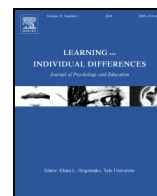




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Assessing perfectionism in children and adolescents: Psychometric properties of the Almost Perfect Scale Revised

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ABSTRACT

The main goal of the present study was to study perfectionism through the psychometric properties of the Almost Perfect Scale-Revised (APS-R) in a representative sample of children and adolescents. The sample encompassed $n = 1476$ students from 9 to 16 years-old ($M = 12.29$ years; $SD = 2.17$). Analysis of the internal structure by means of exploratory factor analysis, yielded a three-dimensional solution (Discrepancy, Order, and Standards). Confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) showed that the three-factor model displayed better goodness-of-fit indices than the competing models tested. Multigroup CFAs showed that the three-factor model had strong measurement invariance across gender and partial strong invariance across age. Significant statistical differences in the mean scores of the APS-R were found by gender and age. The level of internal consistency for the APS-R scores ranged from 0.81 to 0.89. The study of the psychometric properties of the APS-R scores supports the notion that it is a useful tool for the assessment of perfectionism in children and adolescents. The results have clear implications for the understanding of the expression of perfectionism and provide new sources of validity evidence for the APS-R in educational settings.

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1. Introduction

Perfectionism is an important psychological construct. It is related to the concept of excellence and performance, which has been defined and measured by investigators in many ways, from a unidimensional focus towards a multidimensional one. The turning point in its conceptualization was set by Hamacheck's postulates (1978) based on a pioneering vision by Adler (1956). Perfectionism can be healthy whenever the pressure to achieve excellence includes a social interest to maximize one's own potential, and unhealthy if it involves strong neuroticism. These postulates changed their consideration as a unidimensional concept to include a distinction between a healthy perfectionism and an unhealthy or neurotic perfectionism (Neihart, Pfeiffer, & Cross, 2016; Sirois & Molnar, 2015).

This distinction is the one in force nowadays, and is considered as a multidimensional construct (Hewitt, Flett, Besser, Sherry, & McGee, 2003) that both researchers and professionals are trying to get to grips with; particularly when taking into consideration the many differences in the components that configure each type of perfectionism. These stances are influential in the development of many measuring tools aimed towards this goal. Its study is aimed both towards its relations

and consequences in the configuration of the personality and as a cognitive function pattern which is related in particular with high intellectual ability as a potentiality in a place of privilege for a possible consecution of excellence (Pryt, 2007).

One operative criterion that could be used to understand high intellectual ability is excellence. Authors such as Sternberg, Jarvin, and Grigorenko (2011) propose the point of view that high intellectual ability is composed by five criteria: a) Excellence, because of its higher intellectual ability; b) Rarity, because high intellectual ability is not common; c) Productivity, as the acquisitive performance or the numerous products obtained by the person during adulthood; d) Evidence of its existence, through an objective and multidimensional evaluation of high ability; and e) Worth, because the exceptional products obtained must be valued by society and other people. We would expect excellence to be present in high intellectual abilities because of its structural neurobiological potentiality. Excellence, however, is not always manifested, either with high intellectual ability (Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Worrell, 2011) or typical intellectual ability. Perfectionism would be one of the variables that influence this.

From this conceptualization as a cognitive functioning pattern, perfectionism is related to motivation in school and other signs such as test anxiety or satisfaction and academic achievement (DiBartolo & Rendón, 2012; Eum & Rice, 2011; Fletcher & Neumeister, 2012). Thus, according to its performance, it could have a negative impact that could weaken their resolute capacity, metacognitive regulation, and

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excellence relating it with motivation and academic performance, or anxiety before an evaluation (Kristie & Neumeister, 2012; Mobley, Slaney, & Rice, 2005; Rice, Richardson, & Tueller, 2014; Sastre-Riba, 2012). Moreover, perfectionism has been associated as a risk factor for mental disorders and symptoms (e.g., depression, eating disorders) (DiBartolo & Rendón, 2012; Flett & Hewitt, 2002; Rice et al., 2014) as well as psychological well-being (DiBartolo & Rendón, 2012). Taking that into account, and given its consequences, the investigation tries to discern which composition would result in its optimal contribution as a force in positive achievement and well-being.

Currently, authors do agree on the existence of many traits that lead to a perfectionist behaviour (Frost, Marten, Lahart, & Rosenblate, 1990; Hewitt et al., 2003; Stairs, Smith, Zapolski, Combs, & Settles, 2012). For instance, high personal standards (Frost et al., 1990), auto-oriented perfectionism (Hewitt et al., 2003), fear to err (Frost et al., 1990), or discrepancy (Slaney, Rice, Mobley, Trippi, & Ashby, 2001) between what one expects to achieve and the real achievement (Flett & Hewitt, 2002), and up to nine components Empirical support to its multidimensional composition starts to converge from two stances that, trying to grasp it, ended up building the first instruments for its measurement.

On the one hand, the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS) (Hewitt & Flett, 1991), with 45 items organized in three subscales: 1) auto-oriented perfectionism, referred to the personal tendency of high-standard achieving, a strict evaluation of behaviour and motivation to strive for perfection; 2) perfectionism oriented towards others, that is, towards the expectation to achieve high standards by evaluating them strictly; and 3) socially-prescribed perfectionism, directed by the perception other people have of one's own standards, waiting to achieve excellence and through a strict evaluation.

