Social Correlates and Consequences of Perfectionism

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INTRODUCTION

Perfectionism, as defined by Hewitt and Flett (1991), is a personality disposition characterized by setting extremely high standards of performance in the pursuit of flawlessness, often accompanied by overly critical evaluations. **Three types of perfectionism** have been identified by researchers (Frost et al., 1990; Stoeber, 2016), including socially prescribed, self-oriented, or other-oriented. A socially prescribed perfectionist feels pressured by external factors to uphold high standards, while a self-oriented perfectionist will constantly strive for their goals because of their own intrinsic ideals. Other-oriented perfectionists may bind others to these contrived constructs, by demanding perfection from other people (Stoeber, 2015). Much research examines differences across individuals in the presence and type of perfectionism and the effects on other psychological characteristics and behaviors (e.g., stress, anger, procrastination, grades in school, eating disorders, and others) (Curran and Hill, 2019). **However, little research explores how social characteristics shape the probability and types of perfectionism**. Socioeconomic and other social statuses shape individual predispositions and behavior through socialization, expectations that align with class values and norms, and individual perceptions of themselves (Navarro-Carrillo et al., 2020).

Study Questions

1. Do social class, race/ethnicity, or gender predict any of the three types of perfectionism?
2. Are any of the types of perfectionism associated with well-being?
3. Do controls for other social and individual variables alter these relationships?

METHODS

We used a quantitative survey to evaluate the relationships between three salient social factors and the presence and type of perfectionism among honors students in a large, public, research-one institution.

Dependent Variables. Items from Hewitt and Flett's *Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale* (1991) were utilized to measure three types of perfectionism including *self-oriented perfectionism* (SOP), *socially prescribed perfectionism* (SPP), and *other-oriented perfectionism* (OOP).

Independent Variables. **Social class** is often measured using Socioeconomic Status (SES), which is operationalized as an index that includes income, occupational status, and educational level. For purposes of this study and because respondents were students, we measured social class using self-reported family income level. Family income was categorized into twelve ranges, from less than $10,000 (1) increasing incrementally to greater than $150,000 (12). **Race/ethnicity** was also measured by asking respondents to self-identify and responses were coded as white and other. **Gender** was measured as the respondent's self-reported gender identity (woman, man, transgender, non-binary, and other). Widely used measures of self-rated overall health, physical health, and mental/emotional health were also analyzed to assess whether the three types of perfectionism were associated with any of these outcomes.

There are currently 1776 students in the Honors program. A Qualtrics survey was sent to all students through a mailing list and 389 surveys were returned. Respondents were from a wide range of majors and statuses. In addition to the variables central to our study, we collected data on student involvement in student organizations, employment, stress, and satisfaction. The data was cleaned once the survey was closed and responses which were less than 50% completed were omitted to minimize confounding effects of missing values. The sample size after this process was 332.

We analyzed the data using SPSS to assess the relationships between the variables of study through correlations and Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression.

Fig. 1. Conceptual Model: Effects of Social Variables on Types of Perfectionism & Well-being

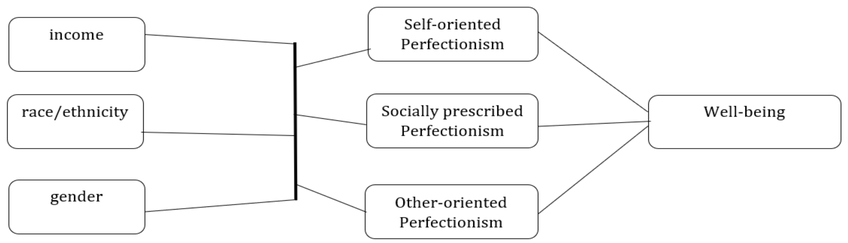

Table 1. Descriptive Sample Statistics

Characteristic	Survey Sample	
Race/ethnicity (n=265)	**# of Respondents**	**%**
White	212	80.0
Other	53	20.0
Gender identity (n=316)	-	-
Women	220	69.6
Man	96	30.4
Parental income (n=328)	-	-
Less than $10,000-$59,999	49	14.9
$60,000-$89,999	59	18.0
$90,000-$149,999	127	38.7
Greater than $150,000	93	28.4

