alcohol to cope,  $r = .14$ ,  $p < .05$ , and giving up,  $r = .33$ ,  $p < .001$ . Although research has examined the influence of certain personality types (e.g., pessimists, Type A) on health and health behaviors, few studies have examined the impact of the self-focused personality on health. Health psychologists, nutritionists, physicians, and psychologists need to be aware of the self-focused personality and the vulnerabilities that appear to go with it when treating their clients. Once more research has been conducted on individuals

with a self-focused personality, perhaps treatment programs could be designed to target these individuals' specific strengths and weaknesses to ensure better health and health behaviors.

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