Examining the Association between Adolescents’ Perfectionism and Satisfaction with Life:
Loneliness as a Moderator

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Abstract

It is important to take social context factors into account when considering psychological outcomes of perfectionism. This can result in an earlier recognition of risk groups, which is important in the prevention of psychopathology among perfectionistic people. Therefore, this study investigated the role of loneliness as a moderator between perfectionism and satisfaction with life. It was hypothesized that being perfectionistic was associated with satisfaction with life, but that it depended on the level of loneliness whether this was a positive or a negative relationship. The present sample consisted of 221 Belgian adolescents who filled in three questionnaires (the perfectionism items of the HEXACO-PI-R, the Louvain Loneliness Scale for Children and Adolescents (LLCA), and the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS)). The results of the hierarchical regression analyses indicated no interaction effect. In the final model loneliness in parental relations (L-PART) and loneliness in peer relations (L-PEER) were statistically significant to satisfaction with life (respectively, $r = -.55, n = 22, p < .01$ and $r = -.43, n = 21, p < .01$). This result stresses the importance of social context factors. Perfectionism was not statistically significant to satisfaction with life and thus, was not found harmful for psychological well-being. It may be the case that positive and negative traits of perfectionism canceled each other out. Further exploration is needed for both perfectionism in the social context and for the impact of perfectionism on positive psychological outcomes.

*Keywords*: perfectionism, social context, loneliness, positive psychological outcomes, satisfaction with life.
Examining the Association between Adolescents’ Perfectionism and Satisfaction with Life: Loneliness as a Moderator

‘Perfectionism; What's Bad About Being Too Good?’, ‘Overcoming Perfectionism’, and ‘Letting Go Of Perfect: Overcoming Perfectionism In Kids’ are just a few of the titles of today’s popular psychology books. The topic of perfectionism has been receiving increased research attention as well and has been associated with positive and negative psychological outcomes (Bieling, Israeli, & Antony, 2004). Protective factors, like perceived social support, can prevent perfectionism from resulting in negative psychological outcomes, like depression and anxiety (Zhou, Zhu, Zhang, & Cai, 2013). These findings suggest that it is important to take social context factors of perfectionistic people into account when considering psychological outcomes of perfectionism. This can result in an earlier recognition of risk groups, which is important in the prevention of psychopathology among perfectionistic people.

The characteristics that typify perfectionism remain subject to discussion, but having high personal standards is a universally accepted characteristic (Gilman, Ashby, Sverko, Florell, & Varjas, 2005). Other characteristics of perfectionism are excessive concern over making mistakes, the perception of high parental expectations, the perception of high parental criticism, the doubting of the quality of one's actions, and a preference for order and organization (Frost, Marten, Lahart, & Rosenblate, 1990).

In past studies in which outcomes of perfectionism were examined, most researchers concentrated on psychopathology, but recently it has been argued that perfectionism can also lead to positive feelings like subjective well-being (Capan, 2010). Subjective well-being is defined as people's cognitive and affective evaluations of their lives and consists of an assessment in which the individual checks self-imposed standards against life conditions (Pavot & Diener, 1993). Satisfaction with life is part of subjective well-being and contents the global judgments of one's life (Diener, 2000). The majority of studies have reported no significant age and gender differences for satisfaction with life, but slight gender differences
have been reported in some samples; male students for example have been found to have higher satisfaction with life than female students (Gilman & Huebner, 2003). The ability of a perfectionist to meet his standards can increase satisfaction with life, but when the difference between the perceived standards and the actual performance increases, satisfaction with life can decrease (Capan, 2010).

It is important to include social context factors of perfectionistic adolescents when examining the relationship with satisfaction with life, because perfectionism has been associated with a less positive social network over time (Shahar, Blatt, Zuroff, Krupnick, & Sotsky, 2004). Furthermore, a higher sense of belongingness has been found to be significantly related to higher levels of overall satisfaction (Gilman, 2001). Loneliness, another social context measure, has been found to be negatively related to satisfaction with life (Moore & Schultz, 1983). Although there have been different models and measures of *loneliness*, most researchers agree that loneliness represents a distressing situation in which one has limited social relationships and a perception of being isolated from others (Chang, Sanna, Chang, & Bodem, 2008). The discrepancy between one’s desired and one’s actual social network can be qualitative (e.g., absence of deeply intimate relationships) or quantitative (e.g., not having many friends). Maybe loneliness can explain some of the differences found among previous studies in which the relationship between perfectionism and psychological well-being was examined. Therefore, the present study examines loneliness as a moderator between perfectionism and satisfaction with life among. First, the literature will be reviewed.

