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The mediating effect of motivational types in the relationship between perfectionism and academic burnout

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the mediating role of motivation in the relationship between perfectionism and academic burnout in Korean undergraduates. To measure perfectionism, two types of scales (i.e., APS-R and HFMPS) were used. Also, five types of motivation (i.e., amotivation, external motivation, introjected motivation, identified motivation, and intrinsic motivation) were examined, distinctively. As a result, intrinsic motivation mediated the relationship between adaptive perfectionism, namely high standards and self-oriented perfectionism, and academic burnout. Identified motivation showed the same results as intrinsic motivation. That is, adaptive perfectionism was positively associated with greater levels of both intrinsic and identified motivation and, in turn, greater intrinsic (or identified) motivation was negatively associated with academic burnout. Meanwhile, there were mediated effects of amotivation in the relationship between maladaptive perfectionism (i.e., discrepancy and socially prescribed perfectionism) and academic burnout. Specifically, maladaptive perfectionism was positively related to greater level of amotivation and, in turn, greater amotivation was positively related with academic burnout. Lastly, introjected motivation only mediated the link between socially prescribed perfectionism and academic burnout. The practical implications were discussed.

Research on academic burnout has gained importance in recent years. Studies on burnout were initially conducted to examine the chronic stress of service providers, such as nurses and social workers (Maslach & Schaufeli, 1993). This limited attention to service providers was mainly due to the fact that the major measurement of burnout, the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), had dimensions that reflected interactions with the recipients of services (Schaufeli, Martinez, Marques-Pinto, Salanova, & Bakker, 2002). Later, the publication of a more generalized version, the Maslach Burnout Inventory - General Survey (MBI-GS), led to the expansion of this area of study. Furthermore, the Maslach Burnout Inventory - Student Survey (MBI-SS) was developed to assess academic burnout in university students (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Since then, the concept of burnout is widely employed among students (Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2002; Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001; Leiter & Schaufeli, 1996). There are three symptoms of academic burnout, identified by Schaufeli et al. (2002), which are emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and incompetence; all of these are caused by heavy study demands, course loads, and chronic stress. Emotional exhaustion is associated with loss of physical or emotional energy, due to study demands (Shin, Puig, Lee, Lee, & Lee, 2011). Cynicism relates to the students' feelings of indifference or disinterest towards academic activities (Shin et al., 2011). Lastly, incompetence indicates the sense of reduced accomplishment, leading students to produce poorer academic achievements (Shin et al., 2011).

There are numerous studies examining academic burnout in university students. Gan, Shang, and Zhang (2007) examined academic burnout in Chinese university students, and found that their coping flexibility negatively predicted burnout. Salanova, Schaufeli, Martínez, and Bresó (2010) found that burnout was significantly associated with the presence of obstacles in academic performance, and the absence of the facilitators of performance among university students. Jacobs and Dodd (2003) showed that a negative temperament and subjective workload of college students predicted a high level of burnout.

As such, many variables related to academic burnout have been the focus of burnout research. One of the variables that this study intends to examine is perfectionism. Perfectionism is a multidimensional construct that has been viewed as a personality trait (Miquelon, Vallerand, Cardinal, & Grouzet, 2005). Numerous studies have tried to identify the different dimensions of perfectionism; according to Hewitt and Flett (1991), perfectionism can be distinguished into three dimensions, namely self-oriented perfectionism, other-oriented perfectionism, and socially prescribed perfectionism. Self-oriented perfectionism indicates an individual's setting of high goals and expectations for her or himself, and striving to achieve them (Hewitt & Flett, 1991). An individual with other-oriented perfectionistic traits expects others to perform perfectly, so as to meet her or his own high standards, and constantly evaluates others (Hewitt & Flett, 1991). Socially prescribed perfectionism is based on the expectations that are prescribed by significant others. An

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individual with socially prescribed perfectionism is sensitive to the goals imposed by these significant others, and tries to achieve those goals in order to avoid their disapproval (Hewitt & Flett, 1991). Among these three dimensions, proposed by Hewitt and Flett (1991), self-oriented perfectionism and socially prescribed perfectionism are the dimensions that indicate the perfectionistic expectations of one's own self rather than of others (Chang & Rand, 2000; Miquelon et al., 2005). Thus, this study excludes other-oriented perfectionism, and only examines self-oriented perfectionism and socially prescribed perfectionism.

Another, more general distinction of perfectionism is the differentiation between adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism. Adaptive perfectionism is related to one's striving to perform and achieve better, while maladaptive perfectionism leads to worrying about being evaluated and judged (Enns, Cox, Sareen, & Freeman, 2001). According to some studies (e.g., Frost, Heimberg, Holt, Mattia, & Neubauer, 1993; Stoeber & Otto, 2006), adaptive perfectionism can be also called as perfectionistic striving (or positive striving) and maladaptive perfectionism can be replaced by perfectionistic concern (or maladaptive evaluation concerns).

According to previous studies, socially prescribed perfectionism is considered to be maladaptive, because the expectations imposed by significant others are perceived to be excessive and uncontrollable, leading to negative psychological adjustments (Bieling, Israeli, Smith, & Antony, 2003; Chang & Rand, 2000; Hewitt & Flett, 1991; Miquelon et al., 2005). On the other hand, self-oriented perfectionism can either be adaptive or maladaptive. According to Hewitt and Flett (1991), self-oriented perfectionism is associated with self-criticism and self-blame. However, it can also result in positive psychological adjustment, because the goals and standards set by oneself are perceived to be under one's control (Flett, Hewitt, Blankstein, & Dynin, 1994). Thus, self-oriented perfectionism can be considered to be a more adaptive form of perfectionism (Bieling et al., 2003; Frost et al., 1993; Miquelon et al., 2005; Suddarth & Slaney, 2001) and classified as a perfectionistic strivings (Hill & Curran, 2015; Stoeber & Otto, 2006).

