Perfectionism and attachment style as factors relating to adjustment in college students

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Pacific University
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Abstract
Perfectionism is a construct only recently operationalized in the literature, with need identified in discovering its relationship to attachment style and patterns of adjustment in college. The first hypothesis was that a positive correlation would be evidenced between insecure attachment style and maladaptive perfectionism. The second hypothesis predicted that the relationship between maladaptive perfectionism and adjustment would be weaker for students with insecure attachment styles than those with a secure attachment style. Participants were 64 first-year undergraduate students from Pacific University and Reed College. Self-report measures used to measure the variables were the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS), Experiences in Close Relationship Scale (ECR), and Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ). A Pearson product-moment correlational analysis was utilized to determine the strength and direction of the relationships between subscales. Findings indicated that the first hypothesis was supported, as a positive correlation was found between the Doubts about Actions subscale of the MPS and the Attachment Avoidance subscale of the ECR. The second hypothesis was unsupported, as a positive correlation was found between the Parental Criticism subscale of the MPS and the Personal Emotional Attachment subscale of the SACQ. These findings counter previous literature and could a) indicate resiliency of emotional development or b) externalization of problems. Future directions include identifying control variables to streamline response styles to these constructs and history of social connectedness as a protective factor aiding resiliency.

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PERFECTIONISM AND ATTACHMENT STYLE AS FACTORS RELATING TO
ADJUSTMENT IN COLLEGE STUDENTS

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY
OF
SCHOOL OF PROFESSIONAL PSYCHOLOGY
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ABSTRACT

Perfectionism is a construct only recently operationalized in the literature, with need identified in discovering its relationship to attachment style and patterns of adjustment in college. The first hypothesis was that a positive correlation would be evidenced between insecure attachment style and maladaptive perfectionism. The second hypothesis predicted that the relationship between maladaptive perfectionism and adjustment would be weaker for students with insecure attachment styles than those with a secure attachment style. Participants were 64 first-year undergraduate students from Pacific University and Reed College. Self-report measures used to measure the variables were the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS), Experiences in Close Relationship Scale (ECR), and Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ). A Pearson product-moment correlational analysis was utilized to determine the strength and direction of the relationships between subscales. Findings indicated that the first hypothesis was supported, as a positive correlation was found between the Doubts about Actions subscale of the MPS and the Attachment Avoidance subscale of the ECR. The second hypothesis was unsupported, as a positive correlation was found between the Parental Criticism subscale of the MPS and the Personal Emotional Attachment subscale of the SACQ. These findings counter previous literature and could a) indicate resiliency of emotional development or b) externalization of problems. Future directions include identifying control variables to streamline response styles to these constructs and history of social connectedness as a protective factor aiding resiliency.
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Introduction

Perfectionism is a characteristic related to personality structure that has been investigated only recently by the literature (Rice & Aldea, 2006). The construct of perfectionism has been operationalized and researchers have begun to find connections between perfectionistic tendencies and quality of attachment style to caregivers. There are inconsistencies in the literature with regard to the strength of the relationship between these two variables, as well as what specific qualities of childhood relationships could be associated with perfectionism (Rice & Lopez, 2004). This topic was chosen because of experiences at a clinical practicum rotation in a college counseling center, which featured clients who presented with perfectionism. It was noteworthy that these clients could be difficult to treat in therapy because of their high, and at times unrealistic, expectations. Examples of these are clients who have eating disorders or those who suffer from anxiety due to pursuit of perfection in academics. The goal of this project is to add to the developing literature on perfectionism by analyzing data that could add specific information about these qualities in college students. Doing this research will help enrich current knowledge about psychosocial stressors of college students and relationships, and will be useful to psychologists who work or have aspirations of working in a college setting.

Attachment theorists have demonstrated through a large body of literature that quality of early childhood relationships to primary caregivers predicts the nature of interactions with others and quality of future relationships (Bowlby, 1969;1982). When
there is a secure attachment to a caregiver, the caregiver is perceived as warm, nurturing, dependable and responsive. When there is an insecure attachment, the caregiver is perceived as unreliable, neglectful, inconsistent and/or intrusive. The young infant will introject the caregiver figure and represent it internally, retaining the emotional component of the attachment. The pervasiveness of the attachment bond is not only evident extrinsically by the dynamic of the relationships the person will seek out as an adult, but also intrinsically with what the person believes to be true about his or her own ability and expectation to receive love and nurturance from another human being.

