

Correlation between Dimensions of Perfectionism and Defense Mechanisms with Narcissism in Students of Islamic Azad University-Tonekabon Branch

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Abstract

The current research has been conducted with the aim of determining the correlation between aspects of perfectionism and defense mechanisms with narcissism in university students. The current research method is correlative. The population includes all of the university students of Islamic Azad University-Tonekabon Branch in academic year 2012 - 2013 and among them 223 individuals were chosen by cluster random sampling as samples. NPI-16, Hall (1979), dimensions of Hewitt and Felt perfectionism (1991) and defense style questionnaire (DSQ-40) Andrews et al, (1993) were used for data collection. Data were analyzed through the use of Pearson correlation coefficient and multivariate regression in two arranged series simultaneously by the use of SPSS software. Results showed that a positive and significant correlation exists between dimensions of perfectionism (self-oriented, other-oriented, community-oriented) and defense mechanisms (immature and neurotic) with narcissism in university students and a negative significant correlation exists between the defense mechanism (mature) and the narcissism in university students. Also in these two set of series 18% of variance related to narcissism was explained.

Keywords: Perfectionism, Defense Mechanisms, and Narcissism.

Introduction

Perfectionism is one of the personality structures which play an important role in individuals' adaptation. The researches and theorizing about perfectionism had growing trend during the last two decades. Right now perfectionism is considered as a multi-dimensional structure, and these dimensions could be very different from each other in terms of correlation and results (Flett et al., 2009). Perfectionism is beneficial for the future as long as it happens in relation to itself and for activating activities for all of its capacities and skills. When the tendency toward perfection happens for competing and surpassing others and it only happens because of achieving their approval and satisfaction then it has a negative aspect and in other words it is malformed (Verdi, 1999). Thus it seems that the cognitive style of perfectionists especially their cognitive assessment practices play an important role in their psychological reactions followed by their performances (Toppinen-Tanner et al, 2005). Hewitt & Flett (1991) stated that perfectionism has three dimensions, these dimensions are: 1- self-oriented perfectionism (Establishing high and unrealistic criteria for oneself. 2- other-oriented perfectionism (Having high and unrealistic expectations from others). 3- community-oriented perfectionism (Having this belief that others expect one to be complete and he/she has to meet their expectations). Additionally if the perfectionism emerges negatively, it reduces the

person's ability to realistically accept the personal limitations and positivism through intensification of inflexible idealistic criteria and enhancing the unrealistic expectations and it also enhances the use of neurotic and immature defense mechanisms (Besharat et al., 2011). Immature defense mechanisms refer to frustrations and conflicts that every human being learns from childhood in their family or community. During failures and frustrations defense mechanisms try to defend "me" in order to help "me" to unconsciously preserve its survival (Cramer, Jones & Constance, 2007). In other words it could be said that "me" is the main core of personality and any type of humiliation about its value or efficiency is a threat to the main core of the individual's essence so for this reason different defense mechanisms are formed in order to preserve "me" from humiliation and dissolution and help it to grow and be stable as far as possible, and when the person's value and personal integrity are under threat it is called for taking an action in order to create a compromise between intentions and contradict conflicts, and alleviate the struggles and internal tensions. Based on the analysis approach in confronting with stress individuals use specific defensive styles, and based on the amount of maturity these styles are divided into three groups of immature (undeveloped), neurotic (narcissist) and mature (developed) (Juni et al., 2009).

