



Insecure attachment, perfectionistic self-presentation, and social disconnection in adolescents

Chang Chen^{a,*}, Paul L. Hewitt^a, Gordon L. Flett^b, Tracy G. Cassels^a, Susan Birch^a, Jonathan S. Blasberg^a

^a Department of Psychology, University of British Columbia, 2136 West Mall, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada V6T 1Z4

^b Department of Psychology, York University, 4700 Keele Street, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M3J 1P3

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 7 October 2011

Received in revised form 2 February 2012

Accepted 8 February 2012

Available online 10 March 2012

Keywords:

Perfectionism

Perfectionistic self-presentation

Attachment style

Social disconnection

Adolescents

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the present study was to investigate several components of the Perfectionism Social Disconnection Model (PSDM) by assessing the relationships among perfectionism, insecure attachment, and social disconnection in adolescents. This study examined perfectionistic self-presentation, attachment style, and experience of disconnection from social environment in a sample of 178 adolescents. Results indicated that perfectionistic self-presentation facets were significantly correlated with social disconnection and fearful attachment was associated with the nondisclosure of imperfection. Moreover, nondisclosure of imperfection partially mediated the relationship between fearful attachment and social disconnection. The current study is the first to examine the link between insecure attachment and perfectionistic self-presentation and provides some evidence supporting the PSDM.

© 2012 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

1.1. Perfectionism and psychopathology

Over the past two decades, investigators have shown considerable interest in the relationship between perfectionism and psychopathology. A large body of research has linked perfectionism to numerous adjustment problems in children, adolescents and adults (e.g. see Flett & Hewitt, 2002; Hewitt, Flett, & Mikail, in preparation). Perfectionism is often conceptualized as a multidimensional construct (Flett & Hewitt, 2002; Frost, Marten, Lahart, & Rosenblate, 1990; Hewitt & Flett, 1991) and according to Hewitt and Flett (1991), trait perfectionism entails three dimensions: self-oriented, other-oriented and socially prescribed perfectionism (Hewitt & Flett, 1991). *Self-oriented perfectionism* is an intrapersonal trait dimension that involves the requirement for one's own perfection, all-or-nothing thinking, and emphasis of one's own flaws. In contrast, *other-oriented perfectionism* involves the extent to which one possesses high expectations and standards for others. *Socially prescribed perfectionism* is an interpersonal dimension that involves the perception that others have unrealistic expectations for one's behavior.

In addition to these perfectionism traits, Hewitt and colleagues (2003) also described perfectionistic individuals' need to appear perfect to others by promoting their perfection or by not displaying or disclosing imperfections, termed the perfectionistic self-presentation. Perfectionism traits and perfectionistic self-presentation facets are associated differentially with various types of psychopathology and maladjustment (see Flett & Hewitt, 2002; Hewitt et al., 2003). Perfectionistic self-presentation facets have been shown to relate to poor relationship functioning and various forms of psychopathology above and beyond trait perfectionism and other personality variables in adults and adolescents (Hewitt et al., 2003; Roxborough et al., in press). The focus of the current work is on the interpersonal expression of perfectionism among adolescents.

1.2. Perfectionistic self-presentation in adolescents

Perfectionistic self-presentation (PSP), the interpersonal expression of perfectionism, involves the need to appear perfect with three dimensions: *perfectionistic self-promotion* (the need to actively promote one's supposed "perfection"), *nondisplay of imperfection* (the need to avoid revealing one's perceived imperfections), and *nondisclosure of imperfection* (the need to avoid disclosing one's imperfections; Hewitt et al., 2003). Recently, Hewitt et al. (2011) have replicated all three facets of the PSP in adolescents. All three PSP facets have been associated with psychological difficulties and distress, including anxiety and relationship difficulties, depression, hopelessness and suicidal risk in clinical and nonclinical samples of adolescents (e.g. Hewitt et al., 2011; Roxborough et al., in press).

* Corresponding author. Address: Department of Psychology, University of British Columbia, 2136 West Mall, D.T. Kenny Building, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada V6T 1Z4. Tel.: +1 604 822 5827; fax: +1 604 822 6923.

E-mail address: phewitt@psych.ubc.ca (P.L. Hewitt).

Although there is evidence that PSP in adolescents is associated with a variety of deleterious outcomes, there has been little research on mechanisms that explain the association. Recently, Hewitt and colleagues have described a model of perfectionism and maladjustment that focuses specifically on interpersonal components of perfectionism known as the Perfectionism Social Disconnection Model (PSDM; Hewitt, Flett, Sherry, & Caelian, 2006). The current study represents a preliminary exploration of the PSDM in adolescents.

1.3. The Perfectionism Social Disconnection Model

The PSDM asserts that interpersonal dimensions of perfectionism (i.e. the PSP facets and socially prescribed perfectionism) develop as a result of inordinate and thwarted needs to feel connected or a sense of belonging. A response to this need for interpersonal acceptance involves the development of perfectionism such that individuals come to learn that if he/she is perfect or appears to others as perfect, others will accept and care for them. However, perfectionistic behaviors actually generate further disconnection from the social environment by fostering problematic or distant interpersonal relationships (Hewitt et al., 2006). According to the PSDM, perfectionism engenders psychological maladjustment through the experience of both subjective (i.e. a felt sense of detachment from others) and objective (i.e. impoverished relationships with others) social disconnection (Hewitt et al., 2006). Therefore, it is proposed that PSP exerts deleterious influences on interpersonal behavior, which, in turn, create a sense of disconnectedness and perceived lack of social support.

