

# Self-assessment of the four subtypes of perfectionism in the $2 \times 2$ model of perfectionism<sup>☆</sup>



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## ABSTRACT

The  $2 \times 2$  model of perfectionism examines the relation between four subtypes of perfectionism and psychological adjustment (Gaudreau & Thompson, 2010). Researchers have investigated subtypes of perfectionism using common multivariate statistical analyses. The development of a new measure is warranted to evaluate whether individuals can, with a decent degree of certainty, assess by themselves their subtypes of perfectionism. Two studies with samples of university students were conducted to develop and provide initial evidence for the *Self-Assessment of Perfectionism Subtypes* (SAPS). Our measurement approach tries to simulate the features of mixture modeling by asking participants to assess a *self-rated probability* of belonging into each subtype of perfectionism. Using a finite-like and continuous scale, our results showed that self-rated probabilities of belonging in subtypes of perfectionism are significantly associated with traditional measures of perfectionism and consequential life outcomes in a way that mostly replicated past research and supported the four hypotheses of the model.

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## 1. Introduction

Mounting theoretical attention has recently been allocated to dispositional perfectionism. Among recent developments, the  $2 \times 2$  model of perfectionism has been proposed to examine whether within-person combinations of core dimensions of perfectionism offer a promising level of analysis to unpack the associations between perfectionism and consequential life outcomes. Thus far, researchers have investigated the four subtypes proposed in the  $2 \times 2$  model of perfectionism using multivariate statistical analyses such as multiple regression (e.g., Douilliez & Lefèvre, 2011; Gaudreau, 2012), moderated structural equation modeling (Franche, Gaudreau, & Miranda, 2012), and cluster analyses (e.g., Cumming & Duda, 2012; Li, Hou, Chi, Liu, & Hager, 2014). Despite the strengths of these approaches, they involve complex mathematical abstractions likely to cast scepticism about the real life applicability of the model among some researchers and practitioners who are less familiar with multivariate statistics. The development of a measure is warranted to evaluate whether individuals can, with a decent degree of certainty, assess by themselves their

within-person combination of perfectionism in a way that will correspond with the results of more complex statistical analyses. The goal of these studies was to develop and provide initial evidence for a novel measure, hereafter referred as the *Self-Assessment of Perfectionism Subtypes* (SAPS).

### 1.1. Dimensions of perfectionism and their distinct within-person combinations

Dispositional perfectionism represents the generalized tendency to strive for perfection and/or to evaluate oneself according to outstandingly high standards of self-imposed and/or socially prescribed excellence (e.g., Flett & Hewitt, 2006). This generally accepted definition highlights the multidimensional and dispositional (i.e., trait-like) nature of perfectionism, which entails two separate but empirically related dimensions (e.g., Dunkley, Blankstein, Halsall, Williams, & Winkworth, 2000). On the one hand, *personal standards perfectionism* (also labeled perfectionistic strivings; Stoeber & Otto, 2006) is a self-directed predisposition to strive toward perfection by pursuing high standards determined by the person himself. *Self-oriented perfectionism* is a core feature of the personal standards dimension of perfectionism because it encompasses the self-directed tendencies to believe that attaining perfection is important, to set exacting standards, and to evaluate oneself accordingly. On the other hand, *evaluative concerns perfectionism* (also labeled perfectionistic concerns; Stoeber & Otto, 2006) is a social evaluative tendency to perceive that others are

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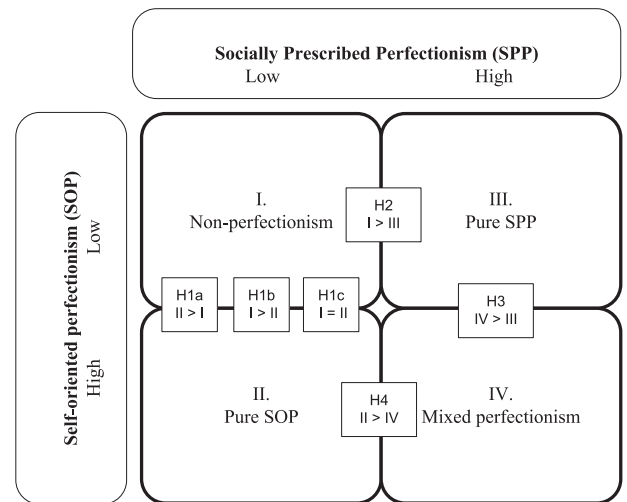
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exerting pressure to be perfect, to evaluate accordingly, and to doubt one's capacity to reach exceedingly high outcomes that are socially prescribed. *Socially prescribed perfectionism* is a cardinal feature of the social evaluative dimension of perfectionism because it entails the pursuit of perfection to obtain or maintain valuation from significant others and to reach socially desirable standards that are imposed by others who "have unrealistic standards for them, evaluate them stringently, and exert pressure on them to be perfect" (Hewitt & Flett, 1991, p. 457).<sup>1</sup>

In recent theoretical, empirical, and methodological articles (e.g., Gaudreau, 2012, 2013; Gaudreau & Verner-Filion, 2012; Stoeber, 2012), proponents of the  $2 \times 2$  model of perfectionism have suggested that perfectionism can be conceived as the within-person organizations of two interrelated systems: the personal and social components of perfectionism. Individuals can be distinguished according to four prototypical within-person combinations of perfectionism that can be used to define and differentiate the four distinct subtypes of perfectionism shown in Fig. 1.

