Understanding Perfectionism

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Perfectionism is a widely known personality characteristic, but it is not always understood. It can motivate and promote growth, or it can stifle and promote low self-worth with consuming negative thoughts and behaviors. Toxic perfectionism occurs when individuals demand perfection and become highly critical of themselves or others, turning normal mistakes into shame and self-hatred or hatred of others.[1] It often includes an all-or-nothing mindset—viewing a performance as either a total success or a total failure—with no in-between.[2] And even success is fleeting for toxic perfectionists because they find flaws in their apparently perfect performances or in the performances of others.[3]

Understanding perfectionism is important because it can influence the lives of individuals in profound ways. If it is not managed well, toxic perfectionism can lead to poor physical health, anxiety, depression, and other psychological disorders.[4] In this article, we review essential

1. Sungok Serena Shim and Kathryn L. Fletcher, "Perfectionism and Social Goals: What Do Perfectionists Want to Achieve in Social Situations?," *Personality and Individual Differences* 52, no. 8 (2012): 919, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2012.02.002.

2. Gordon L. Flett, Paul L. Hewitt, Kirk R. Blankstein, and Donna Pickering, "Perfectionism in Relation to Attributions for Success or Failure," *Current Psychology: A Journal for Diverse Perspectives on Diverse Psychological Issues* 17, nos. 2–3 (1998): 249, https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-998-1010-y.

3. Paul L. Hewitt, Gordon L. Flett, and Samuel F. Mikail, *Perfectionism: A Relational Approach to Conceptualization, Assessment, and Treatment* (Guilford Press, 2017), 18–22.

4. Martin M. Smith, Paul L. Hewitt, Simon B. Sherry, Gordon L. Flett, and Cassondra Ray, "Parenting Behaviors and Trait Perfectionism: A Meta-Analytic Test of the Social Expectations and Social Learning Models," *Journal of Research in Personality* 96 (February

aspects of perfectionism and provide an overview of the scientific study of perfectionism—its definitions, sources, and consequences.

Healthy Perfectionism

Many people associate perfectionism with highly negative outcomes; however, not all types of perfectionism are bad. Healthy perfectionism is when an individual sets high goals and strives for rewards, yet they are flexible and understanding if they do not reach all their set expectations.[5] These individuals have the skill to be satisfied with their progress and work toward their goals.[6] If they fall short of their goals, they can constructively evaluate their performance so that they will be able to perform better the next time they try something. Healthy perfectionism is linked to a desire to be responsible, hardworking, and thorough.[7] For example, a track athlete with healthy perfectionism may set challenging but realistic times they would like to hit. However, if they do not hit those times, they do not beat themselves up but analyze how they could do better in the next race and move on without obsessing over their failures. Thus, healthy perfectionism can be helpful as someone strives to achieve their goals because they can push themselves but continue to progress when setbacks occur.

Toxic Perfectionism

Thomas S. Greenspon distinguishes between the pursuit of excellence (healthy perfectionism) and toxic perfectionism. In his words, "The bright line that distinguishes perfectionism from striving for excellence is precisely [the] fear of mistakes. Nonperfectionists who push themselves to succeed may well be disappointed and hurt by failure; perfectionistic people are potentially devastated by it. . . . Striving for excellence is vitalizing and energizing, and it opens the possibility of continued growth. Perfectionism, by contrast, is deadening, bringing with it feelings of hopelessness and personal failure."[8]

2022): 1, article 104180, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2021.104180; see also Fuschia M. Sirois and Danielle S. Molar, *Perfectionism, Health, and Well-Being* (Springer, 2016).

5. Murray W. Enns, Brian J. Cox, and Ian Clara, "Adaptive and Maladaptive Perfectionism: Developmental Origins and Association with Depression Proneness," *Personality and Individual Differences* 33, no. 6 (2002): 922, https://doi.org/10.1016/S0191-8869(01)00202-1.

6. Enns and others, "Adaptive and Maladaptive Perfectionism," 922.

7. Enns and others, "Adaptive and Maladaptive Perfectionism," 1034–42.

8. Thomas S. Greenspon, "Is There an Antidote to Perfectionism?," *Psychology in the Schools* 51, no. 9 (2014): 988, https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.21797.

Three Types of Toxic Perfectionism

Scholars often examine three types of toxic perfectionism—self-oriented, other-oriented, or socially prescribed perfectionism.[9]

Discrepancy Perfectionism

Self-oriented perfectionism (also called *discrepancy perfectionism*) is when an individual demands perfection of themselves with irrationally high goals and aspirations. The individual then focuses on the inevitable discrepancy between their goal and their actual performance.[10] For example, they might set a standard to get one hundred percent on every exam because they know that they are capable of achieving that score. Then the toxic perfectionist will shame themselves for not achieving that goal and tie their personal worth to it. They would consider themselves "unlovable" if they did not get one hundred percent. Instead of looking at all the questions they got correct, they would focus only on the questions they got wrong.

A person with discrepancy perfectionism frequently struggles through difficult lose-lose scenarios. When they don't meet their standard, they say: "I'm not good enough." This leads to counterproductive behavior and self-criticism. However, if they manage to meet their personal standard (temporarily), they say: "My goals weren't high enough." They assume their standards were not demanding enough and, therefore, increase their standard![11] The target is ever moving (often referred to in common language as "moving the goalposts"), and the person is trapped in negative emotions and behaviors.

The Almost Perfect Scale–Revised (used in the Foundations data referenced in this issue) measures discrepancy perfectionism by asking individuals how much they agree or disagree with the following statements:

- "Doing my best never seems to be enough."
- "I often feel disappointment after completing a task because I know I could have done better."

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9. Smith and others, "Parenting Behaviors and Trait Perfectionism," 1–2.

10. Smith and others, "Parenting Behaviors and Trait Perfectionism," 2; Joachim Stoeber and Patrick Gaudreau, "The Advantages of Partialling Perfectionistic Strivings and Perfectionistic Concerns: Critical Issues and Recommendations," *Personality and Individual Differences* 104 (2017): 379, http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2016.08.039.

11. Roz Shafran, Sarah Egan, and Tracey Wade, *Overcoming Perfectionism: A Self-Help Guide Using Cognitive Behavioral Techniques* (Robinson, 2010), https://www.google.com/books/edition/Overcoming_Perfectionism/Q6SeBAAAQBAJ.