A short review of relationships between perfectionism and negative psychological outcomes will be introduced here, because few studies were found for perfectionism in relation to positive psychological outcomes. In their review of the literature on perfectionism in relation to psychopathology, Shafran and Mansell (2001) indicated that perfectionism was often correlated with the degree of psychopathology, such as levels of depression, social
anxiety, and eating disorders. In a later review, Egan, Wade and Shafran (2011) demonstrated an elevation of perfectionism among people with various anxiety disorders, depression, and eating disorders compared to people without these disorders. Results showed that perfectionism increased the vulnerability for eating disorders and that it maintained OCD, social anxiety, and depression. Furthermore, it was shown that treatment of perfectionism resulted in reductions in anxiety, depression, and eating disorders. In later studies, perfectionism has been associated with lower self-esteem (Accordino, Accordino, & Slaney, 2000), stress, and test taking anxiety (Bieling et al., 2004).

An association between perfectionism and maladaptive psychological outcomes does not explain why there is an association. Some relevant moderators with regard to the relationship between perfectionism and maladaptive psychological outcomes have been found. A moderator is a variable that affects the direction and/or strength of the relation between an independent variable and a dependent variable (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Social support has been found to moderate the relation between personal standards perfectionism and evaluative concerns perfectionism with distress symptoms (i.e., depression, anxiety) (Dunkley, Blankstein, Halsall, Williams, & Winkworth, 2000). Social problem solving has also been found to moderate the relationship between perfectionism and psychopathology (i.e. depressive symptoms and suicide ideation) (Chang, 2002).

Roughly speaking, positive psychological outcomes are the other side of negative psychological outcomes. To understand the entire spectrum of psychological outcomes, researchers must investigate factors that contribute to psychological well-being in addition to those that contribute to psychopathology. Although some researchers have investigated the relationship between perfectionism and positive psychological well-being or satisfaction with life as well, it is not clear which factors moderate the relationship. Stress for example, has been found to mediate but not to moderate between perfectionism and satisfaction with life (Ashby et al., 2012; Chang, 2000). Maybe social context factors moderate the relationship.
Hamachek (1978) already stressed the importance of the social environment. Hamachek (1978) proposed that development of normal perfectionism tended to occur when parents established explicit performance standards for their child or when parental expressions of conditional positive approval did not exceed those of unconditional positive approval. The importance of the social environment can also be drawn from a study that showed supportive relationships to promote stability in individual characteristics (Branje, Lieshout & Van Aken, 2004). Supportive relationships possibly can prevent perfectionism from becoming excessive and resulting in psychopathology.

In the present study the social environment of Belgian adolescents will be investigated. In adolescence, expectations for academic success become more prominent, often at the cost of peer and family relationships (Gilman & Ashby, 2003). Therefore the study of perfectionism might be particularly important regarding adolescents. Perfectionistic students, who have high standards for themselves and also for others, may have difficulties in social relationships and may feel lonely as a result (Arslan, Hamarta, Ure, & Ozyesil, 2010). Loneliness, an indicator of low quality and/or quantity of social relationships, has been found to moderate the effect from perfectionism on depressive and anxious symptoms (Chang et al., 2008; Chang, Hirsch, Sanna, Jeglic, & Fabian, 2011). Interpersonal variables may thus contribute in predicting psychopathology (Chang, 2013) but the contribution in predicting positive psychological outcomes is not clear yet from previous research.

Thus, there exist some problems regarding previous research about perfectionism. First, Slaney and Ashby (1996) reviewed the literature on perfectionism and found it to be primarily based on a biased sample of perfectionists in treatment and on a negative perspective on perfectionism. Second, social context factors were not included in most studies. Third, in most studies done an American population was used, but no studies are found that examined a Belgian population. Therefore, this research will investigate how perfectionism
and the quality of social relations may contribute to satisfaction with life through investigation of Belgian adolescents who are not in treatment.

**Purpose of the present study**

The present study investigates a moderating role of loneliness between perfectionism and satisfaction with life. The purpose is to extend findings from Chang et al. (2008) to Belgian adolescents’ satisfaction with life. Chang et al. (2008) demonstrated that the effect of perfectionism on depressive and anxious symptoms was moderated by loneliness. An understanding of the association of perfectionism in the social context with positive psychological outcomes is considered important for the purposes of developing a better theoretical understanding of perfectionism, detecting risk factors for psychopathology, and providing a target for interventions (Chang, 2000).

In summary, both perfectionism and loneliness can be associated with satisfaction with life. Perfectionism has conceptual associations to loneliness as well. However, no studies were found that investigated the interaction between perfectionism and loneliness in predicting satisfaction with life. It is hypothesized that being perfectionistic is associated with satisfaction with life, but that it depends on the level of loneliness, if this is a positive or a negative relationship. Specifically, the presence of high loneliness is expected to result in a negative association between perfectionism and satisfaction with life. In contrast, the presence of low loneliness is expected to result in a positive association between perfectionism and satisfaction with life.

**Method**

**Participants**

Data for the present study came from a sample from a previous study done by Cicognani, Klimstra and Goossens (2014). The sample consisted of 221 Belgian adolescents (120 females, 54.3%) aged 14–23 years (M age = 16.54, SD = 1.22). They were all students
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attending different types of high schools (university preparatory education, technical oriented school, and vocational school) in the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium (Flanders). Of the 275 Belgian students approached, 250 (90.9%) chose to participate, and 221 (80.4%) provided complete data.

Measures

Perfectionism The 100-item version of the HEXACO-PI-R is a questionnaire operationalization of the HEXACO six-dimensional personality model (Lee & Ashton, 2004). The Dutch version was used, which psychometric properties are in line with the English version (De Vries, Ashton & Lee, 2009). There were six dimensions (humility (H), emotionality (E), extraversion (X), agreeableness (A), conscientiousness (C), and openness to experience (O)) consisting of four facets each. Perfectionism was a facet of C ($r = .70$) and was defined as a tendency to be thorough and concerned with details (De Vries et al., 2009). High scorers tend to check carefully for mistakes and potential improvements. Internal consistency for perfectionism was good ($\alpha = .73$). Participants rated four items on a 5-point scale from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5). One item was reverse-keyed, namely “When working on something, I don't pay much attention to small details.” The other three items were: “I often check my work over repeatedly to find any mistakes,” “I always try to be accurate in my work, even at the expense of time,” and “People often call me a perfectionist.” High scores indicated high levels of perfectionism.

Loneliness. The Louvain Loneliness Scale for Children and Adolescents (LLCA) was used (Marcoen, Goossens & Caes, 1987) to measure loneliness. This Dutch instrument measures loneliness in parental relations (L-PART), loneliness in peer relations (L-PEER), affinity for aloneness, and aversion to aloneness. In this study, only the first two scales were used. There were twelve items that measured L-PART (e.g., “I find it hard to talk to my parents.”) and also twelve items that measured L-PEER (e.g., “I feel alone at school.”). Cronbach alphas were, respectively, .92 and .86. Participants rated items on a 4-point scale
from “never” (1) to “often” (4). Some items of the parents scale were framed in positive terms and were therefore reverse-keyed. No items of the peers scale were framed in positive terms. High scores indicated high levels of loneliness.

Satisfaction with life. The Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS, Diener et al., 1985) using the Dutch version (Arrindell, Meeuwesen, & Huyse, 1991) was completed by participants to measure satisfaction with life. The Dutch version of the originally American SWLS has been found to be reliable (Arrindell et al., 1991). In the present study Cronbach’s alpha was .85. Five items (e.g., “If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing”) were answered on a 7-point Likert scale that ranged from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (7). No items needed to be reverse-keyed. High scores indicated high levels of satisfaction with life.

Procedure

Students were contacted at school by a researcher, after obtaining consent of school authorities. Students were provided information about the research and asked whether they wished to participate by filling out a self-report questionnaire. After the instructions, participants filled in the questionnaires by hand in class. A master student of Psychology was present and checked whether the participants filled in the questionnaires independently. The students did not receive any credits.

