

Ego Defense Mechanisms and Personality: Comparison of Adaptive Versus Maladaptive Perfectionism in Indian Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

The study assessed the ego defense mechanisms and five factors of personality among adaptive and maladaptive perfectionists and examined the connection among level of adaptiveness in "perfectionism", ego defense mechanisms and five factors of personality.

The initial sample consisted of 270 young adult males and females who were administered "Almost Perfect Scale-Revised". Based on the "discrepancy" scores obtained on the "Almost Perfect Scale-Revised", the final sample consisted of 34 adaptive and 34 maladaptive young adult male and female perfectionists. The two other tests administered to the final sample were "Defense Style Questionnaire" (DSQ) and "Ten Item Personality Inventory" (TIPI). A far greater percentage of maladaptive (86%) than adaptive (14%) perfectionists were found in the present study. Maladaptive perfectionists showed significantly greater use of immature and obsessional ego-defense mechanisms and significantly lower conscientiousness and emotional stability. Immature and moderate ego-defense styles and low conscientiousness were the significant predictors of maladaptive "perfectionism". The present study partially supported the link of maladaptive "perfectionism" with ego-defense styles and five factors of personality. A far greater percentage of maladaptive perfectionists and their high scores on use of immature, moderate, and obsessional ego defense styles and their low conscientiousness and emotional stability is indicative of a need for intervention programs that help individuals to acquire adaptive "perfectionism".

Keywords: Perfectionism, Adaptive, Maladaptive, Ego-defense Styles, Immature and Mature Ego Defense Styles, Five Factors of Personality.

1. Introduction

Nothing is perfect in this world, yet many of us expect perfect outcomes from ourselves as well as from others. The term, "perfect" means, "being entirely without fault or defect and the term, "perfectionism" means the "disposition to regard anything short of perfection as unacceptable" (Merriam-Webster online, 2005). "Perfectionism" can be a boon or a bane. Traditionally, research located "perfectionism" in psychopathology. According to Flett and Hewitt (2002), "perfectionism" was studied in clinical populations and linked with mental and physical disorders such as anxiety disorders, major depressive disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and high levels of stress and health related issues. Hamachek (1978) defined "perfectionism" as a "dual construct", Pacht (1984) and Burns (1980) viewed it as a "unitary construct", while it was defined as a "multidimensional construct" by Hewitt and Flett (1991). Hamachek (1978) described "perfectionism" in terms of

its antecedents and consequences. Thus, as a "dual construct", Hamachek (1978) defined "perfectionism" as "normal and neurotic". While "normal perfectionists are those who derive a very real sense of pleasure from the labors of a painstaking effort and who feel free to be less precise as the situation permits", whereas "neurotic perfectionists are the sort of people whose efforts even the best ones-never seem quite good enough, at least in their own eyes". Hamachek (1978) identified non-approving or inconsistent environment and positive environment (where self-worth is not always associated with performance) as antecedents of neurotic and normal "perfectionism", respectively. The outcome measures such as depression, feeling of "I must do it", shame, guilt, face-saving, procrastination and disapproving oneself also describe "perfectionism" (Hamachek, 1978). These behaviors are found at highest levels in neurotic perfectionists. The other two dichotomies of "perfectionism" suggested on the lines of normal and

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neurotic “perfectionism” are adaptive-maladaptive and positive-negative “perfectionism”.

Perfectionists view their behaviors in terms of outcomes, where positive outcomes of “perfectionism” become the positive reinforcers and are evaluated as healthy and normal. On the other hand, the negative outcomes are the negative reinforcers and therefore one’s behavior should be focused to avoid such reinforcers (Terry-Short, Owens, Slade, & Dewey, 1995). Thus, like Hamachek’s (1978) normal perfectionists, positive perfectionists focus on their strengths while like neurotic perfectionists, negative perfectionists shift the focus to fear of failure. Enns, Cox, and Clara (2002) have defined “adaptive perfectionism as setting of high goals and personal standards and striving for the rewards associated with achievement while retaining the ability to be satisfied with one’s performance”. Whereas they defined “maladaptive perfectionism as characterized by the setting of inflexible and/ or unattainably high standards, the inability to take pleasure in one’s performance and uncertainty or anxiety about one’s capabilities”.