Blackman (2004) believes that a lasting correlation exists between the personality traits and also in the clinical range between the personality disorders with some types of defense mechanisms. Blackman stated the neurotic defense mechanism. Perry and Perry (2004) also stated a direct correlation between the narcissism personality disorder with immature and neurotic defense mechanisms (Quoted by Dadsetan, Alibakhshi & Pakdaman, 2008). One of the features of neurotic defense styles is narcissism; a factor which researchers always consider related to ineffective and unethical behaviors of individuals. Narcissism is a wide range of personality traits including exaggerated sense of self-admiration, tendency toward praising themselves. Although narcissists have an exaggerated image of themselves, they have a very vulnerable self-concept and most of the time they are not familiar with themselves. This disorder appears less than other personality disorders and the risk of this disorder is approximately less than 1%. Some studies show that this disorder happens mostly in young men. Vulnerability in self-esteem makes the person very vulnerable toward criticism or failure. Although a possibility exists that one does not reveal this issue obviously, criticizing that person results in irritation, humiliation, and sense of emptiness in that person. These types of people react to insult and anger with mutual invasion and impudence which most of the times such experiences lead to social isolation and/or humiliation (Tatari, 2011).

Conducted researches in the field of narcissism personality trait are based on the correlation of this disorder with defense mechanism and dimensions of perfectionism. In a research Dadsetan and et al (2008) concluded that the correlation between vulnerable narcissism and immature and neurotic defense mechanisms is positive and significant and the correlation between high-minded narcissism and neurotic mechanisms is negative and significant. Also Fathi and colleagues (2012) in a research showed that community-oriented perfectionism entered for predicting the morbid, physical and depression symptoms and community-oriented and self-oriented perfectionisms entered for predicting anxiety and disorder in social functioning, and community-oriented and other-oriented perfectionisms entered for predicting self-esteem. Study results of Raskin & Terry (1988), Donovan (1992) showed that a positive and significant correlation exists between the other-oriented perfectionism and the narcissists personality pattern (Mahmoudi, 2005).

Since an almost wide range of community consists of university students and they are considered as an important and influential group of people thus paying attention to the physical and mental health of this group is very important. The personality traits of university students should be studied and in order to enhance the performance of this group in improving their traits (increase and enhancement of positive traits and decrease of negative traits) adequate actions should be taken at

the right time. In order to achieve these goals the current research tries to answer the below mentioned questions:

- 1- To what extent does the variable of dimensions of perfectionism predict the amount of narcissism among university students?
- 2- To what extent does the variable of dimensions of perfectionism predict the narcissism with defense mechanism styles?

Methodology

Since the current research aim is determining the correlation between the dimensions of perfectionism and defense mechanisms with narcissism in university students therefore the methodology of research was correlative. The research population includes all of the university students of Islamic Azad University of Tonekabon in academic year 2012-2013 consisting of 223 students chosen by cluster random sampling. In order to collect data 10 classes in Islamic Azad University of Tonekabon were randomly chosen and after distributing questionnaires among the students, dimensions of Hewitt perfectionism questionnaire, defense style questionnaire (DSQ-40), and NPI-16 were explained to them. Totally 240 questionnaires were collected, 17 questionnaires were impaired or due to personal reasons they were unanswered, and they were eliminated from the sample list. Ultimately the data of 223 individuals were analyzed as the final samples. The research tools are: authority, entitlement

NPI-16: Narcissistic Personality Inventory, NPI-16 is a short self-evaluating tool for evaluating the narcissism traits for the non-clinical groups and it consists of pair items and the respondent should choose one of them. The test scoring method is based on 0 and 1. 0 is the item related to narcissism and 1 is the item related to lack of narcissism. Total scores show the narcissism or lack of narcissism in individuals. Firstly NPI-16 had 54 items and it was edited by Raskin and Hall in (1979). 4 components were reported for it: Authority/leadership, superiority/arrogance, self-absorption/self-admiration, and entitlement. Later Raskin & Terry(1998) analyzed the main components and reduces the NPI-16 items to 40 items and it consisted of 7 components and then later Alms, Rosee & Anderson (2006) validated the 16-item version of NPI-16. This questionnaire does not have any sub-scales and it evaluates the narcissism based on the one-dimension approach. The retest reliability coefficient was reported by test constructors and it was 0.85 and the questionnaire has a high validity with the original version. Also the validity of this questionnaire in Iran was evaluated by Mohammadzadeh (2009), and the simultaneous validity has been reported as 0.77 and the validity coefficient was 0.84.

