Specific perfectionism components predicting daily stress, coping, and negative affect six months and three years later

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ABSTRACT

This study of community adults compared the relative predictive value of specific perfectionism components in predicting daily stress, coping, and affect in the short- and long-term. Participants completed several measures of higher-order dimensions of personal standards perfectionism (PSP) and self-critical perfectionism (SCP) at Time 1, including the Blatt, D'Afflitti, and Quinlan (1976) Depressive Experiences Questionnaire, the Frost, Marten, Lahart, and Rosenblate (1990) Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale, the Hewitt and Flett (1991) Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale, and the Slaney, Rice, Mobley, Trippi, and Ashby (2001) revised Almost Perfect Scale. Then, six months and three years later, participants completed daily questionnaires of stress, coping, and negative affect for 14 consecutive days. Correlational and multiple regression analyses showed that the DEQ self-criticism measure of SCP uniquely predicted aggregated daily event stress and negative affect at Month 6 and Year 3, whereas the FMPS concern over mistakes measure of SCP uniquely predicted negative social interactions and HMPS socially prescribed perfectionism measure of SCP uniquely predicted avoidant coping. The APS-R high standards measure of PSP uniquely predicted problem-focused coping at Month 6 and Year 3. These findings demonstrate the differential predictive value of specific perfectionism components in prospectively predicting various aspects of daily psychosocial (mal)adjustment.

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1. Introduction

Over the past two decades, perfectionism has been demonstrated to be a cognitive-personality vulnerability factor that plays a role in several psychological problems, including depression and anxiety (see Egan, Wade, & Shafran, 2011). Perfectionism has become widely viewed as a multidimensional construct and has been conceptualized and defined in many different ways. The most influential multidimensional approaches include the Frost et al. (1990) Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (FMPS), the Hewitt and Flett (1991) Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (HMPS), and the Revised Almost Perfect Scale (APS-R; Slaney et al., 2001).

Factor analytic studies have consistently identified two higher-order dimensions of perfectionism cutting across several measures, distinguishing between a primarily maladaptive dimension, self-critical

perfectionism (SCP), and a relatively more adaptive dimension, personal standards perfectionism (PSP; e.g., Dunkley, Ma, Lee, Preacher, & Zuroff, 2014; see Stoeber & Otto, 2006). SCP involves constant and harsh self-scrutiny, overly critical evaluations of one's own behaviour, an inability to derive satisfaction from performance, and chronic concerns about others' criticism and disapproval (Dunkley, Zuroff, & Blankstein, 2003). Measures found to load onto SCP include FMPS concern over mistakes, HMPS socially prescribed perfectionism, and APS-R discrepancy, as well as the self-criticism score of the Depressive Experiences Questionnaire (DEQ; Blatt et al., 1976). Studies show SCP measures to be consistently associated with maladaptive outcomes (see Dunkley, Blankstein, Masheb, & Grilo, 2006; Stoeber & Otto, 2006). On the other hand, PSP involves setting and striving for unrealistically high standards and goals (Dunkley et al., 2003). Measures loading onto PSP include HMPS self-oriented perfectionism, FMPS personal standards, and APS-R high standards. PSP measures are related to adaptive coping and typically exhibit weak or negligible associations with maladaptive outcomes (see Dunkley, Blankstein, et al., 2006; Stoeber & Otto, 2006).

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Despite important differences across theoretical frameworks, significant overlap among perfectionism scales has been demonstrated (Dunkley, Zuroff, & Blankstein, 2006). In light of their shared variance, research is needed to examine the relative importance of the individual perfectionism components constituting the composite factors in predicting (mal)adaptive functioning. To date, three studies have looked at the unique predictive contributions of HMPS, FMPS, and DEQ scales. In a study of 527 university students, Dunkley, Blankstein, et al. (2006) found that DEQ self-criticism but not HMPS scales uniquely predicted depressive and anxious symptoms when controlling for shared variance. Similarly, in a sample of 163 university students, Dunkley, Zuroff and Blankstein (2006) found that DEQ self-criticism but not HMPS and FMPS measures uniquely predicted aggregated daily hassles, avoidant coping, negative affect, and lower positive affect when controlling for shared variance. On the other hand, in a cross-national sample of 524 undergraduates, Sherry, Stoeber and Ramasubbu (2016) found that both DEQ self-criticism and HMPS/FMPS measures uniquely predicted self-defeating behaviours (i.e., binge eating, procrastination, interpersonal conflict).

There are several important shortcomings to previous research that need to be addressed. First, although SCP has been shown to have a long-term impact on maladjustment up to several years into the future (e.g., Dunkley, Mandel, & Ma, 2014), the aforementioned studies only covered a short period of up to one week. As such, the different perfectionism components' relative value in predicting maladaptive outcomes over longer periods of time remains unknown. Second, because the previous studies assessed the outcomes only at a single time-point, the replicability of the findings across multiple time-points could not be examined. Third, none of the previous studies included APS-R discrepancy, which some researchers have argued reflects the essential pathological perfectionism component (e.g., Slaney et al., 2001). Fourth, previous studies limited their focus to maladaptive outcomes, and did not examine the relative utility of PSP measures in predicting adaptive outcomes. Notably, APS-R high standards has been argued to be more closely related to positive outcomes than the HMPS and FMPS PSP measures (Blasberg, Hewitt, Flett, Sherry, & Chen, 2016). Lastly, as these previous studies were carried out with university student samples, the relative predictive validity of specific perfectionism components in more representative samples of community adults needs to be examined.