- "My performance rarely measures up to my standards."
- "I am hardly ever satisfied with my performance."[12]

Discrepancy perfectionism is associated with shame. One researcher explained the feelings of the discrepancy perfectionist: "We are not good enough for ourselves because we don't fit with our own image of perfection. We cannot forgive ourselves for not being what we wish to be, or rather what we believe we should be. We cannot forgive ourselves for not being perfect."[13]

Not being able to forgive oneself for the perceived discrepancy between the real and the person's ideal has a significant impact on one's sense of worth. Researchers have noted that unhealthy perfectionists "seem to suffer from a misperception of their worthiness, rather than lacking confidence in their academic performance. . . . This suggests that when working with toxic perfectionist students, counselors should differentiate between self-esteem (worth) and self-efficacy (ability), and focus attention on the former."[14] Discrepancy perfectionism is therefore not so much a question of having high standards, or even of being able to meet one's standards; it's about how a person feels about themselves when they don't meet the standards.

Other-Oriented Perfectionism

Those with other-oriented perfectionism demand those around them to strive for perfection or to be perfect.[15] For example, an individual may refuse to marry their significant other because of a minor character flaw. Other-oriented perfectionists often have difficulties building close relationships with people because they are always demanding perfection from others. An example could include an overly controlling boss or parent who demands perfection of their employees or children. Again, it is not necessarily about having high standards for others; it is about destroying relationships when the person does not meet their standards of perfection. This other-oriented perfectionist behavior discourages

12. Robert B. Slaney, Kenneth G. Rice, Michael Mobley, Joseph Trippi, and Jeffrey S. Ashby, "The Revised Almost Perfect Scale," *Measurement and Evaluation in Counseling and Development* 34, no. 3 (2001): 139, table 1.

13. Don Miguel Ruiz, *The Four Agreements: A Practical Guide to Personal Freedom* (Amber-Allen Publishing, 2011), 30.

14. Slaney and others, "Revised Almost Perfect Scale," 130–45.

15. Smith and others, "Parenting Behaviors and Trait Perfectionism," 2.

people around them from trying anything new. Statements that correspond to other-oriented perfectionism include the following:

- "If I do not set very high standards for people I know, they are likely to end up second-rate people."
- "I think less of people I know if they make mistakes."
- "If someone I know cannot do something really well, they shouldn't do it at all."[16]

Socially Prescribed Perfectionism

Lastly, socially prescribed perfectionism is when individuals believe they must be perfect for someone else.[17] For example, a child may believe that if they do not win their sporting event, their parents will not love or approve of them. These individuals have major concerns that making mistakes will lead to being viewed negatively by others.[18] They are overly critical of themselves when evaluating performance and needlessly seek validation from others.[19] Socially prescribed perfectionism is measured in the Performance Perfectionism Scale[20] by asking people to respond to how much they agree or disagree with statements such as the following:

- "People always expect more, no matter how well I perform."
- "People always expect my performances to be perfect."
- "People view even my best performances negatively."
- "People criticize me if I do not perform perfectly."[21]

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16. Joachin Stoeber, "How Other-Oriented Perfectionism Differs from Self-Oriented and Socially Prescribed Perfectionism," *Journal of Psychopathology and Behavioral Assessment* 36, no. 2 (2014): 336, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10862-013-9397-7.

17. Smith and others, "Parenting Behaviors and Trait Perfectionism," 2.

18. Stoeber and Gaudreau, "The Advantages of Partialling Perfectionistic Strivings and Perfectionistic Concerns," 379.

19. Jana C. Gäde, Karin Schermelleh-Engel, and Andreas G. Klein, "Disentangling the Common Variance of Perfectionistic Strivings and Perfectionistic Concerns: A Bifactor Model of Perfectionism," *Frontiers in Psychology* 8 (2017): 2, 160, https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.00160.

20. Edward C. Chang, "Conceptualization and Measurement of Adaptive and Maladaptive Aspects of Performance Perfectionism: Relations to Personality, Psychological Functioning, and Academic Achievement," *Cognitive Therapy and Research* 30 (2006): 677–97, https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1007/s10608-006-9060-7.

21. Andrew P. Hill, Paul R. Appleton, and Sarah H. Mallinson, "Development and Initial Validation of the Performance Perfectionism Scale for Sport (PPS-S)," *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment* 34, no. 7 (2016): 659, table 1.

Social interactions weigh heavily on someone with socially prescribed perfectionism. They may tease others at their own expense and often adopt a "self-deprecating style of humor." They likely have low self-esteem, which "makes sense if you're living in a world where your every move is being analyzed and you constantly feel like you can't measure up."[22] Since "social situations carry huge interpersonal weight," socially prescribed perfectionists are people pleasers who deal with a great deal of discouragement.[23]

Illustration of Toxic Perfectionism

Unhealthy perfectionism presents differently for different people. Research suggests that perfectionistic people are likely to have perfectionistic behaviors in some, but not all, areas of their lives.[24] Some areas of perfectionistic behavior include physical appearance, relationships, work, school, health, time management, sports, and academics. The two most common areas where toxic perfectionism occurs are work and academics.[25] Some people may be grounded and flexible in most areas of life but struggle in one specific area, like one client who struggled with academic discrepancy perfectionism. He was a newlywed university student in his early twenties.

> My experience with academic perfectionism established an inflexible and toxic standard of perfection. Learning from my mistakes was not enough. Rather, I had to never make a mistake in the first place. I would obsess about every assignment, project, and exam to ensure I would lose as little points as possible. I became so obsessed with academic perfection that I believed anything less than 100 percent was a personal and moral failure. When I missed even a single point on an assignment, my entire day was ruined. I would spend all day obsessing about that point and what I did wrong. My negative thoughts would bully me. For example: "I should have known the correct answer on

22. Stress & Resilience Institute, "5 Styles of Perfectionism," accessed September 17, 2024, https://stressandresilience.com/5-styles-of-perfectionism/.

23. Aliya Ojuade, "The Boundless Desire for Perfection: Exploring Socially Prescribed Perfectionism," *Medium,* March 1, 2023, https://aliyao.medium.com/the-boundless-desire-for-perfection-exploring-socially-prescribed-perfectionism-28aef86f4b12.

24. Joachim Stoeber and Franziska S. Stoeber, "Domains of Perfectionism: Prevalence and Relationships with Perfectionism, Gender, Age, and Satisfaction with Life," *Personality and Individual Differences* 46, no. 4 (2009): 530–35, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2008.12.006.

