

How Adaptive and Maladaptive Perfectionism Relate to Positive and Negative Psychological Functioning: Testing a Stress-Mediation Model in Black and White Female College Students

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This study assessed racial variations in how adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism relate to psychological functioning in a sample of 150 Black and 150 White female college students. Comparative results indicated that Black women, as compared with White women, reported less adaptive perfectionism, less life satisfaction, greater stress, and greater negative affect. Correlational results indicated that for both groups, maladaptive perfectionism, but not adaptive perfectionism, was associated with stress. Accordingly, a model in which stress mediates the link between maladaptive perfectionism and psychological functioning was tested. Overall, path-analytic results indicated that stress completely or partially mediated the link between maladaptive perfectionism and psychological functioning for both Black and White women. Potential implications of the present findings for counseling Black and White women are discussed.

In recent decades, there has been growing interest in studying the relationship between perfectionism and psychological functioning in adults (Flett & Hewitt, 2002). Recent reviews of perfectionism studies (e.g., Blatt, 1995; Chang, 2003; Shafran & Mansell, 2001) indicate that perfectionism is a key variable associated with negative psychological functioning, including greater depressive symptomatology, greater anxiety, greater stress, greater suicidal risk, greater eating disturbances, and poorer outcomes in the treatment of clinical depression. However, several key questions have yet to be resolved in studying the relationship between perfectionism and psychological functioning.

On the (Unknown) Generalizability of Perfectionism Theory and Research to Diverse Racial Groups: Most of the Participants Were White, and They Still Are a Decade Later!

Gender, race, and culture have been neglected in mainstream psychological research (Sue, Bingham, Porché-Burke, & Vasquez, 1999). More than a decade ago, Graham (1992) analyzed the trend

in research published from 1970 to 1989 reflected in half a dozen leading American Psychological Association (APA) journals. Results from her analyses indicated a steady decline in both the number and the percentage of articles that focused on the experiences of Blacks. Thus, it is not surprising that of the hundreds of studies published on perfectionism over the past decade, less than half a dozen of these looked at perfectionism in Blacks (e.g., Striegel-Moore et al., 2000). Even among those studies that have been conducted, some have used a measure of perfectionism tied to eating disturbances (Garner, Olmstead, & Polivy, 1983) rather than a measure related to general psychological functioning. In fact, few studies have looked at perfectionism, broadly defined, in Black young adults (e.g., Castro & Rice, 2003), and only one study has examined perfectionism comparatively between Black and White, male and female young adults.

In a study involving 118 Black and 299 White college students, Nilsson, Paul, Lupini, and Tatem (1999) found variations between Black and White students on levels of perfectionism. Using Frost, Marten, Lahart, and Rosenblate's (1990) Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS), these investigators found that Black students, as compared with White students, reported greater parental expectations. In contrast, White students, in comparison with Black students, reported greater concern over mistakes and parental criticism. When the two groups were compared on the basis of gender, Nilsson et al. found that Black female students in comparison with White female students reported greater parental expectations, whereas White female students reported greater concern over mistakes and parental criticism. Among male students, Blacks, in comparison with Whites, reported greater parental expectations only. Thus, racial variations on perfectionism appeared

