

# research snapshot

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## Graduate Students Who Hold Themselves to High Standards Are More Prone to Depression Than Others

### What is this research about?

Over the last 25 years, mounting evidence has suggested that there may be two kinds of people that are especially at risk for major, recurring depression: 'dependent' individuals and 'self-critics'. 'Dependent' individuals are people who are prone to what is sometimes called 'neediness' or what psychologists term 'immature dependence.' Basically, these 'needy' people depend on the support of others to ward off low self-esteem. 'Self-critics' also suffer from low self-esteem. But in order to fight off negative feelings of unworthiness, self-critics will set lofty goals for themselves. Are people with a tendency to be self-critical – such as graduate students – at risk for major, recurring depression? And what happens if these people also exhibit signs of 'neediness'?

### What did the researchers do?

Researchers at York University set out to expand the existing knowledge on depression as it relates to people who set lofty goals for themselves as well as those who are 'needy'. They looked at a sample of 158 graduate

### What you need to know:

Academic perfectionists are more prone to major depression than others. Self-critical and 'needy' personality types are at risk for experiencing recurring bouts of major depression.

students from York and the University of Toronto. In order to be eligible to take part in the study, the students had to have been diagnosed with a history of major depression. Those who were eligible were given a series of tests including the Depressive Experiences Questionnaire (DEQ). They were then interviewed again, about 20 months later, to see if they had experienced further bouts of depression.

### What did the researchers find?

The researchers found that graduate students who are self-critical and have high expectations for themselves are more likely to experience recurring bouts of major depression than others. In particular, these students will have more bouts of depression as well as more recurrences of

the disorder over a 20-month follow-up period. When these academic perfectionists also display 'needy' character traits, they become 50% more vulnerable to major depression.

### How can you use this research?

This research expands our knowledge of depression. It may prove useful to academics, graduate students, and others who hold themselves to high standards or display 'needy' character traits – or both.

### About the Researchers

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### Citation

Mongrain, M., & Leather, F. (2006). Immature dependence and self-criticism predict the recurrence of major depression. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 62(6), 705-713. Available online at <http://bit.ly/1qq2eWG>

### Keywords

Depression, Behavioural psychology, Personality, Perfectionism, Character traits

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### Knowledge Mobilization at York

York's Knowledge Mobilization Unit provides services for faculty, graduate students, community and government seeking to maximize the impact of academic research and expertise on public policy, social programming, and professional practice. This summary has been supported by the Office of the Vice-President Research and Innovation at York and project funding from SSHRC and CIHR.

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