On the other hand, the Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (FMPS) (Frost et al., 1990) is made up of 35 items and grouped in six subscales, and its psychometric properties are well established (e.g., Gelabert et al., 2011). Its authors remark on the importance of the existence of high standards followed by a demanding self-evaluation, as well as a special sensitivity towards parental criticism, with tendencies towards order and organization. These characteristics lead to the six subscales of the FMPS: 1) concern towards errors, as a tendency to take them as failures; 2) high personal standards as self-efficacy measurement; 3) doubt before an action, as a tendency to evaluate the non-adequate result of a task; 4) parental expectations, as a personal perception that parents have high expectations that need to be met; 5) parental criticism, as an excessive critique subjective feeling on their behalf; and 6) organization, referring to the tendency to heighten and prefer order.

Given the different starting approaches, the question is knowing whether each perspective's components and the given measurement instruments are related to each other, with a motivation towards performance or not. Authors such as Shafran and Mansell (2001) have studied its covariation, proposing that the self-oriented Perfectionism (Hewitt & Flett, 1991) seems similar to the "Personal standards" and "organization" FMPS subscales, with shows a good correlation with the first ones (0.61 and 0.62) but scarce with "organization" (0.26–0.29); on the other hand, the correlation is lesser with "concern towards errors" (0.38–0.53), and scarce with: "doubt before an action", "parental expectations" and "parental criticism" (0.16–0.27); Socially-prescribed perfectionism seems similar and with a correlation, with FMPS' "parental expectations" and "parental criticism" (0.49–0.57) but also with "concern towards errors" (0.49–0.59), and low with "doubt before an action" (0.28–0.37) and "personal standards" (0.16–0.28). Finally, the perfectionism oriented to others does not seem to be conceptually related to any of the FMPS' subscales, even when having a moderate correlation with "concern with errors" and "personal standards", and low correlation with "parental expectations" and "organization". In this manner, the investigation begins to establish some type of relationship between the possible components of perfectionism and the results from the created measuring instruments.

More recently, Slaney et al. (2001) revised the Almost Perfect Scale (APS-R) with a similar conceptual and measurement goal. It is formed of three subscales: a) Order, referring to the tendency to prefer one's own work; b) High standards, referring to the tendency towards high self-achievement; and c) Discrepancy, referring to the subjective perspective of the non-accomplishment of personal goals and objectives (Slaney, Mobley, Trippi, Ashby, & Johnson, 1996; Slaney et al., 2001). The APS-R scores have shown strong psychometric properties in previous studies and has been used in a range of samples and researches (Rice et al., 2014; Slaney et al., 1996, 2001; Stoeber & Otto, 2006).

For instance, the internal consistency values ranges between 0.91/0.92 for the Discrepancy subscale, 0.85 for the Standard subscale, and between 0.82/0.86 for the Order subscale (Slaney et al., 2001). The three-factor structure of the APS-R (Standards, Order and discrepancy) has been supported in several exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) (Mobley et al., 2005; Slaney et al., 2001; Suddarth & Slaney, 2001; Ulu, Tezer, & Slaney, 2012; Vandiver & Worrell, 2002; Wang, Yuen, & Slaney, 2009). Moreover, the APS-R showed factorial equivalence across gender (Rice et al., 2014) and cultural groups (Mobley et al., 2005). While true that this tool has shown adequate psychometric properties in previous research, it is beneficial and interesting to conduct new studies in different samples and settings (e.g., schools), for instance, children and adolescents from representative samples of the general population.

The main purpose of the present study was to study the construct of perfectionism, through the APS-R (Slaney et al., 2001), testing its psychometric properties in a large sample of children and adolescents. From this general goal four specific objectives have been formulated to: a) analyze the internal structure of the APS-R scores using exploratory and CFAs; b) test the measurement invariance of the APS-R scores across gender and age; c) examine the reliability of the APS-R scores through McDonald's Omega (McDonald, 1999) as well as the information functions from Item Response Theory (IRT) framework (Hambleton, Swaminathan, & Rogers, 1991); and d) compare APS-R mean scores by gender and age. Based on previous research, it is hypothesized that sound reliability will be established, and that the proposed three-factor dimensional (Order, Standards, and Discrepancy) model will be supported for this measure. In addition, we hypothesized that the three-factor model would be equivalent across gender and age. Moreover, differences in the means scores of the APS-R according gender or/and age will be found.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Pupils were selected from different types of secondary schools – public, grant-assisted private, and private – and from vocational/technical schools of La Rioja (a region situated in the north of Spain). The sample comprised a total of 1476 students, of which 740 were male (50.1%) and 736 were female (49.9), belonging to eight schools and 20 classrooms. The age of the participants ranged from 9 to 16 years old ($M = 12.29$ years old; $SD = 2.17$). The age distribution of the sample was the following: 9 years ($n = 195$; 13.2%), 10 years ($n = 195$; 13.2%), 11 years ($n = 193$; 13.1%), 12 years ($n = 189$; 12.8%), 13 years ($n = 191$; 12.9%), 14 years ($n = 216$; 14.6%), 15 years ($n = 210$; 14.2%), and 16 years ($n = 87$; 5.9%). With the aim of conducting pertinent statistical analyses, a cross-validation study was performed where the total sample was randomly split into two subsamples. The first sub-sample consisted of 738 participants (374 male and 364 female), with a mean age of 12.24 ($SD = 2.13$). The second sub-sample consisted of 738 participants (366 male and 372 female), mean age of 12.34 ($SD = 2.21$). Neither gender ($\chi^2 = 0.173$; $p = 0.677$) nor age rates ($t = -0.900$; $p = 0.368$) differed across subsamples.

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