25. Stoeber and Stoeber, "Domains of Perfectionism," 532–33.

> that exam," "I should have studied that topic in more depth," or "How could I have been so lazy and not studied harder?" As I continued to ruminate, I would calculate how many points I could miss in the future and still earn an "A" in the class (without any curve); make a new study plan that put even more pressure on myself; and seek reassurance from my wife, parents, and friends.[26]

Others may struggle with more widespread perfectionistic concerns. To illustrate the insidious nature of toxic perfectionism in a person's life, here's an account from a single female in her early twenties attending medical school. Observe how the toxic discrepancy and socially prescribed perfectionism painfully and destructively attacked and infiltrated every aspect of her life.

> I hear a lot of people talk about perfectionism and how it's having high expectations and being self-critical, but I've realized my perfectionism actually takes over more than I thought it did. I procrastinate small tasks and filling out forms for as long as possible because I don't want to get confused or make mistakes on them that will cause problems. I can't answer questions in class because I can't bear to answer incorrectly. I don't like studying because it means I didn't just remember it or understand it the first time and I'm just being reminded of my own ignorance. I also don't like studying because if I put in a lot of work and don't get a 100 percent, it means I did something wrong or am not intelligent enough or don't work hard enough and it's ultimately more disappointing than not studying and getting an 87. It's better to say I didn't try than to say I failed—because imperfect performance is failure because it means either imperfect/insufficient effort (character) or imperfect/insufficient intelligence (ability). I can't choose the wrong study method or focus on the wrong material. I can't choose the wrong show to watch or food to eat. A wrong choice is always wasting time and I can't get it back and there would have been a correct way to spend it.
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> Everything I do says something about my character or abilities that can be analyzed and judged by myself and/or others. The words I say, the tone I use, the expressions I make, my posture, the habits I have, the clothes I wear, the movements I make, the way I breathe, the thoughts I have, the decisions I make, the foods I eat, my appearance and weight, the way I perform various tasks, my preferences . . . all are under constant scrutiny. I can't afford to make a small mistake. Not because a small mistake will kill me, but because it will torture me. I can't look too long

26. Client story used with permission.

> in the mirror or try to make my handwriting nice or attempt a craft or learn a new skill or play any sports or sing anymore because it will never be RIGHT.
>
> There's a dissonance between who I think I am/should be and the way I behave that drives me crazy.
>
> My entire identity is being smart and doing well in school. If I don't do the best and don't do well, I don't have anything else. I don't think I could (or would want to) live if it were proven that I'm not smart. I have to do the best and do perfectly on everything I decide to try because if I don't, I'm NOTHING. I'm less than other people, I'm dirt and absolute garbage. What's the point of me?[27]

We each seek to become the best versions of ourselves. Yet the type of toxic perfectionism illustrated here discourages and paralyzes the sufferer.

Consequences of Perfectionism

In the following sections, we discuss consequences and causes of perfectionism. We do so with the caveat that, in the social sciences, it is difficult (sometimes impossible) to establish a causal link between two things. As one of the blind peer reviewers for this volume put it, "It's not rocket science, it's far worse!" There are a multitude of factors that can be involved in these processes. However, what we present provides an outline of research on the potential consequences and causes of perfectionism.

Several notable mental health benefits are associated with healthy perfectionism, also called adaptive perfectionism. Individuals with healthy perfectionism appear to have better mental health compared to those without healthy perfectionism (either nonperfectionists or those with maladaptive perfectionism).[28] Healthy perfectionists are less likely to suppress their emotions and tend to have the skills to reframe the meaning of difficult situations in a way that helps them regulate negative emotions.[29] Although individuals with healthy perfectionism likely have concerns over making mistakes, they can use those concerns to help them achieve ambitious goals while maintaining low levels of

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27. Client story used with permission.

28. Sarah K. Nelsen, Alper Kayaalp, and Kyle J. Page, "Perfectionism, Substance Use, and Mental Health in College Students: A Longitudinal Analysis," *Journal of American College Health* 71, no. 1 (2023): 257–65, https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2021.1891076.

29. Kenneth G. Rice and Clarissa M. E. Richardson, "Classification Challenges in Perfectionism," *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 61, no. 4 (2014): 646, https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/cou0000040.

psychological distress.[30] Healthy perfectionism is not necessarily associated with higher levels of stress,[31] because adaptive perfectionists are more able to adapt to environment and relationship changes compared to maladaptive perfectionists and nonperfectionists. This means that often those with healthy perfectionism may be more confident in taking advantage of experiences and opportunities around them. In addition, "adaptive perfectionists also demonstrated clearer goals and firmer beliefs in meaning and directedness in their lives."[32]

On the other hand, toxic or maladaptive perfectionism is detrimental to one's well-being and mental health. Individuals with discrepancy and socially prescribed perfectionism set unrealistically high standards and are never satisfied with their performance.[33] They expect to reach their goals every time they perform and may become obsessed with this attainment to the detriment of their mental, physical, and emotional health. Thus, they never feel confident in their ability to achieve, and they commonly have feelings of inadequacy.[34] For example, an individual may set a goal to do one hundred push-ups in a week when they can do only twenty right now. Because this is an excessively high goal, the goal will probably not be met. The unhealthy perfectionist's reaction is not simply disappointment that they didn't meet their goal. They will be extremely critical and develop a belief that they are weak, not athletic, and not a worthwhile person. Another important thing to consider is that toxic perfectionism is more concerned with avoiding errors than trying to do things well. This can lead to constant feelings of fear and harsh personal criticism.

In contrast to healthy perfectionism, toxic perfectionism is almost always associated with higher levels of stress.[35] This could largely be due to the unrealistic expectations, worry, and shame associated with discrepancy and socially prescribed perfectionism. Furthermore, toxic

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30. Rice and Richardson, "Classification Challenges in Perfectionism," 646.

31. Edward C. Chang, Angela Watkins, and Kira Hudson Banks, "How Adaptive and Maladaptive Perfectionism Relate to Positive and Negative Psychological Functioning: Testing a Stress-Mediation Model in Black and White Female College Students," *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 51, no. 1 (2004): 93–102, https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.51.1.93.

32. Hyun-joo Park and Dae Yong Jeong, "Psychological Well-Being, Life Satisfaction, and Self-Esteem Among Adaptive Perfectionists, Maladaptive Perfectionists, and Nonperfectionists," *Personality and Individual Differences* 72 (2015): 168, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2014.08.031.