Data analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 22. First an independent t-test was done to test for gender differences on the dependent variable. Next, a series of hierarchical regression analyses were done. The independent variable perfectionism and the moderators L-PART and L-PEER were entered in the first step. The interaction effects of perfectionism × L-PART and perfectionism × L-PEER were entered in the second step. A moderator hypothesis will be supported if the interaction is statistically significant (Baron & Kenny, 1986). A moderator
effect can be represented as an interaction between an independent variable and a factor that specifies the appropriate conditions for its operation.

Results

First, a statistically independent samples t-test was done to decide if gender should be controlled for in the moderation analysis. There were no statistically significant gender differences found on the dependent variable satisfaction with life ($t = -1.71, p = .09$, *Mean* boys = 4.57 [SD = 1.23], *Mean* girls = 4.85 [SD = 1.23]). Therefore, gender was not controlled for in the moderation analysis.

The relationships between perfectionism, L-PART, L-PEER, and satisfaction with life were investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. Correlations, means, standard deviations, and internal consistencies for all study measures are presented in Table 1. Perfectionism was statistically and significantly related to L-PART ($r = -.17, n = 22, p < .05$). Perfectionism was not significantly related to L-PEER and to satisfaction with life. Furthermore, L-PART was statistically significant related to satisfaction with life ($r = -.55, n = 22, p < .01$). L-PEER was also statistically and significantly related to satisfaction with life ($r = -.43, n = 21, p < .01$). Finally, L-PART was statistically significant related to L-PEER ($r = .30, n = 23, p < .01$). In summary, all relationships were significant, except for perfectionism with L-PEER and perfectionism with satisfaction with life.
Table 1

*Correlations between measures of perfectionism, loneliness, and satisfaction with life*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>1 (n = 231)</th>
<th>2 (n = 238)</th>
<th>3 (n = 234)</th>
<th>4 (n = 230)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Perfectionism</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. L-PART</td>
<td>-.17*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. L-PEER</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.30**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. SWLS</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.55**</td>
<td>-.43**</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

M       3.24  1.78  1.72  4.72  
SD      .82   .62   .55   1.23  
α       .73   .92   .86   .85   

*Note:* N = 250 Perfectionism was measured with the 100 item version of the HEXACO-PR-R; L-PART = loneliness in parental relations; L-PEER = loneliness in peer relations. SWLS = satisfaction with life Scale

* p < .05.
** p < .01.

A hierarchical multiple regression was used to assess the ability of the three independent measures (perfectionism, L-PART, and L-PEER) to predict levels of satisfaction with life. Results of the analyses are presented in Table 2. Preliminary analyses were conducted to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity. First, perfectionism, L-PART, and L-PEER were centered. Second, the centered variables were entered at step 1 of the hierarchical multiple regression. The total variance explained by the model was 37.3%, $F(3, 20) = 40.19$, $p < .01$. The product of the predictors was calculated and entered at the second step of the hierarchical multiple regression to assess an interaction effect. After entry of Perfectionism * L-PART and Perfectionism * L-PEER at step 2, the total variance explained by the model as a whole was 37.6%, $F(5, 201) = 24.19$, $p < .01$. Contrary to the expectations, the two interaction terms explained no additional variance in satisfaction with life. This means that no moderation was found in the present study. In the final model, only L-PART and L-PEER were statistically
significant to satisfaction with life, with L-PART recording a higher beta value (beta = -.46, p <.01) than L-PEER (beta = -.29, p <.01). Contrary to the expectations, perfectionism was not statistically significant to satisfaction with life.

Table 2
Hierarchical regression analyses showing amount of variance accounted for in satisfaction with life by perfectionism, loneliness, and the Perfectionism × Loneliness interaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Satisfation with Life</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>R²</th>
<th>ΔR²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfectionism</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.37**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L-PART</td>
<td>-.92</td>
<td>-.46**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L-PEER</td>
<td>-.64</td>
<td>-.29**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfectionism × L-PART</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.38**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfectionism × L-PEER</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N = 250 Perfectionism was measured with the 100 item version of the HEXACO-PR-R; L-PART = loneliness in parental relations; L-PEER = loneliness in peer relations.

* p < .05.
** p < .01.

