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## Determining the mediating role of self-differentiation in the relationship between personality traits and perfectionism in students

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study was to determine the mediating role of self-differentiation in the relationship between personality traits and perfectionism in students.

**Methodology:** The present study was descriptive in terms of purpose, and in terms of data collection, it was a descriptive correlational design and a path analysis method. The statistical population of the study was all students of Azad University of Science and Research Branch in the academic year 2018-19. The sample consisted of 300 students who were selected by cluster random sampling. Research instruments included Perfectionism Scale Frost (1993), Differentiation Scale Skowron and Friedlander (1998) and Five-Factor Personality Questionnaire Costa and McCreary (1985). Data analysis was done by path analysis and Sobel test at the significant level of 0.05.

**Findings:** The results of data analysis showed that despite the indirect effect of agreeableness, openness to experience and conscientiousness on perfectionism was confirmed by differentiation. On the one hand, differentiation was influenced by personality traits on the one hand and had a significant effect on perfectionism on the other hand ( $P < 0.005$ ).

**Conclusion:** Given that high perfectionism plays a significant part in the development and persistence of individual problems, it can be acknowledged that personality traits influence perfectionism by considering the mediating role of differentiation.

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## 1. Introduction

In the last decade, studies of perfectionism have grown dramatically. Perfectionism is a personality trait and plays an important role in the etiology and persistence of psychological trauma (Deuling, Burns, 2017). The motivation for perfection and its impact on human behavior and behavior throughout history has been extensively discussed by psychologists. Perfectionism is characterized by a tendency toward perfect performance, high-level goals, and rigorous self-assessments (Lo & Abbott, 2019).

Structuralism defines perfectionism as the extreme fear of mistakes, the tendency to over-focus on failures, excessive self-criticism and high expectations of one's own or others' performance, the tendency to have complete and unattainable standards, and to strive to make them happen. Perfectionism is one of the personality traits defined in both positive and negative aspects. Perfectionism in the positive dimension can be useful and constructive, and according to Hammachek quoted by Lowyck, ET all (2017) is the attempt to compete for the perfection and fulfillment of one's goals, accepting limitations and failures and trying to defeat oneself. They and negative perfectionism include having unrealistic goals and expectations, extreme avoidance of failure, vulnerability to self-criticism, and feelings of dissatisfaction (Kempke, ET all, 2016).

He knows the negative and equates it with normal and psychotic perfectionism. Positive perfectionism, instead of the anxiety about worrying about unfulfilled goals and criteria, activates one's positivity and optimism and aspirations. On the other hand, Hewitt, Flett (2007) perceive negative perfectionism as having three components, including self-centered perfectionism (tendency to set unrealistic standards for one), other-oriented perfectionism (tendency to have excessive expectations, and critical appraisal of others) and community-oriented perfectionism (feeling the need to meet criteria in order to get approval from others). Walton, Hibbard, Coughlin, Coyl-Shepherd (2018) results showed that there is a significant relationship between personality traits and perfectionism. Self-differentiation seems to be a feature associated with perfectionism. Differentiation is a process that, if we think of it continuously, is merging autonomy on the one hand and merging on the other. Autonomy demonstrates the ability to think clearly during a situation, and the mingling means that these people are emotionally dependent on their families even if they live far away. According to Bowen (1978), self-differentiation refers to one's ability to distinguish between the intellectual process and the emotional process or one's ability to automatically follow one's own emotions. This theory is about the forces within the family that seek to be united; or to seek individuality (Ferdowsi, 2016). Differentiation refers to the ability of individuals to differentiate themselves from their main family at the emotional and intellectual level, which includes the intrinsic ability to differentiate between thinking and feeling and interpersonal ability, to maintain independence while maintaining strong intimacy with important people in life (Cabrera-Sanchez, Friedlander, 2017).

In fact, mixing with others refers to the loss of one's independence and dissolution and mixing with one another in intimate relationships with others, and especially with the important people in life. People who have little differentiation from their members are unable to differentiate themselves from others and are easily disturbed by the feelings that family and those around them bring to them, and those with the appropriate level of differentiation manage themselves. , And they know their emotions and thoughts. However, individuals with undifferentiated attitudes are emotionally dependent on others and have difficulty thinking, feeling, and acting for them. Thus, if individuals learn to differentiate their rational and emotional function from others, they have moved towards differentiation (Connery, Murdock, 2019).