33. Enns and others, "Adaptive and Maladaptive Perfectionism," 922.

34. Enns and others, "Adaptive and Maladaptive Perfectionism," 922.

35. Chang and others, "How Adaptive and Maladaptive Perfectionism Relate," 97.

perfectionism is associated with feelings of depression and hopelessness,[36] low self-esteem,[37] and in some cases suicidality.[38] Because toxic perfectionists do not grant themselves grace when their objectives are not reached, they never feel that they measure up and have a constant fear of failing.[39] Compared to healthy perfectionists and nonperfectionists, toxic perfectionists have the lowest levels of life satisfaction.[40]

Allen and Wang's research delves into the negative effects of various factors such as toxic perfectionism and scrupulosity on the mental health of members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The study reveals that toxic perfectionism, characterized by excessively high standards and perpetual feelings of inadequacy, correlates with decreased satisfaction with life, heightened anxiety, and increased depression. This relentless pursuit of perfection and the fear of falling short contribute to feelings of inadequacy and psychological distress, as individuals constantly worry about not meeting their own or God's expectations.[41]

This compelling, uncomfortable anxiety reaction is what keeps many Latter-day Saints stuck in a destructive cycle of anxiety. For example, an individual shared how their perfectionism led to high anxiety and disconnected them from God: "I felt trapped with anxiety. I looked to find relief from the anxious feelings that surrounded my fears and doubts. . . . The anxiety mounted because even though I knew deep down inside I really should be okay and acceptable to God, I couldn't feel it because of the adrenaline that was flowing through my body. Because of this physiological process, I couldn't fully feel peace and was unable to relax and let the Spirit 'really' talk or whisper to me."[42]

While toxic perfectionism may motivate some to achieve, it may demotivate others. Although we often think of perfectionists as high achieving, some toxic perfectionists simply stop trying. For them, failure

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36. Enns and others, "Adaptive and Maladaptive Perfectionism," 921–35.

37. Park and Jeong, "Psychological Well-Being," 168.

38. Karlijn W. J. de Jonge-Heesen, Sanne P. A. Rasing, Ad A. Vermulst, Rutger C. M. E. Engels, and Daan H. M. Creemers, "How to Cope with Perfectionism? Perfectionism as a Risk Factor for Suicidality and the Role of Cognitive Coping in Adolescents," *Journal of Rational-Emotive & Cognitive Behavior Therapy* 39 (2021): 201–16, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10942-020-00368-x.

39. Rice and Richardson, "Classification Challenges in Perfectionism," 646.

40. Park and Jeong, "Psychological Well-Being," 168–69.

41. G. E. Kawika Allen and Kenneth T. Wang, "Examining Religious Commitment, Perfectionism, Scrupulosity, and Well-Being Among LDS Individuals," *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 6, no. 3 (2014): 257–64, https://doi.org/10.1037/a0035197.

42. Client story used with permission.

equates to worthlessness; therefore, the stakes for trying are far too high. If they avoid trying, they avoid failure. Thus, many toxic perfectionists simply avoid doing anything at which they might fail. Indeed, they may purposefully procrastinate or turn in school assignments late, giving an excuse (outside of their abilities) for why their performance wasn't perfect. As one clinician put it, "Some perfectionistic people are overwhelmed by doubt and indecision and find it difficult to bring any task to a conclusion. In some cases, this has led to a profoundly discouraged state of withdrawal and underachievement."[43]

Who Is at Risk for Toxic Perfectionism?

Women have higher levels of some types of perfectionism compared to men.[44] This is especially true when we consider socially prescribed perfectionism,[45] as more women feel that they do not measure up to the standards that they believe they are held to. This may be related to self-image and concern around physical appearance, which women are more likely than men to associate with their self-worth.[46]

Comparing Caucasian American, Asian American, and African American individuals, Asian Americans report the highest rates of perfectionism. Specifically, "Asian American students tend to be more wary of making mistakes and to harbor more self-doubt than Caucasian [and African American] students possibly in response to the high demands placed on them by their parents and increased criticism when those expectations are not fulfilled."[47] Furthermore, Asian Americans and African Americans report feeling higher levels of parental expectations compared to Caucasian Americans.[48] Again, a family's higher

43. Thomas S. Greenspon, "Is There an Antidote to Perfectionism?," 987.

44. M. D. Musumeci, C. M. Cunningham, and T. L. White, "Disgustingly Perfect: An Examination of Disgust, Perfectionism, and Gender," *Motivation and Emotion* 46 (2022): 337, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11031-022-09931-8.

45. Musumeci and others, "Disgustingly Perfect," 337.

46. Alba Moya-Garófano and Miguel Moya, "Focusing on One's Own Appearance Leads to Body Shame in Women but Not Men: The Mediating Role of Body Surveillance and Appearance-Contingent Self-Worth," *Body Image* 29 (2019): 62, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2019.02.008.

47. Jennifer R. Castro and Kenneth G. Rice, "Perfectionism and Ethnicity: Implications for Depressive Symptoms and Self-Reported Academic Achievement," *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology* 9, no. 1 (2003): 73, https://doi.org/10.1037/1099-9809.9.1.64; see also S. Sue and S. Okazaki, "Asian-American Educational Achievements: A Phenomenon in Search of an Explanation," *American Psychologist* 45, no. 8 (1990): 913–20.

48. See Castro and Rice, "Perfectionism and Ethnicity," 70, table 1.

expectations and negative or unsympathetic response to failure can be a factor that leads to toxic perfectionism.[49]

What Causes Perfectionism?

While all the causes of perfectionism are unknown, several factors can lead to perfectionistic tendencies, including high expectations from society, controlling parenting styles, and conditional parental love.[50]

Societal Expectations

Regarding the influence of society, trends in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom show that the rate of perfectionism has continuously increased between 1989 and 2017.[51] Generations today are much more likely to have perfectionism than generations were in the past. These increased rates seem to be on the rise because social and economic expectations are growing harder to maintain.[52] For example, societal pressures and expectations to succeed in employment and career, as well as the fear and anxiety around potential failure in one's life, can contribute to heightened distress. Furthermore, Americans tend to have higher rates of perfectionism compared to Canadians or British individuals. The highly individualistic culture that the United States embodies is suspected to be the reason for this, as it pushes individuals to be motivated by their opinions and strive for independence.[53] Individuals seeking more independence and further accomplishments may increase the likelihood that they will experience the negative effects of perfectionism, including pressures to compete in a very demanding

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49. Joey Fung, Grace Cai, and Kenneth Wang, "Personal and Family Perfectionism Among Asian and Latinx Youth," *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology* 29, no. 2 (2023): 235–36, https://doi.org/10.1037/cdp0000555.