Through her research with The Strange Situation, Mary Ainsworth further refined the literature’s categorization of attachment style, identifying secure and insecure (fearful, preoccupied or dismissive) types (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). When there is a secure attachment bond, the child is sad when the caregiver leaves and seems pleased upon the caregiver’s return. The securely attached child feels comfortable exploring the environment and will return to the caregiver from time to time. Avoidant attachment is characterized by physiological signs of anxiety in the child and withdrawal from the caregiver. The caregiver is often rejecting of the child’s attachment needs, and in return the child may use play behavior as a distraction from these needs. This child usually does not appear to have a preference between a caregiver and a stranger. A child who displays a resistant/ambivalent attachment style tends to cling to the caregiver when near, become distressed when the caregiver leaves, and is difficult to soothe when the caregiver returns. This may be indicative of the caregiver being
inconsistent with regard to his/her availability to the child (Byng-Hall, 1995). Disorganized attachment evidences itself in peculiar behaviors and postures, such as the child having a “frozen” expression or making sudden movements such as falling to the floor. This may be suggestive of a child coping with abuse in his/her home. Adults with insecure attachment styles may experience psychological stressors and symptoms, such as anxiety, depression, fear of embarrassment, and discomfort with intimacy. However, resilient adults may be able to develop strong coping skills that allow them to function without difficulty and have meaningful relationships.

Recently, researchers have criticized these studies in that they may have failed to integrate and empirically test the significance of the relationship between child and parent and later relationships for the adult with romantic partners. Mikulincer and Shaver (2003) attest that working models established in infancy form the foundation of attachment representations throughout adult life. Both attachment anxiety and avoidance have been linked to negative romantic relationship experiences. Research by Gillath & Shaver (2008) investigated specific genetic correlates of adult attachment style, with at least three genes identified: those that activate receptors to dopamine, serotonin and oxytocin. For example, Gillath and Shaver (2008) theorized that certain dopamine (D2) bindings are associated with dysfunctional social behavior, while serotonin plays an important role in social affiliation. Similarly, nonverbal displays of romantic love are associated with release of oxytocin into the blood stream. While support for these
findings is preliminary, it is expected that genetic research in this area will become richer over time.

Genetic factors of attachment are also related to biological aspects of sex priming in relationships. A study by Gillath et al. (2008) found evidence that sexual interest and arousal are related to motives to form and maintain a close relationship with another person. This is conceptualized by sex-related representations being “cognitively primed” (p. 1057) in the pursuer, spurring tendencies to initiate romantic contact and pursue a relationship. Researchers designed two studies on self-reported heterosexual college students; assigned randomly to a sexual prime or neutral prime condition. Participants were asked to pair relationships between objects and respond to 30 statements, of which half were intimacy-related. Those in the sexual prime condition were presented with sexual imagery, while those in the neutral prime were not. Overall results indicated that being exposed to sexual stimuli motivates people to initiate and maintain close relationships. It is hypothesized that sexual priming allows greater accessibility to intimacy-related thoughts and ideas, and more optimistic strategies for attaining a relationship. This suggests that even basic sexual stimulation can activate relationship-related motives, indicating a synergetic component between sexuality and relationship maintenance (Gillath et al., 2008).

A recent study by Dinero, Conger, Shaver, Widaman and Larsen-Rife (2008) built on Bowlby’s theory that threats in the environment, “Activate the attachment system and cause a person to notice the presence or absence (availability and responsiveness) of a
security-providing attachment figure. (p. 622)”’. They argue that the romantic attachment figure may not represent their original attachment representation with earlier caregivers, but the nature and sentiment of the relationships are similar. In their study, they sought to assess the degree to which attachment style predicts quality of behavior in romantic relationships. Participants were 294 girls and 265 boys from a Family Transitions Project in Iowa. Dinero et al. (2008) found that support for positive parent-child interactions at ages 15 and 16 predicted attachment security at age 25. Similarly, positive romantic relationships at age 25 contributed to attachment security at age 27. Thus, longitudinal research shows that both the family of origin and subsequent relationships are important contributions to attachment security. This study particularly emphasized behavioral interactions with parents during adolescence as having a significant impact on expectations for later romantic attachments. It was found that influence of experiences with the family of origin lessened over time, being replaced by influences of significant romantic relationships (Dinero et. al, 2008).

