

Full Length Research Paper

Perfectionism and five-big model of personality in an Iranian sample

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The purpose of this research was to examine the perfectionism and five big personality relationships, as well as the possible effects of gender and age group differences on these in Iranian adolescents and young adults' sample. The sample included 136 adolescents and 184 young adults that were selected randomly from the Shiraz city, Fars province, Iran. A demographic questionnaire, the Ahwaz Perfectionism Inventory (API) and the NEO Five Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI) were used in this study. Analysis indicated there are significant negative correlation coefficients between perfectionism, neuroticism and agreeableness, but there are no significant correlation coefficients between perfectionism, extraversion, openness to experience and conscientiousness. However, a MANOVA rejected the effects of gender and gender-aged group interaction significant effects in perfectionism and personality. Finally, the multiple regressions indicated that only neuroticism explained perfectionism variation in females, males, adolescents, young adults and the total sample.

Key words: Perfectionism, five big personality, adolescents, young adult, gender.

INTRODUCTION

The term 'perfectionism' is rooted in cultures because of human's competitions in workplaces and their striving high to attain resources on one hand and all cultures tendency to prompt a good life for their people in the other hand. Hereby, it assumed that perfectionism has various outcomes across different cultures. This term means a good human life and it is an account of human well-being which implies that the best life for humans is the most perfect one that they can live, and also this originated in their nature. Perfectionism was explained by different ethical, religious and philosophical theories that characterize the good being of humans, in terms of development of human nature by philosophers such

Aristotle. However, a number of scholars have sought to develop accounts of the human good in modern philosophy (Foot, 2003), but this term was considered by psychologists too.

Initially, the theory of perfectionism was defined by Adler (1956) in the field of psychology. He noted that striving for perfectionism is normal and innate because of the tendency of human social being. He argued that those who express healthy perfectionism search for goals that are obtainable, while those who express maladaptive perfectionism might have obsessive order and fear of critique. Additionally, he recognized the importance of social forces for healthy perfectionism. Pioneer scholars of perfectionism have identified its central component as the setting of excessively high personal standards or

goals, combined with other features such as, striving actively to meet rigid goals, self criticism and underrating the accomplishments (Frost et al., 1990). Then, Shafran et al. (2002) proposed that perfectionism is present “when personally demanding standards are pursued despite significant adverse consequences” (p. 778).

Now, Frost and colleagues' (1990) six dimension model, Hewitt and Flett's (1989) three dimension model and Slade and Owens' (1998) dual process model are well known conceptualizations of perfectionism in psychology. In Frost and colleagues' (1990) model, perfectionism was conceptualized as having six dimensions: high personal standards, concern over mistakes, high parental expectations, parental criticism, doubting of actions and organization. Also, they distinguished normal and maladaptive aspects of perfectionism and related its maladaptive forms with psychological disorders. Hewitt and Flett (1990) conceptualized perfectionism as consisting of three dimensions: self-oriented perfectionism, other-oriented perfectionism and socially-prescribed perfectionism. They proposed that perfectionism construct includes both personal and social components and contributes to levels of psychopathology. Self-oriented perfectionism as a motivational force is the setting of perfectionist standards for oneself and the evaluation of one's behavior based on these high standards, regardless of how realistic these standards may be. With other oriented perfectionism, the emphasis is on the perfection of others. This component is the setting of unrealistic standards for others and the strict evaluation of significant others, based on these high standards. If others do not live up to these expectations, the result may be “other-directed blame, lack of trust and feelings of hostility towards others” (p. 457). Socially prescribed perfectionism encompasses the desire to achieve the goals and expectations that significant others have set. In a third theory, the concepts of positive and negative perfectionism and the dual process model of perfectionism is outlined by Slade and Owens (1998). Positive perfectionism is more adaptive and it encourages positive and active striving toward realistic goals and the individual is able to regulate them satisfactorily, while negative perfectionism is largely unregulated and involves avoiding aversive and unhealthy outcomes. They noted these two dimensions related directly to Skinnerian concepts of positive and negative reinforcement and often emerged from the environment. Currently, Flett and Hewitt (2006) suggested that positive perfectionism is motivated by an

avoidance orientation and fear of failure mechanism, and they claimed that attempts to define and conceptualize positive perfectionism may have blurred the distinction between it and the conscientiousness dimension of personality.