Pacht (1984) did not agree with Hamachek’s view of normal “perfectionism”, as he contended that perfection does not exist, hence striving for “perfectionism” leads to psychological problems. He viewed it as a psychopathology and described perfectionists as constantly frustrated individuals who are in a “no-win” situation as they are never satisfied with their accomplishments. If they can achieve a goal, it is normal (i.e., nothing exceptional) but if they are unable to achieve a goal, it is a failure! Burns (1981), on the other hand, defined “perfectionism” as a unitary concept. However, like Pacht’s views, Burns suggested that perfectionists suffered from “all or none” phenomenon as they run after the self-defeating goal of hundred percent target attainment. Other researchers also agreed with the unitary concept of “perfectionism”, for example, it is seen as “self-critical” maladaptive behavior (Dunkley & Blankstein, 2000).

Several researchers (e.g., Hewitt & Flett, 1991; Frost, Lehart & Rosenblate, 1990) took a multidimensional approach to study “perfectionism”. While “perfectionism” was described as composed of three dimensions, namely, “self-orientation”, “other orientation”, and “social prescription” (Hewitt & Flett, 1991), Frost et al. (1990) described it as consisting of six dimensions, which includes two antecedent factors, i) “parental expectations”, ii) “parental criticism” and four consequent factors, iii) “doubts about actions”, iv) “concern over mistakes”, v) “standards”, vi) “organization”. In 1995, another multidimensional model of “perfectionism” put forth by Slaney Ashby, and Trippi has suggested three dimensions, a) “higher standards” (i.e., expecting the best from oneself); b) “order”, which implies that one prefers

organization and neatness; c) “discrepancy” (i.e., incongruence between what has been accomplished and what one wanted to accomplish). The greater the incongruence the greater is the maladaptive “perfectionism”.

In 2001, the only two significant dimensions of “perfectionism” were identified as “adaptive” and “maladaptive” by Suddarth and Slaney. Further, the research established the salience of discrepancy in identification of maladaptive “perfectionism” and supported the inclusion of order or organization as component of “perfectionism”. Factors such as parent-child relationship, family environment, child-rearing practices have been suggested as antecedents of “perfectionism”. Based on these factors, Flett, Hewitt, Oliver, and Macdonald (2002) have proposed “social learning” and “social reaction” models. While the “social learning” model says that “perfectionism” is learnt during childhood through observation of parents’ perfectionist behavior, the “social reaction” model has suggested that perfectionist behavior is learnt by children as a coping mechanism to deal with the harsh environment like abuse, withdrawal of affection, as such children believe that by being “perfect” they can stop the physical and/or psychological abuse.

Explanation of “perfectionism” through social learning and social reaction models can be elaborated further with the Freud’s (1927) structural theory of mind. According to Freud (1937), human mind has three parts, which he named as id, ego, and superego. Each of these parts have distinct roles to play in the personality development. Id consists of unconscious desires and motives and following the “pleasure principle” demands immediate gratification of desires and motives. Superego on the other hand consists of social values, norms, ideals which are acquired through parenting and internalized as one’s own. It follows “morality principle” and strives to become morally and socially perfect. The constant conflict between id and superego gives rise to cognitive dissonance and anxiety. Ego, working on “reality principle” tries to resolve the id and superego conflict by using “defense mechanisms”, thereby decreasing cognitive dissonance and anxiety. According to Vaillant (1993), the conflict among “id-ego-superego” causes anxiety which is staved off by the “defense mechanisms” by altering the person’s perceptions of such anxiety provoking events. The first ever description of the “ego defense mechanisms” was given by Freud in 1894 who also suggested a relationship between these mechanisms and psychopathology. His daughter, Anna Freud in 1936 expanded the knowledge regarding “defense mechanisms” when she suggested ten defense mechanisms, such as “denial”, “displacement”, “intellectualization”, “projection”, “reaction formation”, “regression”, “rationalization”, “repression”, “suppression”, and “sublimation”.

A four-level "hierarchical model of defense mechanisms" based on adaptiveness and maturity was suggested by Vaillant (1994) which includes pathological, immature, neurotic, and mature defenses. "Delusions and "psychotic denial" are the pathological defenses; "fantasy", "projection", "passive aggression" are the examples of immature defenses, "reaction formation", "intellectualization", "displacement", "dissociation" are some of the neurotic defenses. Some of the mature defenses include "humor", "sublimation", "altruism".