Few studies have investigated the link between perfectionistic self-presentation style and social disconnection in adolescents. However, in a recent study of 152 psychiatric outpatient adolescents, Roxborough et al. (in press) demonstrated that nondisplay of imperfection was associated with a sense of disconnection, which was correlated with an increase in the overall suicidal risk among adolescents. In addition, Sherry, Law, Hewitt, Flett, and Besser (2008) found that perceived social support mediated the relationship between socially prescribed perfectionism and depression among university students. Taken together, these studies offer initial support for the PSDM.

Other recent studies have examined the role of perfectionism on intra- and interpersonal functioning in adolescents. For instance, Gilman, Adams, and Nounopoulos (2011) have found that perfectionistic adolescents had more disruptive and less prosocial relationships than nonperfectionistic adolescents. Furthermore, Ye, Rice, and Storch (2008) found that perfectionistic belief accounted for significance variance in interpersonal difficulties and depressive symptoms for adolescents diagnosed with obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), even after controlling for OCD symptoms. Together, these studies suggest that perfectionistic adolescents are more vulnerable to interpersonal difficulties that place them at higher risk for maladjustment.

1.4. Attachment style, perfectionistic self-presentation, and social disconnection

From a theoretical standpoint, early relationships with parents and family histories may be pivotal in producing perfectionism. Several authors (Blatt, 1995; Burns, 1980; Flett, Hewitt, Oliver, & MacDonald, 2002; Hamachek, 1978; Horney, 1950) have suggested that certain perceived parental practices (e.g. neglect, love withdrawal, intrusive parenting, and shaming) may be important precursors of perfectionism in children. Despite the numerous theoretical accounts of its origin, no studies have investigated the origin and development of PSP. This underscores the need for a conceptual framework linking the various psychological factors

and processes associated with PSP. We believe that the adult attachment theory offers such a conceptual framework from which the relationship between perfectionistic self-presentation and social disconnection can be further investigated.

Adult attachment theory is concerned primarily with the nature of relationship bonds and their effects on human development across the lifespan (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Bowlby, 1988). Bowlby (1988) proposed that the quality of caregiver-child relationships results in internal representations or “working models” of the self and others that provide the prototypes for later interpersonal relationships. Subsequently, Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) created a four-category classification of attachment based on Bowlby’s definition of internal working models: *secure*, *preoccupied*, *fearful* and *dismissing*. According to their conceptualization, individuals with *secure* attachment have positive expectations of self and others and report better overall mental and physical well-being. Individuals with *preoccupied* attachment have a deep-seated sense of unworthiness and are highly dependent on others for validation of self-worth. *Fearful* individuals are also highly dependent on others for approval. However, they perceive others as untrustworthy and undependable, and they shun intimacy and disclosure to avoid the pain of potential criticism or rejection. Finally, *dismissing* individuals avoid interpersonal closeness due to their negative views of others. Extensive research has explored the connections between attachment style and affective, cognitive and psychological indicators of adjustment (see Cassidy & Shaver, 1999; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

Flett and colleagues (2002) hypothesized that a poor parent-child relationship produces a chronic sense of disconnection, hopelessness, and self-doubt. To cope with feelings of vulnerability and inferiority, the insecurely attached child may develop an excessive need to appear perfect, to hide imperfections or avoid disclosing flaws and failures. Hence, consistent with the PSDM, children with high attachment insecurity may develop a perfectionistic self-presentation style and, subsequently, experience significant social disconnection. The hypothesis proposed by Flett and colleagues (2002) is also predicated on Mikulincer’s (1995) observation that certain insecurely attached people will become avoidant and isolated from others because “. . . their self-esteem is so low and fragile that they cannot tolerate discovery of the slightest flaw. This idealization of the self seems to be a defense against the experience of rejection by others on the recognition of one’s imperfections” (p. 1213). Consistent with the hypothesis proposed by Flett and colleagues (2002), Hewitt and colleagues (2011) demonstrated that PSP facets in adolescents are linked with an inordinate need for approval, fear of negative evaluation, and excessive self-consciousness offering further support for our contention that PSP may be motivated by fears of failure and rejection.

To our knowledge, no research to date has examined the relationships between attachment style, perfectionistic self-presentation, and the experience of social disconnection among adolescents; however, trait perfectionism has been linked with insecure attachment (Cox, Enns, & Clara, 2002; Rice & Mirzadeh, 2000; Wei, Heppner, Russell, & Young, 2006; Wei, Mallinckrodt, Russell, & Abraham, 2004). Furthermore, it has been shown that trait perfectionism mediates the relationship between insecure attachment and depressive symptoms in adults (e.g. Wei et al., 2004, 2006).

1.5. Hypotheses and goals

The current research had several goals. First, previous research has focused exclusively on adult populations, using either perfectionism traits (MPS; Hewitt & Flett, 1991) or perfectionistic attitudes (FMPS; Frost et al., 1990). No study has examined the associations among insecure attachment, PSP, and social disconnection in an

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

ISIArticles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات