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The relationship between perfectionism and multidimensional life satisfaction among Croatian and American youth

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Abstract

Although much research investigating multidimensional perfectionism has been conducted among adults from various cultures, little is known of the cross-cultural manifestation of perfectionism among school-age youth. In addition, no cross-cultural studies have compared the perceived life quality of youth identified as adaptive perfectionists (i.e., high personal standards but low distress when the standards are not met), maladaptive perfectionists (i.e., high personal standards, high distress), and non-perfectionists (i.e., significantly lower personal standards). In this study, Croatian youth completed the *Almost Perfect Scale-Revised* and the *Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale*. Reports from this group were compared to a group of American youth. Results found differential predictive values of personal standards and discrepancy across satisfaction domains for both groups. Further, adaptive perfectionists reported significantly higher satisfaction across many life domains for both groups than maladaptive perfectionists and non-perfectionists. Males and females reported statistically equivalent satisfaction levels across most life domains—with the exception of friendship satisfaction. Implications of these findings and suggestions for future research conclude the paper.

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1. Introduction

Although a precise definition of perfectionism remains elusive, the setting of especially high personal standards is a universally accepted characteristic (Flett & Hewitt, 2002). Historically, perfectionism has been conceptualized as a unidimensional construct with some authors viewing perfectionism as synonymous with psychological distress (e.g., Ellis, 1962; Missildine, 1963). Conversely, other authors believed that having high personal standards was necessary for positive mental health (e.g., Adler, 1956). To reconcile these disparate views, Hamachek (1978) proposed a multidimensional model of perfectionism consisting of two separate but related subtypes. Normal perfectionists are individuals who report excessively high standards but nevertheless accept the fact that these standards will not always be attained. In contrast, neurotic perfectionists set similarly high standards but have difficulty accepting instances when their standards cannot be accomplished. Individuals in this latter group often find it difficult to feel satisfied with themselves or their performance and are often driven by the fear of failure more than the desire to succeed.

Empirical studies among adults have supported Hamachek's (1978) conceptualization. For example, normal (or adaptive) perfectionism has been significantly and positively related to self-esteem (Ashby & Rice, 2002), internal locus of control (Perisamy & Ashby, 2002), and positive affect (Rice & Mirzadeh, 2000). Conversely, neurotic (or maladaptive) perfectionism has been significantly related to depression (Bieling, Israeli, & Antony, 2004) and anxiety (Kawamura, Hunt, Frost, & DiBartolo, 2001).

Although extant findings have effectively challenged the view that perfectionism is unilaterally pathological, the majority of research continues to focus on maladaptive cognitions (Slaney, Rice, & Ashby, 2002). Very little research has investigated how the dimensions of perfectionism may contribute to positive psychological well-being, or life satisfaction (Bieling et al., 2004; Chang, 2000). Life satisfaction is defined as an individual's conscious, cognitive appraisal of the quality of his or her life (Headey & Wearing, 1992) and may reflect a global (i.e., overall) appraisal as well as appraisals within specific life domains (e.g., family, self). Given that multidimensional life satisfaction reports are differentially related to a number of important psychological states and behaviors, including depression (Lewinsohn, Redner, & Seeley, 1991), self-esteem (Arrindell, Hee-sink, & Feij, 1999), and hope (Chang, 2003), the construct is considered to be a key indicator of an individuals' successful adaptation to changes in life circumstances (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999).

Goal striving is one such circumstance that is significantly and positively related to life satisfaction reports (Diener, 2000), with these reports varying depending upon how well an individual can adapt to instances when goals cannot be attained (Emmons, 1986). Such findings are salient to perfectionistic individuals. That is, considering their cognitive flexibility adaptive perfectionists may report significantly higher life satisfaction than their maladaptive perfectionistic peers. As support for this hypothesis, Chang, Watkins, and Banks (2004) found that college students identified as adaptive perfectionists reported significantly higher global life satisfaction than maladapt-

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