Existing and Potential Causes of Perfectionism

Qingyu Yang[1,a,*]

[1]*School of Human Life and Ecology, Department of Human Development and Welfare, Osaka City University, 3-3-138 Sugimoto Sumiyoshi-ku, Osaka-shi, Osaka, 558-8585, Japan*
a. 1910831201@mail.sit.edu.cn
*corresponding author

Abstract: Perfectionism significantly contributes to the development of mental disorders. To implement timely intervention and prevention, it is necessary to further understand the causes of perfectionism. Although previous studies have identified certain causes of perfectionism, with the rapid development of modern society and the influence of significant events, there will be more potential causes in the future. Therefore, this paper aims to summarize and analyze the existing causes of perfectionism through a literature review, and also predict the factors that may become potential causes of perfectionism in the future. The main factors identified in this article involved in the cause of perfectionism are parenting style, personality and culture. On this basis, this paper suggests that in the future, due to the influence of technological advancements, the potential causes may include social media, artificial intelligence and remote education. In addition, given the prevalence of mask wearing in certain regions during the covid-19 pandemic and its impact on the post-pandemic era, masks should also be taken into account when discussing potential causes of perfectionism in the future.

Keywords: perfectionism, parenting, personality, culture, impact factors

1.   Introduction

Perfectionism has been a hot topic for many researchers, both in the past and present. According to Frost et al.'s research, the most prominent characteristic of perfectionism is the establishment of exceedingly high standards and excessively critical self-evaluations [1].

Perfectionism has been the subject of an increasing number of research in recent years, which have shown a strong correlation between it and a number of psychiatric diseases and psychopathology. Given the strong correlation between perfectionism and psychological and physiological issues, exploring the causes of perfectionism plays a significant role in developing effective interventions, strategies, and preventive measures for mental disorders.

In the past few decades, numerous studies have explored the causes of perfectionism, primarily focusing on factors such as parenting styles and personality traits [2-4]. While study into the causes of perfectionism in the modern era has focused on these elements, it is important to predict other factors that may have an important impact on the formation of perfectionism in the future, considering the evolving societal context and technological advancements. Therefore, this paper will provide a comprehensive review of the existing literature on the causes of perfectionism. Subsequently, it will predict causes of perfectionism by taking into account the evolving societal context. These predictions

will offer new perspectives for future research on perfectionism, as well as help to better understand and address the associated issues posed by perfectionism.

2. Method

A comprehensive literature search was conducted using multiple academic databases: APA PsycNet, Google Scholar, Springer Link, ScienceDirect, Wiley, SAGE, Taylor and Francis Online, Hogrefe eContent and ProQuest. The following search terms and their derivatives were entered: perfectionism, causes, parenting, personality, culture, social media, artificial intelligence, education, and mask. Studies based on the following criteria were selected if they: (i) were published in English, (ii) were related to perfectionism and its derivative concepts, (iii) involved at least one potential cause of perfectionism.

3. Literature Review

3.1. Parenting Styles

The relationship between perfectionism and parenting styles has been an important topic in understanding the causes of perfectionism. Parenting styles have different impacts on kids, which also suggests that these four parenting styles have a big influence on the formation of perfectionism.

In terms of authoritarian parenting, a study of two ethnic groups found that authoritarian parenting style was strongly associated with two maladaptive factors of perfectionism, concern over mistakes and doubts about actions [3]. Similarly, in a study conducted on Chinese university students, researchers also found a strong correlation between authoritarian parenting and maladaptive perfectionism and even a positive relationship with adaptive perfectionism: personal standers [5].

As for permissive parenting, the number of research on the association between it and perfectionism, which can be searched online, is relatively less compared to the number of research on other parenting styles. It was found that permissive parenting appeared to decrease participants' feelings of criticism and also buffered males' concerns about making mistakes [3]. Additionally, in the same study, this parenting style has no clear link to other aspects of perfectionism [3]. However, in a study conducted with Greek students, researchers found that permissive parenting was positively correlated with maladaptive perfectionism in females and may also lead to the lack of perfectionism in males [6].

Additionally, the researchers noted that an authoritative parenting style was adversely related to maladaptive perfectionism in females and positively related to adaptive perfectionism in both genders. [6]. Also, there is a correlation between self-oriented perfectionism in females and authoritative parenting style, possibly due to the fact that females in such parenting environments are more prone to raising their own standards and expectations [7]. On the contrary, some researchers argue that the authoritative parenting style is not necessarily associated with high standards, regardless of gender [3].

