

UNC Alumni Heart Study NEWSLETTER

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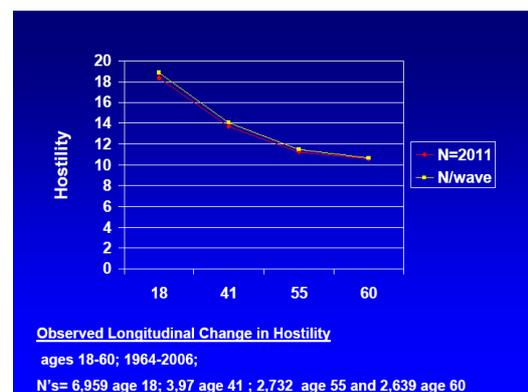
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Dear UNC Alumni Heart Study Participant,

We hope you enjoy the enclosed lapel pin, which we commissioned to commemorate our 20th Anniversary as a Study. We mailed our initial Questionnaire on May 7, 1987. Since this Study began, we have learned a tremendous amount about how personality assessed in college and changes in personality from college to mid-life – when you joined the Study - are related to the development of coronary heart disease and premature mortality. In particular, we have found that higher hostility in college is associated with developing heart disease and with dying in the next 40 years. These exciting new findings were presented as part of an address I was invited to give in San Francisco in August, 2007, at the meetings of the American Psychological Association, where I was also honored to receive the 2007 Developmental Health Award. This particular data took us over 20 years to collect. We started with 7007 MMPI answer sheets that the Dahlstroms had carefully saved from the 1960s at UNC. By 1986-87 we had located 5485 of you and through July 2007, had collected various data in addition to the MMPI from 4647 of you. By comparing the hostility scores of those who had survived until 2007 to those who had not, we found that persons who were one standard deviation below the mean were 11% more likely to be alive today than those one standard deviation above the mean. The model also included age and gender which are, of course, related to survival. The magnitude of the hostility effect can be compared to the impact of age and gender. Individuals are 13% less likely to be alive for every year of increasing age, and men are 211% more likely to be dead than women.

We assess heart disease only on persons who indicate on Questionnaires that they have developed heart disease. With permission from the Study member, we obtain medical records and make a final determination of disease status based on those records. Since 1987, 243 persons (238 men and 5 women) have developed confirmed heart disease. We have found that individuals who were higher on the hostility measure in college were 17% more likely to develop heart disease. For comparison, an additional year in age alone increased these odds by 10%.

Our longitudinal data on stability and change in hostility is unique. We are the first Study to have 4 repeated measures of hostility, and as you can see in this figure, hostility declines with age. This pattern is true for 75% of you. About 20% decline more slowly and 5% actually increase over time. Future data we collect will be important in understanding these patterns of change during early midlife.



I am sad to report that Professor W. Grant Dahlstrom, who collected the original MMPI data and remained an active co-investigator in the Study, died shortly after our last Newsletter. The UNC Alumni Heart Study was very important to Grant as he had a life long interest in understanding how personality relates to health and disease in later life. At his memorial service generous and kind were the two words that best described him for me. A remembrance of his career published in The American Psychologist by Professor Don Baucom can be found on our web site (www.uncahs.org).

Also on our website, you will find reprints of recently published articles and an online version of Questionnaire 12. You can log on with your Birth date and Pin # (found on your address label) and do the Questionnaire at your leisure. For each Questionnaire that is submitted online, we will save \$4.07 in materials and postage – money that can be used to further our research! While the Questionnaire looks long, it only took me 10 minutes to do it and will provide important data about how traumatic events and your responses to them are related to midlife disease.

These first 20 years have been exciting and I look forward to the next 20. We have just been notified of a new grant from the Marchionne Foundation that will explore the costs and benefits of various marital status choices during middle age. Now that we have proven our major hypothesis – about hostility and CHD - we are working on reinventing the UNC Alumni Heart Study in order to resubmit our NHLBI/NIA grant in the near future. Therefore, you will find a section on Q12 about your marital status and history as well as questions about future directions for the Study and your willingness to participate in pilot work on our web site.

My personal thanks to all of you. I always enjoy talking with people who call us, as well as meeting people at weddings, dinner parties and events in Chapel Hill or at National Meetings and also when folks come to the lab to visit – as SID # 79 did on his way north. Because we are serious about confidentiality, I do not know who is in the Study, but am delighted when you introduce yourselves to me.

Sincerely,

Ilene C. Siegler

Ilene C. Siegler, for the faculty and staff of the UNC Alumni Heart Study