Historically, Freud (1926) explained the cause of obsessional neurosis as neurotic "perfectionism" in which the person internalizes the authoritarian parenting to ward off the anxiety. According to Greenspon (2008), conditional parental approval, where parents' love and approval can only be earned by meeting parental demands leads to neurotic "perfectionism". Rice and Mirzadeh (2000) have suggested that unconscious internalization of the parental expectations and punitive attitudes occur in children who have an insecure attachment with their parents. Horney (1950) theorized about an association between "perfectionism" and defense styles. She conceptualized that perfectionists in their search for mastery over all their endeavors use "perfectionism" as a solution. She used the phrase, "the tyranny of the shoulds" to explain the neurotic urge of perfectionists to manifest their inner conflicts. Since perfectionists cannot tolerate their imperfections as they feel threatened, therefore, they project their own imperfections on others. Research has found that perfectionists experience high levels of anxiety, whereas psychoanalysts like Freud, Anna Freud, Horney have conceptualized the ego as an averter of anxiety through defense mechanisms. Hence, taking the cue from these two theoretical perspectives, researchers have endeavored to study how "perfectionism" and "defense mechanisms" are related to each other. For example, neuroticism, borderline personality disorder, and immature defense mechanisms like "projection" and "splitting" are connected with "socially prescribed "perfectionism" (Hill, McIntire & Bacharach, 1997; Hewitt, Flett, and Donovan, 1994; Arntz, van den Hoorn, Cornelis, Verheul, van den Bosch, & de Bie, 2003).

Several other researchers have also reported a linkage of "perfectionism" with immature, neurotic defense styles (e.g., Blatt, Quinlan, Pilkonis, & Shea, 1995; Dunkley, Zuroff, & Blankstein, 2003; Flett, Besser, & Hewitt, 2005). Since "perfectionism" has been found to be associated with "defense mechanisms", sourced from ego which is the part of the personality structure, hence, researchers, e.g., Enns and Cox (2002); Smith, Sherry, Viclovic, Saklofske, Stoeber, and Benoit (2019) suggested that "perfectionism" must be studied with respect to personality dimensions also, such as, "Big Five Factors" model of personality. The five factors in "Five Factor

Model of Personality" are represented by an acronym, "OCEAN" where "O stands for openness, C stands for conscientiousness, E stands for extraversion, A stands for agreeableness, and N stands for neuroticism". The role of "neuroticism" has been implicated in "perfectionism". For example, Adler (1938) theorized "perfectionism" as a neurotic overcompensation in which perfectionists have characterized an incessant feeling of inferiority due to perpetual comparison of themselves with the unattainable goal of perfection.

Ellis (1958) viewed "perfectionism" as an irrational belief located in neuroticism. The theoretical ideas of Freud, Adler, Horney and Ellis regarding the connection of "perfectionism" with "neuroticism" have found research support. For example, Dunkley, Blankstein, and Berg (2012), Rice Ashby, and Slaney (2007) found a significantly greater association between "perfectionism" and "neuroticism" as compared to other personality dimensions, such as "extraversion" and "agreeableness". While Hamachek (1978) says that only maladaptive "perfectionism" is characterized by "neuroticism", according to Rice, Ashby, and Slaney (2007); Stoeber (2014), other dimensions of "perfectionism", such as perfectionist strivings and other-oriented "perfectionism" is associated with "conscientiousness" and low "agreeableness", respectively. Thus, literature review is indicative of a relationship of "perfectionism" with defense mechanisms and personality factors. Research, for example, McAdams and Pals (2006) and McCrae and Costa (1997) has suggested that "perfectionism" may develop due to an interaction between personality factors and the social environment. Flett et al. (2002) in agreement have suggested that highly conscientious child may strive to be perfect due to high parental expectations for excellence. Some researchers have taken a different view to explain the link between "perfectionism" and personality traits, for example, Samuel, Riddell, Lynam, Miller, and Widiger (2012) have contended that extreme form of "conscientiousness" is "perfectionism". On the other hand, Cattell (1977) and Enns and Cox (2002) have suggested that "perfectionism" is a surface trait with an underlying source trait of "conscientiousness". Based on the research evidence about an association of "perfectionism" with ego defense mechanisms and personality dimensions, it can be suggested that individuals with "neuroticism" who experience high levels of parental expectations in different life areas, internalize such expectations and unable to cope. Therefore, they employ immature ego defense mechanisms to deal with parental and self-demands, which results in maladaptive "perfectionism". With the impetus of the existing research, the present study aims, 1) to examine the ego defense mechanisms and five factors of personality among adaptive and maladaptive perfectionists; 2) to study the connection among level of

adaptiveness in “perfectionism”, ego defense mechanisms and five factors of personality.

