THE TYPE A CORONARY-PRONE BEHAVIOUR PATTERN, SELF-AWARENESS AND STANDARDS FOR PERFORMANCE

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SUMMARY:

The research program reported in this thesis was carried out to investigate the possibility of a relationship between the Type A coronary-prone behaviour pattern and self-awareness. From a review of previous work in this area it appeared that Type A coronary-prone individuals tended to resist self-awareness in demanding situations, whereas this did not appear to be the case for non-coronary-prone (Type B) individuals.

Two surveys which sought to investigate the possibility of a relationship between the dimensions of Type A behaviour and dispositional self-awareness were carried out. Data from these studies indicated that there was a small but consistent positive relationship between these dimensions. These results were taken as evidence that any relationship between these two dimensions may be, in part, situationally determined with Type A individuals actually being more self-aware than their Type B counterparts when unchallenged.

A series of 5 laboratory experiments were then carried out. These experiments employed manipulations designed to enhance the level of self-awareness of Type A and B individuals who were engaged in a challenging cognitive task. Data from the first of these experiments indicated that Type A subjects tended to resist becoming self-aware but only when they believed that their previous performance had been poor. This result was in
line with a hypothesis, developed from a review of the literature concerning self-awareness, that Type A subjects would find awareness of previous poor performance particularly aversive due to their very high performance standards. This first experiment also indicated the possibility that greatly differing performance standards become salient to Type A and B individuals when their level of self-awareness is enhanced.

In the light of the results of the first experiment the emphasis of this research changed, in that subsequent experiments attempted to clarify the nature of the performance standards held by Type A and B individuals in differing social situations. In two of these experiments performance data and subjects' attributions about factors affecting their performance were collected. Data from these experiments supported the notion that Type A and Type B subjects possess differing standards for their performance, both when they are alone and in social situations. These data also indicated, in line with the findings of other researchers, that Type A individuals have high standards for their own performance and are interested in maintaining control.

Evidence was found in the performance data from these experiments to suggest that Type A individuals become more concerned with the accuracy of their performance in social situations than when they are alone. Generally the data from Type B subjects tended to show
that these individuals are less responsive to their social situation than their Type A counterparts. It also appeared likely that Type B individuals hold less well defined standards for their own performance than Type A individuals.

The relevance of these findings, to both research into the modification of Type A behaviour, and to research concerning the nature of Type A and B behaviours is discussed.