50. Gordon L. Flett, Paul L. Hewitt, Joan M. Oliver, and Silvana Macdonald, "Perfectionism in Children and Their Parents: A Developmental Analysis," in *Perfectionism: Theory, Research, and Treatment,* eds. Gordon L. Flett and Paul L. Hewitt (American Psychological Association, 2002), 89–132, https://doi.org/10.1037/10458-004.

51. Thomas Curran and Andrew P. Hill, "Perfectionism Is Increasing over Time: A Meta-Analysis of Birth Cohort Differences from 1989 to 2016," *Psychological Bulletin* 145, no. 4 (2019): 419, https://doi.org/10.1037/bul0000138.

52. Thomas Curran and Andrew P. Hill, "Young People's Perceptions of Their Parents' Expectations and Criticism Are Increasing over Time: Implications for Perfectionism," *Psychological Bulletin* 148, nos. 1–2 (2022): 122–24, https://doi.org/10.1037/bul0000347.

53. Curran and Hill, "Perfectionism Is Increasing over Time," 412–13.

society or a desire to be the best at work, sports, and education. As Greenspon describes,

> We live in a perfectionistic culture. The individualistic, competitive side of us contributes to an environment in which second best—the Silver Medal—is considered to be a kind of failure. Tightened economic circumstances have intensified fears that we will lose out if we are not constantly pushing to do better. Our children should only go to the best schools, graduate from the best colleges, and get the best jobs and careers. We worry that failure to be the best, even at preschool age, spells doom for the future. Too often, the result of all of this is that people are valued for their achievements rather than for their character.[54]

Parental Influence

In conjunction with the influence of society, parenting is an important source of perfectionism. Individuals with healthy perfectionism are likely that way because their parents were not overly demanding in their children's accomplishments. Parents of children with healthy perfectionism are usually kind, caring, helpful, and inspiring to their children. They praise the child's efforts and the child's process and express love that is not conditioned on the child's performance. This could lead a child to believe that they are capable and have worth regardless of how they perform. Furthermore, they may feel more motivated to keep working toward goals because they believe that they can accomplish them.[55]

In her review article, Jane Adams suggests that a secure parent-child attachment (one in which the child knows the parents care for and support them) fosters healthy perfectionism, leading individuals to exhibit confidence, competence, and a willingness to take risks.[56] This secure-attachment style is associated with positive self-perceptions and balanced perspectives on strengths and weaknesses. Parents who use behavior-centered remorse (as opposed to shame, which can be

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54. Thomas S. Greenspon, "Is There an Antidote to Perfectionism?," 986.

55. See Ariel Ko, Paul L. Hewitt, Daniel Cox, Gordon L. Flett, and Chang Chen, "Adverse Parenting and Perfectionism: A Test of the Mediating Effects of Attachment Anxiety, Attachment Avoidance, and Perceived Defectiveness," *Personality and Individual Differences* 150 (2019): article 109474; Enns and others, "Adaptive and Maladaptive Perfectionism," 922, 932.

56. Nooshin Pishva and Mohammad Ali Besharat, "Relationship Attachment Styles with Positive and Negative Perfectionism," *Procedia: Social and Behavioral Sciences* 30 (2011): 402–6, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2011.10.079.

psychologically harmful to a person's overall view of themselves) can motivate children to apologize or make amends for their behavior without feeling inherently flawed, promoting healthier interpersonal relationships and reducing the burden of self-criticism.[57]

Moreover, parents who model the acceptance of imperfections—imperfections of themselves and others—is crucial for children developing healthy perfectionism, allowing them to set realistic goals, adjust expectations, and prioritize long-term well-being over immediate perfection.[58] In contrast, children with overly controlling parents may develop toxic perfectionism in response to the parents' particularly high expectations or criticisms, which can push them to have an acute need for approval, inadvertently leading to perfectionism.[59]

Another cause of perfectionism is conditional parental regard, which is when a parent extends love and approval when their child complies with expectations but does not express love when the child does not meet expectations.[60] This teaches children that their worth is contingent on their ability to live up to the expectations of others, which can cause socially prescribed perfectionism.[61] Some researchers propose "that perfection is a defensive response to feelings of inferiority or feelings of not mattering to other people."[62] They come to view achieving perfection as a defense against criticisms and thus a protection of their self-worth.

Children may develop toxic perfectionism because they were raised by parents who were extremely rigid with specific expectations and were not sensitive to their children when goals were not accomplished.[63] For example, if a child got a B on their exam, the parent may express disapproval and tell them that such a grade is not acceptable or that they are not smart. Furthermore, some parents overprotect or micromanage

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57. Milica Nikolic, Eddie Brummelman, Bram Orobio de Castro, Terrencee D. Jorgensen, and Christina Colonnesi, "Parental Socialization of Guilt and Shame in Early Childhood," *Scientific Reports* 13 (2023): article 11767.

58. Hewitt and others, *Perfectionism: A Relational Approach,* 96–117; Smith and others, "Parenting Behaviors and Trait Perfectionism," 13.

59. Curran and Hill, "Young People's Perceptions of Their Parents' Expectations and Criticism," 109.

60. Thomas Curran, Andrew P. Hill, and Luke J. Williams, "The Relationships Between Parental Conditional Regard and Adolescents' Self-Critical and Narcissistic Perfectionism," *Personality and Individual Differences* 109 (2017): 17–22, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2016.12.035.

61. Curran and others, "Adolescents' Self-Critical and Narcissistic Perfectionism," 18.

62. Hewitt and others, *Perfectionism: A Relational Approach,* 36.

63. Enns and others, "Adaptive and Maladaptive Perfectionism," 922.

all their children's actions.[64] This connection of helicopter parenting leading to toxic perfectionism in children can be described as a parent controlling with shame or love withdrawal, not respecting their child's privacy, or excessively monitoring all their children's activities. While parents may have good intentions to be involved in their children's lives, they need to grant appropriate autonomy to their children.

Alan E. Craddock and his colleagues conducted a study investigating the negative association of religious dysfunctional perfectionism (RDP) with family dynamics. The findings revealed significant associations between perceptions of RDP and high levels of family rigidity, enmeshment, and disengagement.[65] This suggests that individuals experiencing RDP often come from family environments characterized by strict rules, excessive involvement, and emotional detachment. Participants high in RDP tended to describe their family of origin as highly rigid and structured, fostering perceptions of God as primarily rule-enforcing and punishing rather than loving and gracious. Consequently, individuals may develop unhelpful self-evaluative criteria, feeling worthy only if they adhere perfectly to rules to earn God's love and avoid punishment. Counseling interventions could involve challenging these rigid beliefs and promoting a more balanced and less punitive understanding of God.

