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## The Development of Perfectionism among Adolescents: Comparing the Influence of Friends and Parents

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Running Head: PERFECTIONISM, FRIENDS, AND PARENTS

The Development of Perfectionism among Adolescents: Comparing the Influence of Friends and  
Parents

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## Abstract

This study investigated the development of perfectionism in adolescence by examining the associations between perfectionism, parenting styles, and friendship experiences. Furthermore, this study investigated the nature of perfectionism by examining whether internal psychological characteristics (i.e., loneliness, depressive symptoms, anxiety, self-esteem, and life satisfaction) were associated with the development of types of perfectionism (i.e., adaptive and maladaptive) or orientations of perfectionism (i.e., self-oriented or socially prescribed). Gender differences regarding each of these components were also explored. Questionnaires were completed by sixth, seventh, and eighth grade adolescents that measured perfectionism, internal psychological characteristics, perspective on parenting styles, and friendship quality. Three general findings emerged. First, results revealed a noteworthy gender difference regarding the relationship between the orientation of perfectionism and internal psychological characteristics. That is, males appeared more negatively affected by perfectionism than females. Second, a significant relationship was found between parenting styles and the types and orientations of perfectionism. Authoritarian parenting was associated with maladaptive, adaptive, self-oriented, and socially prescribed perfectionism. Third, counter to predictions, no significant relationship was found between the types or orientations of perfectionism and the quality of the adolescents' friendships. Overall, this study helps to better understand the role of perfectionism in adolescent development.



## The Development of Perfectionism among Adolescents: Comparing the Influence of Friends and Parents

*"At a time when adolescents are known to be sensitive about how they appear to others, middle schools emphasize relative ability...in learning situations." (Gilman & Ashby, 2003, p.222)*

Educational attainment is one of the top concerns parents have in trying to present their child with every opportunity for a promising future (Ablard & Parlour, 1997). An educational setting may be one place where an individual can go beyond his or her potential and try to reach goals that seem just out of reach. The striving for such potential can be either adaptive or maladaptive, but either way, the essence of perfectionism is likely rooted in both tendencies. Perfectionism is a "multidimensional construct," and there are likely many influential factors concerning its development (Bieling, Israeli, & Antony, 2004, p. 1374). There is no precise definition for perfectionism, but past researchers tend to focus on defining it according to higher personal standards, uncertainty of how one will meet those standards, as well as the focus on social expectations (Gilman & Ashby, 2003). Although many people believe that perfectionism is solely maladaptive, research has suggested that it can be adaptive or maladaptive (Bieling et al., 2004).

The development of perfectionism is influenced by both environmental and interpersonal factors (Flett, Hewitt, & Singer, 1995). For example, parents may plant the seed of perfectionism in children at a young age. Parents want their child to learn early that an education can ensure a more promising future for him or her. Eventually, children begin to relate their parents' expectations of their achievement capability to what they should and can achieve. The expectations of a child can either be lower or higher than parents' expectations, but both sets of expectations become predictors of the child's behavior. The parents' expectations eventually



may lead to the children's own perceptions of their abilities; furthermore, their own beliefs then influence their motivation and effort in school (Rice, Ashby, & Preusser, 1996; Rice, Kubal, & Preusser, 2004). Thus, it is possible that parental expectations and behavior may provide the foundation for the development of perfectionism.

On the other hand, during the early period of adolescence, peers become increasingly influential in an adolescent's development (Fuligni, Eccles, Barber, & Clements, 2001). Adolescence is a time when adolescents begin to establish independence from their parents by searching for their identity, support from peers, as well as acceptance from peers (Berndt, 1996). As a result, peers influence an adolescent's behaviors, values, and thoughts of his or her own abilities. For example, adolescents may be more likely to strive for academic success or minimize their efforts to succeed academically based upon the behavior and values of their peers. Adolescents do begin to transition towards their peers' influences during this age, but at the same time, children place importance upon their parents' approval. The parents' approval becomes the child's way of determining his or her self-worth (Kawamura, Frost, & Harmatz, 2001). Thus, a child may initially determine his or her self-worth based upon their parents' praise and criticism, which then influences his or her confidence in developing strong friendships with his or her peers. Without an understanding of self-worth and confidence, the child may begin to isolate him or herself from peers, which ultimately deters him or her from a healthy social development.

Upon the development of perfectionistic tendencies, a child can begin to experience its "powerful effects on conscious thought" (Burns & Fedewa, 2005, p.104). These effects can include the ability to see multiple perspectives of performances, abilities, as well as potentials. The child may begin to question more of his or her behaviors and abilities, but on the other hand, perfectionism can also lead a child to realize unacknowledged abilities and the ability to view



multiple perspectives on problems, performances, etc. Thus, it becomes apparent that two divisions of perfectionism (i.e., adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism) can lead to powerful effects on the mental well-being of the child (Burns & Fedewa, 2005).

The well-being of the adolescent is the central focus of his or her development. Since perfectionistic tendencies can develop during this period, it is important to focus on the effects and implications of this construct on the development of the adolescent (Gilman & Ashby, 2003). It is important to note that this construct is not solely specific to those of higher intellectual abilities. By further examining the effects of perfectionism, a better understanding of perfectionism's role in adolescent development can then be established. Thus, individuals will be better able to assist adolescents towards a healthy development. As Gilman and Ashby (2003) suggested, a healthy development includes a "healthy emotional development, which is just as important as an adolescent's intellectual and academic achievements" (p. 222).

Past research has shown that the development of maladaptive or adaptive perfectionism can be influenced by parenting styles. However, adolescence is a particularly good time to look more closely at the development of perfectionism because teenagers become more influenced by their peers during this time. The first general aim of the current study is to explore the nature of perfectionism by examining the type of perfectionism that is more prevalent among adolescents. The second general aim is to analyze if parenting styles, friendships, or both influence the development of perfectionism.

#### *Types and Orientations of Perfectionism*

Researchers generally divide perfectionism into two different categories: adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism. Despite this distinction, individuals typically view perfectionism as a more harmful quality to develop, rather than seeing the positive elements of perfectionism



(Kawamura et al., 2001). Perfectionism, therefore, retains its image as harmful to an individual. An individual appears to only be labeled perfectionistic when his or her goals are stretched to an unrealistic level of attainment, as well as when he or she develops unrealistic standards for him or herself (Burns & Fedewa, 2005; Gilman & Ashby, 2003; Kawamura et al., 2001; Rice et al., 1996). Having unrealistic standards will eventually lead to stress for the individual (Gilman & Ashby, 2003). Perfectionists rely on feedback to evaluate themselves, but they also have a tendency to strongly react to the responses (Speirs-Neumeister, 2004). Research has found that perfectionism does not, in fact, have to be looked at solely from a negative perspective.

*Types of Perfectionism.* Adaptive perfectionism is based on the idea that the individual sets high standards and has the motivation to achieve goals, with an understanding of his or her own limits (Gilman & Ashby, 2003; McArdle & Duda, 2004). Adaptive perfectionism can be found rooted in athletics. The main focus is that high ability and achievement is not only found in the classroom but within the sports domain as well. Students can therefore invest their abilities and motivation in an array of different domains. Thus, athletics have been found to be a “salient achievement context” for many adolescents because they learn to develop goals, evaluate their performances, and take pride in their successes (McArdle & Duda, 2004, p. 767). With the rewards that are present in a sports domain, it could be suggested that perfectionism is accepted, even encouraged, in present times (Bieling et al., 2004).

Adaptive perfectionists appear to experience more positive effects of perfectionism with respect to their self-esteem and self-satisfaction (Burns & Fedewa, 2005; Gilman & Ashby, 2003). People with adaptive perfectionism do not let mistakes, not reaching their goals, or not upholding their standards completely deteriorate their self-esteem. They have a tendency to keep matters in an organized and orderly style (Rice & Mirzadeh, 2000). In fact, adaptive



perfectionism seems to be beneficial to self-esteem because it enhances self-esteem through the appreciation of one's work (Dixon, Lapsley, & Hanchon, 2004). These individuals are usually characterized as being conscientious, socially at ease, and achievement-oriented, as well as having moderate to high personal standards (Rice & Mirzadeh, 2000). Usually, they are not as overly self-critical as maladaptive perfectionists (Rice et al., 1996). Adaptive perfectionists also are more at ease about confronting and dealing with their problems (Burns & Fedewa, 2005). Generally, it is beneficial for one's health to strive to increase his or her talents, but when one strives for growth as a result of feeling inferior to others, there is a turn to more of a maladaptive type of perfectionism (Gilman & Ashby, 2003; Dixon et al., 2004).

Maladaptive perfectionism occurs when the individual begins to strive for goals that are unattainable or unrealistic for the individual's abilities. That is, individuals set standards for every situation in which they are involved but without recognition of their personal limitations (McArdle & Duda, 2004; Rice et al., 1996). They perceive that their behaviors are never "good enough" (Rice et al., 1996, p. 246). They sometimes believe that as a result of their failure, they will lose the respect of others (Kawamura & Frost, 2004). They possess poor emotional and behavioral coping skills, which leads them to cope with or ignore their problems (Burns & Fedewa, 2005). It has also been found that students that are labeled as gifted or talented have more difficulty veering away from maladaptive perfectionism and have more difficulty seeing the distinctions between how they view their performance in comparison to what they feel others expect of them (Siegle & Schuler, 2000). In addition, their self-esteem is at risk because as they try to strive for achievement, they are only left with feelings of emptiness and dissatisfaction (Rice et al., 1996). Maladaptive perfectionists tend to have excessive anxiety over imperfections in their behavior and work (Rice & Mirzadeh, 2000). They see the world in primarily "black and



white terms,” with no in between area, which to them signifies that either they are a failure or a success (Burns & Fedewa, 2005, p.109). Concerning their work, they also have more difficulty turning to others when they come upon difficulties (Kawamura & Frost, 2004). Maladaptive perfectionism is also associated with many psychological problems, such as depression and eating disorders (Rice & Mirzadeh, 2000). This type of perfectionist is usually characterized as being anxious, disagreeable, self-critical, and self-centered. They have problems developing confidence due to their tense nature; yet, they still strive to gain the admiration of others (Rice et al., 1996; Rice & Mirzadeh, 2000). Thus, there seem to be two distinct types of perfectionism; individuals can form an adaptive type or a maladaptive type, but it is practically important to explore what factors will help people, especially children and adolescents, develop a more adaptive perfectionism.

