



The advantages of partialling perfectionistic strivings and perfectionistic concerns: Critical issues and recommendations☆



Joachim Stoeber^{a,*}, Patrick Gaudreau^b

^a School of Psychology, University of Kent, United Kingdom

^b School of Psychology, University of Ottawa, Canada

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 13 May 2016

Received in revised form 24 August 2016

Accepted 25 August 2016

Available online xxxx

Keywords:

Two-factor theory of perfectionism

Perfectionistic strivings

Perfectionistic concerns

Partialling

Mutual suppression

Psychological adjustment

Psychological maladjustment

2 × 2 model of perfectionism

ABSTRACT

According to the two-factor theory of perfectionism (Stoeber & Otto, 2006), perfectionism comprises two superordinate dimensions—perfectionistic strivings (PS) and perfectionistic concerns (PC)—that show different, and often opposite, relations with psychological adjustment and maladjustment, particularly when their overlap is partialled out. Recently, Hill (2014) raised concerns about the interpretation of the relations that PS show after partialling. The present article aims to alleviate these concerns. First, we address the concern that partialling changes the conceptual meaning of PS. Second, we explain how the relations of residual PS (i.e., PS with PC partialled out) differ from those of PS, and how to interpret these differences. In this, we also discuss suppressor effects and how mutual suppression affects the relations of both PS and PC with outcomes. Furthermore, we provide recommendations of how to report and interpret findings of analyses partialling out the effects of PS and PC. We conclude that, if properly understood and reported, there is nothing to be concerned about when partialling PS and PC. On the contrary, partialling is essential if we want to understand the shared, unique, combined, and interactive relations of the different dimensions of perfectionism.

© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Perfectionism comes in different forms which requires a multidimensional framework to conceptualize the various aspects of this personality characteristic (Frost, Marten, Lahart, & Rosenblate, 1990; Hewitt & Flett, 1991; see also Enns & Cox, 2002). When examining different measures of multidimensional perfectionism, however, researchers soon realized that the different forms, aspects, and subordinate dimensions of perfectionism can be organized in two superordinate factors: perfectionistic strivings and perfectionistic concerns (Frost, Heimberg, Holt, Mattia, & Neubauer, 1993; Stoeber & Otto, 2006; see also Cox, Enns, & Clara, 2002; Dunkley, Blankstein, Halsall, Williams, & Winkworth, 2000). *Perfectionistic strivings* (PS)—also called personal standards perfectionism—capture forms, aspects, and subordinate dimensions of perfectionism reflecting a self-oriented striving for perfection and exceedingly high personal standards of performance. In contrast, *perfectionistic concerns* (PC)—also called evaluative concerns perfectionism—capture forms, aspects, and subdimensions of perfectionism reflecting concerns over making

mistakes, fear of negative social evaluation if not perfect, doubts about actions, feelings of discrepancy between one's high standards and actual performance, and negative reactions to imperfection (Stoeber & Otto, 2006; see also Table 1).

Differentiating PS and PC is important because the two superordinate dimensions frequently show different, and often opposite, relations with indicators of psychological adjustment and maladjustment (e.g., Frost et al., 1993; Stoeber & Otto, 2006). PC consistently show positive relations with indicators of maladjustment, and may show negative relations with indicators of psychological adjustment. In contrast, PS often show positive relations with indicators of psychological adjustment, and may show negative relations with indicators of psychological maladjustment. Of particular interest, all of the aforementioned relations tend to be stronger when the overlap between PS and PC is partialled out, controlled for, or otherwise taken into account statistically (e.g., Gotwals, Stoeber, Dunn, & Stoll, 2012; R. W. Hill, Huelsman, & Araujo, 2010; Stoeber & Otto, 2006).

