Proceedings of the 5th International Conference on Social Psychology and Humanity Studies
DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2027.38509

How are Perfectionistic Strivings and Perfectionistic Concerns Differentially Associated with Emotion Regulation

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Abstract. Perfectionism includes perfectionistic strivings and perfectionistic concerns, and both dimensions lead to different emotion regulation. This review looks at how the two dimensions link with emotion regulation and why these differences happen. Past studies show that perfectionistic strivings usually connect with better emotion regulation strategies, like cognitive reappraisal and accepting bad feelings. But perfectionistic concerns link with negative emotions, rumination, expressive suppression and emotion-regulation problems. These differences can be explained by their motivation types. Perfectionistic strivings connect more to approach-oriented and autonomous motivation, while perfectionistic concerns connect to avoidance-oriented and controlled motivation. However, researchers still disagree on whether perfectionistic strivings can buffer perfectionistic concerns when both are very high. So, the link between perfectionism and emotion regulation is not just about single dimensions, but also depends on how they work together.

Keywords: perfectionistic strivings, perfectionistic concerns, emotion regulation

1. Introduction

1.1. Multidimensional perfectionism

Perfectionism is a personality feature where people set and pursue very high standards. We can see it in school, work, and personal growth [1]. Early studies saw perfectionism as a construct with different parts. The authors in [2] pointed out aspects about pursuing personal standards and worrying about mistakes. Later, the authors in [3] split perfectionism into two main parts: perfectionistic strivings and perfectionistic concerns. Perfectionistic strivings mean trying to get high standards and excellence. Perfectionistic concerns mean worrying too much about making mistakes, failing, and not reaching goals. The authors in [4] said these two parts come from approach and avoidance motivation. People with approach motivation want to improve themselves and win. However, people with avoidance motivation just worry about doing badly and falling behind others [4]. Because of this, the two dimensions predict different ways of regulating emotions.

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1.2. Emotion regulation

Emotion regulation is about how people change what emotions they feel, when they feel them, and how they show them [5]. It is not just one thing. People use different methods to control their feelings, including reappraisal and suppression. Cognitive reappraisal means changing the way you think about a situation to change how you feel. Expressive suppression means hiding your feelings after you already feel them [6]. People with high perfectionistic strivings use reappraisal more, but people with high perfectionistic concerns use suppression more. Also, these links go both ways [7]. So, different perfectionism dimensions go with different emotion regulation methods.

1.3. Multidimensional perfectionism and emotion regulation

Longitudinal studies show that the two dimensions of perfectionism link to different emotion regulation patterns. Perfectionistic strivings go with cognitive reappraisal and acceptance, while perfectionistic concerns go with suppression and regulation difficulties [8]. Some long-term studies show that these links affect each other over time [7]. But not all studies agree, and we still do not fully know if the differences are about specific strategies or broader emotional difficulties.

1.4. Present study

In general, research shows perfectionistic strivings and perfectionistic concerns link to different emotion regulation patterns. Strivings usually go with better strategies like cognitive reappraisal and accepting negative feelings. Concerns go with emotional difficulties, suppression, and rumination [7]. But this does not mean we can simply say one is good and the other is bad [9]. High perfectionistic strivings do not always bring good emotion regulation. Some people with high strivings still cannot manage their feelings well [10]. For perfectionistic concerns, rumination might be the main reason for negative feelings, instead of general emotion difficulties [11]. Also, strivings do not always lower the bad effects of concerns. When concerns are high, having high strivings might even bring more bad feelings [12]. So the relationship is quite complicated. Because past studies used different measures, groups, and designs, it is hard to find a clear rule. This review compares these findings to see if perfectionistic strivings and concerns truly have distinct emotion regulation patterns. So, the main question is: how are perfectionistic strivings and perfectionistic concerns differently linked to emotion regulation?

2. Method

2.1. Search strategy

The literature search used two main topic areas: perfectionism and emotion regulation. For perfectionism, search terms were "perfectionism", "perfectionistic striving", "perfectionistic concern", "adaptive perfectionism", and "maladaptive perfectionism". For emotion regulation, terms were "emotion regulation", "reappraisal", "suppression", "rumination", "acceptance of negative emotions", "avoidance", and "emotional clarity". Keywords in the same topic were connected with OR, and the two topic blocks were connected with AND. Only English papers were included, with no limit on publication year. All found papers were checked by reading the full text. The main focus was how perfectionistic strivings, concerns, and emotion regulation link together and why. Papers that only talked about perfectionism or only emotion regulation without connecting them were left out.

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3. Results

3.1. Perfectionistic strivings and emotion regulation

People with high perfectionistic strivings like to use cognitive reappraisal to regulate emotions [7]. Reappraisal helps them handle failure better by changing how they view setbacks, which reduces bad feelings. It also helps them accept negative emotions and see failure as a chance to learn, rather than being useless. But perfectionistic strivings are not always good. For instance, if someone has high strivings but also procrastinates a lot, their high standards become a big psychological stress instead of motivation [13]. So, we cannot simply label strivings as good or adaptive.

