Assessing perfectionism in Russia: Classifying perfectionists with the Short Almost Perfect Scale

Kenneth T. Wang [a,*], Tatiana M. Permyakova [b], Marina S. Sheveleva [b]

[a] Fuller Theological Seminary, United States
[b] National Research University Higher School of Economics, Russia

ABSTRACT

This study examines perfectionism among a sample of 183 Russian college students. Psychometric properties of the Russian version of the Short Almost Perfect Scale (SAPS) were examined. Confirmatory factor analysis results supported the Russian SAPS factor structure. Results also indicated adequate reliability and validity of the SAPS in this Russian sample. Participants were further classified into different types of perfectionists—adaptive, maladaptive, and non-perfectionists—using latent profile analysis. As expected, maladaptive perfectionists reported higher levels of both anxiety and depressive mood compared to adaptive perfectionists; however the stress level between these two types of perfectionists was not significantly different. Cultural contexts, practical implications, and future directions were also discussed.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Perfectionism has become an important personality construct with strong implications for mental health. Perfectionism as a multidimensional construct was established in the early 1990s. Since then, researchers have found two distinctive higher-level aspects of perfectionism. In a systematic review of perfectionism studies, Stoeber and Otto (2006) summarized and labeled the two aspects of perfectionism as "perfectionistic striving" and "perfectionistic concerns." Perfectionistic striving is defined as demanding perfection of oneself and setting high personal standards. This perfectionistic striving has been viewed by some researchers as positive/adaptive (though a consensus has yet been reached), due to its minimal associations with psychological concerns (Methikalam, Wang, Slaney, & Yeung, 2015) and positive associations with self-esteem and achievement (Grzegorek, Slaney, Franze, & Rice, 2004). In contrast, perfectionistic concerns can be seen as a tendency to be overly focused on the imperfections, mistakes, criticisms, and perceived discrepancy between actual and ideal achievements. Perfectionistic concerns have been viewed as negative/maladaptive due to its links with mental-health issues, such as depression, anxiety, and eating disorder (Allen & Wang, 2014; Patterson, Wang, & Slaney, 2012).

Not only has the multidimensionality of perfectionism been distinguished by its positive and negative aspects, individuals have been classified into different types of perfectionists (Rice & Ashby, 2007). The different types of perfectionists found in research studies mirrored Hamachek's (1978) clinical observations of normal and neurotic perfectionists. While both types of perfectionists strive to achieve very high standards, the neurotic type is often too focused on their deficiencies. In other words, neurotic perfectionists are those who never seem to be satisfied despite doing their best; and rarely feel good about themselves. In contrast, normal perfectionists are those who are more flexible when their high standards are not attained. The different types of perfectionists (i.e., adaptive, maladaptive) along with nonperfectionists were first identified in Rice and Slaney's (2002) study with U.S. college students using the Almost Perfect Scale-Revised (APS-R; Slaney, Rice, Mobley, Trippi, & Ashby, 2001). The APS-R has been the perfectionism measure most often used to classify individuals into these different types. The APS-R core subscales used to differentiate perfectionists have been Standards and Discrepancy. Standards measure the level of high expectations one has for him or herself. Discrepancy measures the perceived gap between one's ideal standards and performance. Adaptive perfectionists are characterized as having high Standards and relatively low Discrepancy between their standards and performance. Maladaptive perfectionists have both high Standards and Discrepancy. Individuals who scored low on both Standards and Discrepancy are labeled as nonperfectionists. Widely used, the APS-R measures perfectionism as a multidimensional construct and has recently been utilized across cultures.

These three types of perfectionists have been subsequently found across Asian Indians (Wang, Puri, Slaney, Methikalam, & Chadha, 2012), Hong Kong adolescents (Wang, Yuen, & Slaney, 2009), and

* Corresponding author at: Department of Clinical Psychology, Fuller Theological Seminary, United States.
E-mail address: ktwang@fuller.edu (K.T. Wang).

Latino/as (Ortega, Wang, Slaney, Hayes, & Morales, 2014). Across all of these studies, maladaptive perfectionists consistently have lower self-esteem, more depressive symptoms, and higher levels of anxiety than adaptive perfectionists. In general, nonperfectionists' psychological well-being has been in between the two perfectionist groups. The adaptive, maladaptive, and non- perfectionist classification appears to exist across these cultures.

There has been an increasing interest among researchers to study perfectionism across several cultures. For example, the APS-R is a popular measure of perfectionism that has been translated into multiple languages: Chinese (Wang, Slaney, & Rice, 2007; Yang, Liang, Zhang, & Wu, 2007), Dutch (Van Yperen & Hagedoorn, 2008), Japanese (Nakano, 2009), Korean (Park, 2009), and Turkish (Ongen, 2009). It has been used to study perfectionistic constructs of different countries. To more efficiently examine perfectionism across cultures, a short form of the Almost Perfect Scale was recently developed (SAPS; Rice, Richardson, & Tueller, 2014). This 8-item SAPS has strong psychometric properties, can measure core dimensions of perfectionism, and differentiates types of perfectionists (Rice et al., 2014). Despite the recent advancement of perfectionist research, there is still a need for more cross-cultural research on perfectionism (Methikalam et al., 2015). This research is especially important among populations that have been scarcely examined, such as Russians.