However, a huge part of the literature indicates that perfectionism is associated with several personality characteristics in the Western cultures including the ‘five big’ model. The ‘five big’ model gained a universal acceptance as a comprehensive model of normal and abnormal personality (Matthews and Deary, 1998). It assumed that the extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness to experience as the ‘five big’ dimensions will subsume many of the narrower traits, but they are independent of each other in general. Also, it suggested that the ‘five big’ model will be able to capture a few aspects of personality disorders (Matthews and Deary, 1998) such as the perfectionist character. Parker and Stumpf (1995) revealed that perfectionism and ‘five big’ personality relationships have been differential in many studies. Hill et al. (1997) indicated that self-oriented perfectionism was strongly associated with conscientiousness, and with the achievement striving subscale in particular. They noted that other-oriented perfectionism was inversely associated with agreeableness and socially-prescribed perfectionism was associated only with the depression subscale of the neuroticism factor. They concluded that self-oriented perfectionism appeared predominately adaptive, while other-oriented and socially-prescribed perfectionism appeared maladaptive. Ashby et al. (1996) found that the adaptive components of perfectionism were associated with conscientiousness, while its maladaptive components were associated with neuroticism. Some have investigated the association between perfectionism and higher order personality dimensions that reflect potentially, more or less healthy characteristics such as conscientiousness and neuroticism (Enns and Cox, 2002). Rice et al. (2007) revealed a strong relationship between the perfectionism and the neuroticism dimension, whereas Dunkley et al. (2006) reported significant correlations between perfectionism and extraversion, openness to experience and conscientiousness. Also, Stoeber et al. (2009) indicated that conscientiousness is a trait that plays a role in the development of self-oriented perfectionism.

Overall, these findings suggest that individuals who endorse high perfectionist expectations might tend to be curious, imaginative, creative thinkers and be

unconventional, and they tend to prefer social actions in which they can be seen as active and talkative and probably seem to be optimistic to others. Perhaps high standards of performance in perfectionism do not equate to rigid and narrow sets of goals and expectations by introverts, and these findings possibly yield additional evidence that perfectionism can have some adaptive outcomes (Slaney et al., 2002).

Although perfectionism could be considered a positive trait associated with elevated personal standards and high achievement (Hamachek, 1978; Silverman, 1983), it also has a dark side that has been linked with a lot of negative behaviors and emotional characteristics, depression and anxiety (Rice and Mirzadeh, 2000; Suddarth and Slaney, 2001). Altogether, primary conceptualizations of perfectionism are unidimensional and they often focused on self-related standards and cognitions. As a unidimensional construct, the healthy perfectionism is defined as having high achievable expectations and personal satisfaction from efforts to achieve those aspirations, but unhealthy perfectionism is defined as having unrealistic high goals and being unable to feel satisfaction from efforts to achieve them. Therefore, if perfectionism is conceptualized as either unidimensional or multidimensional, then it could be regarded as a culture-bounded construct with positive or negative outcomes. Similarly, investigations found a positive relationship between perfectionism and some psychological disturbances across cultures (Najarian and Khodarahimi, 1997; Blenkiron et al., 1999; Castro and Rice, 2001; Iketani et al., 2002; Xian, 2004), but the degree to which these findings have generalization to all cultures is unknown.

From a cultural point of view, we suggest that perfectionism is not a virtue, although cultures do promote it as if it were. Cultures put some values behind perfectionism as a part of individual life style which means that people are expected to pay attention to details of their goals, never make a wrong decision and never fails. We suggest that both socially significant others and social policy makers might have set extremely high standards for people and citizens and in turn, expect them to be perfect, but simultaneously they deprive people sometimes from attaining to suitable resources for a perfect being because of their profit and power. Therefore, it seems that perfectionism operate as a culturally oriented construct and we think that those high in perfectionism may have greater enduring fears of negative evaluation and might have more experience

feelings of anger, neuroticism and adaptive personality traits if they are not able to meet these goals that are set for them by prescribed social norms. In line with this suggestion, a few researchers have looked at cultural differences in perfectionism in the Western world (Chang, 1998; Nilsson et al., 1999), but this largely ignored in the Eastern countries, especially in Iran.

Since there is a lack of evidence in perfectionism and the 'five big' personality interrelatedness in Iranian culture present study, the main objective was to investigate perfectionism and the 'big five' personality relationships in adolescent and young adult in Shiraz city, the cultural capital of the country. This study is based on unidimensional perfectionism in Iranian culture and its plausible relationships to the 'big five' personality. Therefore, the first hypothesis of this research study is that perfectionism and personality characteristics have significant relationships in adolescents and young adults. The second hypothesis of this research study is that there are significant differences among adolescents and young adults in perfectionism and personality characteristics in both males and females. The third hypothesis of this project is that the 'five big' personality model will predict perfectionism in Iranian sample within multiple regression analysis.