Discussion
The current study is among the first to study a moderating role of social context factors in the association between perfectionism and positive psychological outcomes. The specific question was if the relationship between perfectionism and satisfaction with life depended on the level of loneliness among adolescents. It was expected that being perfectionistic was associated with satisfaction with life, but that it depended on the level of loneliness, whether it would be a positive or a negative relationship. Specifically, the presence of high loneliness was expected to result in a negative association between perfectionism and
satisfaction with life. In contrast, the presence of low loneliness was expected to result in a positive association between perfectionism and satisfaction with life.

Contrary to the expectations, the results of the hierarchical regression analyses indicated that the interaction items explained no additional variance in satisfaction with life. This indicates that neither the relationship with peers nor the relationship with parents moderates the association between perfectionism and satisfaction with life. In the final model and in contrast to previous findings (Gilman & Ashby, 2003; Gilman et al., 2005; Öngen, 2009; Wang, Yuen, & Slaney, 2009) perfectionism was not significantly related to satisfaction with life. This indicates that for satisfaction with life it does not matter if an adolescent is perfectionistic or not.

Also in the final model and in line with the literature, both loneliness in parental relations ($r = -.55$) and loneliness in peer relations ($r = -.43$) were significantly and negatively related to satisfaction with life. This is consistent with human beings’ need to belong, a need to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of interpersonal relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). The need to belong should be marked by the need for regular social contact and by the need for intimate relationships. From an evolutionary perspective, relationships characterized by both of these features would have greater survival and reproductive value than would relationships characterized by one aspect or no aspects. In sum, the results of the hierarchical regression analysis indicate that social context factors such as loneliness in parents and loneliness in peers, are important in predicting satisfaction with life, in contrast to perfectionism.

Furthermore, the correlation matrix indicated perfectionism to be statistically related to loneliness in parental relations ($r = -.17$), although the relationship was small. This indicates that greater loneliness in parental relations is associated with less perfectionism and vice versa. In contrast, Flett et al. (1996) found perfectionism to be positively associated with loneliness ($r = 0.37, n = 105, p < 0.01$), but this relationship was found for socially prescribed
perfectionism. He suggested that individuals with high levels of socially prescribed
perfectionism had adopted a pattern of responding to anticipated criticism from individuals
with unrealistic expectations by becoming isolated and withdrawn. A possible explanation for
the negative association in the present study can be that adolescents live with their parents and
therefore cannot become fully isolated or cannot withdraw too much. As a result,
perfectionistic adolescents are not significantly lonelier.

Furthermore, Flett et al. (1996) found self-oriented perfectionism and other-oriented
perfectionism not to be associated with loneliness. In the correlation matrix of the present
study perfectionism was not statistically significant to loneliness in peer relations. It may be
the case that perfectionism is only related to involuntary relationships, like the relationship
with parents. This is in line with Selhout et al. (2010) who found research suggesting that
conscientiousness, which subsumes perfectionism, to be more important for existing, instead
of newly formed relationships. Perhaps perfectionism is not associated with loneliness in peer
relations, because these relationships must be formed during life-time. Other factors that
differ between relationships with parents compared to peers can also explain that no
relationship was found between perfectionism and loneliness in peer relations. For example,
relationships with parents are considered principally vertical; based on asymmetrical and
complementary behavior. In contrast, relationships with peers are viewed as mainly horizontal;
a quality arising from equality. Maybe perfectionism is related to vertical, but not to
horizontal relationships.

The main hypothesis of the present study was not confirmed however; a few
implications can be established for practice and theory. First, the present findings point to the
potential value for practitioners working with adolescents with low well-being to take
loneliness into account instead of focusing on perfectionism. Furthermore, practitioners
should focus on both loneliness in parental and in peer relations. Furthermore, in preventing
psychopathology and in increasing satisfaction with life in healthy adolescents, it is also
important to take loneliness into account. Finally, for theory and research it is important to use an integrative model by focusing on the social context when studying positive psychological well-being.

There are some alternative explanations for the present results. Although perfectionism was not found harmful or beneficial for psychological well-being in the present study, this does not mean that it is totally unimportant for psychological well-being. Perhaps positive (e.g., ambition) and negative (e.g., having stress) aspects of perfectionism cancel each other out. As a consequence, perfectionism as a whole did not affect psychological well-being in the present study. In a previous study, maladaptive perfectionism was found to act as a suppressor variable in the relationship between adaptive perfectionistic strivings and positive psychological outcomes including psychological well-being, satisfaction with life, and affect (Hill, Huelsman, & Araujo, 2010).