Neglectful parenting style is the exact opposite of authoritative parenting style in which parents ignore children's needs and provide them with little guidance. This neglected parenting style has been considered as childhood adversity linked to socially prescribed perfectionism [8]. This result was also found in another study, which confirmed that neglectful parenting style was connected to maladaptive perfectionism [2].

Taken together, these studies investigated the connection between parenting style and perfectionism, and results showed that the permissive parenting style was not linked to most aspects of perfectionism in both sexes. On the other hand, authoritarian and neglectful parenting styles may lead to the development of maladaptive perfectionism. Conversely, authoritative parenting styles may play a positive role in adaptive perfectionism.

3.2. Personality

Besides parenting style, another factor that may influence the development of perfectionism is personality. Among the theories of personality research, the Big Five personality theory holds a prominent position. According to the Big Five, personality can be classified into five factors. The Big Five theory states that, these five elements vary in strength from person to person, causing variations in personality and behavior. Conscientiousness is the personality trait that is most commonly associated with perfectionism, and it can significantly predict adaptive perfectionism [9]. The reason for this conclusion may be that people with perfectionistic tendencies take things very seriously and persistently, and strongly dislike anything done halfway. In addition to conscientiousness, neuroticism is also strongly related to perfectionism [4]. It has been found that neuroticism is strongly associated with evaluative concerns perfectionism [4]. When individuals become perfectionists, people with high degrees of neuroticism are more likely to experience problems like obsessive-compulsive disorder [10]. This may be because people with neurotic tendencies are more sensitive to things and also concern more about the evaluations of others. They may rely on external evaluations to establish their self-worth, leading to need perfection in order to seek validation from others.

3.3. Culture

When discussing the causes of perfectionism, it is important to consider cultural background. After all, culture differences between different regions can lead to significant variations in the same phenomenon. In a study on perfectionism among American college students from different ethnic backgrounds, researchers found that Asian American students were more concerned about making mistakes and had more doubts about their actions compared to African American and Caucasians students [11]. They claimed that their parental criticism and expectations were at an increased level [11]. In addition, findings on individualistic and collectivistic cultural perspectives revealed that Chinese college students, who prioritize collectivistic values, were more strongly associated with socially prescribed perfectionism and showed greater concern about others' evaluations (e.g., parental expectations) [12]. On the other hand, among Canadian undergraduates, who prioritize individualistic values, there were higher degrees of self-oriented perfectionism and greater focus on mistakes [12]. Thus, it can be observed that different cultures lead to the formation of different types of perfectionism. Comparing students influenced by Eastern culture to those who grew up in Western culture, the former tends to be more concerned about their parents' expectations and criticism, making them more prone to develop socially prescribed perfectionism. This is because of the influence of Confucian culture, where Asian cultures emphasize the importance of loyalty and filial piety towards elders. Especially in Chinese culture, parents use "training" to emphasize what they expect from their children [13]. It can be inferred that this cultural characteristic leads to children's strong desire for parental approval and their excessive concern for others' thoughts, which cause the development of socially prescribed perfectionism.

4. Potential Causes in the Future

4.1. Social Media

In the past decade, social media has experienced rapid development, significantly influenced people's entertainment and provided a platform for people to communicate. While social media enables individuals to make friends, chat, and seek recognition online, a study focused on Facebook found that the use of social media influences individuals' perception of others' lives [14]. People who use Facebook more frequently regard others as happier and believe that life is less fair for them than for others, according to research [14]. This study indicates that the use of social media triggers people's

desire for the content presented on social media. Thus, this paper believes that as people encounter more and more homogeneous content that similar to their own lives, the perception that others are better than themselves will deepen with the further development of social media.

The content presented on social media platforms often presents a tendency towards perfection (e.g., perfect appearance and exquisite lifestyle). Consequently, when people browse through such content, they unconsciously compare themselves to the content or compare the number of likes and comments on their own posts to others. They may compensate for their dissatisfaction by achieving the perfect appearance or lifestyle to gain acceptance. This process may will lead to individuals setting higher standards for themselves and have more concerns about their imperfection, ultimately leading to the formation of perfectionism. However, there is limited research on how social media contributes to the development of perfectionism. Therefore, in the future, with the widespread prevalence of social media, it may become a new potential factor in the development of perfectionism and offer important avenues for exploration.

4.2. Artificial Intelligence

Artificial intelligence (AI) has advanced quickly and has been used in numerous industries. Recently, a new language model called ChatGPT has recently been developed, which is capable of responding to input commands and generating human-like responses. This has aroused widespread attention and applications.