*Other Orientations of Perfectionism.* Beyond making the distinction between adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism, researchers have also suggested that perfectionism fits into categories in terms of how it is prescribed: *socially prescribed* perfectionism, *self-oriented* perfectionism, and *others-oriented* perfectionism. Socially prescribed perfectionism occurs when the individual believes that others are expecting him or her to be perfect or have high expectations for his or her behaviors or performance. Thus for these individuals, it is an *external* force that is driving them to achieve high standards or expect more of themselves. Self-oriented perfectionism, on the other hand, occurs when personal aspects influence the perfectionistic behaviors in an individual. Thus, in this case, it is more of an *internal* struggle to reach higher standards than it is to meet the expectations of others. Finally, others-oriented perfectionism occurs when individuals view those around them as imperfect. Individuals focus on the inadequacies of others, rather than on their strong suits. Those with other-oriented perfectionism



also have more self-confidence and are more competitive (Flett et al., 1995; Speirs-Neumeister, 2004; Bieling et al., 2004).

In terms of achievement, research on socially prescribed perfectionism has found that the individuals characterized by this orientation focus on their failures more than successes (Speirs-Neumeister, 2004). As a result, they view their successes as more of a routine and minimize the importance of the situation, thereby reducing their pride in their work. Having difficulty thinking of successes alone, these individuals show a tendency to accompany their successes with a subsequent failure or opportunity they passed by (Speirs-Neumeister, 2004). Neuroticism, leaning towards more depressive components, characterizes this type of perfectionist (Bieling et al., 2004). These individuals also tend to blame themselves for the failure, without blaming any external factors (Speirs-Neumeister, 2004).

Self-oriented perfectionism, on the other hand, appears to lead individuals to take pride in their accomplishments. Feelings of pride and satisfaction occur because they take into account the amount of preparation they did in order to be successful. Some individuals attribute their success to natural ability, but they also point out that the effort they contributed towards preparation also was a key factor leading to success (Speirs-Neumeister, 2004). This type of perfectionist also tends to be very conscientious (Bieling et al., 2004). When they view their failures, they do not focus and amplify the effects of them. Even though they express disappointment, the event does not have detrimental, lasting effects. These perfectionists also attribute internal factors, rather than external factors, as contributing to their failure (Speirs-Neumeister, 2004).

Perfectionism is a multidimensional construct. It is influenced by both intrapersonal (the self) and interpersonal factors (the environment) (Flett et al., 1995). Past research has divided



perfectionism into two forms: adaptive and maladaptive (Gilman & Ashby, 2003; Kawamura et al., 2001; Rice et al., 1996; Burns & Fedewa, 2005). However, since perfectionism is influenced by more than one factor, it becomes difficult to label perfectionism as simply adaptive or maladaptive. The influential factors help label perfectionism through suggesting how it is prescribed (i.e., socially, self-oriented, or others-oriented), rather than solely on how it can affect an individual psychologically and behaviorally. Thus, both factors, the self and the environment, must be explored in the development of perfectionism.

#### *Psychological Adjustment, Gender, and Perfectionism*

*Psychological Adjustment.* The adolescent's internal psychological characteristics also play a role in the development of perfectionism. Self-esteem is a major factor in making adolescents more or less susceptible to influence from others, whether through acceptance or approval. The amount of susceptibility to others due to self-esteem is connected to the development of socially prescribed or self-oriented perfectionism (Grzegorek, Slaney, Franze, & Rice, 2004).

Self-esteem can be strengthened or weakened during childhood through one's parents. It has been suggested that children who are overprotected throughout their childhood become insecure about their capabilities. As they get older, they no longer have parental protection of their incapacities and are left to fend for themselves in the real world. This decreases their self-esteem, and they may resort to maladaptive perfectionism in the form of socially prescribed perfectionism in order to seek acceptance. Although perfectionism may increase or decrease an individual's self-esteem or self-worth, perfectionists may view their perfectionistic tendencies as a precursor for their success and not change their ways. This type of perfectionism is likely associated with higher self-esteem (i.e., self-oriented perfectionism). Such individuals view the



high standards that they set for themselves as beneficial. Thus in addition to parents' expectations and high standards influencing a child's behaviors, the child's view of his or her own behaviors and what assists in his or her success influences the continuation or termination of his or her behavior (Grzegorek et al., 2004).

Past theoretical research has also addressed these constructs (e.g., self-esteem and depressive and anxiety symptoms) in relation to perfectionism as well. Self-discrepancy models involve the *ideal* and the *ought* self, which typically develop in late childhood and early adolescence. These models are similar in nature to socially prescribed (*ideal self*) and self-oriented perfectionism (*ought self*). When certain adjustment components (e.g., depressive and anxiety symptoms) are looked at specifically concerning perfectionism, socially prescribed perfectionists tend to have more feelings of anxiety; whereas, self-oriented perfectionism tends to be connected to depressive feelings. Depression was found to be a significant issue in adolescents' lives due to the transition between childhood and adulthood (Hankin, Roberts, & Gotlib, 1997). Thus, it is important to explore the connection between perfectionism and psychological adjustment of the adolescent to assist him or her in experiencing a more adaptive transition and development period.

*Gender.* In previous studies, gender has been found to be generally associated with one's self-esteem, as well as with levels of depressive and anxiety feelings. Past research notes that males have higher self-esteem than females (Kling et al., 1999, as cited in Grzegorek et al., 2004). Furthermore, women are twice as likely to experience depressive and anxiety symptoms as males (Hankin et al., 1997). Thus, one's gender may influence an inclination to develop adaptive or maladaptive perfectionism due to a gender's tendency towards depressive or anxiety



symptoms. The relationship between gender and perfectionism can be more complicated due to traditional gender socialization.

When looking at gender socialization, perfectionism can be rooted in how each gender interacts with members of their own gender. Boys focus on a hierarchy system where wanting a higher status provides motivation to be competitive, possibly to the establishment of perfectionism (Benenson & Schinazi, 2004). In this instance, it would appear that boys would be more self-oriented in perfectionism, therefore pushing themselves to do better. Girls, on the other hand, use more of an egalitarian style in their interactions (Benenson & Schinazi, 2004). Girls within the same circle of friends attempt to be on the same level, in the sense that they try to avoid hierarchal systems. At the same time though, they then can influence each other to do the best they can or to be similar to one another. This may lead to a more socially-prescribed perfectionism. Since girls like to be similar to one another, it may be that they all need to push themselves to be at the same level; they dislike when other females outperform them (Benenson & Schinazi, 2004). The differences arise primarily based on how each gender interacts with one another. As a result, it is important to explore gender with the development of perfectionism because of different gender-specific socializing patterns.

#### *Parent Influence on Perfectionism*

*Parenting Styles.* Research has suggested that parenting style and other parental interactions may influence the development of perfectionism in a child (Rice & Mirzadeh, 2000). Previous studies have looked at the association between the development of perfectionism and parental authority styles. The main parenting styles were based on Baumrind's (Baumrind, 1971, as cited in Flett et al., 1995) classifications: authoritarian, permissive, and authoritative. Authoritarian parenting tends to exert restrictions, be punitive, and be overly controlling toward



their children. Authoritarian parents have a tendency to see their child as flawless, resulting in forcing them into perfectionistic behavior to meet their unrealistic expectations (Flett et al., 1995; Kawamura et al., 2001). Permissive parents allow the child to make his or her own decisions and interact with them as little as possible, which basically results in the parents being concerned solely with their own needs and interests rather than their children's needs and interests. Authoritative parents are sure they meet the needs and capabilities of the child's development, thus creating a warm, yet firm environment (Flett et al., 1995). Authoritative parenting is usually correlated to self-oriented perfectionism because of the support the parents make available at home to assist the children in reaching their goals (Flett et al., 1995). It was through authoritative parenting that research found that individuals would excel in school (Ablard & Parlour, 1997). Therefore, it would be beneficial to explore what parenting characteristics would be best for parents to adopt when raising their children. According to past research, authoritative parenting skills would likely be most beneficial for the development of adaptive perfectionism, but no research to date has specifically explored this association with adolescents.

*Observational Learning and Perfectionism.* Parenting styles are not the only influential factors in the development of perfectionism in individuals. Perfectionism can be learned by observation. The main form of observation that a child learns from is modeling (Rice et al., 1996). Modeling occurs when children observe mannerisms of their parents (Rice & Mirzadeh, 2000). There is both positive and negative modeling. Positive modeling occurs when the individual feels a sense of satisfaction with an event after adopting perfectionistic standards. This form of modeling may lead a child to adopt similar habits. As seen with the example of positive modeling, children are more likely to be perfectionistic if their parents are because they



learn from their behaviors. As a result, perfectionistic parents may then expect more from their child, making the child develop feelings that acceptance will only be granted if the standards are met. Negative modeling is when a child constantly observes his or her parents in a state of disorganization (Rice et al., 1996). Most parents of perfectionists are viewed as being harsh and critical with unreasonably high standards for their children. In these cases, the child sometimes develops perfectionism in the hope of obtaining parental approval and acceptance (Rice & Mirzadeh, 2000).

*Parents' Involvement in Academics.* When parents recognize that their child is academically talented or that they wish to help their child develop academically, parents have a tendency to attempt to help their children develop their skills. The problem, however, is that some parents are more likely to focus on their child's performance rather than on the mastery of skills. That is, they encourage their child to accept challenges and support their needs, but their support can come in two ways: pushing or encouragement. These two types of support are characterized by the learning goal orientation theory and performance orientation theory (Ablard & Parlour, 1997). With the learning goal orientation theory, the parents are more focused on the student learning and understanding the material, whereas with the performance orientation theory, the focus is placed on receiving recognition for extreme competence and high intelligence with more critique by parents as well (Ablard & Parlour, 1997).