Table 2. Bivariate Correlation Matrix for Study Variables

	Parental Income	Race/ Ethnicity	Gender	Self-Oriented Perfectionism	Socially Prescribed Perfectionism	Other-Oriented Perfectionism
1. Parental Income	1.000					
2. Race/Ethnicity	-.268**	—				
3. Gender	.027	.004	—			
4. Self-Oriented Perfectionism	-.061	.032	-.200**	—		
5. Socially Prescribed Perfectionism	-.190**	.123*	-.184**	.340**	—	
6. Other-Oriented Perfectionism	-.050	.157*	-.080	.279**	.266**	—

*Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).
**Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3. Regression Results for SOP

Dependent Variable: Self-Oriented Perfectionism (n=248)		
Independent Variables	*b*	*Beta*
Family Income	-.098	-.066
Race/Ethnicity	.037	.004
Gender	-1.904	-.234***

***p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001 (two-tailed)

Table 4. Regression Results for SPP

Dependent Variable: Socially-Prescribed Perfectionism (n=248)		
Independent Variables	*b*	*Beta*
Family Income	-.095	-.088
Race/Ethnicity	.912	.132*
Gender	-1.401	-.235***

***p≤.05, **p≤.01, ***p≤.001 (two-tailed)

Table 5. Regression Results for OOP

Dependent Variable: Other-Oriented Perfectionism (n=248)		
Independent Variables	*b*	*Beta*
Family Income	-.021	-.019
Race/Ethnicity	1.525	.215***
Gender	-.519	-.085

***p≤.05, **p≤.01, ***p≤.001 (two-tailed)

RESULTS

- Social factors appear to influence the presence and type of perfectionism.
- When controlling for parental income, race/ethnicity, gender is a significant predictor of self-oriented perfectionism. Women are significantly more likely to experience self-oriented perfectionism than are men (p.≤001). [Table 3]
- When controlling for parental income and gender, race/ethnicity predicts socially prescribed perfectionism. Specifically, non-whites are significantly more likely to experience socially prescribed perfectionism than are whites (p≤.05). [Table 4]
- With controls for income and race/ethnicity, socially prescribed perfectionism varies by gender. Specifically, women are significantly more likely than men to experience this type of perfectionism (p≤.001). [Table 4]
- When controlling for parental income and gender, only race/ethnicity predicts other-oriented perfectionism. Specifically, whites are significantly less likely than those of other race/ethnic groups to experience other-oriented perfectionism (p≤.001). [Table 5]
- Note: Though parental income is displayed on the frequency table as a four-category variable for descriptive purposes, we used a more refined twelve-category measure in our regression analysis.
- Preliminary regression analyses indicate that neither overall health nor mental health is predicted by degree of perfectionism. However, in the future, we will explore these relationships while controlling for social class, race/ethnicity, and gender by taking a more nuanced approach to measuring well-being.

DISCUSSION AND FURTHER STUDY

- Our survey included questions about life satisfaction and involvement in extracurricular activities. In future analyses we would like to study the relationship between these variables and perfectionism.
- In addition to collecting respondent's parental education information, we gathered data on another form of SES, parental income and perceived social standing relative to others (MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status, 2000) by presenting respondents with a picture of a ladder and asking them to select the rung in which they felt like characterized their family growing up, from worst off to best off. In future research we would like to evaluate the affects of SES on perfectionism using each of these measures and theorizing about how social class influences the likelihood of perfectionism and the relationship between perfectionism and well-being.
- We plan to factor analyze items in each of the perfectionism scales to obtain more precise measures of these constructs for analysis and to use scales based on the factor analysis results to further assess relationships under study.
- We would also like to draw a larger sample from a more diverse population (including non-honors students).

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