The literature reflects evidence of a strong connection between an individual’s attachment style and perfectionism. Specifically, interpersonal functioning and the nature of early relationships are closely related to perfectionistic character structure. Preliminary research on this topic found that perfectionism often emerges from poor quality parent-child relationships, particularly when parenting is harsh or critical, coupled with unreasonably high expectations for the child (Hamacheck, 1978). Children of these parents learn to emphasize their performances and discount their emotional needs in order
to avoid conflict and achieve positive attention from parents. A study by Rice & Lopez (2004) found that self-doubt has more of an impact on self-esteem in students with low attachment security than students with higher attachment security. Securely attached perfectionistic individuals were also more likely to seek out emotional support when under stress, while insecurely attached perfectionistic individuals were more likely to obsess, ruminate and withdraw socially when under stress.

While most of the research to date has focused on the negative, clinically significant aspects of perfectionism, utilization of measures of perfectionism such as the Multidimensional Personality Scale (Frost et al., 1990) have yielded cluster data findings, suggesting that there are two different types of perfectionists: Adaptive and maladaptive. The distinction between adaptive and maladaptive perfectionists is that adaptive perfectionists endorse several items on subscales of the MPS but do not endorse negative symptomatology, therefore not presenting themselves as distressed by their perfectionism. Adaptive perfectionists hold high standards for themselves without evidencing feelings of inadequacy in meeting high expectations (Rice & Slaney, 2002). Those who take the MPS and don’t meet criteria for perfectionism are classified as nonperfectionists. In a sample of undergraduate students, it was found that maladaptive perfectionists had higher scores on the Self-Criticism subscale of the MPS, reported lower self-esteem and were less satisfied with their GPA and were, on average much more depressed than adaptive perfectionists (Grzegorek, Slaney, Franze, & Rice, 2004).
This demonstrates that implications of perfectionism can vary greatly, posing as a serious risk for some students and a benefit for others.

A study by Rice and Mirzadeh (2000) found that security of attachment was a stronger predictor of adaptive perfectionism than maladaptive perfectionism. The authors speculate that “adaptive perfectionism may emerge from unique qualities in attachment relationships that encourage the development of adaptive perfectionism without detrimental relational consequences for children when standards aren’t met (p. 244).” The results of the sample data reflected that attachment to mother plays a more prominent role in the development of perfectionism than attachment to father, which was especially evident with female participants.

College samples from the literature have demonstrated high levels of perfectionism, with up to two-thirds of testing groups endorsing numerous perfectionist qualities (Rice & Slaney, 2002), which may be expected in light of competitiveness and academic difficulty of rigorous academic institutions. A methodological issue of testing perfectionism in college students is that stress levels can fluctuate greatly depending upon time in the semester. Research by Rice et al. (2006) examined perfectionism and stress management in honors students, finding that stress is a partial mediator between maladaptive perfectionism and depression. This indicates that stress would exaggerate symptom presentation in maladaptive perfectionists but would not create significantly different profiles for maladaptive perfectionists, adaptive perfectionists or nonperfectionists, as most perfectionism traits measured by the MPS are stable. Another
finding from this study was that social support was a partial mediator of the effects of perfectionism and hopelessness. Social connection was additionally a partial mediator of academic integration, indicating that those who feel socially isolated may not be able to orient as well into academics (Rice et al., 2006).

It is imperative to consider how various cultural factors may influence perfectionism, as it is an indicator of how individuals perceive the demands of the environment and their ability to meet those demands. Perfectionism is a quality that is rewarded in some aspects of the American culture, especially in competitive educational and vocational settings. This makes it difficult to recognize when perfectionism becomes a debilitating issue. Chang and Rand (1998) examined cultural differences in perfectionism between Asian and Caucasian Americans. Significant findings were found that Asian Americans typically scored higher on subscales of the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (Frost et al., 1990), including: Concern over Mistakes, Parental Expectations, Parental Criticism, and Doubts about Actions scales. These higher scores were not associated with hopelessness or suicide probability, and are more likely to be associated with not wanting to disappoint families. Collectivistic cultures differ from individualistic cultures in that family approval may ultimately be more important than the choices of the individual. In another study of perfectionism and ethnicity (Castro & Rice, 2003) using the MPS, results were similar to the Chang and Rand (1998) study regarding Asian American students in higher perfectionism rankings. Castro and Rice found that Caucasian students reported lower parental expectations than African American students,
but were similar to one another in other subscales. The authors suggested that African-Americans from middle-class families may put higher demands on their children to achieve because they themselves had to struggle to obtain and maintain their status.