It is evident that no one factor alone influences the development of perfectionism. Rather, many components interact, such as the style of child-rearing by their parents, as well as the family environment. The atmosphere that a child grows up in influences both the characteristics of the parent, as well as the child. The family environment is where the values and expectations of family members are established. Children learn what is expected of them,



which results in them adjusting their behavior to meet these needs. A problem develops when the family values revolve around performance (Rice et al., 1996). When children are exposed to authoritarian styles, research has shown that the individual may have a lower self-concept, as well as develop poorer intellectual and social skills. Socially prescribed perfectionism is usually what develops when the child is experiencing more performance pressure from his or her parents to meet expectations. Parents, in such cases, appear unfair and over-controlling concerning demands and expectations of the child (Flett et al., 1995).

*Parenting Styles and Perfectionism.* Adaptive perfectionists likely had parents who were supportive of them striving for success, and who helped them develop more confident and worthy views of themselves and their capabilities. In contrast, maladaptive perfectionists likely had parents that used a child rearing process that did not establish consistency for their relationship, such as with approval (Rice & Mirzadeh, 2000). These perfectionists likely developed socially prescribed perfectionism; their parents expected their performance to meet particular standards. Overall, the maladaptive perfectionists receive less supportive and more critical parenting style throughout their development (Rice & Mirzadeh, 2000). As a result, it is beneficial to explore how parenting can be used to influence the development of a more adaptive perfectionism.

#### *Friendship Influence on Perfectionism*

*Transitioning between Parents and Peers.* The relationship between parents and children goes through significant changes as children approach adolescence. Early adolescents generally strive not to completely withdraw from a relationship with their parents, but they do become more reliant upon their peers (Fuligni & Eccles, 1993). Many adolescents will still hold the same values and beliefs that were instilled in them throughout their childhood by their parents,



but adolescents will orient themselves towards peers for approval, views, and advice (Fuligni & Eccles, 1993; Paikoff & Brooks-Gunn, 1991). Studies have found, however, that adolescents who are more securely attached to their peers and insecurely attached to their parents are better adjusted than those who are insecurely attached to their peers and securely attached to their parents (Rubin, Dwyer, Booth-LaForce, Kim, Burgess, & Rose-Krasnor, 2004). Ultimately, the transition needs to be a cooperative effort between the parents and their adolescent children to adjust their relationship to meet the adolescents' developmental needs (Fuligni & Eccles, 1993; Paikoff & Brooks-Gunn, 1991). On the other hand, with the importance of this developmental period to the personality development of the adolescents, adolescents are faced with the struggle of balancing parental and peer influences.

*Role of Adolescent Friendships.* Friendships are the way in which adolescents begin to gradually move towards more independence from their family (Berndt, 1996). As a result, the friendships become a very influential component of the adolescents' lives, especially since more of their time is spent with peers than parents (Berndt, 1996; Fuligni, Eccles, Barber, & Clements, 2001). It is important to note that peer influence peaks around the ages of twelve and thirteen and gradually tapers off towards the middle and end of adolescence (Fuligni et al., 2001). As a result, adolescents can be influenced more by their peers especially with academic and social issues since a majority of their interactions occur in these situations.

Friendships have critical roles in the development of adolescents. Although friendships act as a way for adolescents to develop a sense of independence from their parents, it is also a way in which adolescents enter a new social world and develop their identities (Berndt, 1996; Fuligni et al., 2001; McElderry & Omar, 2003; Rubin et al., 2004). Adolescents' identities begin to take form as they compare their performances in certain activities, such as academics and



sports, to their peers. Adolescents will also look to their peers for acceptance and approval (Fuligni et al., 2001; Rubin et al., 2004). Another important function of friendships is to act as a support group (Berndt, 1996; Rubin et al., 2004). Support can be established through self-disclosure, a key component of intimacy. Studies have found that intimacy is higher in girl friendships than in boy friendships (Berndt, 1996). These roles can be divided into both agentic and communal needs. Agentic needs refer to the approval and acceptance from peers, development of identity, and self-esteem. Communal needs refer to intimacy and support. Thus, adolescents strive to develop a balance of both needs within their friendships (Buhrmester, 1993). Within these friendships, friends can indirectly influence an individual's identity or his or her values (e.g., reinforcing or demeaning academic achievement). Thus, perfectionism can possibly develop through the socializing that occurs within friendships.

*Influence of Friendships on Development.* It is apparent that adolescents can be influential to one another. Research has found, though, that stronger friendships that include more positive qualities of friendships, such as intimacy, prosocial behavior, and self-esteem support, will have a stronger impact on the adolescent's psychological development. It is also found that a more intimate friendship can be more influential than a less intimate friendship (Berndt, 1996). Higher quality friendships are correlated with more positive peer-assessed sociability and leadership (Rubin et al., 2004). There are some friendships that will have a negative influence on behavior and achievement, whereas there are those that create more of a positive influence. Friends can reinforce each other's positive or negative attitude towards school by reinforcing disruptive behavior or by encouraging academic achievement. Overall, studies found that the negative influence of peers led to lower levels of achievement, and positive influence of peers led to higher levels of achievement (Berndt, 1996). More specifically though,



girl friendships tend to be oriented more towards communal needs, whereas, boy friendships lean towards meeting more of the agentic needs. These types of friendships, therefore, provide different opportunities for rewards, as well as lead to concern of some situations over others (Burhmester, 1993). Hence, friendships influence adolescents in different ways based upon the needs being met, as well as based upon the strength of a friendship. In relation to perfectionism, it would be expected then that the stronger and more need-satisfying friendships would lead to the development of perfectionism.

Social motivation in a friendship also plays a role in the level of achievement that a group strives towards. An individual's own beliefs about his or her abilities can lead to influence others to adopt similar goals and become motivated. Adolescents will usually strive for goals that are valued by individuals in their surrounding environment. Due to adolescents' desire for acceptance, many goals are social goals (e.g., acceptance and approval), but it has been found that while pursuing social goals, individuals socially interact with others, which can increase their intellectual and cognitive skills. The development of these skills then can lead to successful academic outcomes. Studies have found friends' views to be correlated on aspects like motivation to learn, motivation to put forth effort, and motivation to succeed (Wentzel, 1999). It has been suggested that the motivation may be a result of the social and emotional support that an adolescent receives from his or her peers. Friendships provide adolescents with an incentive to maintain the values of the group, as well as remaining a social and emotional support source for the adolescent during the pursuit of goals (Wentzel, 1999). Thus, friendships as a social support can help an adolescent establish values concerning academics. As a result, one may develop perfectionistic tendencies on his or her own or be socially prescribed to adopt perfectionistic behaviors of the peer group.



*The Current Study*

*Research Aims.* The general aim of the current study is to examine what types of perfectionism are prevalently found among adolescents. Recent research has found that adaptive perfectionism is found more among adolescents and usually encouraged due to sports and academics (Bieling et al., 2004; Gilman & Ashby, 2003; McArdle & Duda, 2004). Based upon Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, as well as the cognitive social learning theory, it is suggested that adolescents learn and observe the behaviors of those around them, such as parents and peers, and furthermore, imitate and develop these behaviors through further interactions with individuals (Vygotsky, 1978). As the adolescent develops, he or she adopts these behaviors and beliefs as his or her own.

The second general aim focuses on examining if parenting styles, friendships, or both influence the development of perfectionism among adolescents. Recent research has found that authoritarian parenting styles result in more criticism and harsher demands of children, which results in the development of a more maladaptive perfectionism (Flett et al., 1995; Rice & Mirzadeh, 2000). With the emphasis of parental influence, the perfectionism is shown to be more of a socially prescribed development (Flett et al., 1995). Children who also live in a family environment and are exposed to perfectionistic behaviors are more likely to develop perfectionistic tendencies due to imitating what their parents are expressing as the values of the family, as well as what is positively reinforced in the home (Rice et al., 1996). Thus, if parents put pressure on their children to attempt to reach for unrealistically high standards, the children begin to believe that the only way to gain the acceptance and approval of their parents is to push themselves beyond their limits (Ablard & Parlour, 1997). This pressure creates much stress and



anxiety, consequently forming the maladaptive form of perfectionism (Rice et al., 1996; Rice & Mirzadeh, 2000).

*Rationale and Justification.* Research has shown, however, that parenting does not always have a negative influence on the development of a child, such as with maladaptive perfectionism, but the formation of an adaptive perfectionism can occur with positive influences from a particular parenting style (Flett et al., 1995). Authoritative parenting allows the child to strive for higher standards due to the support found within the home that allows for encouragement to understand and learn material, rather than the end result of intellectual performance-recognition (Ablard & Parlour, 1997; Flett et al., 1995). Also, the more adaptive perfectionists tend to be self-oriented perfectionists. Due to their more supportive environment, adaptive perfectionists may feel that they can raise their own personal expectations to be higher in order to succeed (Flett et al., 1995).

Research has also emphasized the important role that friendships play in an adolescent's development (Berndt, 1996; Fuligni et al., 2001). Friendships are what adolescents turn to when they begin to move towards independence from their parents. Friends become a source adolescents can use to find their identity, an outlet for support, and who they search for acceptance from; therefore, there is a strong influence on the psychological adjustment (e.g., self-esteem of the adolescent). As a result, adolescents influence one another's values, goals, expectations, and standards, including academic standards. Adolescents' personal standards then, although earlier influenced by their parents, can become oriented to the general beliefs, values, and thinking of their peers (Fuligni, et al., 2001). Studies show that this influence can have both positive and negative factors (Rubin et al., 2004).



In light of past research (e.g., Rice et al., 1996), it is important to examine the development of perfectionism among adolescents. That is, if parenting styles that create anxiety during a child's academic development are brought to their attention, there is the chance to intervene and adjust parenting styles to better help the child succeed in his or her future with a minimal amount of anxiety. There is also potential for parents to adjust parenting styles in order to help their adolescent possibly switch a socially prescribed perfectionism into one that is more self-oriented. The current study can help parents realize behaviors that do influence their child's mental state. Moreover, the current study may help adolescents learn more about their own behaviors and how to adjust their expectations and behaviors. As a result, an intervention could be implemented to work with parents and adolescents to determine a way that both can work together to lead to the development of adaptive perfectionism.

It also needs to be taken into consideration that peers can influence an adolescent's development as well as parents (Fuligni, et al., 2001). Peers can influence each other's standards and expectations, such as what they expect of themselves and others. As a result, an adolescent can be exposed to socially prescribed, self-oriented, or others oriented perfectionism. Adolescents can then learn that perfectionism can be beneficial in helping them reach higher standards that they set for themselves by recognizing their limitations, as well as accepting their imperfections. The study can also help adolescents recognize the potential for their peers to influence their behavior. This recognition provides adolescents with the power to filter in or out certain influences that he or she may feel prohibits him or her from becoming the individual he or she hoped to become.

Middle school is an important time to study the development of perfectionism since adolescents are facing new expectations and new challenges for their academic achievement.



The combination of many new transitions in academic and social experiences may lead developing adolescents to be vulnerable to the influence of parents and peers, as well as personal pressures and expectations. Middle school research on perfectionism may provide more opportunities for programs that meet the needs of the students and can educate teachers on how to address the needs of these students (Siegle & Schuler, 2000). Adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism has been found in college students; thus, it is beneficial to explore the development of perfectionism in adolescence in order to learn more and then potentially have the ability to decrease the onset of perfectionistic problems associated with maladaptive perfectionism earlier in life (Bieling et al., 2004; Burns & Fedewa, 2005).

Previous research emphasized the need to investigate significant transitional periods of a child's development to see if there is more vulnerability, especially concerning self-esteem, in the development of perfectionism (Flett et al., 1995; Rice et al., 1996). This is rooted in the evidence that during adolescence, teenagers are embracing a transitional time period, in which parents are not the major influential factor in their life, as peers begin to take a lead role (Berndt, 1996). Based upon the research of Flett et al. (1995) and Rice et al. (1996), it is found that parenting style and interactions influence the development of both adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism in adolescents. Fuligni et al. (2001) and Rubin et al. (2004) have emphasized the increasingly influential role of peers during adolescence on an individual's beliefs and behaviors, which in turn can lead to the development of perfectionistic tendencies. It is shown that multiple factors can be involved in the development of perfectionism, and thorough investigation of those multiple factors has both theoretical and practical implications.

*Hypotheses.* Based upon past perfectionism research, it is first hypothesized that adaptive rather than maladaptive perfectionism will be more prevalent among adolescents. Adaptive



perfectionism is expected because perfectionism has become more natural today due to the rewards that it can provide in academics and athletics. The second hypothesis is that adaptive perfectionism will be associated with higher self-esteem, fewer depressive feelings, and less anxious symptoms compared to maladaptive perfectionism. This prediction is rooted in the fact that overall, adaptive perfectionists have better coping skills and are more socially at ease than maladaptive perfectionists. It is important to look at the psychological adjustment of adolescents in this research because this transitional period involves many emotional issues for teenagers (Siegle & Schuler, 2000). The third hypothesis is that adolescent girls will show more socially-prescribed perfectionism, whereas boys will show more self-oriented perfectionism. These gender differences in prescribing perfectionism are expected based upon the idea that girls are more concerned with the acceptance from their peers, whereas boys are more competitive about surpassing their peers (Berndt, 1996). The fourth hypothesis is that an authoritarian parenting style will be associated with the development of maladaptive perfectionism; whereas an authoritative parenting style will be associated the development of a more adaptive perfectionism. This prediction is based upon the idea that authoritative parenting styles tend to be more supportive, concerned, and involved than authoritarian styles, where criticism is more prevalent (Flett et al., 1996). The fifth hypothesis is that stronger and higher quality friendships (based upon meeting needs) will be associated with the development of perfectionism, both adaptive and maladaptive. It is predicted that the development of perfectionism will primarily be socially-prescribed through peers. This prediction is based upon the idea that friends will not be intentionally instilling perfectionistic values in their friends but will be influential through behavior and normal communication. Since no present research has examined developmental differences between grades six and eight, this study will also explore differences that exist



between the grade levels in relation to perfectionism. It is hypothesized that eighth graders will be more prone to perfectionism, in general, because they would have been developing their academic skills longer than the sixth graders. They are also preparing for high school, which is generally more academically rigorous than middle school.

## Method

### *Participants*

The participants were enrolled in a public middle school in the Midwest. The families were from a primarily middle socioeconomic status. The racial make-up included 65% African American, 22% White, 11% Hispanic, and .02% Asian. The study sampled fifty-seven middle school students. The data consists of 26 males and 31 females. There were also 7 sixth graders, 21 seventh graders, and 29 eighth graders. There is not an even distribution of males and females or the grade levels because the total number of participants was based on obtaining parental permission. The students who had parental permission were then also given the choice to volunteer to participate on the day of the study.

*Recruiting Participants.* All students who wished to participate and who obtained parental permission were included in the study. A letter with permission forms was sent home with the students explaining the study to the parents. They were then asked to sign the permission form to allow their child to participate in the study. When the permission forms were returned and collected at the school, the principal researcher visited the school. She then went to the library located within the school. The respective sixth through eighth grade students came to the library. The students then participated in the study during a homeroom time period, which did not interfere with class time. The principal researcher provided questionnaires for those with



permission to participate. The students were not be given compensation for their participation in the research study.

### *Measures*

Questionnaire packets were distributed to the participants measuring their level of perfectionism, psychological adjustment, quality of friendships, and quality of parent-child relationships. In addition to the main study's questionnaires, demographic information was collected (i.e., age, gender, grade, and average grades received). (Measures are summarized in Table 1).

*Levels and Types of Perfectionism.* The *Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale*, developed by Frost, Marten, Lahart, and Rosenblate (1990), was used in order to measure the presence of perfectionistic tendencies in students. It measures three subtypes of perfectionism: *socially prescribed*, *self-oriented*, and *others oriented* perfectionism. The scale examines these three subtypes using six subscales: (a) Concern Over Mistakes, (e.g., "*I should be upset if I make a mistake.*"), (b) Personal Standards (e.g., "*I set higher goals for myself than most people.*"), (c) Parental Expectations (e.g., "*Only outstanding performance is good enough in my family.*"), (d) Parental Criticism (e.g., "*My parents never try to understand my mistakes.*"), (e) Doubts About Actions (e.g., "*Even when I do something very carefully, I often feel that it is not quite done right.*"), and (f) Organization (e.g., "*Organization is very important to me.*"). The questionnaire required participants to rate themselves on a series of thirty-five items on a five-point Likert-type scale (*Strongly Disagree* to *Strongly Agree*). For this study, participants were also asked to rate their same-sex best friend, as well as themselves. In past studies, the six subscale internal consistencies ranged from .77 to .93, and the internal consistency for the total scale was .90. The reliability for the scale in this study was .91.



*Perfectionistic-Related Measures.* *The Personal Mastery Survey*, developed by Hibbard (2000) was used to measure the student's orientation towards achievement. The questionnaire required participants to rate a series of fifteen items on a five-point Likert-scale (*Strongly Disagree* to *Strongly Agree*). In a recent past study (Hibbard, 2000), the PMS had an internal consistency ranging from .82 to .84. *The Big Five Inventory*, developed by John and Srivastava (1999) was used to measure five main personality traits. The instrument required participants to rate a series of fifty-four items on a five-point Likert-type scale (*Strongly Disagree* to *Strongly Agree*). The items pertain to: (a) Openness, (b) Conscientiousness, (c) Extroversion, (d) Agreeableness, and (e) Neuroticism. For this particular study, only the conscientiousness subscale was utilized since it conceptually most directly related to perfectionism (e.g., "*Does a thorough job.*"). Sheldon, Ryan, Rawsthorne, and Ilardi (1997) found the internal consistencies of the conscientiousness subscale of the BFI to be .83 to .90.

*Psychological Adjustment.* *The Self-Esteem Scale*, developed by Rosenberg (1965) was used to measure the self-esteem among the participants. The instrument required participants to rate a series of ten items on a five-point Likert-type scale (*Strongly Disagree* to *Strongly Agree*). This questionnaire involves a series of self-worth items that would categorize overall responses in a range between high self-esteem and low self-esteem (e.g., "*On a whole, I am satisfied with myself*" or "*I feel I do not have much to be proud of.*"). Rosenberg (1965) reported a reliability coefficient of .92 among adolescents. The reliability for the scale in this study was .77. *The UCLA Loneliness Scale*, developed by Russell and Cutrona (1996) measures participants' feelings of loneliness (e.g., "*I am no longer closer to anyone.*"). The instrument required participants to rate a series of twenty items on a four-point Likert-type scale (*Never* to *Often*). Mahon, Yarcheski, and Yarcheski (1993) reported an internal consistency of .89. The reliability



for the scale in this study was .73. *The Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale* was developed by Lovibond and Lovibond (1995) and measures the negative emotional states of depression, anxiety, and stress. The questionnaire is divided into three subscales that focus on particular items relating to each of the three emotional states (e.g., “*I found it difficult to relax*”). The participants were asked to rate themselves on a four-point Likert-type scale focused on the frequency of the items’ occurrences in the past week (*Did not apply to me at all* to *Applied to me very much, or most of the time*). Devilly (2002) reported the reliabilities of each scale as follows: Depression (.71), Anxiety (.86), and Stress (.81). The reliability for the overall scale in this study was .94. *The Multidimensional Students’ Life Satisfaction Scale*, developed by Huebner (1994) measures a student’s satisfaction with school, family, friends, self, and living environment (e.g., “*I like spending time with my parents.*”). It should be noted that this scale was meant to be used specifically for grades three through eight. The participants were asked to rate a series of forty items on a six-point Likert-type scale (*Strongly Disagree* to *Strongly Agree*). Huebner (1994) found the internal consistency as well as the subscale internal consistencies to be as follows: Overall (.92), School (.85), Family (.82), Friends (.85), Self (.82), and Living Environment (.83). The reliability for the overall scale in this study was .82.

*Friends and Parental Influences on Perfectionism. Measuring the Quality of Adolescents’ Friendships*, developed by Berndt and Keefe (1993) measures the influence that friends have on adolescents concerning their behavior and achievement in school. Specifically, it measures the amount of interactions, intimacy level, effects on self-esteem, and behavior effects between friends (e.g., “*When you feel good about something that happened to you, how often do you tell your friend about it?*”). The participants were asked to rate a series of twenty-six items on a five-point Likert-type scale (*Never* to *Every day*). Berndt and Keefe (1995) found



the internal consistency to be .92. The reliability for the scale in this study was .86. *The Parental Authority Questionnaire*, developed by Baumrind (1971), was used to measure the participant's perception of the type of parenting style he or she experiences at home. It measures Baumrind's typologies of authoritarian, authoritative, permissive, neglectful parenting by evaluating and categorizing types of parenting behaviors that the child experiences in the home (e.g., "*This parent always encourages a verbal give-and-take whenever I feel that family rules and restrictions were unreasonable.*"). The reliability for the mother scale was .67, while the reliability for the father scale was .68 in this study.

### *Procedure*

The participants took part on a volunteer basis. Prior to the questionnaire packets being dispersed, each student was asked to sign a consent form that certified they were under no pressure to complete the questionnaires of the study and understood what the study would entail. Once the consent forms were signed, the researcher handed out the questionnaires individually to each participant. To reassure the students of the confidentiality of the responses, the researchers placed numbers on top of each packet, as to identify the participants by number only. This was emphasized to the participants to encourage honest and complete responses.

Each student filled out the questionnaire packet under the same conditions: in a quiet learning environment during their homeroom period. Filling out the questionnaire packet did not interfere with their class time. They were each given as much time as needed to fill out the packet of questionnaires. Once the participant finished the questionnaire, he or she brought the packet to the researcher, who then placed the packet in a pile. The researcher then presented the debriefing forms to the participants. The debriefing session and debriefing form gave participants more precise information regarding all aspects of the study and gave them an



additional opportunity to ask questions. Participants were informed that they may contact the lead researcher, the head of the Institutional Review Board, and/or the school social worker or psychologist if they have any concerns after the study.

### Results

The main variables of relevance in the study were general perfectionism, adaptive perfectionism, maladaptive perfectionism, self-oriented perfectionism, and socially prescribed perfectionism. Associations between these variables and the other variables (e.g., parenting styles, positive and negative features of friendship, psychological adjustment, etc.) were examined through bivariate correlational analysis. In addition, *t*-tests and analysis of variances were conducted to further analyze the data.

It should be noted that a preliminary analysis of the measures was run before analyzing the data in order to verify the reliability of the scales. The reliabilities of the scales ranged from Cronbach's alphas of .60 to .90, indicating adequate internal consistency for most measures.

#### *Types and Orientations of Perfectionism*

The first prediction that adolescents would show more adaptive perfectionism than maladaptive perfectionism was found to be supported ( $t=9.60, p<.01$ ). The means and standard deviations for the overall values of general perfectionism and adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism for adolescents (males and females) can be found in Table 2. This table also shows the different types of perfectionism for each gender. Although no significant difference was found between genders, adaptive perfectionism overall was found to be more prevalent than maladaptive perfectionism among adolescents as hypothesized.



### *Perfectionism and Psychological Adjustment*

To address the hypothesis that adaptive perfectionism is associated with higher self-esteem, fewer depressive feelings, and less anxious symptoms (compared to maladaptive perfectionism), Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated between the variables. The use of specific internal psychological characteristics connected to adaptive or maladaptive perfectionism was determined based upon previous research on the effects of both types of perfectionism (Rice et al., 1996; Rice & Mirzadeh, 2000; Dixon et al., 2004; Burns & Fedewa, 2005). As predicted, maladaptive perfectionism was found to be significantly associated with lower self-esteem, more depressive symptoms, and more anxiety symptoms ( $r = -.39, p < .01$ ;  $r = .40, p < .01$ ;  $r = .31, p < .05$  respectively). Maladaptive perfectionism was also significantly associated with loneliness ( $r = .39, p < .01$ ). Also consistent with expectations, adaptive perfectionism was found to be significantly associated with general life satisfaction ( $r = .35, p < .01$ ).

### *Perfectionism and Gender*

Although not specifically predicted, further inspection revealed that the associations between types of perfectionism and internal psychological characteristics varied by gender. For example, the associations between maladaptive perfectionism and internal psychological characteristics (i.e., self-esteem, depressive and anxiety symptoms, loneliness, and life satisfaction) were present among males, but they were not present among females (See Table 3). The relationship between the internal psychological characteristics and orientations of perfectionism (i.e., socially prescribed and self-oriented perfectionism) were also further analyzed using bivariate correlations. These results also revealed that the associations between



orientations of perfectionism and internal psychological characteristics were primarily present among males but not females (See Table 4).

While addressing the hypothesis that females would be associated with socially prescribed perfectionism and males would be associated with self-oriented perfectionism, further analysis with a *t*-test showed that the means for socially prescribed perfectionism were in the predicted direction, but none of the differences were significant (See Table 5). Thus, males and females do not appear to differ in orientation of perfectionism.

### *Perfectionism and Parenting Styles*

To test the hypothesis that an authoritarian parenting style is associated with maladaptive perfectionism, whereas an authoritative parenting style is associated with adaptive perfectionism, correlations were calculated between parenting styles and types of perfectionism. As hypothesized for both males and females, authoritarian parenting was positively associated with maladaptive perfectionism (See Table 6). Contrary to the hypothesis, however, females also showed a significant relationship between authoritarian parenting and adaptive perfectionism ( $r=.385, p<.05$ ). Therefore, authoritarian parenting seems to be associated with the development of both types of perfectionism for females, but only authoritarian parenting seems to be associated with the development of maladaptive perfectionism with males.

When more closely examining the relationships between parenting styles and the specific orientations of perfectionism, authoritarian parenting was consistently associated with general perfectionism, self-oriented perfectionism, and socially prescribed perfectionism ( $r=.40, p<.01$ ;  $r=.35, p<.01$ ;  $r=.39, p<.01$ , respectively). In general, it appears that authoritarian parenting is associated with perfectionism, whereas authoritative parenting is not.



### *Perfectionism and Friendship*

Analyses were conducted to examine the extent to which friendships influence the development of perfectionism. Specifically, it was hypothesized that stronger and higher quality friendships (based upon meeting needs) would be associated with the development of perfectionism, both adaptive and maladaptive. Counter to predictions, no significant correlations were found to exist between positive and negative features of friendships and adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism. Thus, the hypothesis was not supported that either positive or negative features of friendships were associated with perfectionism. To further investigate if a relationship existed between orientations of perfectionism and features of friendships, bivariate correlations were calculated. No significant relationships were present between positive or negative feature of friendship or friendship satisfaction and the orientations of perfectionism (i.e., self-oriented or socially prescribed). Thus, from the analyses of friendships and perfectionism, there appears no significant relationship existing between these two variables.

### *Developmental Differences*

The original hypothesis predicted that eighth graders would be more perfectionistic than sixth graders. Due to the smaller number of the sixth grade participants, an analysis was conducted using sixth and seventh grade together (lower grade level) in comparison to eighth grade (upper grade level). Contrary to the hypothesis however, the *t*-tests showed that the *lower* grade level exhibited significantly more perfectionism (with the exception of socially prescribed perfectionism) than the *upper* grade level (See Table 7).

### *Further Examination of Interactive Effects*

In order to further examine key associations in the study, a few of the perfectionism variables were divided into high and low levels, and interactive effects with gender were



examined. This analysis was run with general perfectionism, self-oriented perfectionism, and socially prescribed perfectionism. The division was done by determining the median score for each of the variables. The participants' scores who were above the median were placed in the high level of the variable; the participants' scores who were below the median were placed in the low level of the variable. By dividing the variables into high and low levels, we can more easily see relationships between each of the orientations, internal psychological characteristics (i.e., self-esteem, loneliness, depressive and anxiety symptoms, and life satisfaction), and gender.

Although not specifically predicted, some of the results that were obtained prompted further investigation of interactions that could help further explain the data. Based upon gender findings, further examination was focused on the interactive effects between the orientations of perfectionism, gender, and internal psychological characteristics (i.e., self-esteem, depressive and anxiety symptoms, loneliness, and life satisfaction). The examination was based upon gender since the initial analyses showed important gender differences in the patterns of associations with perfectionism; therefore, the further analysis would explain how the variables (e.g., orientations of perfectionism and gender), when combined, would influence the internal psychological characteristics.

ANOVAs were conducted on depressive symptoms to determine if there were interactive effects between self-oriented perfectionism and gender. The interaction between self-oriented perfectionism and gender showed an outcome approaching significance for depressive symptoms,  $F(1, 53) = 3.71, p = .06$ . As Figure 1 shows, boys who were high on self-oriented perfectionism had the highest level of depressive symptoms. There was no similar pattern between the level of self-oriented perfectionism girls experienced and the amount of depressive symptoms.



ANOVAs were also conducted on depressive symptoms to determine if there were interactive effects between socially prescribed perfectionism and gender. The interaction between socially prescribed perfectionism and gender showed an outcome approaching significance for depressive symptoms, as well,  $F(1, 53) = 3.76, p = .06$ . As Figure 2 shows, boys with higher levels of socially prescribed perfectionism experienced the highest level of depressive symptoms, whereas girls experienced no similar outcome with depressive symptoms.

There was also a significant interaction found between socially prescribed perfectionism and gender for self-esteem,  $F(1, 52) = 4.02, p = .05$ . As Figure 3 shows, boys with higher levels of socially prescribed perfectionism experienced the lowest self-esteem, whereas females did not experience a similar outcome. Also, there was a main effect for level of socially prescribed perfectionism,  $F(1, 52) = 11.01, p < .01$ .

