

2015

## Childhood Antecedents of Perfectionism: Implications for Self-Esteem, Self-Confidence, and Life Satisfaction

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### Recommended Citation

Guthrie, Amaya (2015) "Childhood Antecedents of Perfectionism: Implications for Self-Esteem, Self-Confidence, and Life Satisfaction," *McNair Scholars Journal*: Vol. 19 : Iss. 1 , Article 10.  
Available at: <http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mcnair/vol19/iss1/10>

# Childhood Antecedents of Perfectionism: Implications for Self-Esteem, Self-Confidence, and Life Satisfaction



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The purpose of the present study was to investigate possible origins of perfectionism with specific focus on the parental influences that may contribute to its development. Additionally, we aimed to further assess the potential adaptive benefits and maladaptive symptoms associated with positive and negative dimensions of perfectionism.

Familial variables, such as family environment and parenting style, have consistently been implicated as factors greatly influencing the development of perfectionism. It has been proposed that positive (i.e., adaptive) forms of perfectionism develop as a result of appropriate modeling, close relationships with emotionally important people, and encouragement from parents (or other significant people in a child's life) while negative (i.e., maladaptive) forms of perfectionism are fostered in disapproving environments with inconsistent or conditional approval and unrealistic parental demands and expectations. Furthermore, investigations into the origins of perfectionism have also implicated parental authority style (e.g., authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive) as a significant factor to the development of perfectionism.

In the study participants completed measures of perfectionism, parental authority styles, self-esteem, self-confidence and satisfaction with the self and life. It was hypothesized that authoritarian parenting would be correlated with negative perfectionism and authoritative parenting style would be correlated with positive perfectionism. Additionally, it was hypothesized that positive perfectionism would predict higher levels of self-esteem, self-confidence, and satisfaction with life, while negative perfectionism would have an inverse relationship with these variables.

As expected authoritative parenting style was correlated with positive perfectionism. This finding is in line with the current literature that suggests positive perfectionism is fostered in a democratic,

warm, responsive environment in which the child's self-reliance and autonomy are encouraged. Additionally, authoritarian parenting was positively associated with negative perfectionism. This is consistent with existing theoretical models that suggest negative perfectionism is learned during childhood in a demanding, harsh, overly critical environment where approval is based on an exceptional performance. We further hypothesized that positive perfectionism would predict higher levels of self-esteem, self-confidence, and satisfaction with life, while negative perfectionism would have an inverse relationship with these variables. As expected, our hypotheses were mostly confirmed by the data.

Overall these findings suggest that individuals who were raised by punitive, overly critical parents in a demanding environment not only develop perfectionist tendencies apparently motivated by a fear of negative evaluation, but they also report lower levels of self-esteem, less self-confidence, and feelings of dissatisfaction with themselves and their lives in general. On the other hand, individuals raised by parents who set appropriate limits, along with providing positive feedback consistently, reported higher levels of healthy perfectionist strivings motivated by the rewards of success. Correspondingly, children who reported being raised by authoritative parents also reported higher self-esteem, a greater degree of self-confidence, and were more satisfied with themselves and with the overall quality of their lives.