Hewitt-Flett questionnaire of dimensions of perfectionism: The multi-dimensional scale of perfectionism is used for measuring perfectionism. The examinees' dimensions of perfectionism in this research were determined by the use of Iranian form of multi-dimensional scale of perfectionism by Hewitt and Flett (1991). This scale is a 30-question test and it measures three dimensions of perfectionism (self-oriented, other-oriented and community-oriented). In each of the three sub-scales of test the examinee's perfectionism traits are measured in a 5-point Likert scale from score 1 to 5. The minimum and maximum score of examinees in each sub-scale is respectively 10 and 50. The mentioned questionnaire validity coefficient has been calculated through the use of Chronbach's alpha. In a research Verdi, Mehrabizadeh and Najjarian (1999) calculated the reliability coefficients of mentioned scale by the use of retesting with 5 week intervals in a 70-individual sample and they also calculated the Cronbach's coefficient for the 30-individual sample and the coefficients respectively achieved were 0.63 and 0.85 and they were at a desirable level. In order to measure the internal matching Najjarian and et al (2001) used the perfectionism scale of Chronbach's alpha coefficient. According to the achieved results, the alpha coefficient for the whole

sample was 0.90, for female examinees 0.90 and for male examinees 0.80. Also the reliability coefficient resulted from retesting with 4 week intervals on 190 female and male university students were 0.68, 0.96, and 0.67 and they are at an acceptable level.

DSQ-40: The foundation of constructing this questionnaire is based on the hierarchical model of defenses and the 40-question version was provided by Andrews and et al in (1993) and it measures 20 defense mechanisms in 3 levels of mature, neurotic and immature. Articles of the questionnaire are ranked in a 9-point scale from completely disagree to completely agree and each examinee should states his/her agreement with one of the phrases or defense styles. Both of the sentences in this questionnaire measure one defense mechanism, and the total score of defense mechanisms of each style is considered as the score of that style. The immature defense style includes mechanisms of rationalization, projection, denial, repression, devaluation, transition to action, somatization, autistic fantasy, projective identification, passive aggression, displacement, and dissociation. The mature defense mechanism includes mechanisms of suppression, superiority, humor, and anticipation. The neurotic defense style includes mechanisms of altruism, idealization, and undoing. The validity coefficient of mentioned questionnaire was calculated through Chronbach's alpha method. Chronbach's alpha in Iranian form of scale in the academic sample is respectively 0.75, 0.73, and 0.74. The retesting coefficient in 4 week intervals for all of the examinees was calculated and it was 0.82. The validity of this questionnaire was provided by Besharat (2001) in Iran. The results of alpha coefficient for this questionnaire in Iran were calculated and it was 0.81.

Results

According to the research aim (studying the correlation between dimensions of perfectionism and defense mechanisms with narcissism in university students) the Pearson correlation coefficient and multivariate regression analysis were used for data analysis. The results of this analysis are provided in the below table.

Table 1: Matrix of correlation coefficient of variables of narcissism and predictor variables

Variables	Self-oriented perfectionism	Perfectionism Other-oriented	Perfectionism Community-oriented	Mature defense mechanisms	Neurotic defense mechanism	Immature defense mechanism
Narcissism	**0.224	**0.191	**0.279	**0.244	**0.207	*0.137
Predictor variables						
Self-oriented perfectionism	-					
Other-oriented perfectionism	**0.521	-				
Community-oriented perfectionism	**0.408	**0.514	-			
Mature defense mechanisms	-0.102	-0.072	-0.100	-		
Neurotic defense mechanism	**0.180	0.106	0.102	**0.210	-	
Immature defense mechanism	**0.242	**0.315	**0.276	0.080	**0.237	-

*P<0.05 , **P<0.01

Table data show that a positive and significant correlation exists between the predictor variables of self-oriented perfectionism, other-oriented perfectionism, community-oriented perfectionism and neurotic defense mechanism with narcissism and the significance is at level 0.01, and a negative and significant correlation exists between the mature defense mechanisms and narcissism. Thus the multivariate regression model of two arranged series with simultaneous method and partial correlation was used in order to determine the best predictor of narcissism among university students from the predictor variables and answering to these two questions:

1- To what extent does the variable of dimensions of perfectionism predict the amount of narcissism among university students?