Highly differentiated individuals are aware of their emotions and are capable of thoughtfully assessing situations and being able to grow independently, while less differentiated individuals tend to fuse with others or tend to emotional breakdowns. Early relationships in the family environment lead to the formation of high or low levels of differentiation in individuals, and these early experiences influence subsequent relationships. In addition to differentiation, the family also influences self-healing. Investigating the relationship between self-efficacy and intra-group relationships in individuals showed that self-efficacy

increases the degree of differentiation and self-efficacy between members and groups (Tajfel, 2010). According to a study conducted by Kim, Prouty, Smith, KO, et al (2015), sufficient differentiation in the family system is positively and significantly associated with their healthy and successful functioning in the family because of their awareness of their abilities. They have more self-efficacy and confidence. The results of the study by Liu, Luo, Wu, Wong, and Wu (2016) on the relationship between self-efficacy and self-efficacy with adjustment rate among undergraduate nursing students in China showed that self-efficacy level among nursing students with self-efficacy and occupational adjustment Nurses had a significant positive relationship. The results of research Daemi and Jan Bozorgi (2016) also showed that differentiation and acceptance factor in personality have predictive role for psycho-spiritual transformation. On the other hand, it is important to recognize that individuals in different situations differ in terms of perceptions and exposure to a variety of tasks, events and conflicts, depending on their personality traits. Thus, personality traits have a significant impact on their perfectionism (Eley, Leung, Campbell, Cloninger, 2017).

The personality of each individual is his or her main dimension and psychological structure that helps shape his or her lifestyle. In recent decades, a number of traits, for personality and sophisticated statistical methods such as factor analysis, have been able to gain a foothold among experts. The term personality is briefly used to describe the consistency of one's behavior over time and situations, and the behavioral differences between people who respond to the same situation. In other words, personality refers to a set of stable behavioral traits (Bentea, 2015). Personality theories have confirmed the relationship between personality traits and socially abnormal behaviors. According to these theories, the interaction of environment, individual and personality factors are effective in creating behavior in individuals (Sididi, Ghafouri & Jalali, 2014).

Costa and McCreary characterize personality along five or five main dimensions, including neuroticism (tendency to experience anxiety, tension, self-esteem, hostility and impulsivity, shyness, depression, and low self-esteem), extraversion (tendency to be positive, assertive, motivational), Kindness and sociality), openness (tendency for curiosity, craftsmanship, wisdom, flexibility, intellectualism and innovation), pleasantness (tenderness, kindness, generosity, trustworthiness, empathy, obedience, dedication, and loyalty) Desire for organization, efficiency, reliability, restraint, rationality and contemplation (Mansouri Rad, 2015). In relation to personality relationship and dimensions of perfectionism Dimaggio, et al. (2015) showed that selfish perfectionism is more related to healthy and compatible personality elements such as conscientiousness and extraversion, whereas community oriented perfectionism is associated with unhealthy personality elements. Like neuroticism, it is positively correlated and negatively correlated with other dimensions. The results of Rahnamai nahzami and Boghossian (2014) showed that positive perfectionism is predicted by the variables of conscientiousness, extraversion and openness, and negative perfectionism by neuroticism, extraversion and conscientiousness. Given the research background in the field of perfectionism, much research has been done on the impact of students' perfectionism on various factors, but little research has been done on the factors related to perfectionism. Given the above, and considering that students form an important part of any community, it is important to consider the factors associated with perfectionism. Therefore, the present study seeks to answer the question that perfectionism prediction model based on personality traits mediated by differentiation has a good fit?