METHODS

Participants

The research population included adolescents (11 - 19 years old) and young adults (20 - 29 years old) in Shiraz city, the capital of Fars province of Iran. Based on Line's (1978) table for estimating the sample size of the population, the subjects (adolescents and young adults) that were selected randomly from Shiraz were 320. This sample included 136 adolescents (F = 67 and M = 69) and 184 young adults (F = 97 and M = 87). Age mean (and standard deviation) for adolescents and young adult groups were 17.35 (1.51) and 22.21 (2.01) respectively. After informed consent was acquired, a demographic questionnaire and two inventories were completed by the participants.

Instruments

The demographic questionnaire included age, gender, level of education, marital status, socioeconomic status, ethnicity and the occupation of parents. The two inventories used were: (1) the Ahwaz Perfectionism Inventory (API) and (2) the NEO Five Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI). The NEO Five Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI) (Costa and McCrae, 1992b): The NEO-FFI is an abbreviated form of the NEO Personality Inventory. It is a 60-item questionnaire

which requires 10 to 15 min for it to be completed. This questionnaire is rated on a five-point scale to yield scores in five major domains of personality. The NEO-FFI can provide an accurate measure of the 'big five' personality model. It is a "brief, comprehensive measure of the five domains of personality" (Costa and McCrae, 1992b, p. 11). When the NEO-FFI was correlated with the domain scales of the NEO-PI-R, correlations were 0.92 to 0.87 ranges. Briggs (1992) viewed the NEO-FFI as an easy to comprehend, short and well-written measure of broad personality, whereas Garousi et al. (2001) determined personality factors in 2000 and randomly selected individuals from different provinces of Iran by NEO-FFI. However, the NEO-FFI reliability and validity are affirmed in several studies in Iran (Garousi et al., 2001; Amanellahi, 2005; Hosseini, 2007).

Ahwaz Perfectionism Inventory (API) (Najarian et al., 1999): The API invented the perfectionism measurement in Iranian society and its conceptual framework was based on previous theories of multidimensional perfectionism construct (Flett et al., 1990; Frost et al., 1990). API consists of 27 items and its factor analysis showed any specific factor and only yields a total score. The API consists of 27 questions with four possible answers that include "always, "often", "sometimes" and "never" with numerical values of 3, 2, 1 and 0, respectively. The API concurrent validity with the 'almost perfect scale-revised' (APS-R, Slaney et al., 2001) and the 'multidimensional perfectionism scale' (MPS, Frost et al., 1990) in the present study was $r = 0.36$ and $r = 0.29$, respectively. The API reliability by test-retest method was estimated as $r = 0.68$, while the API Cronbach's internal consistency was 0.85 in Iranian population (Najarian et al., 1997).

FINDINGS

The initial analysis of data included a correlation coefficient which was conducted to evaluate the relationship between the perfectionism and 'big five' personality characteristics including neuroticism (negative effect and self-reproach), extraversion (sociability, activity and positive effect), openness to experience (aesthetic interests, intellectual interest and unconventionality), agreeableness (non-antagonistic and prosocial) and conscientiousness (orderliness, goal-striving and dependability). This was computed among the 18 variables in an effort to assess the degree that these quantitative variables were positive and linearly related in the total sample. Findings indicated that there are significant negative correlation coefficients between the perfectionism and neuroticism (negative effect and self-reproach) dimension and agreeableness (non-antagonistic and prosocial) domains of personality, but there are no significant correlation coefficients between perfectionism, extraversion, openness to experience and conscientiousness personality big domains. However,

perfectionism was negatively and positively correlated with positive effects and activity subscales of extraversion. Also, perfectionism was negatively and positively correlated with aesthetic interests and unconventionality subscales of openness to experience. Findings showed that perfectionism was negatively and positively related with orderliness and goal striving subscales of conscientiousness domains in adolescents and young adults. The Bonferroni approach was used to control Type I effort across the 12 correlations and a p value of less than 0.05 was used as an indicator for significance (Table 1).