2- To what extent does the variable of dimensions of perfectionism predict the narcissism with defense mechanism styles?

And the achieved results are provided in tables 2 to 4.

Table 2: Summary Analysis of Step-by-Step Regression Analysis of the predictors and criterion

Variable	Model	Predictor variable	Multiple correlation coefficient	Squared multiple correlation coefficient	Adjusted squared multiple correlation coefficient	F	Significance level
Narcissism	1	Self-oriented perfectionism Other-oriented perfectionism Community-oriented perfectionism	0.304	0.092	0.092	7.425	0.000
	2	Dimensions of perfectionism and defense mechanism styles	0.430	0.185	0.093	8.208	0.000

Based on the above mentioned findings it could be concluded that dimensions of perfectionism significantly affect the narcissism, ($R^2 = 0.092$, $F = (3,219) = 7.425$, $P = 0.000$). These data show that people whose scores of dimensions of perfectionism are higher have higher narcissism.

The second analysis is that the amounts of defense mechanisms predicted the narcissism beyond the dimensions of perfectionism. It shows that the defense mechanisms have predicted a significant ratio of narcissism variance after the perfectionism ($R^2 = 0.093$, $F = (3,216) = 8.208$, $P = 0.000$). These results indicate that the variable of defense mechanisms predicts narcissism.

Thus it could be concluded that the independent variable of defense mechanism has the power to predict the variable. Thus the regression equation could be extended to the whole population.

Also the independent variables of dimensions of perfectionism have the ability to predict the variable. Thus the regression equation could be extended to the whole population.

The achieved results for determining the regression analysis coefficients and determining the power for significant prediction for independent variables and regulating the regression equation are provided in table 3.

Table 3: Coefficients of standard and non-standard regression analysis for predicting narcissism

Variable	Model	Statistical index Predictor variable	Non-standardized coefficients	Standard error	Standardized coefficient	t	Significance level
	1	Fixed No.	6.059	1.083	-	5.597	0.000
		Self-oriented perfectionism	0.053	0.032	0.129	1.673	0.096
		Other-oriented perfectionism	0.004	0.034	0.010	0.122	0.903
Narcissism		Community-oriented perfectionism	0.089	0.031	0.221	2.892	0.004
	2	Fixed No.	7.682	1.413	-	5.437	0.000
		Self-oriented perfectionism	0.029	0.031	0.069	0.926	0.355
		Other-oriented perfectionism	0.001	0.033	0.003	0.039	0.969
		Community-oriented perfectionism	0.076	0.030	0.190	2.570	0.011
		Mature defense mechanism	-0.070	0.017	-0.268	4.192	0.000
		Neurotic defense mechanism	0.072	0.021	0.222	3.401	0.001
		Immature defense mechanism	0.004	0.008	0.036	0.539	0.591

According to the above mentioned results and significance of F in variance analysis table 3 and t in the above mentioned table, the regression equation for the final model is as followed:

(Community-oriented perfectionism) -0.070 (mature defense mechanism) +0.072 (neurotic defense mechanism)

$$\text{Narcissism prediction} = 7.682 + 0.076$$

According to the slope amount, the less the amount of mature defense mechanism the more amount it will predict for the narcissism, and the more the amount of neurotic defense mechanism and community-oriented perfectionism the more amount it will predict for narcissism. The indices provided in table 4 show the relative strengths of each predictor.

