



## Perfectionism and binge eating linked

A newly-published study shows why individuals with a high degree of perfectionism are often setting themselves up for a host of physical, emotional and mental problems – particularly related to binge eating.

Dalhousie's Dr. Simon Sherry has published "*The Perfectionism Model of Binge Eating*" in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, along with co-author Peter Hall of the University of Waterloo.

Although less well recognized than anorexia or bulimia, binge eating is a serious disorder. Binge eating occurs when a person feels out of control and rapidly consumes a large amount of food in a short period of time. Binge eating elevates the risk of developing depression, obesity, diabetes and other problems.

By closely following the daily activities of a large group of undergraduates, the researchers believe that they're the first to identify why perfectionism results in binge eating.

**"It seems that as perfectionists go about their day-to-day lives, they generate a lot of friction," says Dr. Sherry. "Because of their inflexibility and unrealistic expectations they also create problems in their relationships."**

Binge eating becomes an effort to escape from being overwhelmed with feelings of loneliness, failure and sadness. To temporarily escape from a discouraging reality, it's necessary to do away with higher order thought. The experience of eating – smelling, chewing, tasting – is immediate and visceral.

"Think about it – when was the last time that you were rapidly eating a pizza and pondering a major life decision at exactly the same time?" asks Dr. Sherry.

While binge eating banishes troubles and difficulties in the short term, it also generates powerful negative emotions of guilt and shame that are longer lasting. The intent is that this research will translate directly into better care, through improved assessment and treatment opportunities.

"We want to improve the lives of perfectionists with patterns of disordered eating," he says.  
*Amanda Pelham*



## Chance of a lifetime

Dalhousie is in contention for two of Canada's "super chairs" – the Canada Excellence Research Chairs (CERC). Each would bring \$10 million in funding to attract a world-class researcher.

**"This is a chance of a lifetime to bring top-drawer, Nobel-laureate-style researchers to Dalhousie,"** says Martha Crago, vice-president research.

The CERC Secretariat evaluated 135 proposals from 41 universities. The short-list was unveiled at a ceremony attended by Prime Minister Stephen Harper. Dalhousie was among 17 universities to see its proposals – in Ocean Science and Technology; and in Developmental Immunology and Immunosenescence – among the top 40.

"The problems, such as how climate change is affecting the world's oceans, are so complex and multi-faceted that you need to bring everyone together – the chemical, biological and physical oceanographers – to work on solutions," says Keith Thompson, who leads the proposal for the CERC in Ocean Science and Technology.

Immunosenescence refers to the gradual deterioration of the human immune system due to aging, when it becomes increasingly difficult to respond to infections, immunizations and tumors. The CERC in Developmental Immunology and Immunosenescence, proposed by Scott Halperin and Jean Marshall, would develop new vaccines for different age groups, protecting them from debilitating infectious diseases.

The next step is to identify the two researchers the university intends to attract. The successful 20 CERC recipients are expected to be announced in early 2010.  
*Marilyn Smulders*