Another potential impact on the development of discrepancy and socially prescribed perfectionism is social learning. This is when children see these perfectionistic behaviors in their parents and develop similar patterns of thinking as they model what their parents do.[66]

Mark Ogletree's article in this issue goes into greater detail on the negative association between mental health and toxic perfectionism, but here we mention practicing mindfulness as a useful strategy. Mindfulness is characterized by a nonjudgmental awareness of present experiences and can reduce chronic worry and rumination associated with toxic perfectionism. Mindfulness and learning self-compassion serve as a protective factor against negative affect and distress, ultimately promoting mental well-being.[67]

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64. Enns and others, "Adaptive and Maladaptive Perfectionism," 923.

65. Alan E. Craddock, Wendy Church, Fleur Harrison, and Alexandra Sands, "Family of Origin Qualities as Predictors of Religious Dysfunctional Perfectionism," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 38, no. 3 (2010): 205–14, https://doi.org/10.1177/009164711003800305.

66. Smith and others, "Parenting Behaviors and Trait Perfectionism," 13.

67. Emmanuelle Awad, Souheil Hallit, and Sahar Obeid, "Does Self-Esteem Mediate the Association Between Perfectionism and Mindfulness Among Lebanese University

Perfectionism and Religion

The intersection of perfectionism and religion has garnered significant attention in contemporary research, revealing multifaceted dynamics that influence mental health outcomes. Studies such as those by Sarah L. Nachimson, and Jeffrey S. Ashby and Judy Huffman, and G. E. Kawika Allen and Kenneth T. Wang illuminate how healthy perfectionism connects with religious contexts, emphasizing how adaptive perfectionism may support the high moral standards advocated by religious groups and how both are related to enhanced life satisfaction and diminished depressive symptoms.[68] Among Jesse M. Crosby's undergraduate college student survey, adaptive perfectionism was related to *intrinsic religiosity,* which is defined as the religion itself being the motivating factor for one's religious practice. The high standards of a religion are the source of motivation for behavior. *Extrinsic religiosity* "involves utilizing religion to achieve other interests, such as solace, sociability, or security."[69] A person with higher extrinsic religiosity sees their religion "as a means to an end."[70] Another study further extends this exploration, unveiling intriguing insights regarding the impact of adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism on psychological adjustment within specific religious communities, such as the Latter-day Saint community.[71] Together,

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Students?," *BMC Psychology* 10 (2022): 256, https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-022-00964-9; see also Madeleine Ferrari, Keong Yap, Nicole Scott, Danielle A. Einstein, and Joseph Ciarrochi, "Self-Compassion Moderates the Perfectionism and Depression Link in Both Adolescence and Adulthood," *PLOS ONE* 13, no. 2 (2018): 1–19, article e0192022, https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0192022.

68. Sarah L. Nachimson, "Adaptive and Maladaptive Perfectionism in Jewish Adults: Associations with Religious Practice, Intrinsic Religiosity, and Subjective Well-Being" (PhD diss., Hofstra University, 2021), 1–108; Jeffrey S. Ashby and Judy Huffman, "Religious Orientation and Multidimensional Perfectionism: Relationships and Implications," *Counseling and Values* 43, no. 3 (1999): 178–88, https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-007X.1999.tb00141.x; Allen and Wang, "Examining Religious Commitment," 257–264.

69. Nachimson, "Adaptive and Maladaptive Perfectionism," 19; Jesse M. Crosby, Scott C. Bates, and Michael P. Twohig, "Examination of the Relationship Between Perfectionism and Religiosity as Mediated by Psychological Inflexibility," *Current Psychology* 30, no. 2 (2011): 117–29; see also Leslie J. Shapiro, *When Religion and Morals Become OCD: Understanding and Treating Scrupulosity* (Bloomsbury, 2023).

70. Crosby and others, "Examination of the Relationship," 186.

71. G. E. Kawika Allen, Kenneth T. Wang, and Hannah Stokes, "Examining Legalism, Scrupulosity, Family Perfectionism, and Psychological Adjustment Among LDS Individuals," *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 18, no. 4 (2015): 246–58, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13674676.2015.1021312; Kenneth T. Wang, G. E. Kawika

these studies provide a comprehensive understanding of the intersection of perfectionism and religiosity, shedding light on its implications for mental health and well-being.

In the study by Nachimson, the positive facets of adaptive perfectionism within an intrinsic religious belief are prominently evident.[72] This alignment with high moral standards advocated by religious groups reinforces individuals' sense of purpose and dedication to their spiritual beliefs.[73] Nachimson's findings resonate with prior research that showed the positive correlation between religious commitment and healthy perfectionism.[74] Specifically, heightened cognitive and behavioral religious commitment corresponds to adaptive perfectionism, leading to enhanced life satisfaction and diminished depressive symptoms.[75] Allen and Wang further suggest that the robust moral framework inherent in Latter-day Saint teachings may be associated with adaptive perfectionism, which may contribute to overall well-being among religious individuals.[76]

Ashby and Huffman explored the relationship between religious orientation and multidimensional perfectionism, uncovering significant implications. They found that holding high personal standards, a characteristic of perfectionism, was correlated with higher levels of self-esteem and self-efficacy. Their findings suggested that intrinsic religiosity may be associated with healthy aspects of adaptive perfectionism and protective against maladaptive perfectionism.[77] Alignment with intrinsic religious beliefs, as proposed by Allport, inundates one's life with motivation and meaning,[78] indicating that perfectionism within the context of intrinsic religiosity may serve as a significant source of motivation and purpose.

Allen, Hannah I. Stokes, and Han Na Suh, "Perceived Perfectionism from God Scale: Development and Initial Evidence," *Journal of Religion and Health* 57 (2018): 2207–23, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-017-0405-1.

72. Nachimson, "Adaptive and Maladaptive Perfectionism in Jewish Adults," 1–107.

73. Nachimson, "Adaptive and Maladaptive Perfectionism in Jewish Adults," 11, 21.

74. Allen and Wang, "Examining Religious Commitment," 257–64; Ashby and Huffman, "Religious Orientation and Multidimensional Perfectionism," 178–88.

75. Allen and Wang, "Examining Religious Commitment," 262; Ashby and Huffman, "Religious Orientation and Multidimensional Perfectionism," 186.

