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Introduction to the Special Issue on Pathological Worrying

Pathological or chronic worry is known to be a feature associated with most of the anxiety disorders and most specifically with Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) (Brown, Antony & Barlow, 1992), and since the advent of DSM-III, worrying has been the central diagnostic feature of GAD. Pathological worrying in the anxiety disorders is characterized by a number of distinctive features, including perseveration at the worry activity, a sense of lack of control over the worry process, a tendency to catastrophize the worry topic, and concurrent feelings of discomfort and negative mood which in some cases leads to increasing levels of distress as worry progresses.

Research on worry and its pathological counterparts has burgeoned since the early 1990s, and there are now a range of theories that attempt to explain the development of pathological worrying and its defining features (e.g. Wells, 1995, this issue; Davey, 2006; Borkovec, 1994; Sibrava & Borkovec, 2006; Koerner & Dugas, 2006), and a range of therapeutic interventions designed to address the symptoms of pathological worry and its diagnostic counterpart, Generalized Anxiety Disorder (e.g. Wells, 2006, this issue; Borkovec, 2006; Robichaud & Dugas, 2006).

The present Special Issue on pathological worrying adds to this growing body of knowledge by providing an eclectic selection of peer reviewed articles. The special issue begins with two papers on pathological worrying in children and adolescents. **Charlotte Wilson** provides a very thorough review of what is currently known about normal worrying and pathological worrying in children. This is a very under-researched area and the review provides an ideal basis for future research by posing a range of questions for potential researchers. The review considers worrying in children as a form of problem solving which in some cases can become pathological, and looks at the applicability of adult models of worrying to what is currently known about worrying in children and adolescents. **Lucie Turner & Charlotte Wilson** continue this theme by reporting a study designed to investigate whether mood-as-input principles apply to perseverative worrying in young adolescents. This article provides interesting information on the kinds of worrying stop rules used by young adolescents and also describes some of the difficulties inherent in studying this phenomenon experimentally.

The following two articles describe experiments designed to investigate some predictions based on worry as 'intolerance of uncertainty' (Dugas & Robichaud, 2007) and the avoidance theory of worry developed by Tom Borkovec & colleagues (Borkovec, Alcaine & Behar, 2004). The study by **Sonya Deschenes, Michel Dugas, Adam Radomsky & Kristin Buhr** describes an innovative experimental manipulation of intolerance of uncertainty which provides partial support for the view that beliefs about uncertainty may have a causal effect on interpretations of ambiguous situations as well as on ease of access to threat schemata. **Larry Pruitt & Holly Hazlett-Stevens** study reports an attempted manipulation of the future-oriented property of worry, with findings suggesting that worry about everyday concerns may effectively distract some individuals from previously experienced emotionally distressing material.

We have all experienced someone telling us they are "worried sick!", yet another under-researched area is the effect that worrying might have on our physical health. The next two articles provide a review and

theory of how perseverative cognition may affect physical well-being, and an empirical study of the possible relationship between worry and physical health. **Bart Verkuil, Jos Brosschot, Winifred Gebhardt & Julian Thayer** provide a review of the role of perseverative cognition, such as worry and rumination, in reactions to stressful events. This view proposes that worrying about stressful events has a ‘wear and tear’ effect on the human body and can have a significant detrimental effect on somatic health. The study by **Evelyn Behar, Kathryn McHugh & Michael Otto** suggests that worry serves as a proxy risk factor for health status through the influence of trait anxiety and depressive symptoms, and that worry may have an effect on physical health status that is mediated through trait anxiety.

The final two articles cover topics relevant to effective interventions for pathological worrying. **Adrian Wells** provides a timely review of the empirical evidence for his influential metacognitive theory of worry and Generalized Anxiety Disorder, and describes in detail the specific treatment derived from this theory. He also discusses recent studies that provide evidence on the effectiveness of this intervention. Finally, **Catherine Ayers, Andrew Petkus, Lin Liu, Thomas Patterson & Julie Loebach Wetherall** describe some of the factors that can influence the outcome of treatment for Generalized Anxiety Disorder in older adults. Their study indicates that levels of anxiety symptoms, avoidant coping, and negative life events may all negatively affect outcomes of treatment for pathological worrying in this older age group.

Hopefully, this special issue has something for everyone who has either a research or practitioner interest in pathological worrying, and I have no doubt these articles will stimulate further research and theory across a range of psychopathologies that have worry as an important feature. My thanks go to all the authors for their contributions and the enthusiasm they have shown in contributing to this special issue.

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