For Latino college students, adjustment can be more of a struggle, especially if there is any language barrier and/or familial conflict, or it is the first generation of college attendance in the student’s family. A research study surveyed 338 Latino college students on adjustment measures and support system (Rodriguez et al., 2003). Results indicated that the most predictive factors of psychological distress were being female and having a heavier burden of acculturation issues. The most predictive factors of psychological well-being were being male with higher family income and less acculturation issues. Perceived availability of family and friend support is evidenced to be a protective factor; the Latino students represented in this sample endorsed utilization of social support to cope during times of stress.

College counseling centers are available to students each year, but even students struggling may not choose to get help. A study by Sharf and Bishop (1973) found no significant differences between counseled and noncounseled students with regard to college adjustment. Sharf and Bishop (1973) discussed that reasons for this might be that students who go to a counseling center are often self-motivated to do so, which requires some level of personal distress. Noncounseled students may or not be experiencing the same level of distress. Therefore, though counseled students may improve in treatment, their level of adjustment may not surpass that of noncounseled students enough to make a
significant difference in their study. In a study by Destafano et al. (2001), students who received counseling services were compared in their adaptation to college with students who did not receive counseling services. Students receiving counseling initially reported lower adaptation scores as measured by the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ). After counseling, scores were no longer significantly differentiated between the two groups. Results suggest that counseled students as a whole initially reported more distress, but were affected positively by counseling experience.

Clients who have high standards for themselves may have a hard time in counseling with setting realistic goals or coping with uncertainty and ambiguity regarding therapy progress. Many studies in this literature have described maladaptive perfectionists as having the most severe psychological symptomatology (Grzegorek et al., 2004), and unfortunately they are the least likely to reach out to others for help. Development of a group treatment protocol may be helpful in that it would put less focus on the individual client’s presenting problems and may normalize the client’s experience.

The purpose of this study is to build on past research by collecting and analyzing data regarding the relationship between perfectionism and attachment style, and their implications for predicting college adjustment in first-year undergraduate students. This dissertation will also serve as additional evidence for perfectionism as a measurable construct relevant to psychological well-being. The goal is to contribute additional information to the literature by identifying these factors and providing demographic
information regarding utilization of counseling services, minority status and drop-out rates for students at each institution.

Hypotheses for this study involved examining the relationship among perfectionism, attachment style, and adjustment. The first hypothesis was that a strong positive correlation will be evidenced between insecure attachment style and maladaptive perfectionism. The connection between perfectionism and attachment style is slowly growing in the literature, but information is still somewhat limited.

The literature has suggested that both maladaptive perfectionists and those with insecure attachment styles are more likely to have adjustment problems. However, few studies have combined both perfectionism and attachment style to investigate relationships with adjustment. The second hypothesis predicted that the relationship between maladaptive perfectionism and adjustment will be weaker for students with insecure attachment styles (i.e., fearful, preoccupied, and dismissing) than those with a secure attachment style.
Method

Participants & Settings

Participants were 64 first-year undergraduate students enrolled full-time in their first semester of college. There were a total of 38 participants from Pacific University in Forest Grove, Oregon and 26 participants from Reed College in Portland, Oregon. First-year students were recruited to participate because of their likelihood to have the most variability in their experiences of adjusting to college, as compared to students coming back to campus for subsequent years of study. This also served the purpose to control against potential cohort and history effects from being at the respective institutions. Transfer students were not eligible to participate in this study.

Pacific University is a small, private liberal arts institution with about 3,000 total undergraduate students. Reed College is similarly a small, private liberal arts institution, with about 1,500 total students. While Pacific University’s foci are on health professions and education, Reed College students are more involved with arts and humanities and have a more egregious admissions standard. The student body at Reed College is known to be politically radical, with influences by Marxist principles and liberal student discipline and tend to be of higher socioeconomic status (R. Rapkoch, personal communication, October 24, 2008). The majority of students at both universities are of European-American descent, which is represented in the research sample.