76. Allen and Wang, "Examining Religious Commitment," 261.

77. Ashby and Huffman, "Religious Orientation and Multidimensional Perfectionism," 186–87.

78. Gordon W. Allport, "The Religious Context of Prejudice," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 5, no. 3 (1966): 455, https://doi.org/10.2307/1384172.

Shapiro's study explores the strengths associated with perfectionism in individuals with OCD within the context of religion. Individuals with OCD may exhibit perfectionistic tendencies driven by the conflict between the impulsive id and the inflexible superego, particularly in matters related to religious beliefs and practices. This internal conflict serves as a driving force for obsessions and compulsions, reflecting a level of critical thinking deeply intertwined with religious ideals.[79] Shapiro's findings resonate with Allen and Wang's research, suggesting that individuals with OCD may scrutinize the intention behind actions, a behavior indicative of their perfectionistic inclinations, especially in matters of religious morality.[80]

Allen and Wang's study explores the positive effects on mental health within the Latter-day Saint community, revealing a positive association between intrinsic religious commitment and life satisfaction among Latter-day Saint individuals. Most of the sample, classified as adaptive perfectionists, demonstrated elevated levels of intrapersonal commitment (private religious life), interpersonal commitment (public religious behavior), self-esteem, and satisfaction with life, emphasizing the potential for healthy perfectionism to contribute to positive outcomes within the Latter-day Saint context.[81] These findings challenge the notion that perfectionism is inherently detrimental and instead highlight its potential to foster a faith-driven approach to life and well-being within the Latter-day Saint community.

Allen, Wang, and Stokes's study further investigates the positive facets of perfectionism within the Latter-day Saint community, yielding findings regarding its impact on psychological adjustment. The correlation between the pursuit of high standards and enhanced self-esteem and life satisfaction among Latter-day Saint individuals suggests that adherence to rigorous moral and behavioral standards serves as a source of personal fulfillment and contentment within the Latter-day Saint context. It is not religious commitment that correlates with distress and maladaptive perfectionism but rather "strong legalistic beliefs with the distorted focus on never being good enough."[82] Scrupulosity and shame could be avoided if therapists, parents, and church leaders

79. Shapiro, *When Religion and Morals Become OCD,* 1–9.
80. Allen and Wang, "Examining Religious Commitment," 258.
81. Allen and Wang, "Examining Religious Commitment," 258–62.
82. Allen and others, "Examining Legalism," 255.

teach a more accurate definition of grace—avoiding the idea that God's acceptance and approval must be earned with behavior. Legalism, or the idea that one must earn God's love, is strongly associated with scrupulosity.[83] Additionally, the research highlights the significant psychological relief experienced by Latter-day Saint individuals with scrupulosity when engaging in psychotherapy interventions, underscoring the potential for therapeutic interventions to alleviate the detrimental effects of scrupulosity.[84]

Expanding upon previous research, Wang and his colleagues introduced the Perceived Perfectionism from God Scale, shedding light on the likely negative effects observed among individuals who perceive that God is constantly displeased with their performance.[85] This study indicates a positive association between religious commitment and perceived standards from God, echoing earlier findings regarding the relationship between intrinsic religiosity and healthy perfectionism.[86] They also found an association between perceived discrepancy from God, or religiously prescribed perfectionism, and scrupulosity. The way an individual perceives the nature of their God significantly impacts a believer's mental health.[87] Moreover, Allen and his colleagues' investigation among Latter-day Saint individuals highlights the intricate dynamics between perfectionism, scrupulosity, intrinsic spirituality, and psychological well-being within the religious context. The role of intrinsic spirituality as a buffer against the detrimental effects of scrupulosity underscores the protective function of intrinsic spirituality in maintaining a healthy relationship with religious beliefs and practices.[88]

Muse's study provides further insights into mental health help-seeking attitudes and intentions among members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, highlighting a proactive approach to

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83. Allen and others, "Examining Legalism," 252–54.

84. Allen and others, "Examining Legalism," 248.

85. Wang and others, "Perceived Perfectionism from God Scale," 2221.

86. Wang and others, "Perceived Perfectionism from God Scale," 2219.

87. Wang and others, "Perceived Perfectionism from God Scale," 2220.

88. G. E. Kawika Allen, Abigail Norton, Sara Pulsipher, David Johnson, Benson Bunker, "I Worry That I Am Almost Perfect! Examining Relationships Among Perfectionism, Scrupulosity, Intrinsic Spirituality, and Psychological Well-Being Among Latter-Day Saints," *Spirituality in Clinical Practice* 10, no. 4 (2023): 316–25, https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2021-71838-001.

addressing mental health concerns within the religious community.[89] The significant role of clergy members in providing psychological support underscores the importance for religious leaders to learn how to address mental health concerns and provide support to members of the Latter-day Saint community.

Similarly, Corrigan's study among Christian clergy suggests that adaptive self-oriented perfectionism is associated with enhanced self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation, personal control, and resourcefulness, contributing to overall mental well-being.[90] Peer and McGraw's study among members of the Church of Jesus Christ further found some positive relationships between adaptive perfectionism and mental health, such as compassion, nonjudgmental attitudes, and positive perceptions of parental reactions to their adherence to religious commandments.[91] Steffen's study on perfectionism and life satisfaction in religious individuals highlights the positive relationship between intrinsic religiosity and increased life satisfaction, further emphasizing the potential psychological benefits associated with intrinsic religious beliefs.[92]

In their comprehensive review of the literature on religion, mental health, and Latter-day Saints, Dyer and his colleagues highlighted several positive relationships between intrinsic religious commitment and adaptive perfectionism with mental well-being among Church members.[93] Latter-day Saints with adaptive perfectionism had lower levels of depression and anxiety. In contrast, poorer mental health among Latter-day Saints was related to scrupulosity, legalism, abandonment by God, and maladaptive perfectionism. Additionally, adaptive perfectionism is

89. Paula Park Patten Muse, "Factors Influencing Mental Health Help-Seeking Attitudes and Intentions in Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints" (PhD diss., Palo Alto University, 2020), 88–94.

90. Caroline Waters Corrigan, "The Relationships Among Perfectionism, God Image, Religious Coping Style, and Vocational Burnout in Christian Clergy: An Empirical Investigation" (PhD diss., Wright Institute, 1998), 222, 227.

91. Samuel O. Peer and James S. McGraw, "Mixed-Method Study of Perfectionism and Religiosity Among Mormons: Implications for Cultural Competence and Clinical Practice," *Issues in Religion and Psychotherapy* 38, no. 1 (2017): 75–100, https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/irp/vol38/iss1/12/.

