

The Relationship Between Perfectionism and Reflective Functioning Among College Students A Correlational Study

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Abstract

This study was conducted to investigate the association between perfectionism and reflective functioning among the undergraduate students whose ages ranged between 18 and 25 years. Rather than focusing on causation, the project looked at how closely these traits move together across individuals. Spread through targeted selection; three hundred participants made up the group under review. Tools used included a scale built by Randy O. Frost's team back in 1990 measuring various sides of high personal standards. Instead of informal methods, researchers relied on structured responses gathered via established checklists. Included also was a more recent tool from Peter Fonagy's circle released in 2016 assessing insight into thoughts behind behaviors. Through number based analysis, links between rigid expectations and emotional awareness emerged for observation. Age, gender, along with field of study, formed part of the data gathered. Analysis involved summary measures followed by examination of variable links via Pearson's method in SPSS software. A clear upward link appeared between perfectionism and capacity for reflection ($r = .563$, $p = .01$). People leaning toward high standards might spend more time reviewing inner thoughts possibly boosting their ability to reflect. Recognizing such personality features in school environments matters; building stronger thinking about one's own mind could ease stress tied to rigid self-expectations while supporting mental health.

Keywords: Perfectionism, Reflective functioning, College students, Self-reflection, and Mentalization.

INTRODUCTION

Young adulthood brings rising worries about mental health, especially as stress grows common in university settings. Facing shifts in lifestyle, learners juggle coursework demands, new friendships, peer dynamics, while weighing future job paths - each adding weight through unspoken rules about achievement. A drive for flawless results, labeled Perfectionism, shapes how some respond; it pushes pursuit of unreachable ideals, sparking both motivation and inner strain. The skill called Reflective Functioning - seeing meaning behind feelings and thinking in self and people nearby - adds depth to emotional awareness. Looking close at how perfectionist tendencies link with this capacity to reflect reveals hidden layers shaping student wellness.

Perfectionism

Fueled by rigid expectations, perfectionism shapes how some judge their own performance. While reaching high may appear beneficial, trouble follows once goals stretch beyond reach. Certain individuals pursue flawless outcomes yet manage their time wisely here, ambition functions without

breaking down. In contrast, others fixate on unreachable targets, tormented by errors even when minor. Relief after achievement often fails to arrive when criticism inside remains sharp and constant. Silence carries weight: early routines, schoolyard comparisons, unspoken rules they feed an inner push that never rests. Environments built around success often deepen this cycle without warning. Some thrive under pressure; others, caught in endless criticism, face slow drains of energy. Attention sticks to flaws, blind to steps forward taken. Effort that seems disciplined may stem from worry wearing a different mask.

Perfectionism in college students

Starting in young adulthood, ages 18 to 25 often bring struggles with unhealthy perfectionism, particularly during college years times filled with self-discovery amid ongoing academic scrutiny. School environments, since they highlight performance, quietly increase demands over time. Mistakes, rather than being seen as normal missteps, can feel like clear evidence of personal shortcoming for certain individuals, slowly weakening self-assurance. After facing failure, some find themselves circling past errors instead of progressing beyond them. Mistakes linger longer when perfection stays out of reach. Each gap between expectation and outcome adds a quiet weight. The comparison of others, by and by, undermines the spirit gradually. Grades and reviews next to each other are stacked, further raising the level of doubt. One is put under pressure, but not immediately, but rather by the continuous little reflections.

Malaise From Unhealthy Perfectionism

What often masquerades as high standards can quietly erode inner balance, feeding tension alongside low mood and constant unease. Driven by relentless self scrutiny, those aiming at faultless results become hyper alert to missteps. Judgment on the spot is leaving lots of them with empty, exhausted, and even haunted by the idea of not measuring up. Growth is slowed as the uncertainty instigates retreat rather than exploration. Withdrawal from risk halts learning before it begins. Gradually, this habit weakens awareness of personal emotions or thoughtful examination of inner experiences. When focus leans heavily toward outcomes, private sensations tend to pass by unseen. Ignoring such signals makes understanding and handling them more difficult. Insight into emotion dims if accomplishments dominate. Attention flows where tracking happens, leaving little room for what arises quietly inside.