Since there is extensive research on identifying different dimensions of perfectionism, it would be important to clarify the constructs being examined in the study. In a previous study that examined the relationship between perfectionism and academic burnout, Chang, Lee, Byeon, and Lee (2015) used a Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (HFMPS; Hewitt & Flett, 1991) to measure self-oriented and socially prescribed perfectionism. However, this study was limited in that the wide scope of perfectionism was measured using only one scale.

It was suggested that various measures could be used to investigate perfectionism. In addition, Slaney, Rice, Mobley, and Trippi (2001) raise the question of whether previously used scales- regarding perfectionism- are really measuring the essence of perfectionism itself. Thus, Slaney et al. (2001) developed a revised version of the Almost Perfect Scale (APS-R) in order to capture the common definition of perfectionism, as well as both the positive and negative aspects of perfectionism. The APS-R consists of three subscales, namely high standards, order, and discrepancy. The high standards subscale measures whether one has high expectations for one's own performance. The order subscale is associated with whether one prefers orderliness, and the discrepancy subscale is related to the perceived gap between one's performances and standards (Rice, Ashby, & Slaney, 2007; Slaney et al., 2001). Among these three, the high standards subscale is used to assess the adaptive form of perfectionism while the discrepancy scale measures the maladaptive form of perfectionism (Rice & Slaney, 2002; Rice, Richardson, & Tueller, 2014; Slaney et al., 2001; Suddarth & Slaney, 2001). Many researchers (e.g., Rice et al., 2014; Stoeber & Otto, 2006) have insisted that high standards and discrepancy are the main factors of the APS-R, so we only considered these two factors in this study.

To measure perfectionism, this study used APS-R and HFMPS concurrently. While the APS-R clearly distinguishes between adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism, the self-oriented perfectionism scale of HFMPS has been found to be either adaptive or maladaptive. However, since self-oriented perfectionism is viewed as a more adaptive form in many studies (e.g., Cox, Enns, & Clara, 2002; Flett et al., 1994; Frost et al., 1993; Miquelon et al., 2005; Zhang, Gan, & Chan, 2007), examining both the self-oriented perfectionism scale of HFMPS and the high standards scale of the APS-R would provide a clearer view of adaptive perfectionism (i.e., perfectionistic strivings). Some meta-studies (Hill & Curran, 2015; Stoeber & Otto, 2006) also distinguished these two kinds of perfectionism as perfectionistic strivings. On the other hand, the socially prescribed perfectionism scale of the HFMPS along with discrepancy scale of the APS-R would measure maladaptive perfectionism (i.e., perfectionistic concerns) as indicated in the previous studies (Hill & Curran, 2015; Stoeber & Otto, 2006).

In academic settings, adaptive perfectionism is associated with academic engagement, while maladaptive perfectionism is related to academic burnout (Zhang et al., 2007; Jo & Lee, 2010). Students with adaptive perfectionism set their own goals, and strive to achieve them, by facilitating motivation and increasing the level of their performance (Jo & Lee, 2010). Students with maladaptive perfectionism, on the other hand, may set unrealistic goals due to external expectations and standards, and force themselves to perform in an exceedingly competitive manner, eventually leading to academic burnout (Shim, 1995). A previous study conducted by Chang et al. (2015) attempted to identify the relationship between perfectionistic traits and symptoms of academic burnout, and found that motivation was a key mediating factor. That is, intrinsic motivation partially mediated the relationship between self-oriented perfectionism and academic burnout, while extrinsic motivation fully mediated the relationship between socially prescribed perfectionism and academic burnout (Chang et al., 2015). This study was meaningful, in that it showed the path by which these perfectionistic traits influence academic burnout, and the importance of motivation as a mediator. However, Chang et al. (2015) did not consider the different dimensions of motivation, but rather divided motivation- dichotomously- into intrinsic and extrinsic.

There are extensive branches of theories regarding motivation, and each theory conceptualizes motivation in a different way. It would be essential to clearly identify the theoretical framework of motivation being examined. In this study, the self-determination theory (SDT) is applied, to understand the different dimensions of motivation. The SDT explains that motivation is related to the regulation of behaviors across one's life span, and it can largely be divided into intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Intrinsic motivation refers to the inherent tendency to venture for one's own enjoyment and satisfaction, while amotivation indicates one's unwillingness to act (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Extrinsic motivation is the attainment of separable outcomes, based on social pressure and norms, and it consists of different degrees of self-determination and autonomy, ranging from external regulation to introjected regulation, identified regulation, and integrated regulation (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Among these four extrinsic motivation types, external regulation and introjected regulation have a more external locus of causality, that is, behaviors based on these regulations are less autonomous and performed to acquire external rewards (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Identified and integrated regulations are also forms of extrinsic motivation, but they have a more internal locus of causality (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In other words, when there is social pressure for individuals to perform certain behaviors, the individuals take in the social value and transform it into their own (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The characteristic of identified regulation and integrated regulation would be the internalization of the social values, and such internalization leads these extrinsic motivational types to be more self-determined, functioning more similarly as intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Thus, some studies combine external and introjected forms of regulation as a controlled motivation composite, while combining identified, integrated, and intrinsic forms of regulations as an autonomous motivation composite (e.g., Williams,