2. Method

Design

In a cross-sectional design, “perfectionism”, “ego defense styles”, and “big five” personality factors (“openness”, “conscientiousness”, “extraversion”, “agreeableness”, “emotional stability”) were examined among male and female young adults (18-25 years) by using an online questionnaire prepared as a Google form.

Participants

Two hundred and seventy participants (male and female) with an age range of 18-25 years who had functional knowledge of English language, comprised the initial sample. Thirty-four participants were identified as “adaptive” and 202 were identified as “maladaptive” perfectionists as per their “discrepancy” scores obtained through “Almost Perfect Scale-Revised” (Slaney, Rice, Mobley, Trippi, & Ashby, 2001). Since, higher the “discrepancy” score, higher is the “maladaptive perfectionism”, hence the 202 maladaptive perfectionists were arranged according to their discrepancy scores in descending order, and first 34 participants were taken as participants for the present study. The final sample consisted of 34 adaptive and 34 maladaptive male and female young adults from different states of India, with age range of 18 to 25 years, belonging to nuclear families from middle income group. Further, none of the participants had a clinically diagnosed physical or psychological disorder.

Measures

“Almost Perfect Scale-Revised” (APS-R): it is the revised version of “Almost Perfect Scale” and has been devised by Slaney, Rice, Mobley, Trippi, and Ashby (2001). There are three subscales namely, “standards”, “order”, “discrepancy”. The subscale of “standards” measures the respondents’ tendency to set high standards and expectations from themselves. The subscale “order” measures the respondents’ preference for organization and neatness. The subscale of “discrepancy” measures the level of incongruence between the respondents’ actual and expected accomplishment. While the “standards” subscale is used to identify the perfectionists from non-perfectionists, the “discrepancy” subscale differentiates between “adaptive” and “maladaptive” perfectionists. The higher the “discrepancy” score, the higher is the maladaptive “perfectionism.” The twenty-three items of this scale are scored according to the seven-point Likert scale.

“Defense style questionnaire-60” (DSQ-60): is the shorter version (with 60 items) of the original “Defense Style Questionnaire” with 81 items by Bond (1986). It includes 30 defense styles, such as immature, mature, moderate,

obsessional defense styles. Each defense style is measured by two items which are randomly arranged throughout the questionnaire.

“Ten Item Personality Inventory” (TIPI): is a ten-item version of the original “NEO-PI” devised by Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann (2003). The “NEO-PI” is based on the big five factors of personality theory, where the five factors are, “Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism.” In TIPI, neuroticism is measured through the level of emotional stability, that is higher the emotional stability, lower is the neuroticism. Each of the five factors of personality are measured with two items. The inventory uses the seven-point Likert scale for scoring. It has an advantage of being administered and scored within a short time duration.

Procedure

Initially, 290 young adults were approached online for participation in the present study through snowballing technique. Informed consent forms were sent to them through online mediums (mails, instant messaging etc.). Out of the total individuals approached, 270 agreed to participate in the present study. Questionnaire booklet prepared as a Google Form was sent to the participants online. The queries of respondents were addressed, and they were thanked for their participation in the study. The collected data was organized into Google spreadsheets for further scoring and analyses.

3. Results

“Perfectionism” (“adaptive” & “maladaptive”), ego defense mechanisms and five factors of personality were examined among male and female young adults by using “Almost Perfect Scale-Revised” “Defense Style Questionnaire-60”, and “Ten Item Personality Inventory”, respectively. The statistical methods such as percentage, t-test for independent means, correlations, and multiple regression were applied to analyze the results through the “Statistical Package for Social Sciences, version 24.0.”

