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Perfectionism Dimensions and Resistance to Peer Influences in Adolescence

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Abstract

Research showed that low resistance to peer influence is considered a risk factor in developing vulnerability toward socio-cultural promoted models. A personality trait that favours compliance to social standards is perfectionism. Peoples with high levels of perfectionism have higher expectations for themselves and lower self-esteem. Lately, perfectionism is analysed as a multidimensional concept, studies making a distinction between social and individual dimensions of perfectionism. The aim of the present study was to investigate the association between perfectionism dimensions and resistance to peer influence in adolescence. Specific types of perfectionism were examined. Results showed that only perfectionist self-promotion and nondisplay of imperfection were related to low resistance to peer influences.

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1. Introduction

It is widely recognized that high levels of perfectionism are related to psychological distress, such as anxiety, depression and low self-esteem (Flett, Hewitt, Blankstein, & Gray, 1998). Perfectionist people set high standards for themselves and express self-criticism when evaluating their performance or their appearance in different social settings. Perfectionism is considered to be a multidimensional concept. One important distinction is made between personal and social dimensions of perfectionism (McGee, Hewitt, Sherry, Parkin, & Flett, 2005). Therefore, self oriented perfectionism is illustrated in the perceived need to be perfect, while socially prescribed perfectionism describes people who perceive that society imposes high standards to them.

In adolescence, when teenagers are constructing their identity, wanting to be perfect or perceiving that others are demanding perfection, increases vulnerability toward socio-cultural models of success and beauty (Dittmar, 2007). The sources of inspiration are multiple. Mass-media, significant others, peers offer a wide variety of models and comparison targets. Influences from mass-media are considered to be both direct and mediated by the
perceived effect on significant others. Beliefs that socio-cultural models are relevant standards for friends or peers in general influence own sensitivity toward models. Researches concerning body image development, confirm that both own attitude and others attitude toward thin ideal increases appearance dissatisfaction (Strahan, Wilson, Cressman, & Buote, 2006). Girls appear to be more vulnerable compared to boys. Peer influence, in the form of direct comments or modeling, is stronger in adolescence compared with other age groups (Steinberg & Monahan, 2007).

The aim of the present study is to explore the relation between perfectionism dimensions and resistance to peer influences and their contribution to a positive attitude toward thin ideal.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

A cross sectional and correlation design was used, having as subjects 129 teenage girls between 15 and 17 years, students from two schools situated in the city area.

2.2. Procedure

2.1.1. Measures

Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (Hewitt & Flett, 1991)
Perfectionistic Self Presentation Scale (Hewitt, Flett, & Ediger, 1995)
Resistance to Peer Influence (Sumter, Bokhorst, Steinberg, & Westenberg, 2009)
Sociocultural Attitude toward Appearance Questionnaire (Heinberg, Thompson, & Stormer, 1994)

All the scales were translated into Romanian language and back in English using the reverse translation in order to ensure the accuracy of original wording. The research team checked that all items were translated in a correct and meaningful way.

3. Results

3.1. Descriptive statistics

Independent t tests were run to identify significant differences between low and high resistance to peer influences, using the mean as a cut off score. Low resistance to peer influence group registered significantly higher scores in perfectionist self-promotion (t = 2.39, df = 129, p = .018) and non-display of imperfection (t = 3.03, df = 129, p = .003).

The correlations among study variables are presented in Table 1. There are moderate but significant correlations between variables. Socio-cultural attitude toward thin ideal positively correlates with both self oriented perfectionism and socially prescribed perfectionism. Specifically, adolescent girls with a positive attitude toward thin ideal have higher levels of perfectionism dimensions. Furthermore, some of the perfectionism dimensions negatively correlate with resistance to peer influences. A negative relation was found between resistance to peer influences and socially prescribed perfectionism, perfectionist self-promotion and non-display of imperfection.
3.2. Predictors of resistance to peer influence

We planned to examine how perfectionism dimensions are related to resistance to peer influences and if perfectionism dimensions moderate or mediate the relation between resistance to peer influences and socio-cultural attitude toward appearance. Therefore, hierarchical multiple regression analysis were run for the data. Overall, the regression model (table 2) predicted a significant amount of variance (F = 5.08, p < .000, R² = .18). Non-display of imperfection was the only significant predictor for low resistance to peer influence. Self-oriented perfectionism was a positive contributor to resistance to peer influence.

Table 2. Summary of factors associated with resistance to peer influence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>β</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>βeta</th>
<th>t</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Resistance to peer influence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socially prescribed perfectionism</td>
<td>-1.29</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>-.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-oriented perfectionism</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>2.11*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfectionistic self-promotion</td>
<td>-1.89</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>-1.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nondisplay of imperfection</td>
<td>-4.03</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>-.29</td>
<td>-3.04**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nondisclosure of imperfection</td>
<td>-.54</td>
<td>.98</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-5.55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3. Mediation

Regarding the hypothesis that perfectionism dimensions would mediate the relation between resistance to peer influence and socio-cultural attitude toward thin ideal, preconditions for testing mediation (Baron & Kenny, 1986) were satisfied for nondisplay of imperfection (Fig. 1), such as this variable and resistance to peer influence were related to socio-cultural attitude toward thin ideal and significantly related to each other. Hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to assess if the relation between resistance to peer influence and attitude toward thin ideal would decrease after controlling for nondisplay of imperfection. The mediator was entered at step one, followed by resistance to peer influence at step two. The variance in thin ideal internalization, explained by resistance to peer influence (β = -.24, p < .001) was decreased after the mediator entered the equation (β = -.18, p < .001), demonstrating partial mediation.

4. Discussion

The relation between perfectionism dimensions and resistance to peer influences follows different patterns in this adolescent girls’ sample. Those with low resistance to peer influences were more tempted to promote a perfectionist self and to hide imperfection. For self-oriented and socially prescribed perfectionism no significant
differences were found between low and high resistance to peer influence. The need to hide what is considered to be a weak part of one’s personality seems to be the most relevant perfectionism dimension in relation to low resistance to peer influence.

Attitude toward thin ideal, as expected, was predicted by low resistance to peer influence. Girls, who rely on friends’ opinions in decision making, express a more positive attitude toward thin ideal and invest resources in hiding imperfect aspects of self. The use of a cross-sectional design impeded us to draw any causal conclusions.

References