Reflective Functioning Concept

Understanding how individuals recognize thoughts within themselves - also in others - carries a label: mentalizing. Shaped by unseen elements such as desires, worries, or beliefs, behavior begins to make sense through this lens. With practice, emotional regulation improves, perception sharpens, while relationships gain depth over time. Pausing to reflect creates space; impulsive responses lose their grip when insight takes root. Early attachments include an initial level but the development continues much later in life, in stages, through recurrent contacts and significant experiences.

Reflective Functioning and its contribution to Emotional Regulation.

Peering inside affects emotional responses along with recovery after setbacks. Noticing personal feelings lets some individuals understand triggers behind their reactions, shaping behavior through insight. Under stress, this self-knowledge supports sharper judgment, steadier decisions, together with improved interactions. Beyond first impulses lies a fuller view of someone else's experience. Missing this perspective may blend emotions into confusion, distort signals during conversations, let impulsive moves take over once strain increases.

Reciprocal Operationalization and Psychological Health

Thought becomes clearer once emotion is observed from a distance. A moment spent noticing internal shifts tends to soften responses under pressure. Since awareness of feeling opens space for gentler replies, strict rules start to feel less absolute. When the reasons beneath ambition come into view, failure lands differently without breaking anything essential. In the long run, this attitude will create a more moderate response to both success and failure. Mental breaks in college alleviate the stresses of altered self-images, social pressures, as well as challenging academics.

Rationale of the Study

Even older work looked at Perfectionism and Reflective Functioning apart, but almost none connected both in student life. College brings rising demands - grades weigh heavily, social position seems always under scrutiny, while awareness of inner experience frequently trails. Under these conditions, studying how one shapes the other might expose quiet forces affecting psychological health in youth. This project is concerned with connections between pursuing perfection and richness of self-conception, in undergraduates between the age of 18 and 25. The clarity of this connection might indicate people who are more emotionally vulnerable, which may inform customized means of reinforcing growth at the time it is most required.

NEED FOR STUDY

Nowadays, college learners deal with mounting coursework loads, constant grading scrutiny, along with comparisons to peers factors that frequently spark mental tension and emotional fatigue. Such conditions tend to feed intense perfectionist tendencies, causing individuals to fixate on error-free results and approval from others. Without sufficient capacity to reflect on inner states, these students might find it hard to process feelings, resulting in harsh self-judgment and weak coping strategies. While each concept perfectionism and reflection skills has seen thorough exploration alone, little attention has been paid to how they connect within university populations. Young people face key emotional shifts during early adult years, making it vital to grasp how they relate to their inner experiences. Because of this link, spotting those at risk for mental strain becomes more possible through careful analysis. When researchers look closely at behavior trends tied to performance, hidden struggles with self-awareness often surface. Insights gained here support teachers and advisors in shaping responses that encourage deeper thinking about feelings. With thoughtful approaches, learners might build stronger reactions to stress, handle challenges more effectively, even grow mentally healthier over time.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Flett, G. L., and Hewitt, P. L. (2020), in an article launching a special section of the Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment, offered a broad look at how multidimensional perfectionism has evolved across thirty years. Instead of presenting new data, they pulled together core progress in ideas, tools, and methods used to assess perfectionism, highlighting movement away from single-factor models toward more complex frameworks. As understanding deepened, so did the range of questionnaires and analytical techniques developed to capture its nuances. Work over time revealed how different forms - aimed at the self, directed at others, or believed to be demanded by society - affect individuals in distinct ways. Several recurring topics stood out through their analysis, showing patterns in what researchers have prioritized. Looking ahead, one path involves blending stable personality traits with thinking styles and whole-person viewpoints to enrich future studies. Among the tools reviewed were standard self-

report questionnaires on perfectionism alongside newer, shorter forms, each contributing distinct insights into its layered nature. What stands out is how these varied methods help map different facets of a complex trait. Progress in theory and practice depends heavily on evolving how we measure it. Refining existing approaches while exploring alternative ones remains central to meaningful advancement.

In their 2023 work, Suzanne Cooke, Deborah C. Cooke, and Yvonne Hauck explored how group programs centered on parent–child bonds affect a mother's mental state, her sense of ability in raising a child, and her capacity to interpret infant emotions. To assess possible benefits, researchers observed changes in women who took part in organized group meetings focused on relational aspects. Rather than relying on controlled trials, an early-stage analysis method guided the approach, capturing outcomes among participants who engaged with the sessions. Before starting the program, participants filled out standard questionnaires - similar ones followed afterward. Improvements appeared in how mothers felt emotionally, along with greater belief in their parenting skills. Following the sessions, parents also demonstrated a stronger capacity to reflect on their child's inner world. When connections between parent and infant are emphasized, benefits tend to emerge in emotional wellness. Strengthening the ability to understand unspoken thoughts during early care moments seems linked to these kinds of group approaches.

METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

The methodology section explains the logical approach that was taken to undertake the current research. It gives an elaborate description of the research procedures that were used to collect, analyse, and interpret the data to answer the research objectives. A well-developed methodology makes the study more scientific and opens the opportunity to evaluate its validity and reliability. This section presents the research design, population and sample, sampling technique, data collection tools, data collection procedure, and methods used to conduct data analysis using statistics. This chapter provides sufficient transparency and replicability to the research findings by outlining a methodological framework.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The study aims to find the relationship between perfectionism and reflective functioning.

AIM

To study the relationship between perfectionism and reflective functioning among college students aged 18–25 years.

OBJECTIVE

1. To assess the level of perfectionism exists among college students.
2. Aiming to measure how deeply university learners think about their own mental processes.
3. To study the link between perfectionism and reflective functioning.
4. To measure certain background traits, influence perfectionist tendencies in university learners.

HYPOTHESES

H₁: There is a significant relationship between perfectionism and reflective functioning among college students.

H₀: There is no a significant relationship between perfectionism and reflective functioning among college students.

VARIABLES

1. Independent Variable: Perfectionism
2. Dependent Variable: Reflective Functioning

RESEARCH DESIGN

A quantitative correlational research design is used in this study to examine how perfectionism and reflective functioning are connected among college students. This design allows the researcher to study both variables as they naturally exist in students' daily academic and personal life, without making any changes or controlling any conditions. Through this correlational approach, the study aims to identify the strength and direction of the relationship between perfectionism and reflective functioning.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

Among those included, three hundred college learners come from various institutions. Selected using purposive sampling technique, each person fits particular requirements tied to the work. Ranging from eighteen to twenty-five, everyone takes part while actively studying at a university. To explore how perfectionist traits link with reflective thinking in youth immersed in school life this group serves that aim. One way into the topic is through how tightly students hold themselves to flawless outcomes, watching that shape their inner dialogue. Because high personal standards come up repeatedly, they often blur where effort ends, and self-worth begins. When mistakes appear, some pause to ask why others rush straight into judgment. A closer look shows those who reflect tend to handle pressure differently than those caught in rigid routines. Not every response gets weighed equally; emotional reactions sometimes lead before thought does. Patterns form quietly: over time, certain thinking habits deepen while others fade without notice.

Tools used

Perfectionism Scale Perfectionism Scale (Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale - FMPS) : Multidimensional Scale.

Reflective Functioning Questionnaire (RFQ)

Perfectionism Scale (Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale - FMPS)

In 1990, researchers Frost, Marten, Lahart, and Rosenblate came up with a tool by the name Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale. Rather than examining a single characteristic, it explores several dimensions related to perfectionist cognition. Designed around self-assessment, people respond to 35 different statements using numbers between one and five. Each number reflects agreement level starting at strongly disagree, ending at strongly agree. Across these items, focus spreads across six areas such as internal benchmarks, emotional weight when errors happen, uncertainty after decisions, what parents were thought to expect, perceived judgment from caregivers, and habits linked to order. Although built long ago, its structure still supports exploration of how high demands shape daily functioning. Together, these areas form a full picture of someone's tendency toward perfectionism. When results are higher, they point to intense personal demands, deep worry about errors, strict objectives, one being affected by others' opinions. More moderate outcomes suggest looser, practical expectations. Evidence supports consistency and accuracy of the FMPS internal reliability often falls from 0.80 to 0.90 among subgroups. Since it measures what it means, this tool is often used by scholars in their work with learners, particularly concerning stress during schooling, mood reactions, behavioral reactions related to overworking.