Thus far, researchers have inferred the subtypes of perfectionism using multivariate statistical analyses. Results of recent cluster analytical studies have provided support for the differentiation of individuals in four clusters that closely matched the four subtypes defined in the  $2 \times 2$  model of perfectionism (e.g., Cumming & Duda, 2012; Sironic & Reeve, 2012). Consistent with the guidelines of Cohen, Cohen, West, and Aiken (2003), researchers have also used the regression equation with and without interaction terms (e.g., Gaudreau & Thompson, 2010; Hill, 2013; Hill & Davis, 2014) to estimate and compare the predicted values of an outcome at different levels of perfectionism matching up the definition of the four subtypes of the  $2 \times 2$  model. This approach has also been extended to structural equation modeling with and without an interaction (Franche et al., 2012). Overall, results have offered a fair amount of support for the four hypotheses of the  $2 \times 2$  model to predict outcomes such as performance, affective states, burnout, and emotion regulation strategies.

Although subtypes of perfectionism are associated to outcomes in a theoretically expected manner, they are not directly observable. As eloquently outlined by Stoeber (2011, p. 131), "perfectionism is in the mind". In this study, it was proposed that a subtype of perfectionism can be conceived as *an accessible mental representation* of the within-person combination of personal and social components of perfectionism. Traditional self-report measures assume that individuals can directly access and accurately evaluate the extent to which a question, a stem, an adjective, a paragraph, and even a scenario represent who they are or what they do in general in their lives. As such, this assumes that individuals have sufficient self-knowledge to access mental representations of themselves to declare where they situate on two distinct continuums from low to high self-oriented perfectionism, on the one hand, and from low to high socially prescribed perfectionism, on the other hand. This accepted assumption is at the heart of the dimensional/normative measurement approach in psychological sciences. It is also consistent with taxometric evidence showing that the distribution of scores for each dimension of perfectionism should be treated as continuous rather than categorical (Broman-Fulks, Hill, & Green, 2008). Given the capacity of participants to evaluate each of their self-oriented and socially prescribed perfectionism, a logical extension would be to empirically examine whether they can evaluate their own within-person combination of these two cardinal features of perfectionism. In this case, the perception of individuals about their own subtype of perfectionism



**Fig. 1.** Definition of the four subtypes and hypotheses of the  $2 \times 2$  model of perfectionism. > denotes higher scores on positively valenced dependent variables (better adjustment). = denotes equivalent scores.

should be *significantly and strongly associated* with scores obtained with questionnaires used to measure perfectionism in the extant literature.

## 1.2. Toward a Self-Assessment of Perfectionism Subtypes

The *Self-Assessment of Perfectionism Subtypes* (SAPS) was inspired by the effort of researchers who have tried to combine the strengths of ipsative/categorical and dimensional/quantitative methodologies (e.g., Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). In the first part of the SAPS (see Appendix 1), individuals are asked to select, among four statements, the one that best describes themselves in general in their lives. The forced-choice rating scale allows individuals to position themselves on a bidimensional space in order to assess their own subtype of perfectionism. This ipsative forced-choice rating scale should be seen as a preliminary step that provides the impetus to propose a *continuous finite-like probabilistic assessment* of subtypes of perfectionism. In the second part of the SAPS, individuals are asked to evaluate how much each of the four subtypes of perfectionism represents them as a person on a scale from 0 to 100. This approach relies on a finite-like distribution in which the sum the four choices must equal 100% for each individual. The finite-like distribution tries to simulate the posterior membership probabilities of the mixture modeling (e.g., Nagin, 2005; Roeder, Lynch, & Nagin, 1999). In this case, however, the posterior membership probabilities are *self-rated probabilities* of belonging to each of the four subtypes of perfectionism. This approach incorporates a key assumption of mixture modeling in which the categorization into a given latent class or subtype is conceived as uncertain and probabilistic rather than known and deterministic (e.g., Nagin, 2005; Roeder et al., 1999). This definitional feature has been and shall remain a core assumption of the  $2 \times 2$  model (Gaudreau, 2013; Stoeber, 2012).

Imagine two individuals, Karim and John, who endorse the statement that characterizes a subtype of pure SOP in part 1 of the SAPS. In part 2 of the SAPS, Karim evaluates his likelihood of having a subtype of pure SOP to 100%. His self-rated probabilities of belonging to each of the other three subtypes of perfectionism are 0%. In contrast, John evaluates his likelihood of having a subtype of pure SOP to 45% whereas he evaluates at 25%, 20%, and 10% his likelihood of belonging to a subtype of mixed perfectionism, pure SOP, and non-perfectionism, respectively. Despite their equal self-endorsement of a subtype of pure SOP in part 1 of the

<sup>1</sup> The  $2 \times 2$  model has been tested on both broader dimensions and subscales of perfectionism but I will use the terms self-oriented and socially prescribed perfectionism throughout the remainder of the manuscript.

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