## 2. Methodology

The purpose of this study was applied and descriptive in terms of data collection and correlational schemes and path analysis method. The statistical population of the study was all students of Azad University of Science and Research Branch in the academic year 2018- 19. The sample consisted of 300 students who were selected by cluster random sampling. Thus, 20 classes were randomly selected from the classes of Research Sciences University. Finally, 15 students were selected from each of the schools and completed the research questionnaires. According to sample size estimation in structural equation modeling research which Kline (2011) divides into three simple, slightly complex and complex model types and considering the number of variables studied, the present study is a kind of complex quantitative models. That is, a sample size of at least 300 people has been suggested. The sampling method was cluster sampling. Data were collected using the Frost, Marten, Lahart, Rosenblate (1990) perfectionism scale, the Skowron and Friedlander differentiation scale (1998) and the NEO five-factor personality questionnaire. The Perfectionism Scale was designed by Frost et al. (1990) to measure perfectionism and includes 35 questions, Grading. The Frost et al. Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale is scored on a 5-point Likert scale from strongly agrees (5) to strongly disagree (1). There is a lot of individualism. Frost (1993) reported internal consistency coefficients below test scales ranging from 0.73 to 0.93 and internal consistency coefficients of the whole test being 0.90. In one Australian sample, the internal consistency coefficient below the test scales was 0.77 to 0.90 and the internal consistency coefficient of the whole test was 0.91. The convergent and discriminant validity of the Multidimensional Frost Perfectionism Scale was also confirmed by the significant positive relationship of this test with the Perfectionism Scale of Burns (1980), the Self-Evaluation Scale of Irrational Beliefs Scale, and the Sub-Perfectionism Scale of Eating Disorders Questionnaire (Lynd-Stevenson, Hearne, 1999).

The 43-item DSI Questionnaire consists of 4 subscales: 1. Emotional Reactivity, 2. My Position, 3. Emotional Escape, and 4. intermingling with others (Skowron and Friedlander, 1998). The purpose of this questionnaire is to measure individuals' differentiation. The 11 items of emotional reactivity subscale reflect the degree to which a person responds to environmental stimuli or hypersensitivity or with emotional variability. My subscale consists of 11 items that, along with a clear definition of self-esteem, determine the degree of loyalty to one's opinions when one is compelled to do the opposite. The 12-item Emotional Avoidance subscale indicates a sense of fear of intimacy and of being overly vulnerable to others. Items associated with this subscale indicate fear of intimate relationships, defensive behaviors such as overwork, distancing, or denial. Finally, the 9-item subscale of interplay with others indicates involvement in overly emotional relationships with others. The Likert scale was administered on a 6-point scale. Overall, the high scores in each subscale indicate a high level of self-differentiation. The alpha coefficient reported by Skowron and Friedlander (1998) was reported as 0.88 and the subscales of emotional responsiveness with alpha coefficient of 0.84, I position of 0.83, emotional escape of 0.82, and interference with 0.74. Has been reported. The same alpha coefficient has been reported in a study by Peleg- Popko (2004) of 0.86.

The NEO Five-Factor Personality Questionnaire, produced by Costa and McCreary in 1985, has been validated by Kiamehr in (2002). The 60-item questionnaire is used to assess five personality factors (neuroticism, extraversion, openness, adaptability, conscientiousness). In this form we have 12 questions for each component and each question is scored from zero to four according to the answer it receives. The subject must choose one answer for each question that I agree with, agree with, disagree with, disagree with and disagree with. Regarding the reliability of the questionnaire, the creators of this scale in the United States, Costa and McCreary (1992) in their study of a sample of 1000, obtained the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for each of the five test factors: Neuroticism 0.92, extraversion 0.89, openness 0.87, compatibility 0.86, conscientiousness 0.90, so this questionnaire has acceptable reliability. NEO-PIR test was administered to subjects 6 months after the first test to assess the Persian version of the test. The

results show a correlation coefficient of 0.76 to 0.83 (Hagh shenas 2006). The long-term reliability of the NEO test has also been evaluated. A 6-year longitudinal study of openness, extraversion, and neuroticism showed a reliability coefficient of 0.68 to 0.83 in both self-reported and married couples. The reliability coefficients of the two conscientiousness and adjustment factors were 0.79 and 0.63 between the three years (Costa and McCreary, 1992, cited by Garousi Farshi, 2001). Data analysis was done by path analysis and Sobel test at the significant level of 0.05.

### 3. Findings

The descriptive findings of the research variables are presented in Table (1).