### Discussion

This study examined the development of perfectionism and its relationship with parenting styles and friendships. More specifically, the two different types of perfectionism (i.e., adaptive and maladaptive) and two different orientations of perfectionism (i.e., self-oriented and socially prescribed) were more closely examined in terms of parenting styles and friendships. In addition, the association between types and orientations of perfectionism and internal psychological characteristics (i.e., self-esteem, depressive and anxiety symptoms, loneliness, and life satisfaction) was examined. The discussion focuses on the support or lack of support of the hypotheses. Moreover, noteworthy gender differences in the findings are discussed.

#### *Types and Orientations of Perfectionism*

Adaptive perfectionism was predicted to be more prevalent among adolescents than maladaptive perfectionism. Adaptive perfectionism was also hypothesized to be associated with



positive features of psychological adjustment (e.g., higher self-esteem, lower levels of depressive and anxiety symptoms), whereas maladaptive perfectionism was hypothesized to be associated with negative features of psychological adjustment. Gender differences were hypothesized to exist based upon the two orientations of perfectionism as well.

According to previous research, perfectionism has the potential to be divided into two types: adaptive and maladaptive (Gilman & Ashby, 2003; McArdle & Duda, 2004). More recent research has used athletics as a rationale for the acceptance and encouragement of perfectionism in individuals today (Bieling et al., 2004), and this rationale then suggested that adaptive perfectionism would be found more prevalently among individuals. Consistent with predictions, adaptive perfectionism was more prevalent among the adolescents.

When internal psychological characteristics (i.e., self-esteem, depressive and anxiety symptoms, loneliness, and life satisfaction) were explored in connection to adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism in this study, maladaptive perfectionism was found to be negatively correlated with self-esteem and positively correlated with depressive and anxiety symptoms. Thus, the hypothesis was supported that maladaptive perfectionism would be associated with more negative features of adjustment, but there was no relationship determined between adaptive and positive features of adjustment (e.g., higher self-esteem and lower depressive symptoms). Adaptive perfectionism was, however, associated higher with life satisfaction. Past research (Rice et al., 1996) has suggested that each type of perfectionism could be associated with positive or negative features of adjustment, but this was not found in this study. On the other hand, other research has suggested similar results to those of the present study. Thus, it may be more fitting to focus on the idea that there is a definite maladaptive form of perfectionism but that adaptive perfectionism may be more of a “neutral” perfectionism. In this sense, adaptive



perfectionism does not necessarily harm the individual's psychological adjustment, but it does not seem to help it either (Bieling et al., 2004). In a sense, adaptive perfectionism may provide adolescents with the opportunity to develop their academic skills and strategies (e.g., setting goals and developing strategies to accomplish goals) in a way that could benefit their performance, more so than their psychological adjustment.

Consistent with Siegle and Schuler's (2000) findings, females had higher mean levels of perfectionism in comparison to males. However, these gender differences were not significant. Contrary to the hypothesis that girls would show higher socially prescribed perfectionism and boys would show higher self-oriented perfectionism, further examination showed that neither females nor males had more of a tendency towards the development of self-oriented or socially prescribed perfectionism. The lack of relationships based upon the types and orientations of perfectionism could mean that both genders are equally prone to the development of either type or orientation of perfectionism. In addition, this lack of relationships could also suggest that particular gender qualities, such as competitiveness or desire for acceptance, do not have a strong influence over a gender's tendency to adopt a type or orientation of perfectionism as originally hypothesized. Thus, although it may rationally seem possible for each gender to be associated with a type or orientation of perfectionism, perfectionism may be more of a gender-neutral behavior that is more influenced by an individual's personal characteristics, such as vulnerability to others' influences, self-motivation, etc. These types of characteristics are not necessarily associated with a particular gender; therefore, adopting perfectionistic tendencies may not be due to gender characteristics but due to more gender-neutral characteristics.



*Perfectionism, Gender, and Psychological Adjustment*

With respect to each gender regarding perfectionism and internal psychological characteristics, unforeseen findings arose. According to Rice et al. (1996), maladaptive perfectionism is associated with negative features of psychological adjustment, such as lower self-esteem, loneliness, and depressive and anxiety symptoms. This study supported the finding of Rice et al. (1996), but the support was found only with males (See Table 3). That is, males were negatively affected by maladaptive and socially prescribed perfectionism. In response to the relationship exhibited between boys and perfectionism, past research has emphasized that socially prescribed perfectionism is closely associated with maladaptive perfectionism, especially in relation to greater social stress (Gilman & Ashby, 2003; Bieling et al., 2004). Maladaptive and socially prescribed perfectionists are both influenced then by those around them to meet certain expectations (Gilman & Ashby, 2003).

Past research has also emphasized that there is a strong connection between socially prescribed perfectionism and negative consequences and maladjustment. Some of these negative consequences can include concern about others' evaluations, self-doubt, and worry over making mistakes, therefore, leading towards a strong relationship with lower self-esteem (Bieling et al., 2004; Grzegorek, 2004). These individuals also have a tendency to self-blame, strongly self-criticize, and self-conceal, which only further contributes to lower self-esteem (Grzegorek, 2004; Rice et al., 2004; Speirs-Neumeister, 2004). In addition to these negative consequences, socially prescribed perfectionists also have difficulty coping both emotionally and behaviorally (Burns & Fedewa, 2005).

Based upon this information, it is evident that boys in this study would have a tendency to be negatively affected by socially prescribed perfectionism and maladaptive perfectionism for



the following reasons. Rice et al. (2004) suggests that males' self-esteems fluctuate based upon accomplishments and failures; their self-esteem is then increasingly vulnerable to difficulties that arise in situations. This vulnerability could be due to added pressure that is sometimes placed on males to achieve and succeed in everything that they do, because they are assumed to have the ability that allows them to succeed (Pipher, 1994). Males are more likely to be praised for their academic work, which may then lead them to be more sensitive to making mistakes and to trying to hide their insecurities with difficult tasks (Pipher, 1994; Rice et al., 2004). In these situations, males try to present an image to society of what they feel is expected from them- the "ideal of *masculine* self-confidence" in academics (Pollack, 1998, p. 238). By not consulting social support units, such as family, peers, teachers, etc. while having difficulty, males, as a result, increase their level of stress and anxiety concerning the task (Rice et al., 2004). They, in turn then, may resort to self-handicapping. Self-handicapping references the idea that males underestimate what they are capable of accomplishing. In this type of situation, they then do not attempt to reach their potential in order to protect their ego. Their focus is to attempt to reach the expectations of those around them but at the same time protect themselves from feedback about failure from either others or themselves (Doebler, Schick, Beck, & Astor-Stetson, 2000). Males may strive to appease society by pretending that they are confident in their abilities, rather than "showing their fears about not measuring up" (Pollack, 1998, p. 238). It could be that males' psychological well-being may suffer due to the pressure that society places upon them to satisfy gender roles and masculine ideals (Pollack, 1998). Thus, we can then develop more of an understanding why boys would begin to develop an association between socially prescribed and maladaptive perfectionism.



*Parenting Styles and Perfectionism*

Authoritarian parenting was predicted to be associated with maladaptive perfectionism due to the strict, harsh, and demanding living environments of this parenting style. Again, gender differences were found with respect to orientations of perfectionism and parenting styles.

According to Flett et al. (1995) and Kawamura et al. (2002), authoritarian parenting is associated with socially prescribed and maladaptive perfectionism. Their previous research was further supported by this study. Males and females that developed maladaptive perfectionism were also in households exhibiting authoritarian parenting styles. Contrary to the expected association between authoritarian parenting and maladaptive perfectionism, females experiencing authoritarian parenting also developed adaptive perfectionism. This contradiction could suggest that the rigid environment may also present the opportunity for girls to strive for achievement. Traditionally, males are the individuals that are encouraged towards achievement and competitiveness, but since females also experience the authoritarian parenting without the added pressure to develop these *atypical* female traits (e.g., competitiveness and achievement motivation), they are then able to receive some pressure but not the same amount as males. As a result, girls do not necessarily develop only maladaptive perfectionism due to their involvement in authoritarian parenting (Flett et al., 1995).

When each orientation of perfectionism was analyzed with authoritarian parenting, it was determined that authoritarian parenting had a relationship with both orientations of perfectionism, as well as general perfectionism. Although it was hypothesized that authoritarian parenting would only be associated with maladaptive perfectionism or socially prescribed perfectionism, research suggests that the rigid environment of the authoritarian homes create a child's concern over mistakes and high personal standards. It could be suggested that the degree



to which parents are authoritarian (e.g., strictness level and demanding) with their child determines if he or she develops socially prescribed or self-oriented perfectionism.

*Relationship with Internal Psychological Characteristics.* To examine the influence of the social expectations of parents upon their children, it was beneficial to further examine how authoritarian parenting could further the negative effects of socially prescribed and maladaptive perfectionism in males. Since males in this study appeared to be negatively affected by maladaptive perfectionism and socially prescribed perfectionism, it was later hypothesized due to this study's findings that their internal psychological characteristics would be affected by authoritarian parenting as well. This hypothesis was based on the idea that authoritarian parenting could lead to socially prescribed perfectionism, which was found to be associated with negative internal psychological characteristics in this study. To further examine the relationship between parenting styles and internal psychological characteristics (i.e., loneliness, self-esteem, depressive and anxiety symptoms, and family satisfaction), correlations were calculated.

Consistent with earlier analyses of this research, perfectionism among males was related to internal psychological characteristics, unlike females (See Table 8). After analysis, it was determined that males who experienced authoritarian parenting had lower self-esteem, less satisfaction with their family, higher levels of loneliness, and higher depressive and anxiety symptoms (See Table 8). This data corresponds with the research of Flett et al. (1995), which suggests that authoritarian parenting could not only lead a child to develop socially prescribed perfectionism but also can lead to poorer intellectual and social development. These negative features can occur because parents are over-involved and over-controlling with their children and place unrealistic demands on them. In this situation, the male is then conflicted between wanting his parents approval and with his capability of perfect performances. Eventually, the male



adopts his parents' criticism as his own self-criticism, only further perpetrating the cycle of maladaptive perfectionism (Flett et al., 2002; Kawamura, 2002). Thus, according to the data, it is evident that parental expectations play a strong and influential role in a child's performance, as well as the internal psychological characteristics that affect their cognitive and social development.

