

Perfectionism

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Abstract – This paper aims to further discuss the concept of perfectionism, the kinds it covers, its positive and negative aspects, the relation between perfectionism and academic achievement, motivation and achievement goals. Some definitions have been presented and discussed to some extent and it is concluded perfectionism can both influence individuals' achievements and it can be influenced by some factors in its own right.

Keywords: perfectionism, motivation, achievement goals, academic achievement

I. INTRODUCTION

It is agreed that perfectionism might be a good reason for ordinary people, students, doctors, and anyone else to try their best to achieve their goals. Students at schools may expect themselves or even others they know to be perfect in whatever they do. Teachers want their students to be the best students among all. Parents expect their children to be the best or perfect children for them. Children expect their parents to be the best in the world. Spouses expect each other to have the best behavior with each other. Therefore, it seems perfectionism exists in people's minds everywhere in different forms. However, it may have different reasons, sources or even consequences.

II. REVIEW AND RESPONSE

A. What is Perfectionism?

Flett and Hewitt (2002) have defined perfectionism as the tendency to set extremely high standards of personal performance. Other perfectionism theorists (e.g. Frost, Marten, Lahart & Rosenblate 1990; Hewitt & Flett, 1991) have confirmed perfectionism is a multidimensional construct that is comprised of both intrapersonal and interpersonal components. There are a large number of people who like to have a perfect life from various aspects such as their studies, their jobs, their marriage and so on. However, there exist some people who never care about what happens to them during their lives and they just accept whatever happens to them without even bothering about trying to change the undesired situations in their lives.

B. Different Kinds of Perfectionism?

There are three kinds of perfectionism in all. The first one is called *self-oriented perfectionism* (which is high self-standards and motivation) and two interpersonal dimensions described as *other-oriented perfectionism* and *socially prescribed perfectionism* (Hewitt & Flett 1991). People who tend to have other-oriented perfectionism, have high standards for others while socially prescribed perfectionism means people or somebody wants or expects them to be perfect. It seems self-oriented perfectionism is observed more in developed societies because people mostly care about the quality of their own jobs and duties, so they believe what others do or how they do it is just their own business and no one else's concern whereas living in smaller societies is slightly harder because the two kinds of interpersonal dimensions of perfectionism are more common among people. For instance you live in a small village. Surely most of the inhabitants know each other and because it is not a highly developed society and people can be more curious about each other's state of life, they show they care more about each other compared to people living in cities, therefore, they want to know everything about you, they show their expectations from you in a way that can make your life stressful for you.

C. Negative and Positive Facets of Perfectionism

According to Blatt (1995), it seems perfectionism can be related to both conscientiousness and neuroticism. When it comes to conscientiousness, it means an individual strives to achieve success in what they do and they have high expectations from themselves regarding their jobs or studies. On the other hand, perfectionism can lead to neuroticism in that after a person determines high standards for themselves, it can push the individual towards high self-evaluation and self-criticism following by stress and neuroticism. Conscientiousness and neuroticism can be changed or moderated into positive facets of perfectionism as long as the individual tries to avoid excessiveness or dissipation. Any person can have normal behaviors in every situation. If an individual tries to strive reasonably for a goal, the conscientiousness trait belonging to that person can be called "*Personal Standards Perfectionism*" (or perfectionistic striving) and also the neuroticism trait can be called "*Self-critical Perfectionism*" (or perfectionistic concerns). (Stoeber & Otto, 2006). A large number of reasons can be effective in pushing perfectionism into a positive or negative state. Imagine students studying for their exams. A student can be influenced dramatically by their teachers, peers and also their family members. If those around students keep persuading them by their admiration and helps, surely that student will experience a much more tolerable situation while if people in touch with a student keep frightening them by constant warnings about the exam, destructive competitions and increasing their stress, definitely that student will tolerate a heavy pressure which may lead to disappointing results. An interesting point here is that the dominant points of views around a student will slightly change that student's beliefs about themselves. Gradually that student will start believing that he is a successful person if he is exposed with positive people and this belief will cause relaxation in them and it can become a part of their character and lead to more and

more success as a result of perfectionistic strivings. Nonetheless, exposure with negative people will eventually ruin a person's character. That student will start feeling he is not competent enough and he will never be one because negative thoughts will ruin all their energy and they will change into a person who is more self-critical about himself and has less self-confidence.

