Family Profiles of Maladaptive Perfectionists among Asian International Students

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INTRODUCTION

- Perfectionism has been conceptualized as multidimensional (Hamachek, 1978). Recent psychological research points that there are three perfectionistic types (maladaptive, adaptive, and nonperfectionistic). Of the three perfectionist types, maladaptive perfectionists are most at risk for negative psychological outcomes (Stanley, Rice, Mobely, Trippi, & Ashby, 2001).

- Maladaptive perfectionism is hypothesized to have origins in parenting characterized by high expectations and criticism (Blatt, 1995). The Family Almost Perfect Scale (FAPS) measures perceived levels of perfectionistic evaluation and standards from one’s family (Wang, 2010). Using a person-centered approach to study maladaptive perfectionists’ family background may be helpful to clarify the link between family origin and personal perfectionism.

- Family perfectionism is hypothesized to be an important concern among Asian international and Asian American university students in the United States due to the cultural value for familial expectations and conformity and a strong cultural focus on family obligations for scholastic achievement (Triandis, 1995).

- The present study aims to investigate the relationship between family perfectionism for an Asian international sample and various mental health outcomes. We hypothesize that cluster analyses will reveal three groups of perfectionistic family profiles. Secondly, we hypothesize that participants from maladaptive perfectionistic families will display lower psychological well-being and more mental health problems.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Which family perfectionistic types will an Asian international student sample of maladaptive perfectionists yield?
2. Will there be group differences in mental health outcomes based on family perfectionistic type?

METHODS

Participants
- 198 Asian int'l students pre-screened as maladaptive perfectionists at a large Midwestern university
- Averaged 24.68 years of age (SD = 4.92 years)
- 54% identified as female
- Average # yrs spent in the US was 27 mos (SD = 25)
- Originated from 16 Asian countries including China (52%), India (15%), and South Korea (8%).

Procedure
- 1666 Asian international students were invited to participate in the initial screening for maladaptive perfectionists. Of 698 students who completed the initial screening survey, 198 maladaptive perfectionists were identified and invited to complete another survey in a laboratory setting.

Measures
- Family Almost Perfect Scale (FAPS; Wang, 2010). Measures perceived level of perfectionism from one’s family. Subscales: Family Discrepancy, Family High Standards, and Family Order.
- Counseling Center Assessment of Psychological Symptoms (CCAPPS-34; Locke et al., 2012). Subscales: Depression, Generalized Anxiety, Social Anxiety, Academic Distress, Eating Concerns, Hostility, Alcohol Use.
- Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale (ATSPH-SF; Fischer & Farina, 1995).
- Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS; Diener, 1985).
- Suicidal Ideation Scale (SIS; Rudd, 1989).

Data Analytic Plan
1. A two-step cluster analyses procedure involving both hierarchical and nonhierarchical analyses. A nonhierarchical k-means cluster analysis using standardized means of each cluster’s Family High Standards and Family Discrepancy scores as starting values resulted in classifications of family perfectionistic types.
2. To test for group differences, we conducted analyses of variance (ANOVA) to observe disparities in psychological outcomes for maladaptive perfectionists from different types of perfectionistic families.

RESULTS

Cluster Analyses

Group Differences in Mental Health Outcomes

DISCUSSION

Our findings highlight the relevance of family perfectionism for understanding factors contributing to mental health outcomes in Asian international students. Our sample comprising solely of maladaptive perfectionists yielded cluster analyses results revealing that subjects came from three different family perfectionistic types. This finding suggests that there may be various processes within family of origin beyond family perfectionistic type that influence whether maladaptive perfectionism develops in individuals.

Furthermore, it is interesting that though all participants were identified as maladaptive perfectionists through pre-screening, there were significant group differences in mental health outcomes based on family perfectionistic type. Specifically, participants from maladaptive families scored lower for depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, academic distress, and eating concerns, and higher for life satisfaction. This suggests that there may be protective factors for maladaptive perfectionists that come from adaptive or nonperfectionistic families.

Limitations of our study include the fact that our measures were collected through self-report. Furthermore, future studies may seek to explore extraneous factors beyond family perfectionism that could explain the link between personal perfectionism and mental health outcomes, such as peer expectations. For example, a study on Asian American and European American college students reports that while the strongest predictor as an interpersonal source of perfectionism was expectations prescribed by parents, expectations prescribed by peers accounted for variance in socially prescribed Asian Americans above and beyond parental expectation (Perera & Chang, 2015).

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REFERENCES