Reflective Functioning Questionnaire (RFQ)

The Reflective Functioning Questionnaire (RFQ) began with eight items, and was developed in 2016 by Fonagy and Luyten, and Moulton-Perkins et al. It is a short, but it is also tapping on the process of mentalization, the way people perceive thoughts, feelings, and intentions in themselves and other people. The statements are rated out of 1 to 7 as one indicates Strongly Disagree and seven Strongly Agree. It does not involve complicated formats; it makes use of simple self-assessment. One part, labeled RFQ-C, captures how sure someone feels about inner experiences. In contrast, RFQ-U measures hesitation or doubt in reading minds. Together, these parts reveal patterns like clarity or distortion in emotional insight. While not long, its questions point toward deeper ways of relating. Balance or lack of it in understanding motives shows up clearly through responses. Uncertainty runs higher when emotions feel unclear or hard to make sense of, while mid-level certainty often points toward balanced self-reflection. Seeing things too definitively might actually signal a narrowed view of inner experience. Across multiple trials, the RFQ holds up well - internal consistency sits between 0.70 and 0.80 on Cronbach's scale. Because it tracks steady patterns, researchers lean on it when exploring how young adults navigate emotion, manage stress, relate to others, or adapt mentally. Even though mild, its effect is evident in the behavioral literature.

INCLUSION CRITERIA

1. Learners enrolled in a college or university.
2. Students aged between the range of ages that have been selected to be used in the study (18 - 25).

EXCLUSION CRITERIA

1. Students that are not currently attending a college or university.
2. Learners under the age of 18 years and over 25 years.
3. Students that are away on long leave or not attending classes frequently.

Statistical Analysis:

Analysis began once data collection concluded, handled through IBM SPSS Statistics version 26.0. To outline participant backgrounds, along with Perfectionism and Reflective Functioning levels, measures like mean and standard deviation, counts, and proportions came into play. Instead of complex modeling, straightforward summaries shaped the initial insights. Each variable received attention through basic statistical tools to ensure clarity. Processing followed a linear path, starting from raw responses toward structured overview. Examining how the factors connect required using Pearson's correlation method. Through this approach, insight emerged about any meaningful link tying perfectionism to reflective thinking in university learners. Where one factor rose or fell, patterns appeared alongside shifts in the other. The information that was identified by the data went very well with what the study intended to investigate.

Procedure

The research was conducted to determine the relationship between perfectionism and reflective functioning among young adults attending college, that is, young individuals between 18 and 25. Before gathering responses, approval came through official channels responsible for oversight. Participants learned about the study's intent; their privacy stayed protected throughout, identities remained hidden, also they could leave whenever desired. Three hundred students took part, recruited by asking initial respondents to refer others they knew. Once agreement was given, each person learned what the research

involved and why it was being done. Following that, they shared personal information including age, gender, their field of study, current year at university, along with details about their family history. Using a standard Perfectionism Scale, researchers gathered information on perfectionist tendencies; at the same time, the Reflective Functioning Questionnaire measured how people think about mental states. Each participant filled out forms one by one, following straightforward directions presented beforehand. Honesty in answers was emphasized throughout, while enough minutes allowed thoughtful replies without rushing. Once finished, scorers applied official guidelines to tally results accurately. Analysis followed, relying on Pearson’s correlation method to explore links between perfectionism and reflective capacity - as originally intended by the research plan.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This chapter shows findings and the discussion of the statistical analysis that has been done to investigate the association between perfectionism and reflective functioning among college students. In order to understand the distribution of the variables, the descriptive statistics were applied, and the Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to investigate the correlation between perfectionism and reflective functioning.

TABLE 1 Descriptive Statistics showing the Mean and Standard Deviation of Perfectionism and Reflective Functioning.

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	N
Perfectionism	92.84	18.421	300
Reflective Functioning	32.41	7.135	300

Note. This is a note about the table

From a group of 300, perfectionism averages around 92.84 yet values scatter widely, with variation exceeding 18.4. That gap means some embrace rigid standards much more than others. Not everyone follows the same path when it comes to high personal demands.

A score of about 32.41 marks the typical level of Reflective Functioning, yet outcomes shift from one student to another. Spread within the group reaches 7.135, revealing uneven development in how people see themselves. While many hover around the center, a few move further out shaped by sharper or weaker insight into their own thoughts.

TABLE 2 Correlation between Perfectionism and Reflective Functioning

Variables	Pearson Correlation (r)	Significance (p)	Decision
Perfectionism and Reflective Functioning	.563	< .001	Reject H ₀

Note. This is a note about the table

Further examination of the young adults in higher education examines the relationship between perfectionist characteristics and the capacity to contemplate mental states. Three hundred individuals supplied information used in the examination. Findings showed a noticeable connection favoring higher reflection skills alongside stronger perfectionism (r = .563, p < .001). Rather than working against each

other, these qualities appeared to rise together across the group. Put differently, those students who show higher levels of perfectionism might spend more time examining their own thoughts and feelings. It's improbable that the observed link happened randomly, given the numbers involved. As a result, the idea that perfectionism and reflection connect weakly doesn't hold up here. What emerged points instead of a real tie between striving for flawlessness and thinking deeply about inner experience in this group of undergraduates.