The second hypothesis of this research study is that age group (that is, adolescence and young adult periods) and gender plays a significant role in the perfectionism and personality characteristics. A t-test for independent groups was conducted to evaluate the effects of age group and gender in perfectionism and personality dimensions and traits separately, and initial analysis did not show significant effects for gender, but it indicated significant effects for age group in sociability, activity, aesthetic interest and intellectual interest personality subfactors. Additionally, to examine the possible gender differences and age groups interaction, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted by gender, in which age-group and gender-age group interaction is seen as independent variables and psychopathy deviate and personality characteristics variables as dependent variables. An overall multivariate effect was found for gender (Wilks' $k = 0.961$; $F(13, 304) = 0.959$; $p < 0.493$), aged group (Wilks' $k = 0.917$; $F(13, 304) = 2.110$; $p < 0.014$) and gender-aged group interaction (Wilks' $k = 0.952$; $F(13, 304) = 1.177$; $p < 0.259$), which reject gender and gender-aged group interaction significant effects in perfectionism and personality characteristics. However, there were aged group differences in some subscales of extraversion and openness to experience domains. Findings indicated that young adults had significant higher performance in sociability and activity subfactors of extraversion and intellectual interest subfactor of openness to experience, while adolescents were only significantly higher in aesthetic interest subfactor of openness to experience domain. Therefore, aged-group differences only belonged to both extraversion and openness to experience domains of personality.

Finally, multiple regression analyses were conducted to evaluate the relationship of personality five big domains and perfectionism by genders, aged group and total sample. Findings indicated that neuroticism explained

Table 1. Perfectionism and personality characteristics correlations coefficients.

Variable	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	
Perfectionism	-0.167**	-0.535**	-0.372**	-0.225**	0.034	0.230**	0.040	-0.110*	-0.090	0.111*	-0.029	-0.252**	-0.165**	-0.143*	-0.125*	0.171**	0.023	
Negative effect		-0.052	0.502**	-0.007	-0.038	0.119*	0.041	-0.021	0.137*	-0.029	0.040	0.034	-0.019	0.020	0.077	0.067	0.106	
Self-reproach			0.838**	0.295**	0.063	-0.209**	0.058	0.117*	0.189**	-0.078	0.103	0.378**	-0.052	0.301**	0.293**	-0.256**	0.047	
Neuroticism				0.252**	0.034	-0.116*	0.073	0.090	0.239**	-0.084	0.111*	0.345**	-0.056	0.272**	0.296**	-0.185**	0.099	
Positive effect					0.041	-0.003	0.486**	0.102	0.143*	-0.023	0.107	0.266**	0.072	0.261**	0.281**	0.027	0.236**	
Sociability						0.275**	0.717**	0.023	0.098	0.236**	0.210**	0.138*	0.259**	0.233**	0.012	0.202**	0.150**	
Activity							0.697**	0.017	0.206**	0.173**	0.222**	0.102	0.275**	0.209**	0.043	0.367**	0.288**	
Extraversion								0.069	0.233**	0.213**	0.287**	0.256**	0.326**	0.363**	0.161**	0.324**	0.350**	
Aesthetic interests									0.079	0.105	0.600**	0.141*	0.091	0.162**	0.154**	0.096	0.186**	
Intellectual interests										-0.011	0.534**	0.280**	-0.041	0.222**	0.174**	0.055	0.172**	
Unconventionality											0.684**	0.003	0.261**	0.118*	-0.017	0.337**	0.222**	
Openness												0.212**	0.191**	0.266**	0.153**	0.290**	0.320**	
Non-antagonistic													0.089	0.898**	0.334**	0.034	0.281**	
Prosocial orientation														0.518**	-0.125*	0.303**	0.115*	
Agreeableness															0.231**	0.164**	0.292**	
Orderliness																-0.074	0.719**	
Goal striving																		0.640**

*p = 0.05, **p = 0.01.

10, 17, 12, 16 and 14% of perfectionism variation in females, males, adolescents, young adult and total sample, respectively. Moreover, neuroticism and extraversion altogether explained 17% of perfectionism variation in adolescents. However, predictive variables were positively correlated to perfectionism in all groups (Table 2).

DISCUSSION

The results from this study in the first hypothesis demonstrated that perfectionism

has significant positive relationships to neuroticism (negative effect and self-reproach) and agreeableness (non-antagonistic and prosocial) domains of personality. As was explained previously, this perfectionism measure factor analysis in Iranian population showed a single unidimensional construct and its positive relationships with two neuroticism and agreeableness domains of personality in the present research is substantially in line with Hill et al. (1997) findings in other-oriented and socially oriented perfectionism outcomes. These findings might

implicitly indicate the inherent other-oriented and socially oriented elements of perfectionism in the present sample that generally shows maladaptive perfectionism (Rice et al., 2007). Since there were no significant relationships between perfectionism, extraversion, openness to experience and conscientiousness, it seems that positive and adaptive components of perfectionism, associated with such domains of personality in previous literature, were often overlooked in the API scale (Ashby et al., 1996; Enns and Cox, 2002; Dunkley et al., 2006).