A total of 41 women and 23 men participated in this study, and all reported to be between 18-25 years of age based on demographic information collected. Due to the restricted age range
of the participants, age was not used as a variable in determining correlate and prediction outcomes of perfectionism, attachment style and adjustment. When asked to describe their ethnicity, 76.6% of respondents identified as Caucasian/White, 7.8% identified as Hispanic/Latino, 6.3% identified as Asian/Asian American, 4.7% identified as Multi-ethnic, 3.1% identified as Black/African American, and 1.6% identified as American Indian/Alaska Native. In response to their family’s annual income, 25% of participants reported <$25,000, 37.5% reported $25,000-$50,000, 9.4% reported $50,000-$100,000, 6.3% reported $75,000-$100,000, 3.1% reported >$100,000 and 15.6% preferred not to disclose information about their family’s annual income.

In regard to utilization of counseling services, 76.6% of participants stated that they have not utilized counseling services at their University, while 7.8% stated that they had utilized counseling services, and 15.6% declined to respond. Of the 7.8% of participants who utilized counseling services, 66.7% reported that they found counseling services helpful overall, while 33% reported not finding counseling services helpful overall.

Procedure

Participants were recruited at each university by contacting chairs of each academic department and communicating a summary of what the study involved and what type of participation would be needed from students. Because not all measures could be attained for computer use, it was necessary to conduct data collection sessions in person with research participants. Research sessions were scheduled in large rooms that would grant participants more comfort and privacy while engaging in the assessments. Group research sessions took
approximately 1.5-2.0 hours to complete. Compensation for participation was provided to the students in the form of a drawing for one of four $25 gift cards. Further, refreshments were provided during each study session.

Six research sessions were conducted at each university. Test sheets were labeled with numbers for the purpose of identifying and matching related test materials while protecting confidentiality. After participants were recruited and times were scheduled, informed consent was obtained and explained verbally; making sure students understood the basic intentions of the study and their confidentiality, as well as the voluntary aspect of their participation. A short questionnaire was administered regarding demographic information, such as age, gender, ethnicity and socioeconomic status (see Appendix A). Three self-report measures (discussed below) were then administered, as well as a few questions about the students’ experience with counseling or therapy services, if applicable (see Appendix B).

Measures

The first self-report measure that was used is the Experiences in Close Relationship measure (ECR). This measure was developed in 1998 by Brennan, Clark and Shaver, focusing upon measuring attachment security. The measure contains several self-report scales with a factor structure designed to measure various aspects of attachment style. Brennan and colleagues studied 1,000 university students, finding a summary of structural factors of attachment consistent with those reported by previous attachment experts, such as Ainsworth (1978). The ECR is currently one of the most widely used measures of adult attachment style, as it has been used in hundreds of studies since 1998. The measure addresses two major aspects of adult
attachment style: avoidance of intimacy and interdependence, and anxiety about rejection and abandonment (Arbiol et al., 1998). There are 36 items on the measure, with 18 on the Anxiety scale and 18 on the Avoidance scale. Respondents are instructed to answer each question with their answer on a 7-point Likert scale, from disagreeing strongly with the statement provided to agreeing strongly with the statement provided.

The Experience in Close Relationship measure demonstrates excellent psychometric properties. To provide criterion-related validity, Arbiol et al. (1998) analyzed scale items with attention paid to the type and quality of the participants close relationships. For example, uncoupled participants were significantly more avoidant than coupled participants (Arbiol et al., 1998). Additionally, the ECR has demonstrated good factor validity, confirming the two dimensional factor structure conceptualized by the two different scales of attachment insecurity: anxiety and avoidance. Three parcels of items for each subscale were created, dividing them into 6 items each. Results were then calculated for the mean of each parcel. The fit of the model was evaluated by Bentler’s comparative fit index (CFI), adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI), the goodness of fit index (GFI), and Tucker and Lewis’ (1973) nonnormalized fit index (NNFI). Results indicated a CFI of 1.00, an AGFI of .99, a GFI of .99, and an NNFI of 1.00. With the NNFI, 1.00 is considered an exact fit, and values above .90 are considered tenable (Arbiol et al., 1998). The statistical index was found significant for both the Spanish and American versions of the ECR (p<.01). This study demonstrated adequate internal consistency reliability of the ECR, with coefficient alphas above .85 for both scales (p<.01).
The second self-report measure that was used is Frost et al.’s (1990) Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS), which measures degree and type of perfectionism using a 35 item questionnaire with six subscales: Concern over Mistakes, Personal Standards, Parental Expectations, Parental Criticism, Doubts about Actions, and Organization. Internal consistency estimates for the MPS have been adequate, with Cronbach’s coefficient alphas ranging from .77 to .93. Internal consistency estimates on the MPS subscales are high, ranging from .77 to .91 (Castro & Rice, 2003). The MPS demonstrates criterion-related validity, as evidenced by correlations ranging from .28 to .61 between subscales such as Concern Over Mistakes and Doubts about Actions with measures of depressive symptoms in The Brief Symptom Inventory (Derogatis & Melisaratos, 1983). Through the MPS subscales, which measure self-esteem, depression, compulsiveness and other factors, participants will be grouped as healthy perfectionists, dysfunctional/maladaptive perfectionists, and nonperfectionists.