3.2. Perfectionistic concerns and emotion regulation

People with high perfectionistic concerns feel much more negative emotions when they fail [14]. They also struggle to understand what they are feeling, making it hard to pick good ways to regulate emotions. So, they often use bad strategies like rumination and suppression, or just get overwhelmed by bad feelings [14]. Rumination is a key problem here because constantly thinking about mistakes and bad self-evaluations makes bad feelings last longer [15]. It is a big cause of psychological pain for people with high concerns [15]. Expressive suppression matters a lot too. Long-term studies show a two-way link: high perfectionistic concerns lead to more suppression, and using suppression often makes perfectionistic concerns even higher [7]. This creates a bad cycle. Also, people with high concerns often hold wrong ideas about emotions, thinking anxiety or self-criticism is needed to stay motivated, or that they deserve punishment for failing [14]. These ideas stop them from using good emotion regulation strategies.

3.3. Comparing perfectionistic strivings and perfectionistic concerns

Since strivings and concerns link to different emotion regulation ways, we need to know what causes this. Achievement motivation theory and self-determination theory give good answers [4]. In achievement motivation, people with strivings focus on the hope of success and want to improve themselves [4]. So, strivings predict mastery-approach goals directly [4]. They also pursue performance-approach goals because they want to show competence and succeed [4]. But people with concerns are driven by fear of failure [4]. They mostly try to avoid looking stupid, which connects to performance-avoidance goals. They may also use mastery-avoidance goals because they fear not reaching their own standards [4]. Self-determination theory shows a similar point. Perfectionistic strivings connect to autonomous motivation, where people do things because it matters to them personally. Perfectionistic concerns connect to controlled motivation, where people act because of internal or external pressures like avoiding failure or criticism. These motivation differences explain why strivings and concerns show different emotion regulation patterns [4].

3.4. Relationship between perfectionistic strivings and perfectionistic concerns

When strivings and concerns exist together, what happens? Two main models explain this: the 2 × 2 model and the tripartite model. In the 2 × 2 model, the authors in [16] found that people with only high strivings had the best results, like more positive feelings and higher goals. People with only high concerns had the worst results, like lowest self-satisfaction. When both strivings and concerns were high, the result was in the middle. This suggests that the self-acceptance from strivings can reduce some bad effects of concerns. However, the authors in [12] found a different result using the

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tripartite model. They argued that having high concerns alone is not the worst case. Instead, having both high strivings and high concerns is the most dangerous combination. When concerns are high, having high strivings actually makes bad emotions worse. Strivings only help buffer bad feelings when concerns are low. So, current research is still not sure whether high strivings help or hurt when concerns are already high.

4. Discussion

4.1. Potential factors of different motivational orientations

Different motivation types in strivings and concerns affect how people deal with setbacks and emotions. People with strivings use problem-focused coping more. They focus on fixing problems instead of getting stuck in bad feelings [3]. Being conscientious and disciplined helps them stay focused on goals [3]. Also, having good self-efficacy keeps their confidence high [4]. These traits make them rely more on cognitive reappraisal to rethink hard situations and keep moving forward [4]. On the other hand, people with concerns easily fall into all-or-nothing thinking. They notice small flaws easily even when they did well overall [3]. So small mistakes cause huge anxiety. Their fear of failure also causes procrastination and avoidance, because running away reduces fear temporarily [3]. Besides, their self-worth relies heavily on achievement and others' evaluations, so negative feedback hurts them deeply [4]. As a result, they use suppression and rumination more [4]. Suppression stops them from showing feelings, while rumination keeps their mind stuck on mistakes, making bad emotions last longer [7].

4.2. Limitations and future directions

There are several limitations. First, cause-and-effect relationships are still not clear. Most studies are correlational, so we cannot tell if perfectionism causes emotion regulation style or the other way around. Second, different studies used different scales and definitions for perfectionism and emotion regulation, making comparisons difficult. Third, study samples, contexts, and designs varied a lot across studies. Last, the combination of strivings and concerns is complex, and their joint effect is different from looking at them separately. So we should be careful when interpreting these results. Future research needs consistent measures and long-term designs to make things clearer [7]. Future research should, on one hand, capture real-life emotion regulation processes, for instance, by utilizing Experience Sampling Method (ESM) technology, to compare whether perfectionists are more prone to employing emotional suppression strategies in daily life and to identify which specific situations trigger particular strategies [17]. The advantages of ESM should be leveraged to examine whether individual regulation processes evolve over time. Furthermore, future studies should investigate why some perfectionists manage emotions more effectively while others experience poorer mental health outcomes, and identify the factors that either protect against or mediate the relationship between perfectionism and emotion management.

5. Conclusion

In short, perfectionistic strivings and perfectionistic concerns connect to different emotion regulation patterns. People with higher strivings show better emotion regulation, while those with higher concerns show worse patterns. However, when both strivings and concerns are high, it is still unclear if strivings help or hurt. For perfectionists, the fear of making mistakes or failing often leads

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to procrastination and avoidance behaviors; however, avoidant emotional coping strategies tend to reinforce negative feedback, and the act of suppression does not make negative emotions vanish. Instead, it prolongs their presence.Therefore, we cannot just look at the two dimensions separately; we must look at how they interact with each other.

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