The mean scores obtained on the “Almost Perfect Scale-Revised” showed a far greater percentage (87.4%) of young adult perfectionists than the non-perfectionists (12.6%). Out of the perfectionists’ group, only 14% were adaptive perfectionists (AP) whereas 86% were maladaptive perfectionists (MAP). According to the “Almost Perfect Scale-Revised”, the “maladaptive”, “perfectionism” is determined by the discrepancy score where higher the discrepancy score, greater is the maladaptive “perfectionism”. Since, 34 young adults showed adaptive “perfectionism”, hence, discrepancy scores of young adults with maladaptive “perfectionism” were arranged in descending order, out of which 34 participants were selected for further analyses. In comparison to adaptive perfectionists, the maladaptive perfectionists showed significantly greater high standards

Table 1: Difference between adaptive and maladaptive perfectionists on ego defense mechanisms and personality factors

Measures	Adaptive Perfectionists (n=34)		Maladaptive Perfectionists (n=34)		t(66)
	M	SD	M	SD	
High Standards	39.50	5.02	42.29	4.66	2.38*
Discrepancy	34.74	7.53	76.65	5.92	25.50***
Overall Defense Styles	5.05	0.79	5.73	1.00	3.09**
Immature Defense Styles	3.81	1.08	5.40	1.18	5.80***
Moderate Defense Styles	4.43	1.34	6.04	1.26	5.09***
Mature Defense Styles	6.45	1.09	6.39	0.87	0.27 (ns)
Obsessional Defense Styles	5.13	1.52	5.85	1.19	2.16*
Adaptive Defense Styles	6.54	0.85	6.21	0.94	1.49 (ns)
Extraversion	9.59	3.30	8.85	3.17	0.94 (ns)
Agreeableness	10.15	2.18	9.32	2.04	1.61 (ns)
Conscientiousness	10.74	2.33	8.35	3.19	3.52***
Emotional Stability	8.53	3.06	7.03	3.22	1.97*
Openness	10.56	2.18	10.03	2.73	0.89 (ns)

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$, ns = non-significant

($M_{(AP)} = 39.50$, $SD = 5.02$; $M_{(MAP)} = 42.29$, $SD = 4.66$, $t = 2.38$, $p < .02$), significantly greater discrepancy ($M_{(AP)} = 34.74$, $SD = 7.53$; $M_{(MAP)} = 76.65$, $SD = 5.92$, $t = 25.50$, $p < .001$), significantly greater overall defense mechanisms ($M_{(AP)} = 5.05$, $SD = 0.79$; $M_{(MAP)} = 5.73$, $SD = 1.00$, $t = 3.09$, $p < .003$), significantly greater immature defense mechanisms ($M_{(AP)} = 3.81$, $SD = 1.08$; $M_{(MAP)} = 5.40$, $SD = 1.18$, $t = 5.80$, $p < .001$), significantly greater moderate defense mechanisms ($M_{(AP)} = 4.43$, $SD = 1.34$; $M_{(MAP)} = 6.04$, $SD = 1.26$, $t = 5.09$, $p < .001$), as well as significantly greater obsessional defense mechanisms ($M_{(AP)} = 5.13$, $SD = 1.52$; $M_{(MAP)} = 5.85$, $SD = 1.19$, $t = 2.16$, $p < .03$). On the other hand, in comparison to maladaptive perfectionists, the adaptive perfectionists were significantly more conscientiousness ($M_{(AP)} = 10.74$, $SD = 2.33$; $M_{(MAP)} = 8.35$, $SD = 3.19$, $t = 3.52$, $p < .001$) and more emotionally stable ($M_{(AP)} = 8.53$, $SD = 3.06$; $M_{(MAP)} = 7.03$, $SD = 3.22$, $t = 1.97$, $p < .05$) (Table 1). The biserial correlation of discrepancy (as a measure of adaptiveness) with different ego defense mechanisms and personality factors revealed a significant positive relationship of "maladaptive perfectionism" to overall ego defense style ($r = 0.41$, $p < .01$), immature ego defense style ($r = .61$, $p < .01$), moderate ego defense style (r

$= .57$, $p < .01$), obsessional ego defense style ($r = .33$, $p < .05$). Further, greater "maladaptive perfectionism" was significantly associated with lower conscientiousness ($r = -.37$, $p < .01$) and lower emotional stability ($r = -.26$, $p < .05$).

The stepwise multiple regression with discrepancy as a dependent variable showed that overall defense mechanisms, immature, moderate, mature, obsessional, and adaptive defense mechanisms accounted together for 41% variance in "maladaptive perfectionism". However, it is evident from Table 2 that only immature and moderate defense mechanisms were the significant predictors of "maladaptive perfectionism". Further, while all the five factors of personality predicted 13% variance in "maladaptive perfectionism", however, only low conscientiousness was the significant predictor of "maladaptive perfectionism".