**Table1.** Descriptive findings of differentiation, perfectionism, and personality

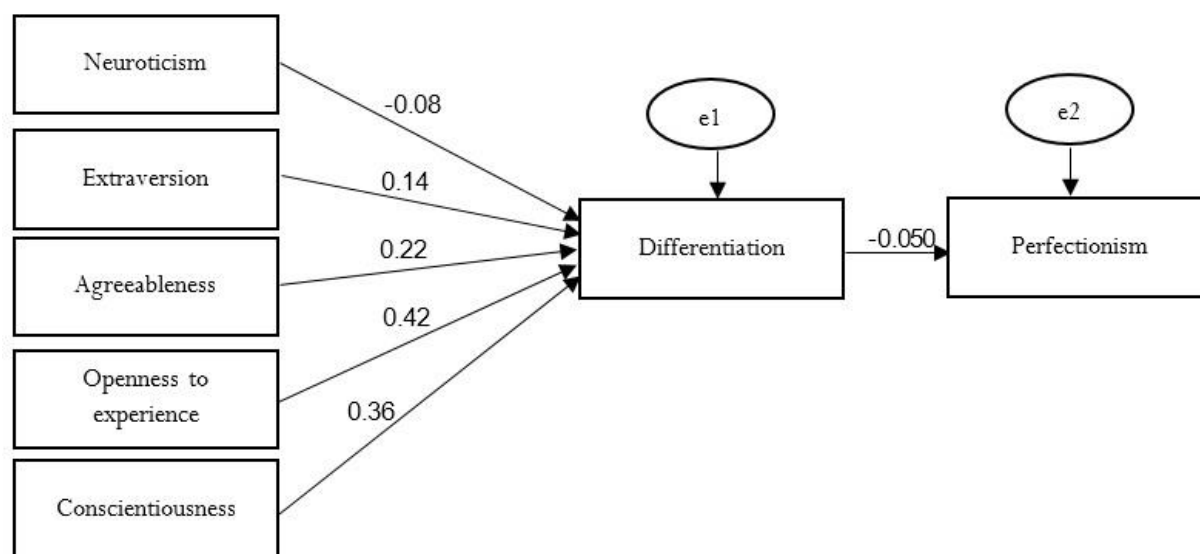
Scale	mean	Standard deviation	skew	Chew
Differentiation	128.21	14.22	-0.29	0.09
Agreeableness	38.99	7.67	0.65	-0.27
Extraversion	34.88	6.84	-0.66	-0.10
Openness to experience	29.08	4.65	0.67	-0.67
Psychosis	30.81	3.69	0.09	-0.83
Conscientiousness	28.50	5.79	0.33	0.31
Perfectionism	41.103	9.08	-0.12	-0.97

The results in Table (1) show that among the personality traits the highest mean is related to agreeableness. To verify the univariate normality, a general criterion is recommended that the data do not have a normal distribution if the tilting and elongation are not in the interval (0, -1). Based on the data in Table (2), it is shown that the tilting and elongation indices of any of the markers are not outside the range (0, -1) and can therefore be considered as normal or normal approximations. The results of model fit indices showed that the model is in good condition in terms of fit indices.

**Table2.** Model fit characteristics

Index name	Fitness index	
	Ratio	Standard
( $\chi^2$ ) / df	2.4	Less than 3
RMSEA (Root mean error of estimation)	0.06	Less than 0.1
CFI (Modified Fit)	0.95	Above 0.9
NFI (Soft Fit)	0.94	Above 0.9
AGFI (soft softness)	0.96	Above 0.9
GFI (goodness of fit)	2.4	Less than 3

The standardized and non-standardized path coefficients of the model are presented in the figure and in the table below.



**figure1.** Model in standardized coefficients mode

Given that in the model tested above, the paths between variables are the same as research hypotheses, the indirect effects tables are then tested in the research hypotheses.

**Table3.** Coefficients and Significance of Indirect Effects

Criterion variable	Predictive variable	Type of effect	Coefficient not standardized	$\beta$ not standardized	Sobel's significant statistic	sig
Perfectionism	Psychosis	Indirect (mediating role of differentiation)	0.06	0.04	0.45	0.46
Perfectionism	Extraversion	Indirect (mediating role of differentiation)	0.11-	0.07-	0.79-	0.28
Perfectionism	Agreeableness	Indirect (mediating role of differentiation)	0.14-	0.11-	2.03-	0.04
Perfectionism	Openness to experience	Indirect (mediating role of differentiation)	0.27-	0.21-	2.98-	0.001
Perfectionism	Conscientiousness	Indirect (mediating role of differentiation)	0.23-	0.18-	2.19-	0.02

The Sobel test was used to investigate the mediating effect of personality characteristics on the relationship between self-differentiation value and perfectionism. The results of Table (3) showed that since the Sobel statistics for agreeableness, openness to experience, and conscientiousness were more than 1.96, the hypothesis regarding the indirect effect of agreeableness, openness to experience was more than 1.96. And conscientiousness over perfectionism was confirmed by differentiation with 95% confidence.