### *Perfectionism and Developmental Factors*

Concerning both the intellectual and social development of the adolescents, friendships were predicted to influence the development of the orientations of perfectionism due to the positive or negative features present in the adolescents' friendships. It was also predicted that eighth graders would be more perfectionistic than sixth and seventh graders because they are later in their intellectual development and preparing for the more difficult curriculum present in high school.

*Friendship.* After analyzing the data, it became evident that no significant relationships between the development of perfectionism and friendship existed. When reflecting upon the study, the use of mutual friendships or matching friends with one another may have been more advantageous for the study. By adding this factor, we could have obtained the student's actual perspective of his or her friend's role in their academic life. It could also be suggested that later adolescence is a period when influence is at its peak; therefore, it would be more practical to hypothesize after this study that later in eighth grade into high school is the ultimate opportunity when peers can influence one another. Since this study only investigated sixth through eighth grade, it could be possible that the influential period or transition to peer influence over parents occurs in later adolescence rather than early adolescence.



*Grade Levels.* The difference between grade levels was also examined. Due to the limited number of sixth graders that participated in the study, the data were grouped to use sixth and seventh graders as the *lower* grade levels of middle school students and then the eighth grade was the *upper* grade level of middle school students. Contrary to the hypothesis, the lower grade levels were found to have significantly higher adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism, general perfectionism, and self-oriented perfectionism. Adolescence is a time of development, both socially and cognitively; therefore, self-oriented perfectionism may prevail more among these lower grade levels because they are just beginning to develop their own personal abilities with the educational system. Teachers and parents may not yet recognize a child's giftedness, thereby reducing the added pressure and higher expectations they could place on the child. The child is then left to develop abilities until later in life when they may be more susceptible to socially prescribed perfectionism (Speirs-Neumeister, 2004). The eighth grade could have the tendency to be less perfectionistic because although they are headed to a more difficult type of curriculum, their psychological focus is oriented towards beginning a new school and the factor of meeting new people. They experience the anxiety and pressure of beginning anew; meanwhile, the lower grade levels in this study were already habituated to the environment and the people. Therefore, lower grade levels were able to focus on their studies, as well as increasing their potential, without the added pressure of future changes awaiting them. Such social changes can be stressful for adolescence during a time when their peers are beginning to play a more crucial and important role in their lives.

### *Practical Applications*

A major goal of this study was to obtain information that would assist parents, adolescents, and educators in better understanding perfectionism and how it affects adolescents'



development. Thus, it is important to consider practical applications of these results in the following three areas: parenting, male development, and educational guidance.

Parenting holds an influential role in the child's development of his or her own expectations. The child looks to the adult for an understanding of their abilities, as well as potential (Rice et al., 1996). Therefore, it is beneficial for parents to assist their child in school work, remain involved at a healthy, non-over-controlling level, and exhibit their interest in their child's academics. It is important for parents to create a supportive and encouraging environment for the child to develop within, but at the same time, parents should be mindful of the amount of pressure that they place on their child as well. Too much pressure can result in poor intellectual and social development of the adolescent. As found in this study, authoritarian parenting can lead to poor academic development and psychological adjustment. Thus, it is important for parents to find balance concerning their parenting styles to allow their child to develop confidence towards his or her abilities.

The study showed that males are negatively affected by socially prescribed and maladaptive perfectionism. Since the study also conveyed that perfectionism is not necessarily only maladaptive, it is still important to encourage the male adolescent to continue to strive for goals that challenge him. Parents and educators need to praise boys for accomplishments but should be careful to avoid overly criticizing them for failures. It should not be assumed that boys are expected to perform well on every task. Doebler et al. (2000) suggests that a male's ego is sensitive to negative feedback; thus when providing feedback, individuals need to be sure to talk with the male and inquire what difficulties were present while he worked through the task. It is also important to emphasize to the male that receiving assistance from those around him, such as parents, educators, or peers, is acceptable and helpful.



Finally, the study showed that adolescents are more perfectionistic during early years of middle school but have a tendency to lose these characteristics towards the end of middle school. Therefore, although these results are only tentative, it is important for the school and educators to encourage students to continue setting challenging goals for themselves. Educators can also assist them in developing strategies to reach these goals, which forces the students to recognize and work towards actually achieving goals. Since there is the possibility that the newfound stress of switching schools may inhibit adolescents from being perfectionistic, it may be beneficial for the educators to discuss the transition into high school, as well as the importance of education in high school. This discussion could then help ease their fears and anxieties. Such a discussion could include activities that would show adolescents the tasks that they would be expected to complete in high school. Then, educators could help the adolescents develop characteristics of adaptive and self-oriented perfectionism (e.g., setting realistic goals, using different strategies to succeed, or looking towards support groups for assistance), in order to show them strategies of how to tackle high school academics.

### *Conclusions*

One of the main research aims was to determine what the most common form of perfectionism is among adolescents. The study showed that adaptive perfectionism was the most commonly experienced type of perfectionism among adolescents as hypothesized. Due to a lack of research in the area, analyses were conducted to determine if there is a difference based upon development levels in respect to grade levels. Contrary to the hypothesis, the lower grade levels (i.e., sixth and seventh grade) appeared to be more perfectionistic than the upper grade level (i.e., eighth grade).



After completing data analysis, it became apparent that males appear to be negatively affected by perfectionism, unlike females. The negativity includes primarily psychological adjustment during adolescence (e.g., self-esteem, loneliness, depressive and anxiety symptoms, and life satisfaction). Based upon the results of the internal psychological characteristics' analysis, the study showed, in general, that there was a definite maladaptive form of perfectionism, but it failed to prove that there were benefits in connection to adaptive perfectionism.

The study's other main research aim focused on determining if friendship or parenting styles was more influential in the development of perfectionism. The study supported the idea of Flett et al. (1995) and Kawamura et al. (2002) that authoritarian parenting is influential in the development of both socially prescribed and maladaptive perfectionism. On the other hand, self-oriented perfectionism appears not to be directly associated to either parenting style. In addition to experiencing negative consequences to perfectionism, negative consequences were also experienced due to authoritarian parenting. Finally, friendship was not found to have a relationship with perfectionism.

A major strength of this study was to focus on acknowledging the presence of perfectionism at an earlier age than college. This acknowledgement was made, and as a result, individuals can now begin to develop a more complete understanding of perfectionism that could help facilitate a healthy development of adolescents through understanding the dynamic nature of perfectionism. Although perfectionism and its consequences are experienced in middle school, future research is needed to examine how perfectionism may evolve into high school or if the influence may become more powerful.



### *Limitations*

One limitation of the study is that there was a relatively low number of participants in the study. If the sample population was larger, there may have been the potential to find more significant results, such as concerning the influence of friendship. A second limitation may be that there were a limited number of sixth graders that volunteered to participate. As a result, sixth and seventh grade had to be grouped together to analyze a difference between the grade levels. More sixth graders would help in answering the developmental hypothesis. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, there was the inability to obtain the student's perspective of his or her friend's actual role in his or her academic life, based upon mutual friendships, which may have helped in exploring the role of friendship in the development of perfectionism.

### *Future Research*

This study begins to develop an understanding of the nature of perfectionism and how parents and friendships might influence its development, but there still needs to be a more thorough examination in order to more completely understand the relationships present. From this present study, it is evident that parents highly influence a child's perfectionism. Although no significant results were determined with friendships, it would be advantageous to continue to research this variable because it is well-known that adolescence is a time when friends begin to influence one another. It may also be important to look at high school as an age group since significant relationships between friendship and perfectionism did not appear with this sample of adolescents concerning developmental factors. The influence may become stronger in later adolescence. For future research, the key should be to investigate perfectionism in adolescence—both in middle school and high school. Future research could investigate both age groups at one time, or there is the possibility for a longitudinal study. This exploration could then facilitate a



more complete understanding of how perfectionism may change and evolve throughout a child's development.

Taking into consideration the large percentage of African American participants in this study (65%), it is important for future research to investigate the role race may or may not have in the development of both types or orientations of perfectionism. McCreary, Joiner, Schmidt, and Ialongo (2004) suggest that much of perfectionism research bypasses the idea of potential cultural differences. An individual's psychological well-being can actually differ based upon his or her race or socioeconomic status (McCreary et al., 2004). Research has also suggested that African American children may experience more parental expectations and demands. These expectations and demands can be due to the parents struggling to maintain the status that they have achieved over the years. In addition, children may also feel the pressure to succeed due to the racism and oppression their parents may have endured for years (Castro & Rice, 2003). Parents then "encourage their child to thrive in the majority culture," in which they are faced with racism and discrimination (Nilsson, Paul, Lupini, & Tatem, 1999, p. 147).

Furthermore, African Americans place importance upon family, community, connectedness, and collectivism (Nilsson, Paul, Lupini, & Tatem, 1999). The emphasis on individualism in society may not be advantageous for African Americans; that is, African Americans are more successful when they have a sense of community or connectedness (McCreary et al., 2004). Thus, it is suggested that family may play an even more influential role in the development of perfectionism among ethnic minority groups (Castro & Rice, 2003). Yet again, research is still minimal in this area, especially in respect to adolescents. Therefore, it is important for future research to embark upon the role of race in the development of perfectionism.



It is evident from past research that perfectionism exists in college populations, but it is important to detect early perfectionistic behaviors (Grzegorek, 2004). This study showed that socially prescribed and maladaptive perfectionism have significant negative consequences on the emotional and psychological well-being of the child; therefore, the earlier detection can occur, the more the schools can cooperate with students to steer them towards adaptive perfectionism. Although adaptive perfectionism appears to have more “neutral” consequences, it also appears to benefit academic performance by allowing the child to learn to set realistic goals, to use different strategies to succeed, or to look towards support groups when difficulties arise (Kawamura & Frost, 2004; Rice et al., 1996).