4. Discussion

The findings revealed a significant percentage of perfectionists than the non-perfectionists among the young adult participants. Among the perfectionists a far greater percentage was that of maladaptive than adaptive perfectionists. Comparison between adaptive and maladaptive perfectionists showed significant difference

Table 2: Multiple regression on level of discrepancy for the male and female young adults (n = 68)

Dependent measure	Predictor	Standardized coefficient	t(66)	p	R ²	F	df	p
Discrepancy					.41	8.87	1,66	.001
	Overall Defense Styles, Immature, Moderate, Mature, Obsessional, Adaptive Defense Styles							
	Overall Defense	.002	.02	.99				
	Immature	.38	2.78	.01				
	Moderate	.39	2.65	.01				
	Mature	.19	1.09	.28				
	Obsessional	.10	.78	.44				
	Adaptive	.28	1.59	.12				
	Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability, Openness				.13	2.96		.02
	Extraversion	.13	1.04	.30				
	Agreeableness	.11	0.87	.39				
	Conscientiousness	.35	2.44	.02				
	Emotional Stability	.16	1.23	.22				
	Openness	.21	1.45	.15				

between the two groups on ego defense styles and personality factors. The maladaptive perfectionists obtained significantly higher scores on overall defense mechanisms as well as on immature, moderate, and obsessional defense mechanisms than the adaptive perfectionists. On the other hand, in comparison to the adaptive perfectionists, the maladaptive perfectionists obtained significantly lower scores on two personality factors, namely, conscientiousness and emotional stability. Further, higher the maladaptive "perfectionism", higher were the overall defense mechanisms, also higher were the moderate and obsessional defense styles. However, higher the maladaptive "perfectionism", lower were the "conscientiousness" and "emotional stability". These findings agree with the existing research. "Perfectionism" has been associated with psychopathology, for example, Freud (1926) postulated that "perfectionism" was an individual's neurotic response to strict parental expectations. An inability to meet such expectations, leads to id-ego-superego conflicts that

causes anxiety, which is dealt by internalizing parental expectations. However, the risk of id-ego-superego conflict coming to foreground persists, which the ego attempts to avoid through defense mechanism such as displacement and undoing. Displacement and undoing are behaviors which temporarily provide relief from anxiety that occurs due to internal conflicts. Such behaviors are referred to as immature defense styles as these do not resolve the conflict but provide only temporary relief. Nevertheless, the relief even if it is temporary pushes a person to indulge in such defense mechanisms repetitively. Thus, these immature defense styles underlie obsessional neurosis which is a psychological disorder.

According to Adler (1938), human beings are born with an inferiority complex for they are weak as compared to their surrounding environment. The inferiority turns into striving for superiority hence they try to overcome their weaknesses by gaining mastery over their environment. However, the striving for superiority is thwarted in case of

individuals who have overcontrolling and/or over-protective parents. Thus, to carve out a niche for themselves, such individuals may try to be perfectionists by insisting on performing a task in a specific and rigid manner (which may be completely unproductive) that often results in obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). Horney (1950) also viewed "perfectionism" as an outcome of neurotic disturbances, which result from "tyranny of shoulds". That is, "perfectionism" is seen as a solution to attain mastery over variety of life situations by a person tormented by shoulds and musts imposed by parents and society. Since imperfections within oneself are viewed as a threat, which increase one's neurotic thinking and behavior, hence such an individual indulges in "perfectionism".

The present study also found immature, moderate, and obsessional defense styles in perfectionists. However, these defense styles were found to be significantly greater in maladaptive than adaptive perfectionists. This finding is supported by groundbreaking theory of Hamachek (1978), which suggested that "perfectionism" is not simply a behavior, but it is a cognition about such behavior. That is, how a person thinks about behavior that describes "perfectionism". Based on the cognitions, "perfectionism" can be of two types, normal and neurotic. The normal perfectionists do a realistic evaluation of their own strengths as well as limitations and so their expectations from themselves are also realistic. Contrarily, the ability to self-evaluate is lacking in the neurotic perfectionists. Rather, their focus is on avoidance of failure, which often leads to procrastination with the resultant stress. Hamachek (1978) theory of normal and neurotic personality formed the basis for "adaptive" and "maladaptive" "perfectionism" which are defined as behavioral outcomes. Terry-Short et al. (1995) have defined adaptive "perfectionism" as a behavior that has positive outcomes which functions like positive reinforcers. The maladaptive "perfectionism" is a behavior that is carried out to avoid negative reinforcers of "perfectionism" such as anxiety and fear of failure.