In a recent article titled “Perfectionistic strivings and the perils of partialling,” Hill (2014)¹ raised a number of questions regarding the potentially undesirable effects associated with the practice of partialling out the effect of PC from the relations of PS with psychological adjustment and maladjustment. In particular, Hill raised two main concerns. First, partialling out PC changes the “conceptual meaning” of PS, to the

☆ Preparation of this article was facilitated by teaching release from the Faculty of Social Sciences awarded to Patrick Gaudreau. We thank Daniel Madigan for proofreading an earlier version of this manuscript.

* Corresponding author at: School of Psychology, University of Kent, Canterbury, Kent CT2 7NP, United Kingdom.

E-mail address: J.Stoeber@kent.ac.uk (J. Stoeber).

¹ Throughout this article, to improve readability, Hill is always A. P. Hill unless otherwise indicated.

Table 1
Indicators of perfectionistic strivings and perfectionistic concerns: Examples.

Scale	Perfectionistic strivings	Perfectionistic concerns
FMPs	Personal standards Pure personal standards ^a	Concern over mistakes Concern over mistakes + doubts about actions ^b
HF-MPS	Self-oriented perfectionism ^c	Socially prescribed perfectionism
APS-R	High standards	Discrepancy
PI	Striving for excellence	Concern over mistakes
MIPS	Striving for perfection	Negative reactions to imperfection

Note. Scales are listed in chronological order of their first publication. FMPs = Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (Frost et al., 1990); HF-MPS = Hewitt-Flett Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (Hewitt & Flett, 1991, 2004); APS-R = revised Almost Perfect Scale (Slaney, Rice, Mobley, Trippi, & Ashby, 2001); PI = Perfectionism Inventory (R. W. Hill et al., 2004); MIPS = Multidimensional Inventory of Perfectionism in Sport (Stoeber et al., 2007). Table adapted from Stoeber and Damian (2016, p. 276).

^a See DiBartolo, Frost, Chang, LaSoto, and Grills (2004).

^b See Stöber (1998).

^c Particularly the subscale capturing striving for perfection (cf. Stoeber & Childs, 2010).

extent that what is left after partialling no longer represents PS. In fact, Hill argued that the conceptual meaning of PS becomes unclear after partialling out the effect of PC. Second, Hill raised the concern that the evidence supporting the adaptive outcomes of PS may be the result of suppression effects that may have no correspondence to reality, thus suggesting that partialling creates spurious relations (i.e., relations that did not exist before partialling) that should not be interpreted.

Although criticism is a healthy indicator of the maturity of our field, we feel that a careful examination is required before rejecting an approach that has been used in many of the theoretical and empirical advances over the last three decades. Constructive criticisms, if proven defensible and valid, should be accompanied with solutions and/or alternatives to steer research in promising directions. Given the current state of the evidence, we feel that it would be premature, if not entirely inappropriate, for researchers who are concerned about the issues raised in the Hill's (2014) article to refrain from interpreting the partialled effects of PS (when controlling for PC) and PC (when controlling for PS).

Therefore, our overarching goal in the present article was to address these concerns and provide guidance to ensure that researchers can reliably interpret observed effects after partialling. Because we intended this article as guidance for a general readership interested in research on multidimensional perfectionism, we kept our presentation largely non-technical with the exception of discussing the differences between bivariate correlations and partial correlations in greater detail. Moreover, we did not elaborate on the practice that the effects of partialling are considered problematic only when there is a change in the statistical significance ($p < 0.05$) of the relations that PS show after partialling (Hill, 2014) which is questionable given the well-known problems of null hypothesis significance testing (e.g., Nickerson, 2000).

Before we come to the core of the matter, however, we need to clarify the terminology we selected for this article. We used the term “relations” for any statistical associations between variables (e.g., bivariate and partial correlations in correlational analyses; regression coefficients and semipartial correlations in regression analyses; path coefficients in structural equation models). We used the term “adaptive relations” as a shorthand to denote the positive and negative relations of PS with variables that are usually considered adaptive (e.g., conscientiousness, active coping, positive affect) and maladaptive (e.g., neuroticism, avoidant coping, negative affect), respectively. Conversely, we used the term “maladaptive relations” to denote the positive relations with variables that are considered maladaptive and the negative relations with variables that are considered adaptive. Finally, we used the term “residual PS” for what Hill (2014) called residualized PS (i.e., PS after PC have been partialled out) and the term “residual PC” for what Hill called residualized PC (i.e., PC after PS have been partialled out).