The third self-report measure that was used is the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ; Baker & Siryk, 1984), a widely-used measure with 67 items measuring four facets of college adjustment: academic, social, personal-emotional, and goal commitment/institutional attachment. Baker and Siryk (1984) reported coefficient alphas ranging from .79 to .88. Criterion-related validity was found through negative correlations between SACQ subscales and attrition from school, as well as utilization of counseling services. Norms have been established for the full scale and for each of the subscales based on typical freshman classes at Clark University and Holy Cross University. Positive correlations were found between
the SACQ and higher grade point averages as well as participation in social events, which were both indicators of better adjustment (Baker & Siryk, 1984).

Further investigation of the SACQ has indicated that freshmen in college may have trouble with adjustment because of unrealistically high expectations of college (Cooper & Robinson, 1988). In this study, 302 students from a technical school were administered the SACQ to determine level of adjustment. Results supported reliable use of the instrument, as findings were unidimensional in nature, with high correlations in related scales. Thus, those studied evidenced either being well adjusted or poorly adjusted, with little contrary data in each protocol. The study notes that strength of the SACQ is the inclusion and acknowledgement of the stress of the institutional environment, including academic major and other environmental stressors. This is helpful in assessing data for universities, gaining general knowledge about student satisfaction that aids in designing interventions aimed at improving institutional qualities and providing additional resources for students (Cooper & Robinson, 1988).
Results

The first hypothesis was tested by examining correlation coefficients among the subscales of the MPS (Personal Standards, Parental Criticism, Parental Expectations, Doubts about Actions, Concern over Mistakes, and Organization) and the ECR (Attachment-related Anxiety and Attachment-related Avoidance). It is important to note that maladaptive perfectionism is measured by the subscales of Parental Expectations, Doubts about Actions and Concern over Mistakes. The subscales of Personal Standards and Organization are associated with adaptive perfectionism. The second hypothesis was tested by examining the correlations between the maladaptive perfectionism subscales of the MPS and the total and subscale scores from the SACQ for each attachment style (e.g., secure and insecure) separately. Prior to performing the main analyses the data were evaluated to meet determine if certain parametric assumption were met.

Perfectionism & Attachment Style Groups

Prior to interpreting the correlations the data were assessed to make sure assumptions were met; specifically normality and linearity. The assumption of normality was examined by the Shapiro-Wilk test for normality as well as evaluating the skewness and kurtosis statistics. Review of the S-W test for normality showed large support for the normality assumption on most subscales. That is, the normality assumption was met on all subscales except for Concern Over Mistakes (COM), Organization (O), and Attachment Avoidance (AA). However, the skewness statistics of these subscales were 0.47, -0.21, and 0.26 respectively, which indicates while the distributions were not symmetrical, there were only minor deviations from normal. Further, the
kurtosis statistics for the subscales were as follows: COM = -0.31, O = -1.0, and AA = -1.1. While, these values were all negative, indicating that the distributions are platykurtic, the size of the coefficients indicated the distributions could be considered normal.

The scatterplot of the independent variable (perfectionism) and the dependent variable (attachment) revealed that the assumption of linearity was supported, as there were no visible curves in the data points. Many of the plots depicted a weak correlational relationship between the variables. This was revealed by observing the wide distribution of variable scores without a trend in a strong direction on the scatterplots. However, the results of the correlational analysis revealed a significant positive correlation between the Doubts about Actions subscale of the MPS and the Attachment-related Avoidance subscale of the ECR ($r = .29, p < .05$). This finding supports the first hypothesis of a significant positive correlation between maladaptive perfectionism and insecure attachment. The scatterplot for the relationship between these variables supports the assumption of linearity and is depicted in Figure 1. This representation suggests that those participants who had a high score on the Doubts about Actions subscale were also likely to score highly on the Attachment-related Avoidance subscale. There were no other significant correlations between subscales of the MPS and the ECR (Refer to Table 1).
Figure 1: Scatterplot of Correlation between Perfectionism and Attachment