This means that people can use AI to generate accurate and diverse answers, or they can provide their own prepared answers to be modified and polished by AI to produce near-perfect answers. From the perspective of this paper, the pursuit of perfect answers may lead to higher personal standards and make individuals more concerned about their mistakes, which will contribute to the development of self-oriented perfectionism. Since AI provides perfect answers to people, they may unconsciously compare their imperfect answers with those provided by AI, wishing that they could come up with such perfect answers on their own in the future. This may lead to higher even unrealistic expectations of their future performance and increased concerns about making mistakes. On the other side, the widespread application of AI in the future might also help to foster the growth of other-oriented perfectionism. Considering that AI can efficiently and quickly provide responds and assist employees in creative work, this means an improvement in their task completion and productivity. However, for supervisors, the continued use of AI by employees may lead them to believe that providing perfect projects is expected and taken for granted. This can result in increased expectations of employees from supervisors and more attention paid to their mistakes, which can lead to the development of other-oriented perfectionism. Therefore, this article speculates that in the future, AI will influence the formation of both self-oriented and other-oriented perfectionism due to its convenience, timeliness, and accuracy.

4.3. Remote Education

The development of technology has not only led to the widespread use of social media and AI but also facilitated the implementation of remote education, especially during the covid-19 pandemic. Before covid-19, the traditional face-to-face education model existed, where parents would send their children to school and then focus on their own work. However, during the pandemic and in the post-pandemic era, remote education has become a new and prevalent educational model. This has led to more parental involvement in their children's academic and personal lives [15]. This shift seems to make parents focus more on children's academic progress and provide them a chance to witness areas of their kids' lives they would not have known about before.

This paper argues that during this process, parents may change their attitudes and approaches of educating their children. Due to remote teaching, where teachers are unable to directly supervise students' attendance and homework completion, parents are required to monitor their children's studies. This may result in an increase in parental demandingness, which may potentially lead to a shift in parenting styles. For parents with an authoritarian parenting style, this shift may not have a significant impact on their parenting style. However, for parents who have adhered to a permissive parenting style, being required to monitor and provide guidance in their children's learning may increase their demands and expectations, which can cause their parenting style change to the authoritative one. As mentioned in before, this authoritative parenting style has a positive effect on adaptive perfectionism and is connected to the development of self-oriented perfectionism. Particularly, for females who have grown up in an authoritative parenting style, they are more likely to set higher goals and expectations [7].

In conclusion, this paper believes that under the influence of remote education, the authoritative parenting style may increase to some extent, which can promote the formation of adaptive perfectionism and self-oriented perfectionism in children. Even after the pandemic, there will still be many people who stick to remote education. Thus, in the future, when discussing the causes of perfectionism, the impact of remote education on children needs to be taken into account.

4.4. The Mask During Covid-19

During the covid-19 pandemic, a significant change in people's daily lives is the wearing of masks. Research conducted during covid-19 pandemic has indicated that wearing surgical masks can make people who are considered to have average appearances look more attractive [16]. This implies that people may feel more attractive while wearing masks, which could potentially lead them to voluntarily continue wearing masks even after the pandemic. In this case, this paper speculates that although people may have a better self-perceived appearance after wearing masks, it could also lead to stricter self-criticism about their appearance. Moreover, people might become more concerned about others' evaluations of their appearance. And this could potentially lead to the formation of perfectionism for appearance anxiety in some degree. However, when discussing this, it is necessary to consider cultural differences towards mask-wearing. Unlike the anti-mask protests in Western countries, wearing masks had become a common and taken-for-granted phenomenon in many Asian countries. Considering the different impacts of collectivism and individualism on the formation of perfectionism, this paper hypothesizes that this kind of appearance-related perfectionism may be more prevalent in Asia.

5. Discussion

The main contribution of this paper is to summarize the main causes of perfectionism in the present, and to predict the causes of perfectionism in the future based on the background of the era. These predictions make it possible to add more contemporary elements into the study of perfectionism, so that people can have a better understanding about the causes of perfectionism in contemporary times. At the same time, exploring the potential causes of perfectionism in the future can also broaden the related research fields of perfectionism and provide more theoretical framework for its study. Most importantly, understanding these potential causes can also help people develop intervention and prevention strategies for mental illness arising from perfectionism, so that people can also reduce the negative impact on overall well-being.

However, there are some limitations in this paper. In the review of the existing causes of perfectionism, only three main causes are selected, and all the concepts related to the causes of perfectionism are not covered. In addition, when speculating on the potential causes in the future, the

focus was primarily on the impact brought by the technological advancements, while there should be other factors that could potentially contribute to perfectionism. Finally, predictions are based on existing research and have not been confirmed by empirical studies. Therefore, in the future, empirical research can be conducted to facilitate in-depth exploration on this topic.