#### 4. Discussion

The purpose of the present study, as noted, was to predict perfectionism based on personality traits, taking into account the mediating role of students' differentiation. The results of statistical tests showed that the indirect effect of agreeableness, openness to experience and conscientiousness on perfectionism in students was confirmed by students' differentiation. In explaining this finding, Costa and McCreary (1992) use procedures such as competence, order, task-orientation, and striving for success to measure conscientiousness and agreeableness factors. Competence is related to one's sense of competence. The person adequately enhances the readiness and ability to do things. The orderly and conscientious emphasis on commitment to principles is all self-motivating and ultimately contributes to the reduction of negative

perfectionism. In addition, according to Allport, the forces of the unconscious, forces that can neither be seen nor influenced, are not directed and managed by healthy adults. For Allport, ignorant forces can only have a significant impact on the behavior of psychoanalysts. However, healthy people act at a reasonable level and are fully aware of the forces that drive them and can overcome them. They are free from the constraints of the past. A healthy person looks forward to present and future events, not past times and childhood events. Such a healthy attitude opens up more freedom of choice and action to man. (Suh, Sohn, Kim, and Lee, 2019) perceive perfectionism as a personality trait that has been neglected. He sees perfectionists as people who demand a certain level of activity for themselves, who are not satisfied with anything less than perfection, and look for the flaws and disadvantages of their work.

On the other hand, Bowen's distinction is one's ability to emotionally and physically separate him from the main family, as well as the ability to achieve emotional growth and independence without losing the capacity for emotional connection with the family. One person is discriminated against when his or her emotional and security needs are forced to lose his or her individuality in order to gain the confidence of others' love or acceptance or to be restricted by the other's differentiation about his or her identity, it can freely enter into intimate communication. As it pursues meaningful goals and is more likely to succeed in all aspects of its life. Self-differentiation reflects one's ability to think realistically about emotional issues in the family. People who have the most mismatch between their thoughts and emotions have the weakest function, they are likely to be subjected to automatic or involuntary emotional reactions, and they usually perform poorly even at low levels of anxiety. Since they are unable to separate thoughts from emotions, they also have trouble separating themselves from others and are therefore easily resolved in the dominant or current emotions of the family. Under such circumstances, the individual will remain detached from the family and become an efficient functioning creature.

The result of this situation is the emergence of valuable situations in which the individual makes conditions for his / her worthiness and finds him or herself valuable only in certain circumstances. The child must avoid the behavior and thinking that is favored by the mother. Conducting forbidden behaviors causes the child to feel guilty and inferior, which are situations in which the individual must defend himself / herself. As such, the state of defense becomes a part of the individual's behavior, which results in a restriction of one's freedom and the complete non-disclosure of his or her true nature and a tendency toward perfectionism.

Consistent with research by Liu, Luo, Wu, Wang, and Wu (2016) showed that there is a significant positive relationship between self-efficacy and adaptation level of nursing professions in nursing students. The results of research Daemi and Jan Bozorgi (2016) also showed that differentiation and acceptance factor in personality have predictive role for psycho-spiritual transformation.

Based on the findings of the research in the theoretical domain, it can be said that high perfectionism plays a significant role in the development and persistence of individual problems, how such judgments and expectations are formed in the individual as important implications for education practitioners and has mental health services. In the meantime, it is important for consultants to recognize the differentiation and personality traits as antecedents of perfectionism. Consider the therapeutic interventions, their characteristics and differences, and expectations that are appropriate and appropriate to their psychological characteristics and characteristics. The present study predicted perfectionism based on personality traits with regard to the mediating role of differentiation and showed that personality traits influenced perfectionism by considering the mediating role of differentiation. But it is clear that the amount of variance explained by perfectionism was not complete. This suggests that other factors at different levels, such as family and community levels, influence this variable, which needs to be identified and investigated in future research.

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