1.1. Perfectionism in Russia

There are only few Russian studies on perfectionism. Some of these Russian studies translated perfectionism measures, including the Almost Perfect Scale-Revised (Yasnaya, Mitina, Enikopolov, & Zurabova, 2011). The overall results of studies that examined the factor structure of Russian translated scales largely coincided with the original. Russian studies on perfectionism have mainly focused on the negative influence of perfectionism on the psychological well-being of an individual (Permyakova & Sheveleva, 2015). These studies have shown that perfectionism has positive correlations with the number of suicide attempts (Sokolova & Tsygankova, 2011), the level of hostility and stress (Kholmogorova, Garanian, Evdokimova, & Moscova, 2009), and the level of depression and anxiety (Garanyan & Yudeeva, 2009). While new studies have emerged recently, there are further concepts and consequences of Russian culture that impact perfectionism, which should be further researched and examined.

One study, the only article located through a search on PsycINFO, examines how appearance and perfectionism are intertwined. Tarkhanova's (2014) study examined factors related to physical appearance perfectionism and emotional well-being among Russian youth. Individuals with physical appearance perfectionism strive to look physically attractive and become distressed if they fail to meet their own expectation of attractiveness. According to the study, there was a close connection between physical appearance perfectionism and emotional well-being for young girls. Moreover, individuals with higher levels of physical appearance anxiety were often from critical and dysfunctional families (Tarkhanova, 2014). Though research on perfectionism in Russia is limited, further research shows that it is not limited to appearance.

Perfectionism in Russia is also affected by its transitioning economy (Lisauskene, 2007). The youth generation between the ages of 17 and 20 has been labeled as "young perfectionists" due to their values and behavioral patterns. Their life goals are to achieve successful careers and obtain material rewards (Lisauskene, 2007). Aligned with these aspirations, Novak (2013) found material acquisition, high paying jobs, consumption of luxury brands, and the opportunity to work abroad, which indicates a "good life," to be the main values of young Russians. This type of materialism has been linked with lower life satisfaction (Tsang, Carpenter, Roberts, Frisch, & Carlisle, 2014) and higher levels of depressive mood (Mueller et al., 2011). The "consumption perfectionism" identity is typical of East-European countries with

transitioning economies (Kaufmann, Vrontis, & Manakova, 2012). Thus, perfectionism in Russia is also affected by these consumptive behavioral patterns and values.

There is another important aspect of perfectionism research in Russia, having to do with how emotional well-being was handled historically. During the former USSR, emotional well-being studies did not give much credence to social/environmental factors. For instance, the only cause of depressive disorders was thought to be biological factors. Social and psychological factors contributing to depressive disorders were overlooked (Kholmogorova & Garanyan, 1999). Understanding Russian culture and history explains why perfectionism research in Russian has been scarce.

Due to these cultural background factors, studying perfectionism and mental health is particularly important with the Russian population. Russia is transforming socially, toward a more individualized society. In individualized societies, there are higher standards of well-being and achievement orientation, which are associated with perfectionism. Thus, perfectionism studies should take priority. This study aims to examine perfectionism among Russian students and how perfectionism is associated with emotional stress.

1.2. The current study

The aims of the study are threefold: (a) To examine the factor structure and psychometric properties of the SAPS among a sample of Russian college students. (b) To use latent profile analysis to classify individuals into different types of perfectionists and see whether the three types of adaptive, maladaptive, and non- perfectionists are found in this sample of Russian college students. (c) To compare the perfectionist types on mental health indicators (i.e., anxiety, depression, and stress). We hypothesized that maladaptive perfectionists would have higher levels of depression, anxiety, and stress compared to adaptive perfectionists.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Participants of this study were 183 third-year university students (60 men, 123 women) at a research university in Russia. The age of participants ranged from 19 to 22 years old with a mean of 20.40 (S.D. = 0.57). Participants reported a mean academic grade average of 7.07 (S.D. = 0.93), with the grade scaling as 8–10 = excellent (equivalent of A), 6–7 = good (equivalent of B), 4–5 = satisfactory (equivalent of C), and below 4 = unsatisfactory (equivalent of D, or fail). Students majored in four different fields: management (44%), economics (33%), business informatics (12%), and social sciences and humanities (11%).

Students were invited to participate in the study by staying after class to complete this paper-and-pen questionnaire. First, the purpose of the survey was explained as well as the fact that participation was completely voluntary. The survey included demographic questions, the Almost Perfect Scale-Revised, Depression Anxiety Stress Scale, and Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale, which was not included in this study. The whole process took between 20 and 30 min. No compensation or additional incentive was provided. This research complied with the research ethical code of HSE.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Short Almost Perfect Scale (SAPS; Rice et al., 2014)

The SAPS is a brief, recently established measure of the Almost Perfect Scale-Revised (Slaney et al., 2001). The SAPS consists of two subscales—Standards (4 items) and Discrepancy (4 items). The Standards' subscale measures the level of perfectionistic striving by assessing one's setting of high expectations. A sample Standards item is "*I have high expectations for myself.*" The Discrepancy subscale