6.   Conclusions

The objectives of this paper are to explore the causes of perfectionism and predict potential causes of perfectionism in the future. The primary causes of perfectionism are parenting styles, personality, and culture. Particularly, the formation of adaptive perfectionism is positively connected with an authoritative parenting style. Additionally, research on the Big Five has identified conscientiousness and neuroticism as major contributing factors to perfectionism. Moreover, cultural differences have also been identified as a factor in the development of different types of perfectionism. By reviewing these existing causes, this paper combines the developmental background of the era to discuss potential causes of perfectionism in the future. This article discusses how frequent use of social media may lead people to set higher personal standards and heightened concern about personal flaws. Therefore, this paper speculates that social media will become an important cause of perfectionism in the future. Furthermore, AI will also lead to higher self-expectations and will make supervisors improve their standards, even pay more attention to the mistakes which employees made. As a result, the emergence of self-oriented perfectionism and other-oriented perfectionism are promoted. Moreover, Remote education makes more parents participate in children's learning and daily lives, which influence changes in parenting styles and further impact the development of perfectionism. In addition, this paper suggests that the wearing of masks may also influence the formation of appearance-related perfectionism to some extent. However, considering cultural backgrounds, it is inferred that this phenomenon may be more prevalent in Asia.

References

[1]   Frost, R.O., Marten, P., Lahart, C., & Rosenblate, R. (1990). The dimensions of perfectionism. Cognitive Therapy and Research, 14(5), 449-468.
[2]   Walton, G.E., Hibbard, D.R., Coughlin, C., & Coyl-Shepherd, D.D. (2020). Parenting, personality, and culture as predictors of perfectionism. Current Psychology 39, 681–693.
[3]   Hibbard, D.R., & Walton, G.E. (2014). Exploring the Development of Perfectionism: The Influence of Parenting Style and Gender. Social Behavior and Personality, 42(2), 269-278.
[4]   Dunkley, D. M., Blankstein, K. R., & Berg, J. (2012). Perfectionism Dimensions and the Five–factor Model of Personality. European Journal of Personality, 26(3), 233–244.
[5]   Chen, W.-W., Yang, X., & Jiao, Z. (2022). Authoritarian parenting, perfectionism, and academic procrastination. Educational Psychology, 42(9), 1145-1159.
[6]   Diana, C., & Spyridon, T. (2018). The relationship between parenting and the manifestation of perfectionism among Greek college students. Psychology: The Journal of the Hellenic Psychological Society, 23(2), 145–162.
[7]   Flett, G. L., Hewitt, P. L., & Singer, A. (1995). Perfectionism and parental authority styles. Individual Psychology: Journal of Adlerian Theory, Research & Practice, 51(1), 50–60.
[8]   Chen, C., Hewitt, P. L., & Flett, G.L. (2019). Adverse childhood experiences and multidimensional perfectionism in young adults. Personality and Individual Differences, 146(1), 53-57.
[9]   Ulu, I. P., & Tezer, E. (2010). Adaptive and Maladaptive Perfectionism, Adult Attachment, and Big Five Personality Traits. The Journal of Psychology, 144(4), 327-340.
[10] Campbell, J. D., & Paula, A. D. (2002). Perfectionistic self-beliefs: Their relation to personality and goal pursuit. In G. L. Flett, & P. L. Hewitt (Eds.). Perfectionism: Theory, research, and treatment (pp.181-198). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
[11] Castro, J. R., & Rice, K. G. (2003). Perfectionism and Ethnicity: Implications for Depressive Symptoms and Self-Reported Academic Achievement. Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 9(1), 64–78.
[12] Smith, M. M., Saklofske, D. H., Yan, G., & Sherry, S. B. (2017). Does Perfectionism Predict Depression, Anxiety, Stress, and Life Satisfaction After Controlling for Neuroticism? Individual Differences, 38(2), 63-70.

[13] Chao, R. K. (1994). Beyond Parental Control and Authoritarian Parenting Style: Understanding Chinese Parenting through the cultural Notion of Training. Child Development. 65(4), 111-1119.

[14] Chou, H. T. G., & Edge, N. (2012). "They Are Happier and Having Better Lives than I Am": The impact of Using Facebook on Perceptions of Others' Lives. Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking, 15(2), 117-121.

[15] Thorn, W., & Vincent-Lancrin, S. (2022). Education in the Time of COVID-19 in France, Ireland, the United Kingdom and the United States: The Nature and Impact of Remote Learning. Primary and Secondary Education During Covid-19, 383-420.

[16] Patel, V., Mazzaferro, D. M, Sarwer, D. B, Bartlett, S. P. (2020). Beauty and the Mask. Plast Reconstr Surg Glob Open, 8(8).