DISCUSSION

This research investigated how perfectionism connects with reflective functioning in young adults at university, specifically those between eighteen and twenty-five. Findings describing the sample showed participants had neither low nor high perfectionism, sitting around the middle range, while their ability to reflect mental states was close to typical averages. Facing tough school demands along with personal goals might shape how intensely these students pursue flawlessness or notice feelings. When examining patterns across scores, a noticeable link appeared perfectionism tied to stronger reflection skills with a correlation value of $r = .563$, significant below the one percent threshold. Higher numbers in striving for precision could mean more frequent thinking about one's thoughts, not less. The tendency to concentrate on personal performance is likely to make people more aware of the inner world thoughts, emotions, impulses. Nevertheless, perfectionism has two faces one positive, and another negative. When it serves growth, it fuels goals and insight; when distorted, it feeds harsh judgment and strain. So, caution matters in reading these results one form isn't guaranteed benefit. In the mix of data, a link stands out between how students reflect and how they chase flawlessness. Strengthening reflection might ease rigid standards, opening space for steadier mental health.

SUMMARY

This research investigated how perfectionism connects with reflective functioning in young adults at colleges, specifically those between 18 to 25. High personal standards and a drive for errorless results define perfectionism, whereas understanding thoughts and emotions both self and others is what makes up reflective functioning. A numerical method was used to explore links across these traits, drawing on three hundred participants chosen deliberately based on specific criteria. Measurement tools included the Frost scale for perfectionist tendencies and a questionnaire assessing reflection on internal experiences. Processing responses occurred through statistical software known as IBM SPSS. To outline the data, measures like average and spread appeared useful. At 92.84, perfectionism sat alongside a variation of 18.421. Reflective functioning showed an average of 32.41; its fluctuation measured at 7.135. A link emerged clearly when scores moved together correlation stood at $.563$, with certainty marked by $p < .001$. As one rose, so did the other; stronger perfectionist traits linked to deeper reflection. Because evidence opposed no connection, that idea lost support. What was assumed absent turned out present the tie held weight.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded based on the research findings that perfectionism is closely related to reflective functioning in the case of university students. The people with more perfectionist characteristics tend to demonstrate the acuity or sharpness of their thought, emotions and behavior scrutiny in themselves. This pattern suggests such individuals engage regularly in reviewing themselves perhaps leading to deeper

insight into inner experiences. Ways people make sense of rigid standards may depend heavily on how well they reflect on their minds' workings. Nevertheless, the association of the two characteristics does not necessarily imply positive consequences. Although there are positive types of seeking perfection, which lead to development and learning, in many cases, overindulgent or unhealthy ones cause tension, anxiety, and emotional stress. A moderate perception of success is of importance to mental health. Looking closely, the study shows perfectionism ties into how people reflect on thoughts and feelings. Because of this link, student awareness of emotions may shift in noticeable ways. Academic choices often follow these inner patterns, shaping growth over time. When reflection becomes clearer, actions tend to align more steadily. Professionals who guide learners might use this insight carefully. Instead of pushing flawless results, attention turns toward thoughtful processing. Small shifts in approach can reduce pressure linked to high personal standards. Understanding this balance opens space for healthier habits. Outcomes improve when effort focuses less on error-free performance. Emotional maturity grows where self-examination feels safe. So, supporting mindful evaluation benefits both learning and identity.

LIMITATION

Even though this study adds value, certain limits exist. Starting here: answers came through surveys people filled out themselves this might skew how honest replies really are. Some individuals possibly shared what sounded good instead of what felt true, muddying real feelings or actions. Next up, only two mental aspects got attention: striving for flawlessness and thinking about thoughts. Missing were others like handling pressure, ways to manage tough moments, awareness of emotions, character features, or help from others nearby. Another layer the group studied stayed small, focused just on university learners between eighteen and twenty-five. Findings may not mirror older or younger folks, nor different backgrounds. One last thing: information captured a single moment rather than tracking shifts across weeks or months. Seeing cause-effect links becomes hard when snapshots replace long-term views. Later efforts could shift course pulling wider crowds, broadening inner factors considered, watching patterns unfold slowly over stretches of time.

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