Table 1  
**Correlation Matrix: Subscales of the MPS and ECR**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
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<td>.29*</td>
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<td>14.43</td>
<td>10.41</td>
<td>11.45</td>
<td>17.94</td>
<td>19.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td>6.92</td>
<td>4.09</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>6.42</td>
<td>5.63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05, **p < .001

The second hypothesis was tested by examining correlation coefficients among the subscales of the MPS (Personal Standards, Parental Criticism, Parental Expectations, Doubts about Actions, Concern over Mistakes, and Organization) and the SACQ (Academic Adjustment,
Personal Emotional Adjustment, and Attachment) and seeing if significant differences existed among these relationships separately for participants with secure \((n = 33)\) and insecure \((n = 29)\) attachment styles, as measured by the ECR. Results largely indicated weak correlations among the variables of the MPS and SAC-Q, especially for the insecure subjects. This indicates that respondents did not score in a reliable manner to create a significant trend in correlational findings between subscales. However, among the secure subjects, a significant positive correlation was found between the Parental Criticism subscale of the MPS and the Personal Emotional Adjustment subscale of the SAC-Q \((r = .37, p < .05)\). Thus, for participants who were classified as having a secure attachment style, those who endorsed a high degree of Parental Criticism on the MPS were more likely to endorse higher Personal Emotional Adjustment on the SAC-Q (See Table 2). There were no overall significant differences found in correlations between subjects with insecure attachment style and secure attachment style.

**Table 2**  
**Correlation Matrix: Subscales of the MPS and SACQ for individuals with Secure and Insecure Attachment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Personal Standards</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Parental Expectations</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Parental Criticism</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.37*</td>
<td>.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Doubts about Actions</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>-.34</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>-.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Concern over Mistakes</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Organization</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*\(p < .05\), **\(p < .001\)

Note: Correlation coefficients for subjects categorized as “secure” are in the upper right portion of the matrix. Correlation coefficients for subjects categorized as “insecure” are in the lower left portion of the matrix.
Discussion

The first hypothesis was that a strong positive correlation will be evidenced between insecure attachment style and maladaptive perfectionism. This hypothesis was supported only in the correlations between the Doubts about Actions subscale of the MPS and the Attachment-related Avoidance subscale of the ECR. This may indicate that individuals who often exhibit indecisiveness and confidence in their actions are less likely to feel comfortable developing close intimate relationships. This could be due to fear of revealing vulnerabilities and weaknesses to others, or past experience of criticism. This perfectionism style is categorized as maladaptive as it interferes with the individual’s ability to function effectively. In this sense, the participants who endorsed high scores on Doubts about Actions and Attachment-related Avoidance may be struggling in several areas of their lives, as evidenced in the results. This may be demonstrating what is stated in the literature (Rice & Mirzadeh, 2000) that some early childhood experiences of parental criticism and internalization of high standards results in both perfectionistic traits and attachment-related anxiety. The attachment-related avoidance being linked to maladaptive perfectionism suggests that those who are struggling more and are likely experiencing disruptions in their lives because of their perfectionism are also avoidant of close relationships. There may be an absence of a sense of control or safety within intimate relationships. In contrast, adaptive perfectionists may be nervous or worried about their status in relationships, but they do not appear to be as avoidant of them. This lends credibility to the term “adaptive”, as
these individuals have perfectionist traits that cause some anxiety, but do not necessarily cripple their ability to form connections with others.

Past literature informs that certain maladaptive perfectionists may be more self-critical, less likely to attend social functions, less likely to seek help or support when needed and more likely to have difficulty adapting to change, especially in a rigorous and demanding setting such as a new college environment (Hood et al., 2002). Past research has also indicated that high degrees of perfectionism can be associated with hopelessness and depressive symptoms (Chang & Rand, 2000), as unrealistic expectations of self and others are met with constant disappointment. Further, depressive symptoms resulting from hopelessness thereby interfere with the individual’s ability to function normally, which would affect their adjustment scores reflected in the SACQ. This indicated the presence of a perfectionist-depressive cycle, making it necessary for those in this category to attain support.

