

A clinical impression concerning overeating and obesity led to a review of the relevant research and culminated in a research hypothesis. This stated that eating was in many people not only a means of satiating hunger, but a means of obtaining stimulation and part of a general tendency to 'overindulge'. In the research, overeating was found to be linked to high external responsiveness, and sensation seeking to low basal arousal level. Eating as a form of sensation seeking was the subject of this study. The role of arousal level and externality were also examined.

Three measures were chosen: a measure of extraversion, of sensation seeking and of basal arousal level (resting pulse rate). These were administered to a small randomly selected sample of subjects, who were then divided into a normal weight and an overweight group, using a 5 percent overweight cutoff point. In addition, a questionnaire was administered, and a standard structured interview given to a subgroup.

Results showed the overweight group to be significantly higher on extraversion. The overweight group were found to be differentiated into two groups, the mildly overweight and the very overweight. The mildly overweight were the most extraverted and the highest sensation seeking of all three groups. The overweight group had a lower mean pulse rate than the normal group.

The overweight group were higher on the Boredom Susceptibility and Experience Seeking factors of the sensation seeking measure.

The mildly overweight smoked and drank more than any other

group, suggesting a general pattern of overindulgence.

The overweight group as a whole preferred non-physical and non-risk activities. They disliked monotonous activities.

It appeared that whereas eating provided stimulation, it appeared to be stimulation of a low intensity type that is easily obtained.

Implications were that overeating is a 'normal' response to prevalent food cues in the society, given man's genetic adaptations over the centuries. Treatment should be both curative and preventative, and should take the whole individual into account as obesity is the result of physiological, psychological and environmental factors.