



## The relationship of perceived parenting styles to perfectionism<sup>☆</sup>

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### Abstract

Past research on perfectionism has suggested that the development of perfectionism is related to harsh parenting styles. The present study extends past research by examining the relationship between perceived parental characteristics and perfectionism in both men and women from two ethnic groups. This study also included an examination of the relationship between perfectionism and academic achievement. One-hundred and Forty-five Asian-American and 192 Caucasian-American college students participated in the present study. In general, harsh and authoritarian parenting styles were related to maladaptive, but not adaptive, components of perfectionism in Caucasian-American men and women and Asian-American women. The adaptive component of perfectionism was related to higher grade-point averages for women in both ethnic groups but not for the men. © 2001 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

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Perfectionism has been defined as the tendency to set excessively high standards and engage in overly critical self-evaluations (Frost, Marten, Lahart, & Rosenblate, 1990). Many theorists view the development of perfectionism as a product of children's interactions with their parents (Barrow & Moore, 1983; Burns, 1980; Driscoll, 1982; Missildine, 1963; Pacht, 1984). For instance, perfectionists may have grown up in family environments where less than perfect performance by the children is met with either overt criticism or criticism implied through the imposition of high standards and expectations. As a result, children of demanding parents may not learn less critical ways of evaluating their own performance (Missildine, 1963; Pacht, 1984). Perfectionistic tendencies that are formed in the child may then be maintained by a number of factors such as

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unrealistic models in the popular culture and the emphasis placed on achievement in the educational system.

Several studies have provided empirical evidence supporting the hypothesis that perfectionism develops more readily in those families with overly critical parents (Flett, Hewitt, & Singer, 1995; Frost, Lahart, & Rosenblate, 1991; Rice, Ashby, & Preusser, 1996). Frost et al. (1991) found that in a sample of college women, perfectionism was associated with reports of harsh parenting styles. Likewise, Rice et al. (1996) found that those with maladaptive perfectionistic styles described their parents as being more demanding and more critical than did those with more adaptive perfectionistic styles. Flett et al. (1995) also found an association between maladaptive perfectionism and reports of exposure to authoritarian parenting styles.

Flett et al.'s (1995) study is the only known study to have examined gender differences in the relationship between perceived parenting styles and perfectionism. Flett et al. utilized the Hewitt and Flett Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS-H; Hewitt & Flett, 1991) that examines three dimensions of perfectionism based on the target of perfectionistic expectations. Socially Prescribed Perfectionism was the only dimension of perfectionism related to authoritarian parenting styles, and furthermore, this relationship was seen only among men. Socially Prescribed Perfectionism is a subscale of the MPS-H that refers to the belief that others hold unrealistic expectations for oneself and is the subscale most often related to maladaptive functioning.

The main purpose of the present study was to further examine gender differences in the relationship between perceived parenting styles and perfectionism by utilizing the Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS-F; Frost et al., 1990). Unlike the MPS-H, the MPS-F focuses on perfectionistic evaluations individuals direct towards themselves while also differentiating between maladaptive and adaptive components of perfectionism. The relationship between parenting styles and the following three subscales of the Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale were examined: *Concern Over Mistakes* reflects negative reactions to mistakes, the tendency to equate mistakes with failure, and the tendency to believe that failure will result in the loss of respect of others, *Doubts About Actions* measures how confident individuals are in their ability to complete tasks, and *Personal Standards* reflects the setting of high expectations for oneself. Both Concern Over Mistakes and Doubts About Actions are associated with maladaptive perfectionism and have been associated with psychopathology and dysfunction (Frost et al., 1990). On the other hand, Personal Standards reflects adaptive perfectionism and has been found to be related to positive, but not negative, affect (Frost et al., 1990; Frost, Heimberg, Holt, Mattia, & Neubauer, 1993).

The present study also sought to examine differences between ethnic groups in the relationship between parenting styles and perfectionism. Parents in Asian-American cultures are often viewed by their children as emphasizing authoritarian parenting styles (Kelley & Tseng, 1992; Schneider & Lee, 1990). Therefore, it is plausible that perfectionism develops more readily in Asian-American families where parents are perceived as being critical and demanding. Chang (1998) found that Asian-American college students did in fact exhibit higher levels of maladaptive perfectionism than did Caucasian-American college students. It is important to note, though, that what might be considered negative traits (maladaptive perfectionism and authoritarian parenting styles) in the general population, may not necessarily have negative repercussions for Asian-Americans. For example, although Asian-Americans report authoritarian parenting styles in their

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