The second hypothesis predicted that the relationship between maladaptive perfectionism and adjustment would be weaker for students with insecure attachment styles (i.e., fearful, preoccupied, and dismissing) than those with a secure attachment style. Results indicated weak correlations overall between perfectionism and adjustment subscales for both insecure and secure groups. The exception to this was found in the positive correlation between Parental Criticism of the MPS and Social Emotional Adjustment of the SACQ for participants with a secure attachment style. This suggests that participants who endorsed a higher level of parental criticism were more likely to achieve higher scores on Personal Emotional Adjustment. This is a
different finding from the research, as it suggests that maladaptive perfectionists with a secure attachment style are able to adjust emotionally to the college experience. In contrast, past research has suggested that high endorsement on the Parental Criticism subscale would predict poor emotional adjustment (McCarthy et al., 2006). Perhaps past experience with critical caregivers warrants further investigation as it could be evidence of social learning and resiliency with regard to handling emotions in difficult life situations. It is also a possibility that participants with higher degrees of Parental Criticism were more likely to externalize problems as a defense mechanism, endorsing difficulties growing up with caregivers while denying current difficulties with themselves.

The finding that Asian-American students yielded higher overall ratings of perfectionism is consistent with past literature about ethnic differences and perfectionism (Castro & Rice, 2003). There could be cultural differences in expectations of self, as it has been noted that subscale scores that were particularly heightened were Parental Expectations, Parental Criticism, and Concern over Mistakes. A higher achievement standard may have the benefit of shaping some individuals into adaptive perfectionists, but insecure attachment style or lack of support system appears to play a mediating role in the development of an individual becoming a maladaptive perfectionist.

These findings are consistent with past research in that support that is crucial in assisting a person classified as a maladaptive perfectionist to get through the adjustments of first year in college may be even more difficult if social support is strained. This makes it even more important for college counseling centers to educate resident advisors,
professors and staff on ways to coach students when they observe behaviors such as excessive self-criticism, unrealistic expectations of themselves and social isolation. The literature reflects that perfectionists (adaptive or maladaptive), by their nature, are less likely to seek out counseling services due to some of their core belief systems of responsibility for self and independence (Rice, Cole, & Lapsley, 1990).

It’s unclear why more strong correlations were not found for both hypotheses in this research sample. It’s possible that individuals were hesitant to disclose information about personal relationships and their difficulties with academic adjustment while undergoing paper-and-pencil surveys in an academic setting. In that realm, participants may underreport difficulties in their relationships. There is also the potential for some respondents to have been reporting unreliably, not reading questions fully or answering survey questions in a random manner. It’s also possible that there was enough of a heterogeneous sample that consistent responding with regard to these variables was not present. Despite these considerations, support was found in the results for both normality and linearity, which suggests that the sample met acceptable standards for interpretation. It’s important to note that distributions of data were largely platykurtic, showing a wide variety of responses to survey questions.

These findings illustrate the need for Universities to educate students on ways to manage stress, avoid burnout, and balance hobbies and social interests with academic demands. Increase in proactive self-care may also help individuals with insecure attachment styles and/or the tendency to withdraw socially to find some comfort with
themselves and seek out healthy friendships and relationships. In future research, it would be helpful to look into other specific features of student circumstances such as socialization, early development of self-esteem and coping skills for stress to see if they would aid in decreasing the harmful aspects of maladaptive perfectionism and aid in increasing positive adjustment to college.
References


adjustment: Evidence for a specific diathesis-stress mechanism among college students. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 47*(1), 129-137.


Mikulincer, M., & Shaver, P. R. (2003). The attachment behavioral system in adulthood:


Appendix A

Demographic Questions:

1. Please indicate your gender ________________

2. How do you describe yourself? (please check the option below that best describes you)
   __ American Indian or Alaska Native
   __ Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
   __ Asian or Asian American
   __ Black or African American
   __ Hispanic or Latino
   __ Multi-ethnic (Specify) ________________
   __ Non-Hispanic White
   __ Other (Specify) ________________

3. Please indicate which category best describes your family’s annual income:
   __ <$25,000
   __ $25,000-$50,000
   __ $50,000-$75,000
   __ $75,000-$100,000
   __ >$100,000
   __ Prefer not to say

Thank you for your participation in this survey!
Appendix B

These questions relate to your experiences with counseling services.

1. Have you attended a counseling center or community site that offers counseling services in the past year?

   __ Yes

   __ No

   __ Prefer not to say.

2. If you answered YES, did you find these counseling services helpful?

   __ Yes, I feel that counseling services were helpful overall.

   __ No, I did not feel that counseling services were helpful overall.

   __ Prefer not to say.

Thank you for your participation in this survey!