Table 4: Bivariate and partial correlations of predictors with narcissism

Variable	Bivariate correlations	Partial correlations
Self-oriented perfectionism	**0.224	0.063
Other-oriented perfectionism	**0.191	0.003
Community-oriented perfectionism	**0.279	*0.172
Mature defense mechanism	** -0.244	** -0.274
Neurotic defense mechanism	**0.207	**0.225
Immature defense mechanism	*0.137	0.037

*P<0.01 **P<0.05

As it was observable the bivariate, multiple, and partial correlations are significant between the amounts of dimensions of perfectionism and defense mechanisms with narcissism in university students ($P<0.01$), and the partial correlations in community-oriented perfectionism and mature defense mechanisms and neurotic defense mechanisms at level 0.01 are significant. Based on this correlation analysis it could be concluded that the predictor of dimensions of perfectionism alone predicts 9%, and the defense mechanisms also predict 9% (R^2) of the changes of narcissism in university students ($R^2 = 0.185$).

Discussion and Conclusion

According to the achieved results it has been determined that a positive and significant correlation exists between all of the dimensions of perfectionism and immature defense mechanism and neurotic defense mechanism with narcissism, and a negative significant correlation exists between the mature defense mechanism with narcissism. In other words the higher the dimensions of perfectionism and immature defense mechanisms and neurotic defense mechanisms the higher the narcissism will be, and the higher the mature defense mechanism the less the narcissism will be.

The previous research results in the field of studying the three dimensions of perfectionism also confirmed the correlation of this structure with personality and behavioral traits and psychological problems (Hewitt and Flett, 1991). Self-oriented perfectionism is related to positive features of efforts and competitions for progress and self-actualization (Blatt, 1995; Frost and et al, 1990; Hill & Zrull, 1997; Flett and et al, 1991) in one hand and negative features of narcissism, self-criticism, guilt, depression and neuroticism (Alden and et al, 1994; Hewitt & Flett, 1991; Hill & Zrull, 1997; Flett and et al, 1991) on the other hand.

The other-oriented perfectionism has a correlation with negative features such as other-criticism, authority, dominance, showy personality features, narcissism and anti-social (Hewitt & Flett, 1991; Hill & Zrull, 1997).

In a research Aghayari (2012) also studied the dimensions of perfectionism, obsession and depression and narcissism in university students. Results showed that perfectionism (self-oriented, other-oriented and community-oriented) has a positive and significant correlation with narcissism. Also in the research by Mahmoudi (2005) the results showed that a direct significant correlation exists between the dimension of other-oriented perfectionism and personality models of narcissism. But no significant correlation exists between the dimension of community-oriented perfectionism and obsessive-compulsive personality pattern.

Perfectionists believe that the environment and also themselves have to be perfect and any type of efforts in life should be flawless and without any mistakes. Burns (1980) for describing such idealists state that: They are individual who have set irrational and high criteria for themselves, and they are obsessively trying to reach impossible goals and they evaluate themselves by the degree of

achieving those criteria. The Brenz's definition in fact completes the Ellis' irrational beliefs and thoughts. Generally for defining the perfectionism the emphasis is on the negative aspects and fear of failure (Salanva, Schaufeli, Martinez, et al., 2010).

Self-oriented perfectionists usually predict the lack of acceptance and rejection from others and they are afraid of them. With this fear they create a defensive position toward the criticisms of others and through this they make others to take distances from them. A self-oriented perfectionist without being aware of this issue in his/her unrealistic criteria has expectations from others and as a result he/she becomes demanding and critical. Ultimately it is probable that self-oriented perfectionists do not let others to see their mistakes. Such people usually want to not let others see their mistakes and they love to be praised all the time. Such feelings in these people are so strong that sometimes leads them to create some troubles and even self-structured crisis to set the scene for self-assembly and proving their values. On the other hand, narcissism is a term for describing those who pay too much attention to themselves, and some of the features of narcissists are egotism, pride, and being self-center, dreaming and having unreal goals and following idealism.