Table 2. Regression analyses of NEO-FFI and perfectionism prediction.

Groups	Predictors	R	R ²	Beta	t	p
Female	Neuroticism	0.328	107	-0.328	- 40.399	0.0001
Male	Neuroticism	0.418	0.175	-0.418	-50.580	0.0001
Adolescence	Neuroticism	0.355	0.126	-0.355	-40.635	0.0001
Young adult	Neuroticism	0.400	0.160	0.160	-50.880	0.0001
Total sample	Neuroticism	0.372	0.138	-0.372	-70.148	0.0001

Overall, the present findings demonstrate the dark side of perfectionism in this sample. Thus, it was linked to neurotic behaviors, conformity and some passive types of agreeableness in this sample.

Additionally, an examination was done on the possible gender differences and aged groups interaction and the rejected gender and gender-aged group interaction effects in both perfectionism and 'five big' dimensions. The present findings are obviously in contrast with the investigations that showed significant roles for age and gender in both perfectionism and 'five big' personality (Feingold, 1994; Blenkiron et al., 1999; Haase et al., 1999; Costa et al., 2001; Iketani et al., 2002; McCrae, 2002; Furnham et al., 2005; Soenens et al., 2005). In addition, we explored a significant aged group difference in a few subscales of extraversion and openness to experience domains. So, young adult had significant higher performance in sociability and activity subfactors of extraversion and intellectual interest subfactor of openness to experience, and adolescents only had higher significance in aesthetic interest subfactor of openness to experience. These findings, which are in agreement with the 'five big' personality postulations that assume personality traits, are "insulated from the direct effects of the environment" and have "reached a matured form in adulthood" (McCrae and Costa, 1999, pp. 144 - 145).

Finally, the present research indicated that neuroticism explained 10, 17, 12, 16 and 14% of perfectionism variation in females, males, adolescents, young adult and total sample, respectively. This finding is consistent with the dark and neurotic side of perfectionism across cultures (Edwards and Lynch, 1999; Rice and Mirzadeh, 2000; Suddarth and Slaney, 2001; Blenkiron et al., 2001; Iketani et al., 2002; Xian, 2004). Altogether, findings such as these imply that cultural differences may well exist, regarding perfectionism and its related constructs, since

cultures are different in their emphasis to reinforce and socialize types of perfectionism such as neurotic or negative. Neurotic perfectionism typically involves the setting of unrealistically high standards for people and the then inability to accept their minimal mistakes. In agreement to Mitzman et al. (1994), the neurotic aspect of perfectionism may include a fear of failure that serves as a motivational component and may lead to negative feelings about oneself because of the inability to achieve true perfection. When a culture is neurotic, perfectionist oriented would in turn influence some of the personality traits among people. Since perfectionists are afraid to leave anything out because of blame, pressure and punishment, they as much stop doing something. This is why perfectionism gets longer, workloads get heavier and to-do lists grow to overwhelming proportions, and finally, it linked to some negative personality dimensions such as neuroticism and agreeableness. However, there is no straightforward relationship between perfectionism and 'five big' personality across culture. For example, a recent investigation revealed that perfectionism and five big dimensions relationships might be mediated by attachment styles (Ulu and Tezar, 2010). Therefore, in line with the present findings and the aforesaid literature, we suggest that both socially significant others and social makers have a major contribution in the creation of instrumental perfectionism among people. Thus, they install this type of perfectionism by prescribing some specific meanings, standards and ideals for the public and then they would define similar ideals for them by their own visions, while there are no same equal opportunities and access to different resources for everyone to attain these standards. Obviously, this prescribed and instrumental perspective highlights the dark side of perfectionism and in turn, might result in neurotic behaviors and passivity among adolescents and young adults.

In conclusion, the current research adds to the psychology literature because of the significant positive relationships between perfectionism, neuroticism and agreeableness and the role of neuroticism in the perfectionism explanation among an Iranian sample. However, the present research is limited because of the correlational nature and single measure used to assess perfectionism, and as such, further research may apply other multidimensional scales such as the positive-negative and self-oriented, others-oriented and socially-oriented scales. It would expect that further research should be done to investigate the roles of goal attainment, need satisfaction, wishes, values, social support and capital as socio-cultural issues in perfectionism and five big personality relationships in cross-cultural studies among clinical and non-clinical populations.

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