D. The Relation between Perfectionism and Academic Achievement

As Slaney, Ashby and Trippi (1995) have reported, researchers have done a large number of studies to determine if there is a relation between perfectionism and individuals' performance in college or at their jobs in terms of success, productivity and satisfaction. Not surprisingly, the results have confirmed that positive aspects of perfectionism that is perfectionistic striving has had a positive correlation with self-efficacy and academic performance whereas negative aspects of perfectionism which is the self-critical one affected individuals' performance negatively (Chang, 2006; Stoeber, Feast & Hayward, 2009; Stoeber et al., 2008).

E. Perfectionism and Motivation

Hewitt and Flett (1991) have asserted motivational aspects of perfectionism can be a good explanation for adaptive behaviors along with self-oriented perfectionism. An individual with high self-oriented perfectionism determines some goals to achieve and then tries their best to meet those goals. Bandura (1989) has related this self-oriented perfectionism to the individual's intrinsic motivation. On the contrary, Deci and Ryan (1985) have confirmed the socially prescribed perfectionism is related to the individual's extrinsic motivation which takes root from the need to make others pleased and to avoid punishment. A human being without motivation to move cannot be considered an alive human and it is better to call them dead. Motivation seems to be the reason to live. When a person is motivated to move and try and be successful, then he can think of being a perfectionistic individual or not. We have all seen people who have started doing a job energetically and happily because they were having high spirits at that time and they were ready to face any obstacle on the way of achieving their goals. However, we have seen them to slightly lose their energy and hopes which little by little led to that individual's failure all because they lost their motivation either because they faced constant disappointing results or they were in exposure with people who had poisonous and negative thoughts who sucked the energy and motivation out of them.

F. Perfectionism and Achievement Goals

Elliot et al (2011) define achievement goals as mental representations which an individual accepts as their approach towards achieving their goals. For instance students studying in a college may have different feelings or approaches while studying a course and they make use of various strategies to help them make it easier. Namely, if a student tries enough to acquire

a desired outcome at the end of his course, their approach is called “*mastery approach goals*” while some students pay more attention to their performance during a course and that is why they try to keep quiet in class in order not to make any mistakes. This strategy is called “*mastery avoidance goals*”. Some students feel satisfied with defeating their classmates which confirms their attitude or approach is “*performance approach goals*”. A group of students prefer not to be very active in class in order to prevent poor performance in front of their classmates whose behavior is called “*performance avoidance goals*”. Verner-Filion and Gaudreau (2010) have conducted a research to find out the relation between perfectionism and achievement goals. According to the results of this research, performance-approach goal partially helped and mediated the relation between self-oriented perfectionism and academic achievement. Mastery-approach goal was completely a mediator between self-oriented perfectionism and academic satisfaction. In addition, performance-approach goal was a partial mediator between socially prescribed perfectionism and academic achievement. However, the negative relation between socially prescribed perfectionism and academic satisfaction was partially mediated by mastery-approach goal.

III. CONCLUSION

As it was discussed above, a large number of factors can influence an individual's success or failure. It was mentioned that perfectionism means a person considers some items for themselves which determines if that person is successful or not. These perfectionistic attitudes can be encouraged or discouraged by some items such as the individual themselves or people around them. Perfectionistic attitudes which take root from the individual's thoughts are known as the self-oriented perfectionism while those perfectionistic attitudes which take root from others are called interpersonal perfectionism. Perfectionism can be in relation with a lot of factors like motivation, achievement goals, academic achievement and so forth. To sum up, it can be deduced although there are a lot of strengthening or weakening energies, attitudes and forces around all of us, it is us who determines our success or failure. This reminds of a famous story. Once two people were drowning in a deep river. People around them were standing beside the river and shouting to them to stop trying because there was no way out. One of those men gave up trying because of disappointing sentences he was hearing and he died but the other man saved himself. When people came to him to see what helped him, they understood he was deaf! As a result, he had kept trying and managed to come out of that deep river.

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