Hamachek (1978) already conceptualized perfectionism as consisting of two separate but related subtypes: normal and neurotic (Gilman & Ashby, 2003). Other names for these subtypes are respectively adaptive or healthy perfectionism versus maladaptive or unhealthy perfectionism (LoCicero & Ashby, 2000). Based on the work of Hamachek (1978), some authors have found statistical significant differences between adaptive and maladaptive perfectionists (LoCicero, & Ashby, 2000). Gilman and Ashby (2003) for example, found a statistically significant higher global satisfaction among both adaptive and maladaptive perfectionistic subtypes, compared to non-perfectionistic subtypes. Furthermore, adaptive perfectionists reported a statistically significant higher self-satisfaction than both maladaptive and non-perfectionists. In other studies, adaptive perfectionists reported higher satisfaction with life scores than maladaptive and non-perfectionistic students (Gilman et al., 2005; Öngen, 2009; Wang, Yuen, & Slaney, 2009).

Some researchers investigated the relationship with positive psychological outcomes as well, but with other subdivisions of perfectionism. In one study, socially prescribed
perfectionism showed a statistically significant negative correlation with satisfaction with life, whereas self-oriented perfectionism and perfectionism in general showed no significant correlations with satisfaction with life (Stoeber, & Stoeber, 2009). In contrast, another study found self-oriented perfectionism as a personality trait to statistically significantly predict satisfaction with life (Capan, 2010).

These studies illustrate the importance of assessing both adaptive and maladaptive dimensions simultaneously or of assessing socially prescribed, self-oriented, and other-oriented perfectionism when examining relationships between perfectionism and psychological outcomes. So perhaps an association between perfectionism and satisfaction with life will be found when perfectionism is divided in some aspects. Possibly, an interaction effect can then be found as well; meaning that the effect of perfectionism on satisfaction with life will depend on social context factors, when perfectionism is divided in different aspects. Future studies are needed to test this hypothesis.

Before specific suggestions for further studies are recommended, several limitations to this study must be mentioned. One limitation of the current study is that there remains no consensus on a measure or model of perfectionism (Chang, 2002). Perfectionism was not subdivided in this study, in contrast to previous studies where perfectionism was mostly divided in adaptive, maladaptive, and non-perfectionism or in high socially prescribed, self-oriented, and other-oriented perfectionism. According to Hewitt and Flett (1991) self-oriented, other-oriented and socially prescribed perfectionism relate differently to indices of psychological maladjustment. The authors found few statistical significant findings involving self-oriented or other-oriented perfectionism (Flett, Hewitt & De Rosa, 1996).

Although the present research focused on examining the association between general perfectionistic tendencies and satisfaction with life, this does not preclude the importance of considering perfectionistic components or facets not measured by the HEXACO-PI-R. In the present study, perfectionism was measured with only four items: three of the four items
contained the verb ‘work’, but perfectionism can also be present in other parts of life. Items should measure more characteristics that typify perfectionism, namely: having high personal standards, excessive concern over making mistakes, the perception of high parental expectations, the perception of high parental criticism, the doubting of the quality of one’s actions, and a preference for order and organization (Frost et al., 1990).

The second limitation of the present study was the scope of the dependent variable. Satisfaction with Life is a broad term. In past studies that examined the outcomes of perfectionism, the dependent variables were less broad than satisfaction with life and often negative; e.g., distress symptoms (Dunkley et al., 2000), depressive symptoms, and suicide ideation (Chang, 2002). Maybe there is a relationship between perfectionism and some aspects of satisfaction (e.g., family, friends, self, and/or school) and not with other aspects. Maybe there is a relationship between perfectionism and more specific positive psychological aspects, like positive mood or coping mechanisms. Explicit self-esteem; the conscious feelings of self-liking, self-worth, and acceptance, is another example of a positive psychological measure that is less broad than satisfaction with life. Explicit self-esteem has been found to be negatively correlated with maladaptive perfectionism (Zeigler-Hill & Terry, 2007). Furthermore a weak correlation emerged between explicit self-esteem and adaptive perfectionism.

The third limitation is that, given the cross-sectional nature of the present study, cause and effect cannot be determined. Loneliness in both parental and peer relations was found to be related to satisfaction with life, but it is not clear which variable comes first. One can be lonely and as a result have low satisfaction with life, but one can also have low satisfaction with life and as a consequence invest less in social relations or when one does, still feel unsatisfied about the relations because of feeling unsatisfied in general.

