

Anorexia Nervosa: A Product of Perfectionism

Cockell, S. J., Hewitt, P. L. [Dept. of Psychology, Univ. of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia V6T 1Z4, Canada; phewitt@cortex.psych.ubc.ca], Seal, B., Sherry, S., Goldner, E. M., Flett, G. L., & Remick, R. A. (2002). Trait and self-presentational dimensions of perfectionism among women with anorexia nervosa. *Cognitive Therapy and Research, 26*, 745-758.

Past research on the relationship between perfectionism and anorexia nervosa has always considered perfectionism unidimensionally. Using a multidimensional trait perspective, the authors identified 4 perfectionism traits: (a) self-oriented perfectionism (SOP; compulsive striving to meet unrealistic expectations for oneself), (b) socially prescribed perfectionism (SPP; striving to meet perfectionistic expectations of others), (c) other-oriented perfectionism (setting unrealistic expectations for and stringent evaluation of others), and (d) nondisclosure of imperfection (NI; need to avoid disclosure of imperfection).

The authors administered a variety of psychological measures to 21 women who met *DSM-IV* criteria for anorexia nervosa. The authors also administered these measures to 2 control groups who did not meet *DSM-IV* criteria for an eating disorder: 1 control group consisted of 21 women recruited from the community, and the other control group consisted of 17 psychiatric patients who met criteria for a mood disorder. The inclusion of a psychiatric control group extends past research that only compared women with and without anorexia nervosa.

The authors conclude that the anorexia nervosa group displayed greater levels of SOP, SPP, and NI than did either control group. However, when distress across the 3 groups was controlled for, the anorexia nervosa group differed from the psychiatric control group only across these perfectionistic trait dimensions and did not differ from the normal control group. The authors note that the means were clearly in the predicted direction, despite no significant difference between the anorexia nervosa and normal control groups.

These findings have several implications. First, this research suggests that women with anorexia nervosa not only try to display some form of body perfection but also have a personality orientation that includes a multidimensional perfectionistic self-presentation style revealed in ways other than body image. Findings also suggest that women with anorexia nervosa are highly affected by both internal and external pressures of perfectionism. Clinicians should focus on this personality orientation, the obsessive need for perfection, and the fear of seeming imperfect to more adequately treat this disorder.

Do People With Borderline PD "Burn Out" With Age?

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Clinical lore suggests that individuals with borderline personality disorder (BPD) tend to show decreased severity of symptoms as they age. This hypothesis was tested by using data from 123 outpatients with BPD (80% female; mean age = 31.6 years, $SD = 8.3$, range = 18-52) enrolled in a psychotherapy program. Individuals were administered a screening assessment followed by the Revised Diagnostic Interview for Borderlines to measure core features of the disorder (i.e., affective lability, relationship problems, cognitive disturbance, impulsive behavior). Linear regression analyses using age to predict the core features revealed that older patients showed significantly less impulsivity than younger ones. However, there were no differences for the other 3 features. Although the hypothesis that people with BPD "burn out" with age was supported in terms of impulsivity, these results suggest that older individuals with BPD are likely to require continued assistance from clinicians to manage other aspects of the disorder.

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