Higgins (2002) has used the concept of "promotion and prevention-focus" motivation to describe the adaptive and maladaptive "perfectionism". Being "promotion-focused" is "adaptive" as individuals move toward a goal whereas having "prevention-focus" is "maladaptive" as individuals are motivated to avoid failure. Enns and colleagues (2002) have suggested that "the adaptive perfectionism is an ability to be satisfied with one's performance despite setting of high goals and striving for the rewards, whereas the maladaptive perfectionism is the tendency to set unrealistic, rigid, high standards of achievement which makes the performance cumbersome and causes uncertainty, doubtfulness, and anxiety about ones' own capabilities." By attaching dots between psychoanalytic

and cognitive-behavioral perspectives, it can be postulated that maladaptive perfectionists employ immature and obsessional defense styles to deal with anxiety caused by the internalized unrealistic expectations and demands on themselves.

The other line of explanation for "perfectionism" is five-factors model of personality. Early theorists, such as Adler (1938), Horney (1950), Ellis (1958) have located "perfectionism" in the "neuroticism" dimension of personality. The present research showed that higher was the "maladaptive" "perfectionism", greater was the "neuroticism" and lower was the "conscientiousness". Even though, significant difference was not found, nevertheless, the maladaptive perfectionists showed lower scores on "extraversion", "agreeableness", and "openness". The connection of "perfectionism" with five factors of personality is explained through an interaction between personality factors and social environment. That is, "perfectionism" is an outcome of an interaction between highly demanding social environment and personality factors such as, high levels of "conscientiousness" (McAdams & Pals, 2006; Flett, Hewitt, Oliver, & MacDonald, 2002). According to another explanation by Samuel, Riddell, Lynam, Miller, and Widiger (2012), an extremely high conscientiousness turns into a variant which is known as "perfectionism". Yet another explanation by Enns and Cox (2002) says that "perfectionism" is a "surface trait" with an underlying "source trait" called conscientiousness. The present findings have also shown that maladaptive perfectionists obtained significantly lower scores on emotional stability and conscientiousness than the adaptive perfectionists. Further, maladaptive "perfectionism" was significantly negatively associated with emotional stability and conscientiousness. However, only low conscientiousness significantly predicted maladaptive "perfectionism".

A meta-analytic review of studies conducted over the last 25 years have shown a connection between "perfectionism" and personality. However, this relationship has not been clearly understood due to inconsistent findings, small effect sizes and multiple scales of "perfectionism" being used. Few studies have used the "Almost Perfect Scale-Revised", hence more research will help to clarify the role of setting of high standards for one's performance, the preference for organization, and discrepancy between set standard for achievement and actual achievement in causing maladaptive "perfectionism". The better understanding of maladaptive "perfectionism" will help to establish its link with personality factors as predictors. Overall, the present findings have indicated that "perfectionism" relates to both ego-defense mechanisms and personality factors, however, the ego defense mechanisms have been found to be the stronger predictor of "perfectionism".

5. Conclusion

In line with the existing research on “perfectionism”, “ego-defense styles” and “personality”, the present study has corroborated Hamachek’ theory which has viewed “perfectionism” as a “dual-construct”. That is, “perfectionism” can be “normal” which is adaptive or “neurotic” which is maladaptive “perfectionism”. Further, maladaptive “perfectionism” was significantly connected with immature, moderate, and obsessional defense styles as well as with low conscientiousness and low emotional stability. However, only immature, and moderate defense styles and low conscientiousness were the significant predictors of maladaptive “perfectionism”. Thus, the present study has partially supported the link of maladaptive “perfectionism” with ego defense styles and five factors model of personality.

6. Limitations and Implications

The sample size in the present study was small and was limited to undergraduate students only. The gender differences as well as parenting and attachment styles were not studied. Despite these limitations, the present study has added to the existing research on “perfectionism”, ego-defense styles, and personality. Since, the study found a far greater percentage of maladaptive perfectionists among the young adult undergraduate students, hence assessment of physical and psychological distress and well-being can be done in future studies. Further, intervention programs can be devised to spread the awareness about the difference between adaptive and maladaptive “perfectionism”, the steps that can be taken to acquire adaptive “perfectionism” and ways to deal with maladaptive “perfectionism”.

7. References

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