Regarding the structure of this article, we will first present arguments supporting our position that partialling does not change the conceptual meaning of PS. Next, we will offer some non-technical explanations to help readers understand what partialling does when we vary the correlations between PS and PC on the one hand, and the correlations of both PS and PC with outcomes on the other. We think that clearly delineating different scenarios is needed to demonstrate that the suppression effects, outlined as a potential problem by Hill (2014), are substantially informative rather than spurious. In addition, we will take the opportunity to point out that the suppression effects of PS and PC are mutual rather than exclusive (R. W. Hill et al., 2010). As a matter of fact, controlling for PS can augment the maladaptive relations of PC as much as controlling for PC can augment the adaptive relations of PS. Informed by this substantial and theoretically-based reinterpretation of partialling, we will conclude by presenting recommendations on how to report and interpret the results of partialling PS and PC in future research.

2. Is partialling perilous or a theoretically informative approach?

2.1. Does partialling change the “conceptual meaning” of PS?

As a first main concern, Hill (2014) contended that partialling out PC from PS changes the “conceptual meaning” of PS. According to Hill, PS share some definitional features (e.g., conditional self-acceptance, self-criticism) with PC. Hence, what is left after partialling out these shared features is conceptually different from PS. Furthermore, Hill regarded some of the features that PS share with PC as core conceptual characteristics that define the “perfectionistic” in PS. After partialling, PS are thought to be left without these core definitional features to the extent that PS now represent some kind of “conscientious achievement strivings” that are essentially non-perfectionistic and thus can tell us little, if anything, about perfectionism (for similar arguments, see Flett & Hewitt, 2014; Hall, 2006).

There are a number of reasons why we do not share Hill's (2014) concerns and do not agree with his line of argument. First, it is possible to define PS and PC without making reference to the features that Hill considered defining characteristics of perfectionism (e.g., conditional self-acceptance, self-criticism). People can strive for perfection without making their self-worth contingent upon achieving perfection, or without criticizing themselves if they fail to reach perfection. Consequently, the characteristics that Hill claimed to be defining characteristics of PS are better conceptualized as correlates of perfectionism to be studied separately from PS and PC. Take, for example, conditional self-acceptance. Conditional self-acceptance and closely related constructs (e.g., contingent self-worth) have shown positive correlations with PS and PC, but the correlations are not so large as to suggest that they should be defining characteristics. Instead, such constructs are better examined separately from PS and PC (e.g., DiBartolo, Frost, Chang, LaSoto, & Grills, 2004; Sturman, Flett, Hewitt, & Rudolph, 2009) as demonstrated by Hill and his colleagues in the case of unconditional self-acceptance (Hill, Hall, Appleton, & Kozub, 2008). For self-criticism, the relation with PS is even weaker. Like conditional self-acceptance, self-criticism has shown positive correlations with PS and PC. The correlations with PS, however, are considerably smaller than those with PC (e.g., Dunkley, Zuroff, & Blankstein, 2006). This pattern of relations suggests that self-criticism is closely related to PC, but not to PS (Dunkley et al., 2006; Sherry, Stoeber, & Ramasubbu, 2016). Consequently, evidence is lacking to suggest that either conditional self-acceptance or self-criticism should be considered defining characteristics of PS.

Second, we believe that accepting the line of argument put forward by Hill (2014) has the potential of steering perfectionism research in the wrong direction. If the characteristics that PS share with PC are core defining characteristics of PS—and if everything that is “perfectionistic” about PS is contained in the parts that PS share with PC—there would be little need to invest theoretical and empirical effort to study PS. Consider the Venn diagram in Fig. 1 representing the relations of PS, PC, and

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7249399>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7249399>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)