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Addiction and Personality

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A voluminous literature notwithstanding, there is little convincing empirical research about the correlation between personality traits and addictive behaviors. Substance abuse and dependence (alcoholism, drug addiction) is only one form of recurrent and self-defeating pattern of misconduct. People are addicted to all kinds of things: gambling, shopping, the Internet, reckless and life-endangering pursuits. Adrenaline junkies abound. The connection between chronic anxiety, pathological narcissism, depression, obsessive-compulsive traits and alcoholism and drug abuse is well established and common in clinical practice. But not all narcissists, compulsives, depressives, and anxious people turn to the bottle or the needle. Frequent

claims of finding a gene complex responsible for alcoholism have been consistently cast in doubt. In 1993, Berman and Noble suggested that addictive and reckless behaviors are mere emergent phenomena and may be linked to other, more fundamental traits, such as novelty seeking or risk taking. Psychopaths (patients with Antisocial Personality Disorder) have both qualities in ample quantities. We would expect them, therefore, to heavily abuse alcohol and drugs. Indeed, as Lewis and Bucholz convincingly demonstrated in 1991, they do. Still, only a negligible minority of alcoholics and drug addicts are psychopaths.

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