Short Communication

Perfectionism, trait emotional intelligence, and psychological outcomes

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ABSTRACT

Perfectionistic strivings and perfectionistic concerns correlate moderately and positively but exhibit divergent patterns of associations with positive and negative outcomes. Despite accumulated evidence supporting the incremental validity of trait emotional intelligence, over and above the Big Five, the contention that trait emotional intelligence plays a mediating role in the perfectionism-outcome link has yet to be investigated. To address this, 645 Chinese participants completed pencil-and-paper measures of perfectionistic strivings, perfectionistic concerns, trait emotional intelligence, depression, anxiety, stress, and satisfaction with life. Perfectionistic strivings were positively related to trait emotional intelligence while perfectionistic concerns were negatively related to trait emotional intelligence. Moreover, trait emotional intelligence fully mediated the link between perfectionistic strivings and satisfaction with life and partially mediated the link between perfectionistic concerns and depression, anxiety, stress, and satisfaction with life. However, perfectionistic strivings' total effects on depression, anxiety, and stress were non-significant, thus precluding mediation.

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1. Introduction

There are several existing conceptualizations of perfectionism (Dunkley, Zuroff, & Blankstein, 2003; Frost, Marten, Lahart, & Rosenblate, 1990; Hewitt & Flett, 1991) with research indicating perfectionism is best conceptualized as multidimensional (Hewitt, Flett, Besser, Sherry, & McGee, 2003). One major model proposes that perfectionism is comprised of two higher-order factors (Cox, Enns, & Clara, 2002; Stoeber & Otto, 2006): perfectionistic strivings and perfectionistic concerns. Perfectionistic strivings refer to a strongly held belief that being perfect is important, as well as a propensity to ceaselessly and rigidly demand perfection of the self (Stoeber & Otto, 2006). In contrast, perfectionistic concerns describes a strongly held belief that being perfect is important to others, as well a propensity to experience nagging self-doubts, excessive concerns over mistakes, and overly negative reactions to perceived setbacks (Stoeber & Otto, 2006). This two-factor model of perfectionism is theoretically based, widely used, and an empirical supported synthesis of several fundamental models of perfectionism (Frost et al., 1990; Hewitt & Flett, 1991).

Perfectionistic strivings and perfectionistic concerns correlate moderately and positively (see Stoeber & Otto, 2006). Nonetheless, they exhibit divergent patterns of associations with positive and negative outcomes (Stoeber & Otto, 2006). Perfectionistic concerns are robustly related to decreased life satisfaction and increased depression, anxiety, and stress (Hill, Huelsman, & Gustavo, 2010; Smith, Saklofske, & Nordstokke, 2014; Stoeber & Otto, 2006). In contrast, perfectionistic strivings typically have non-significant bivariate associations with positive and negative outcomes (Stoeber & Otto, 2006). However, after controlling for overlap with perfectionistic concerns, perfectionistic strivings are sometimes positively related to positive outcomes (e.g., life satisfaction) and negatively related to negative outcomes (e.g., negative emotionality; Hill et al., 2010). While research into this discrepancy has been conducted (e.g., Dunkley et al., 2003), there remains much to be learned. Specifically, despite evidence supporting the incremental validity of TEI beyond the Big 5, in predicting positive and negative outcomes (e.g., Austin, Saklofske, & Egan, 2005; Saklofske, Austin, & Minski, 2003), the contention that TEI mediates divergent patterns of associations with perfectionistic strivings and perfectionistic concerns remains untested.

1.1. Trait emotional intelligence and perfectionism

TEI is a lower-order personality trait that subsumes a constellation of emotion-related self-perceptions (Petrides & Furnham, 2001). Research indicates perfectionistic concerns correlates moderately and negatively with TEI (Smith et al., 2014) while the relationship between perfectionistic strivings and TEI has not been

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determined. Given that individuals with high perfectionistic strivings experience the desire to excel as motivating (Aldea & Rice, 2006), effectively regulate emotions (Aldea & Rice, 2006), and engage in proactive coping strategies (Dunkley et al., 2003), it is plausible that, after controlling for overlap with perfectionistic concerns (Hill et al., 2010), perfectionistic strivings will correlate positively with TEI. If perfectionistic strivings is positively related to TEI, and if perfectionistic concerns negative relation with TEI is replicated (Smith et al., 2014), it follows that TEI may account for perfectionistic strivings and perfectionistic concerns divergent pattern of associations with positive and negative outcomes. The aim of the present study was to evaluate this contention.

