



## Relationship Perfectionism and Depression: A Vicious Cycle

February 29th, 2012

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Perfectionism and depression have been shown to be closely related, with perfectionism being a predictor of depressive symptoms. In a [romantic relationship](#), expectations of perfectionism can lead to hostility, criticism, and resentment. These emotions cause harm to the intimacy and closeness needed to maintain a healthy union and often result in conflict. A healthy intimate relationship provides many psychological and physical benefits, and is vital to one's well-being. The cycle of perfectionism and conflict diminishes the resources needed to maintain this balance and can cause partners to withdraw and experience depressive symptoms. Additionally, individuals who suffer with depression may be seen as imperfect to their mates, setting the stage for future conflict, which eventually leads to further depressive symptoms. Identifying the role that each of these behaviors and emotions plays in the cycle is important to more effectively treat partners experiencing difficulty within their relationships.

To address this dilemma, Sean P. MacKinnon of the Department of Psychology at Dalhousie University in Halifax tested the level of social disconnect in over 200 heterosexual couples. He looked specifically at perfectionism, conflict, and measures of depression in a 28-day period. MacKinnon found that perfectionist expectations led to depression by way of conflict. In other words, when perfectionism was not met, couples fought, and each felt more depressed after. MacKinnon also discovered that depression was a cause and an effect of conflict. The behaviors of depressed individuals; irritability, withdrawal, [isolation](#), and fatigue, increased the hostility within the relationships and caused more fights, which in turn led to more depressive symptoms.

Individuals with high perfectionist ideals were more likely to engage in conflicts with their partners, which led to a greater breakdown of respect and intimacy, two factors necessary to conflict resolution in relationships. Although the results of this study clearly demonstrate a vicious cycle, MacKinnon believes that there is hope for partners struggling with perfectionism. He added, "By better understanding how perfectionistic concerns confer vulnerability to [depressive symptoms](#), we can develop greater understanding—and ultimately, better assessment and treatment options—for people suffering from depressive symptoms."

### Reference:

Mackinnon, S. P., Sherry, S. B., Antony, M. M., Stewart, S. H., Sherry, D. L., & Hartling, N. (2012). Caught in a Bad Romance: Perfectionism, Conflict, and Depression in Romantic Relationships. *Journal of Family Psychology*. Advance online publication. doi: 10.1037/a0027402

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**Russell**

March 1st, 2012 at 12:19 AM

#1

1 thing to remember-nobody is perfect and although you may think you are the act is that you're not.hence it is unreasonable to expect your partner to be perfect and this can lead to a lot of problems in the relationship or marriage.

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**Sommer Russo**

March 1st, 2012 at 5:23 AM

#2 Family Counselor | Psychotherapist

Being in that "perfect" relationship is not guarantee that you won't feel some form of depression at some point in your life, just like the fact that if you are depressed then this means that you are trying to create something out of the relationship that is not there.

There are always going to be some who seek out perfection and are naturally going to be disappointed a lot because I think that most of us realize that this is not ideal to achieve. It is not possible.

I can see how someone who is constantly seeking for things to be perfect could sabotage things though by always wanting more than what they have instead of being content with the happiness that they may have already found.

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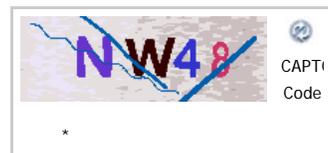
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