Fourth, the present sample was predominantly Caucasian and participants were adolescents, thus one must be cautious in generalizing the present set of findings to
populations with another culture and/or age. For example, Wang et al. (2009) found differences in scores on perfectionism among Chinese and U.S. students. A culturally nuanced understanding of perfectionism and loneliness as predictors of psychological outcomes is thus important. Furthermore, in the present sample all participants went to high school and therefore see peers regularly, which can influence loneliness. This can be different when participants do not go to school.

Fifth, the data collected in this study came from self-report measures and thus may not always reflect the truth. Social desirability has been associated with self-report variables, in a positive direction for desirable characteristics and in a negative direction for undesirable characteristics (Soubelet & Salthouse, 2011).

For further studies some recommendations are made. First it is suggested to use the same analysis but with another measure for the independent variable. Instead of using the HEXACO-PR-R, which measures personality in general and only contains four items for perfectionism, a specific questionnaire for perfectionism is recommended. Then items can be categorized so one can examine associations between subdivisions of perfectionism and satisfaction with life or psychological well-being. One suggestion is to use two aspects for perfectionism: Maladaptive Evaluative Concerns (MEC) and Pure Personal Standards (PPS). One study found MEC to be related to psychopathology whereas PPS was found to be more closely related to positive features of mental health (DiBartolo, Li, & Frost, 2008). The MEC factor included subscales that focused on perceived pressure from others to achieve high standards as well as the negative self-evaluative processes associated with making mistakes or trying to achieve such goals. The PPS factor measured the tendency to set high standards. Future studies examining the association with perfectionism and psychological well-being outcomes should make the same subdivision.

Other questionnaires can be used as well. A frequently used division is between perfectionism towards the self, towards others and towards expectations from the social
environment. These three aspects are measured with the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale-Revised (MPS-R) which was originally developed by Hewitt and Flett (1991). High socially prescribed perfectionism has been associated with different negative psychological outcomes, but there are few statistically significant findings involving self-oriented or other-oriented perfectionism (Flett et al., 1996; Shafran & Mansell, 2001). Another recommended questionnaire is the Almost Perfect Scale–Revised (APS-R; Slaney, Rice, Mobley, Trippi, & Ashby, 2001) which measures adaptive and maladaptive dimensions of perfectionism. This inventory measures perfectionism through three subscales: standards, order, and discrepancy. Ashbly et al. (2012) found maladaptive perfectionists to have significantly lower satisfaction with life compared to adaptive perfectionists.

The second recommendation is for the moderator. It is suggested to use more measures for social context, because social context has more aspects than loneliness (Helliwell & Putnam, 2004). One suggestion for measuring the social context is attachment, which is having an emotional bond with other people. Attachment has been suggested to serve as a model for all close relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1994). Attachment to both parents and peers has been found to predict satisfaction with life (Nickerson & Nagle, 2004) and to predict the type of perfectionism; adaptive perfectionistic university students reported more secure attachments than did maladaptive perfectionists (Rice & Mirzadeh, 2000). Perhaps attachment and loneliness together moderate the relationship between perfectionism and satisfaction with life.

Despite some limitations of the present study, a few strengths must be mentioned. First, an integrative model was used in which the social context of adolescents has been taken into account. Second, two measures for loneliness were used, namely loneliness in parents and in peers. This distinction gives more information than loneliness in general or when only one of the loneliness scales is used. Third, a focus on positive psychological outcomes was used. This is important because the relationship with perfectionism is not clear yet and most
of the earlier studies examined only negative psychological outcomes. Fourth and last, Belgium Dutch-speaking adolescents were used and the sample size was good. This is important when generalizing results to other populations, because previously few studies have looked at Dutch-speaking adolescents. Taken together, the present study can have important theoretical and practical implications. It is important to include social context factors when preventing psychopathology, during interventions, and in increasing satisfaction with life.

Conclusion

The present study indicated the importance of social context factors for positive psychological outcomes, but it is still not clear if, how, and when perfectionism is related to positive psychological outcomes and how it is related to social context factors. It remains a mystery when one should overcome perfectionism versus when one should embrace it.
References


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