Several studies support this idea that other-oriented perfectionism has the interpersonal aspects which could form some problems for interactions and having relationships with others, it is obvious that different dimensions of perfectionism in this field act in different forms. Other-oriented perfectionism is continuously related to behaviors which have a kind of hostility and dominance. Other-oriented perfectionists have tendency toward dictatorship, dominance and rule, exploitation and possibly blaming others. Thus in accordance with conceptualization of other-oriented perfectionism as a concern with others, other-oriented perfectionists are involved in behaviors that are strongly related to others, which means that the aim of idealistic criteria are only others not the person. On the other hand, DSM-IV criteria for the narcissism personality disorder has similar cases such as: A) Sense of hauteur caused by having a sense of being important and enlarging progresses and talents, B) Preoccupation with imaginations about unlimited opportunities, being powerful, beauty, idealistic love, being unique which is the infrastructure for hostility and dominating others, C) Having irrational expectations from others and a sense of possessing them. D) Continuity on interpersonal relationships and taking scores from them for reaching one's goals which are some of the other features of narcissist personality disorder, which is obviously accompanied by others blaming them. As a result, overlapping between the traits related to other-oriented perfectionism and some of the features of narcissism largely justify the existence of a significant correlation between these two components.

Community-oriented perfectionism significantly has a correlation with tendency toward controlling, need to a considerable amount of ordering and narcissism. These people are afraid of others' negative evaluations, and they seek for others' approval. The community-oriented perfectionism is related to need for having others' approval, fear of negative evaluation, external locus of control, high generalization, failure, self-criticism, self-blaming and blaming others, psychological incompatibility, and narcissist personality traits, and passive aggression and depression and anxiety. Due to the existence of this vicious circle, the community-oriented perfectionists usually have problem in having close relationships with others, as a result they have less satisfaction from their interpersonal relationships. Typically they need continuing need of attention, approval and admiration from others, they always seek for persistent fantasies about achieving success and power, and lack of empathy toward others, thus a positive and significant correlation exists between these two variables.

Results also showed that a negative and significant correlation exists between the mature defense mechanisms and narcissism. In other words, the higher the immature and neurotic defense mechanisms the higher the narcissism will be and the higher the mature defense mechanism the less

the narcissism will be. The achieved results are consistent with the researches of Dadsetan and et al (2008). Dadsetan and et al (2008) studied the defense mechanism styles in different types of narcissism. Results showed that a positive and significant correlation exists between the vulnerable narcissism and immature defense mechanisms and neurotic defense mechanism, and a negative and significant correlation exists between the hauteur narcissism with neurotic mechanisms.

Mature defense mechanisms let us have flexibility toward different situations and they include acceptable behaviors even for confronting with limitations. They are considered as normal and efficient adaptive confronting methods. Mature defense mechanisms have very little distortion about reality and they emphasize on the humorous aspects of a conflict or stressful situation and they confront with difficulties by direct express of feelings and thoughts to others, they avoid from thoughts that are related to painful issues, since narcissists always try to escape from stressful situations and they considerably distort the realities and in relationships with others they have no positive and continuous relationship and they expect to receive any kind of services

People having medium narcissism use the neurotic method including mechanisms of false altruism, idealizing, reaction formation, inattention to feelings and reactions of others, rejection and dominance. In other words, the narcissists avoid from dependency to others in order to not mention their needs in interpersonal relationships, because they see it as a weakness. People at higher levels of narcissism exaggerate in using neurotic defense mechanisms, and they have more limited social relationships, and also more shame and frustration. Based on the role of maladaptive perfectionism on the signs of narcissism it is suggested to the mental health professionals to perform cognitive interferences in order to decrease the maladaptive perfectionism in youth in order to prevent the destructive patterns such as narcissism from progressing in youth. It is recommended to provide training programs at the universities in order to help individuals to use mature defense mechanisms.

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