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Table 1

*Summary of Measures*

Construct being Measured	Questionnaire
Levels and Types of Perfectionism	The Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (Frost et al., 1990)
Perfectionism-Related Measures	The Personal Mastery Survey (Hibbard, 2000) The Big Five Inventory (John & Srivastava, 1999)
Psychological Adjustment	The Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) The UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell & Catrovia, 1996) The Depression, Anxiety, Stress Scale (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995) The Multidimensional Student's Life Satisfaction Scale (Huebner, 1994)
Friendship and Parental Influence on Perfectionism	Measuring the Quality of Adolescents' Friendships (Berndt & Keefe, 1993) The Parental Authority Questionnaire (Baumrind, 1971)



Table 2

*T-test of Types of Perfectionism*

Variable	Males(N=26)		Females(N=31)		Both(N=57)		<i>t</i> (df)	Sig.
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>		
General Perfectionism	2.92	.54	3.14	.62	3.04	.58	-1.05(55)	.83
Adaptive Perfectionism	3.31	.64	3.49	.62	3.41	.63	-1.25(55)	.58
Maladaptive Perfectionism	2.58	.60	2.81	.73	2.71	.68	-1.39(55)	.38



Table 3

*Gender Relationship between Types of Perfectionism and Internal Characteristics*

Variable	Adaptive Perfectionism		Maladaptive Perfectionism	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
Self-Esteem	-.10	.09	-.72**	-.14
Depressive Symptoms	.25	.11	.71**	.21
Anxiety	.17	.20	.47*	.27
Loneliness	.36	.19	.50*	.32
Life Satisfaction	.23	.40*	-.06	.31

\*\*Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

\*Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).



Table 4

*Gender Relationship between Orientations of Perfectionism and Internal Characteristics*

Variable	Self-Oriented Perfectionism		Socially Prescribed Perfectionism	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
Self-Esteem	-.26	.01	-.62**	-.09
Depressive Symptoms	.38	.07	.65**	.32
Anxiety	.26	.14	.44*	.39*
Loneliness	.35	.23	.60**	.32
Life Satisfaction	.23	.37*	-.12	.32

\*\*Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

\*Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).



Table 5

*T-test of Orientations of Perfectionism*

Variable	Males	Females	<i>t</i> (df)	significance
	<i>Mean</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>Mean</i> ( <i>SD</i> )		
General Perfectionism	2.92(.54)	3.14(.62)	-1.39(55)	.17
Self-Oriented Perfectionism	3.17(.55)	3.37(.64)	-1.24(55)	.22
Socially Prescribed Perfectionism	2.63(.66)	2.87(.71)	-1.32(55)	.19



Table 6

*Relationship between Types of Perfectionism and Parenting Styles*

Variable	Authoritarian			Authoritative		
	Males	Females	Both	Males	Females	Both
Adaptive Perfectionism	.18	.39*	.24	.22	.05	.14
Maladaptive Perfectionism	.60**	.43*	.46**	-.03	.14	.09

\*\*Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

\*Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).



Table 7

*T-test of Perfectionism based upon Younger and Older Middle School Students*

Variable	Lower	Upper	<i>t</i> (df)	significance
	<i>Mean(SD)</i>	<i>Mean(SD)</i>		
General Perfectionism	3.23(.65)	2.85(.47)	2.51(55)	.02 *
Self-Oriented Perfectionism	3.48(.58)	3.08(.57)	2.65(55)	.01 **
Socially Prescribed Perfectionism	2.94(.80)	2.59(.52)	1.92(55)	.06
Adaptive Perfectionism	3.58(.60)	3.24(.62)	2.13(55)	.03*
Maladaptive Perfectionism	2.93(.76)	2.49(.51)	2.53(55)	.01**



Table 8

*Relationship between Parenting Styles and Internal Characteristics*

Variable	Authoritarian		Authoritative	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
Loneliness	.62**	.08	-.40	-.28
Self-Esteem	-.55**	.04	.15	.21
Anxiety	.45*	.15	-.38	-.20
Depressive Symptoms	.62**	.18	-.33	.20
Satisfaction with Families	-.50**	.03	.45	.26

\*\*Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

\*Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).



Figure Caption

*Figure 1.* Interaction between self-oriented perfectionism and gender on depressive symptoms.



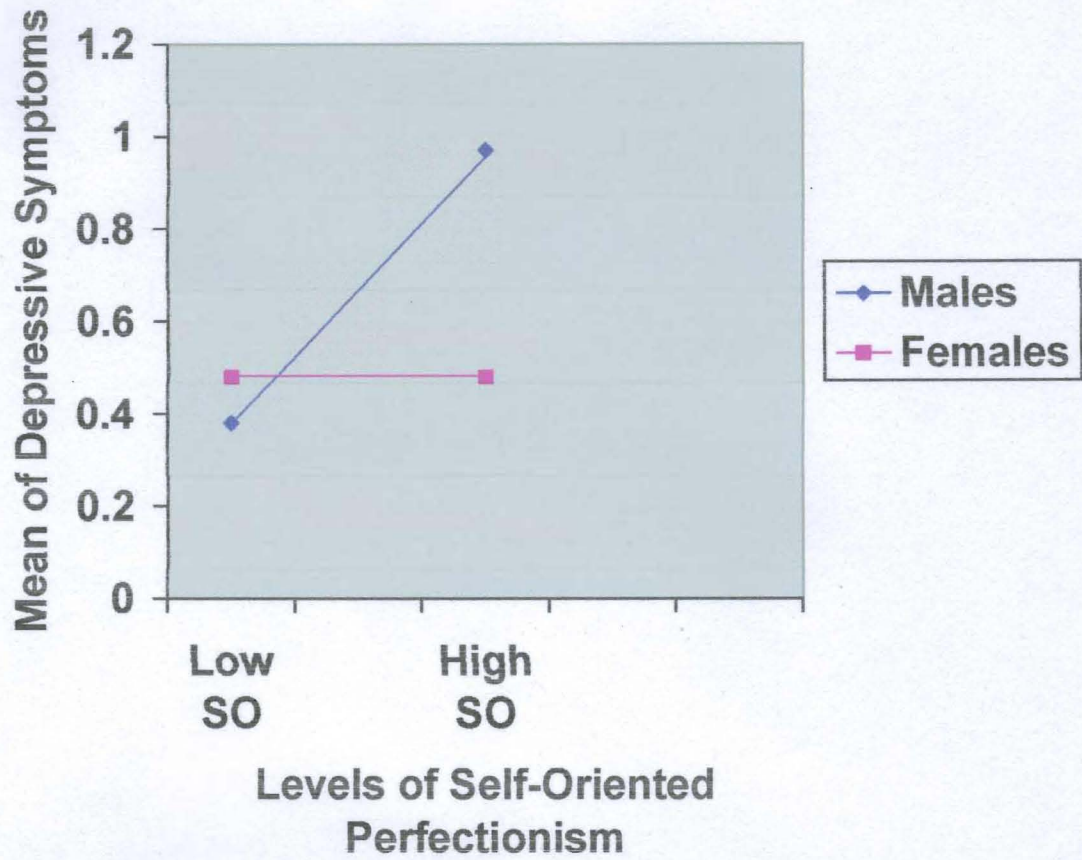




Figure Caption

*Figure 2.* Interaction between socially prescribed perfectionism and gender on depressive symptoms.



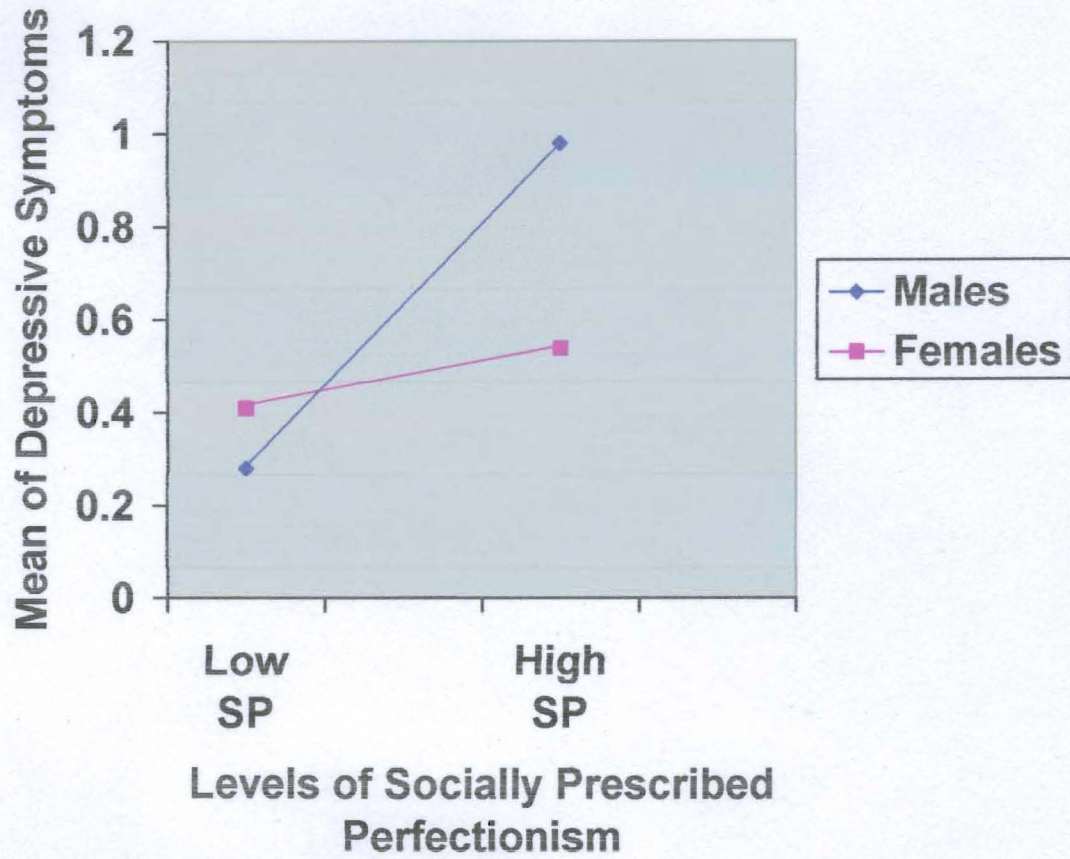


Figure Caption

*Figure 3.* Interaction between socially prescribed perfectionism and gender on self-esteem.