1.2. Hypotheses

It was hypothesized that the moderate negative relationship between perfectionistic concerns and TEI reported in Smith et al. (2014) would replicate. As noted by Stoeber and Damian (2014), replication is essential for research to ascertain that findings are valid and reliable. Further research questions included that perfectionistic strivings would be positively associated with TEI, after controlling for overlap with perfectionistic concerns (Hill et al., 2010) and that TEI would mediate perfectionistic strivings and perfectionistic concerns associations with depression, anxiety, stress, and satisfaction with life.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Undergraduate participants ($N = 645$; 184 males) were recruited from BNU University ($N = 320$), Capital Normal University ($N = 177$), and the Guangxi University of Science and Technology ($N = 148$). On average participants were 20.1 years of age ($SD = 2.31$). In addition, participants were asked to report the highest level of education achieved by their father; 321 (49.8%) reported a post-secondary degree, 216 (38.7%) reported less than grade 9, and the remaining 108 reported 'other'. Participants were also asked to report the highest level of education achieved by their mother; 282 (43.7%) reported post-secondary education, 245 (38%) reported less than grade 9, and the remaining 118 (18.3%) reported "other".

Table 1
Means, standard deviations, coefficient alphas, and bivariate correlations.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Perfectionistic strivings	1						
2. Perfectionistic concerns	.47**	1					
3. Trait emotional intelligence	.11**	−.31**	1				
4. Depression	.15**	.41*	−.53**	1			
5. Anxiety	.24**	.46**	−.45**	.77**	1		
6. Stress	.28**	.49**	−.44**	.76**	.82**	1	
7. Satisfaction with life	.06	−.21**	.42**	−.29**	−.22**	−.22**	1
α	.87	.81	.88	.85	.82	.83	.81
M	–	–	4.67	.46	.59	.72	4.39
SD	–	–	.65	.53	.55	.57	1.05

Note: Perfectionistic strivings and perfectionistic concerns have a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1.
* $p < .01$.
** $p < .001$.

Table 2
Decompositions for effects of exogenous variables on endogenous variables for the perfectionism-TEI model.

Endogenous variables	Exogenous variables					
	Perfectionistic strivings			Perfectionistic concerns		
	Unst.	St.	Bootstrap 95% CI (St)	Unst.	St.	Bootstrap 95% CI (St)
Trait emotional intelligence						
Direct effect	.257	.335	.253 to .416	−.413	−.470	−.546 to −.392
Indirect effect	–	–	–	–	–	–
Total effect	.257	.335	.253 to .416	−.413	−.470	−.546 to −.392
Depression						
Direct effect	.069	.107	.029 to .185	.150	.205	.114 to .295
Indirect effect	−.103	−.160	−.207 to −.113	.165	.225	.172 to .277
Total effect	−.034	−.053	−.132 to .025	.315	.429	.356 to .503
Anxiety						
Direct effect	.106	.162	.088 to .236	.190	.254	.169 to .340
Indirect effect	−.085	−.130	−.173 to −.088	.137	.183	.136 to .231
Total effect	.021	.032	−.043 to .107	.327	.438	.366 to .509
Stress						
Direct effect	.135	.198	.122 to .275	.212	.272	.186 to .358
Indirect effect	−.087	−.127	−.168 to −.087	.139	.179	.131 to .226
Total effect	.049	.071	−.007 to .150	.351	.450	.377 to .524
Satisfaction with life						
Direct effect	.108	.086	−.007 to .179	−.195	−.136	−.223 to −.039
Indirect effect	.151	.120	.081 to .159	−.243	−.169	−.221 to −.117
Total effect	.259	.206	.114 to .298	−.438	−.305	−.399 to −.220

Note: Unst., unstandardized; St., standardized; bootstrap 95% CI., 95% bias-corrected standardized bootstrapped confidence interval with 20,000 resamples.

2.2. Measures

All scales were translated into Mandarin following the procedures outlined by Hambleton and Lee (2013). Research supports the validity of our two-factor model of perfectionism in Chinese samples (see Smith, Saklofske, Yan, & Sherry, 2015).

2.2.1. Perfectionistic strivings

Perfectionistic strivings were measured using the measurement model recommended by Cox et al. (2002) and Sherry and Hall (2009), which was composed of a short form of Hewitt and Flett's (1991) Self-Oriented Perfectionism subscale of the Multidimensional Perfectionism Inventory (HFMPS-SOP), Frost's Personal Standards subscale of the Multidimensional Perfectionism Inventory (FMPS-PS), and the modified form of Garner, Olmstead, and Polivy's (1983) Self-Oriented Perfectionism subscale of the Eating Disorder Inventory (EDI-SOP). The total score for perfectionistic strivings was calculated as the sum of the standardized scores from the HFMPS-SOP, FMPS-PS, and the EDI-SOP. The 5-item HFMPS-SOP was rated on a 7-point scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The 4-item FMPS-PS was rated on a 5-point scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The 5-item EDI-SOP was rated on a 6-point scale from 1 (*never*) to 6 (*always*). Research supports the