Active and passive maladaptive behaviour patterns mediate the relationship between contingent self-esteem and health

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Article info
Article history:
Received 29 November 2010
Received in revised form 20 March 2011
Accepted 24 March 2011
Available online 17 April 2011

Keywords:
Contingent self-esteem
Social styles
Differential health

Abstract
People with an impoverished basic self-acceptance are compelled to seek external reassurances of their own value and to cope with the threats and challenges of social life by different compensatory behaviours. The present study examines the links between competence based self-esteem (CBSE) and relation based self-esteem (RBSE) (Johnson & Blom, 2007), active and passive maladaptive socio-behavioural styles and health status. The active style was indicated by hostile perfectionistic strivings whereas the passive style was indicated by avoidance and emotion suppression. In a cross-sectional design 284 Swedish adults completed personality and health questionnaires. The results showed that CBSE is a stronger predictor of poor physical health than RBSE and that the relation is primarily mediated by an active “toxic” style, whereas the role of RBSE for health appears purely indirect, mediated by a passive repressive style. An additional finding was that the two types of contingent SE and socio-behavioural styles were associated with different kinds of health problems.

1. Introduction
It is widely recognised that psychosocial vulnerability to stress arises from thoughts, emotions, and attitudes triggered by psychological needs in a social context (Leary, 1999; Redfield & Stone, 1979; Sheldon, Elliot, Kim, & Kasser, 2001). In this respect, Blatt, Cornell, and Eshkol (1993) proposed that associations between personality factors and physical ill health are mediated by specific motivational and behavioural patterns related to different kinds of perceived social threats, adverse states, and responsiveness (see also Higgins, Vookles, & Tykocinski, 1992; Kemeny, 2009). In these processes involving threat appraisal and congruent response appears self-esteem, indicating perception of one’s own value, to be a critical factor (Crocker & Park, 2004; Leary, 1999). In particular, a dynamic view of self-esteem, where an impoverished basic sense of self-esteem is considered to foster different compensatory self-validation strategies, provides a promising framework for studies of vulnerability and health (Blatt et al., 1993; Deci & Ryan, 1995; Johnson, 2010; Johnson & Blom, 2007; Johnson & Forsman, 1995). Recently, the significance of responses to different social threats for health processes has been recognised (e.g., Kemeny, 2009), however, the interpersonal mechanisms governing these processes have yet to be elucidated. Therefore, the present paper set out to examine links between self-esteem staked on success and competence, self-esteem dependent on reassurances in relationships, different maladaptive socio-behavioural styles, and health status.

1.1. Contingent self-esteem – two differentially vulnerable behaviour patterns
To feel valued and accepted as an individual is a fundamental psychological need (Leary, 1999; Sheldon et al., 2001). Therefore, people holding an impoverished basic sense of self-esteem (Johnson & Forsman, 1995), emanating from insecure attachment patterns in early development, are compelled to seek external reassurances of their own value (Blatt & Zuroff, 1992; Deci & Ryan, 1995; Johnson & Blom, 2007). Two other important social needs in people are to relate to others and to achieve success (Sheldon et al., 2001). Subsequently, it appears that self-validation is predominately sought from relationship or competence issues (Crocker & Park, 2004). Which of these domains is the most salient for an individual depends on early experiences of parental regard and attachment patterns (Blatt & Zuroff, 1992; Deci & Ryan, 1995; Johnson & Blom, 2007). These experiences create internalised working models that are decisive for which kind of vulnerability the individual develops (Blatt et al., 1993; Mikulincer, Gillath, & Shaver, 2002).

On this basis, Johnson and Blom (2007) identified two distinct cognitive motivational structures arising from an impoverished sense of basic self-esteem (Johnson & Forsman, 1995), termed, Relation based self-esteem (RBSE) and Competence based self-esteem (CBSE). For clarity, RBSE and CBSE are not considered 'types
of self-esteem’ but refer to chronic attitudes and behaviours which serve to protect or defend one’s self-value for the moment, but are dysfunctional in the long run (Blatt et al., 1993; Johnson & Blom, 2007).

RBSE-structure develops given experiences of emotional deprivation or rejection by parents in early childhood fostering a motivation to seek emotional affirmation in close relationships to “stay afloat” psychologically (Blatt & Zuroff, 1992). Subsequently, this excessive need of others’ acceptance leads to compliance and suppression of one’s own needs and feelings, as conflicts and rejection are perceived as threatening (Murray, Griffin, Rose, & Bellavia, 2003; Pincus & Wilson, 2001). Consequently, the stressful conditions which trigger RBSE-structure deal with threats in emotional relationships calling for self-protection (Blatt & Zuroff, 1992). People with this kind of conditional stance have in previous research displayed a non-assertive attitude, dependency, and helplessness (Johnson, 2010; Johnson & Blom, 2007; Johnson & Forsman, 1995). CBSE-structure (Johnson & Blom, 2007) develops when the child experiences being loved and accepted conditionally upon parental standards leading to a conviction later in life that successful experiences being loved and accepted conditionally upon parental standards is necessary for self-worth. People with this kind of conditional stance have in previous research displayed a non-assertive attitude, dependency, and helplessness (Johnson, 2010; Johnson & Blom, 2007; Johnson & Forsman, 1995).

Accor ____2____ therapeutic implications of RSBE and active maladaptive style, these factors were expected to show a stronger link to health than RBSE and passive maladaptive style (Blom et al., in press; Johnson, 2010; Smith et al., 2004).

(iii) The two contingent SE structures and social styles are further hypothesised to be related to different physical symptoms. CBSE and active style are thought to be associated with tension/cardiac problems while RBSE and passive style are thought to be related to asthma/allergy type of symptoms (Blatt et al., 1993, 1995; Higgins et al., 1992; Johnson, 2003; Petrie et al., 1998).

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The participants were 296 Swedish adults. Of the original sample, the data from 12 participants were discarded due to their failure to provide complete information. The remaining 284 participants (182 women and 102 men) had a mean age of 29.52 years (SD = 4.61). Of this sample 113 were students from different areas of social sciences at a provincial university and 171 were recruited from the local non-student population via different working places. No monetary incentives or course credits were provided to the participants.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Contingent self-esteem

The competence aspect of contingent self-esteem was measured using the Competence based SE Scale (Johnson & Blom, 2007) consisting of 12 items with a verified theoretical structure reflecting self-worth conditional on competence (e.g., “I feel worthwhile only when I have performed well”) and exaggerated self-criticism coupled with a feeling of insufficiency in one’s own
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