The current study sought to address these limitations by assessing the relative predictive validity of SCP and PSP components in predicting daily stress, coping, and affect six months and three years later in a sample of community adults. We examined the unique contributions of the DEQ/HMPS/FMPS/APS-R PSP and SCP measures in relation to diverse indicators of maladaptive functioning, including negative affect and maladaptive characteristics associated with SCP (i.e., negative social interactions, event stress, and avoidant coping) that have been shown to uniquely mediate the relation between SCP and distress (Dunkley et al., 2003; Dunkley, Sanislow, Grilo, & McGlashan, 2006; Dunkley, Ma, et al., 2014). We also examined the unique contributions of PSP and SCP components in predicting problem-focused coping, which has been found to be an adaptive tendency associated with PSP (Dunkley, Blankstein, Halsall, Williams, & Winkworth, 2000; Dunkley, Ma, et al., 2014).

To investigate these questions, the present study undertook additional analyses on the same community sample used in Dunkley, Mandel, et al. (2014), where participants completed a daily diary method similar to Dunkley, Zuroff and Blankstein (2006) for 14 consecutive days at Month 6 and Year 3. Each participant's responses in the daily diaries were aggregated across 14 days to derive trait measures for negative social interactions, event stress, avoidant coping, problem-focused coping, and negative affect. Aggregated measures have been argued to increase the ecological validity of trait measurements relative to using retrospective summary questionnaires that are more prone to memory biases and distortions (Moskowitz, 1986).

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Participants were a sample of 198 English- or French-speaking employed, community adults, who represented a subset of a larger sample of 223 participants (see Dunkley, Mandel, et al., 2014 for a detailed description). At Time 1, 198 (66 male, 132 female) participants successfully completed the perfectionism questionnaires. There were 99 English-speaking and 99 French-speaking participants, with a mean age of 41 years ($SD = 12.31$). Of these 198 participants, 196 also completed the daily diaries at Month 6 and 156 completed the daily diaries at Year 3. As reported by Dunkley, Mandel, et al. (2014), no significant differences were found between the participants who did complete and those who did not complete the daily measures at both Month 6 and Year 3.

2.2. Procedure

At Time 1, participants completed a package of questionnaires including measures of perfectionism, affect, stress, and coping in a 1.5 to 2-hour lab session. At Month 6 and Year 3, participants completed a daily diary at bedtime, starting that night, for the next 14 nights. The diary consisted of a package of questionnaires, including measures of daily affect, event stress, and coping (see Dunkley, Mandel, et al., 2014). Participants were compensated $25 for completing questionnaires at Time 1, $75 for completing daily diaries at Month 6, and $75 for completing daily diaries at Year 3. The 196 participants at Month 6 completed a total of 2726 out of a possible 2744 daily diaries, whereas the 156 participants at Year 3 completed a total of 2168 daily diaries out of 2184 (see Dunkley, Mandel, et al., 2014 for a detailed description).

2.3. Measures

Available French versions of the perfectionism and daily negative social interactions, coping, and stress measures were given to French-speaking participants. The internal consistencies and validity of the French versions have been found to be comparable to that of the original English versions (see Dunkley, Blankstein, & Berg, 2012; Dunkley & Kyparissis, 2008; Dunkley, Ma, et al., 2014; Dunkley, Mandel, et al., 2014).

2.3.1. Perfectionism

Based on previous factor analytic findings (e.g., Dunkley, Ma, et al., 2014; see Stoeber & Otto, 2006), SCP measures included DEQ self-criticism (66 items; Blatt et al., 1976), HMPS socially prescribed perfectionism (15 items; Hewitt & Flett, 1991), FMPS concern over mistakes (9 items; Frost et al., 1990), and APS-R discrepancy (12 items; Slaney et al., 2001). PSP measures included HMPS self-oriented perfectionism (15 items), FMPS personal standards (7 items), and APS-R high standards (7 items). The reliability and validity of the DEQ (see Blatt, 2004), HMPS (e.g., Hewitt & Flett, 1991), FMPS (e.g., Frost et al., 1990), and APS-R (e.g., Slaney et al., 2001) have been well established.

2.3.2. Negative social interactions

The revised 24-item Test of Negative Social Interactions (TENSE; Finch, Okun, Pool, & Ruehlman, 1999) assessed negative social interactions today. The TENSE has been shown to have good reliability and validity (Finch et al., 1999). In the current sample, the between-persons reliability was 0.93 and 0.95 for the aggregated daily measures at Month 6 and Year 3, respectively (Dunkley, Mandel, et al., 2014). The Month 6 and Year 3 measures of negative social interactions correlated, $r = 0.81$, $p < 0.01$.