92. Patrick R. Steffen, "Perfectionism and Life Aspirations in Intrinsically and Extrinsically Religious Individuals," *Journal of Religion and Health* 53 (2014): 945–58, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-013-9692-3.

93. William Justin Dyer, Daniel K. Judd, Megan Gale, and Hunter Gibson Finlinson, "Religion, Mental Health, and the Latter-Day Saints: A Review of Literature 2005–2022," *Religions* 14, no. 6 (2023): 1–21, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14060701.

associated with "greater intrinsic religiosity, experiencing God's grace, and less legalism."[94]

Negative aspects of perfectionism within religious contexts have been extensively studied, as evidenced by research such as that conducted by Nachimson and discussed by Craddock and his colleagues.[95] Toxic perfectionism within religious spheres can manifest as dysfunctional tendencies, which inhibit the positive expression of religious beliefs and practices. Crosby and his colleagues further elaborate on this, noting that maladaptive perfectionism among religious individuals correlates with psychological inflexibility, "a rigid and inflexible style of responding" to thoughts and emotions. It is a variable that can link maladaptive perfectionism to detrimental psychological outcomes, such as poor health, anxiety, depression, and more.[96] Moreover, Steffen's findings suggest that adaptive perfectionism mediates negative outcomes associated with extrinsic religiosity, with intrinsic religiosity positively linked to life satisfaction and extrinsic religiosity negatively linked to life satisfaction, particularly when mediated through maladaptive perfectionism.[97] These studies underscore the importance of addressing the negative effects of perfectionism within religious realms to promote mental health and well-being.

Notably, Christian religions, characterized by their emphasis on high standards and expectations, suggest a potential connection between perfectionism and religiosity. These findings underscore the need for comprehensive assessments of perfectionism and religiosity to understand their nuanced affects on mental health within religious communities.

Allen, Wang, and Stokes provide insights into the possible negative effects of various factors—including legalism, scrupulosity, and family perfectionism—on the mental health of Latter-day Saints. The study suggests that excessive scrupulous fear of sinful activity and punishment from God indicates strong legalistic belief and promotes the desire to earn God's favor, resulting in heightened feelings of guilt and shame for

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94. Dyer and others, "Religion, Mental Health, and the Latter-Day Saints," 12.

95. Craddock and others, "Family of Origin Qualities as Predictors of Religious Dysfunctional Perfectionism," 205–14; Nachimson, "Adaptive and Maladaptive Perfectionism in Jewish Adults," 1–107.

96. Jesse M. Crosby, Scott C. Bates, and Michael P. Twohig, "Examination of the Relationship Between Perfectionism and Religiosity as Mediated by Psychological Inflexibility," *Current Psychology* 30 (2011): 120, https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-011-9104-3.

97. Steffen, "Perfectionism and Life Aspirations," 947, 956–57.

every mistake.[98] With a strong, distorted belief in God's punishment, individuals can become obsessed with pleasing God and "overly fearful of making mistakes."[99]

Additionally, the research reveals that family maladaptive perfectionism intensifies the connection between scrupulosity and shame, suggesting that environments characterized by high levels of toxic family perfectionism exacerbate feelings of shame associated with scrupulosity. Moreover, the study emphasizes that strong legalistic beliefs, particularly those focused on never being good enough for the family, are correlated with distress; this finding highlights how this distorted view of God—rather than religious commitment itself—contributes to negative emotional outcomes and potential psychological difficulties.

Gender differences were also observed, with men exhibiting "higher levels of scrupulosity and guilt compared to women," potentially indicating that Latter-day Saint men fear God and God's punishment for offensive behaviors, which could negatively affect their religious commitment.

Additionally, toxic perfectionism and scrupulosity are identified as predictors of heightened fear and anxiety. The mediation analyses further suggest that these fearful tendencies negatively impact psychological functioning and life satisfaction among Latter-day Saint individuals, leading to a fear-driven pattern of living characterized by excessive worry and self-criticism. Ultimately, this fear-driven approach detracts from a faith-based approach to religiosity and diminishes overall well-being and satisfaction with life.[100] These findings underscore the importance of addressing toxic perfectionism and scrupulosity within religious contexts to promote mental health and well-being among Latter-day Saint individuals.

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98. Although *guilt* and *shame* are often used synonymously, they are typically treated as distinct in research. Shame is typically defined as feelings of self-hatred, self-loathing, and worthlessness. Guilt is typically defined as a recognition that what a person did was wrong, often accompanied by feelings of remorse. While shame is conceptualized as negative, guilt (without shame) is often conceptualized as a healthy recognition for wrongdoing.

99. Allen and others, "Examining Legalism," 254.

100. Allen and Wang, "Examining Religious Commitment," 258–62; Jonathan S. Abramowitz, Jonathan D. Huppert, Adam B. Cohen, David F. Rolin, and Shawn P. Cahill, "Religious Obsessions and Compulsion in a Non-Clinical Sample: The Penn Inventory of Scrupulosity (PIOS)," *Behavior Research and Therapy* 40, no. 7 (2002): 825–38, especially table 1 on page 830.

A study of Latter-day Saints by Allen and colleagues explored how toxic perfectionism and scrupulosity were negatively related to psychological well-being and religious dynamics. Toxic perfectionism was found to be positively associated with scrupulosity and anxiety about God, indicating that individuals experiencing scrupulosity are more likely to exhibit anxious attachment to God, leading to avoidance behaviors. Moreover, individuals with toxic perfectionism or scrupulosity may experience detrimental effects to their overall religiosity, spirituality, and well-being. Their religious obsessions or compulsions can impair their relationship with God and their self-esteem.[101] These findings have implications for Church administrators, suggesting the importance of assisting members struggling with scrupulosity and toxic perfectionism.

Conclusion

Much has been discussed in this article regarding perfectionism, mental health, and religiosity. However, there remains a lack of knowledge and research regarding these aspects. This article hopefully illustrates the importance of this topic and stimulates additional interest of other educators, scholars, and researchers to continue moving this research forward. Based on the work of so many outlined in this article, several practical implications when working with individuals and families who struggle with unhealthy perfectionism should be considered. First, parents and professionals should help perfectionists differentiate between the tendency to have high standards and the tendency to never feel satisfied with one's performance.[102] Utilizing psychological flexibility in response to high standards rather than lowering the standards may be a better option for decreasing the impact of perfectionism.[103] A person who espouses psychological flexibility and is adaptive to their difficulties is striving to be faithful and still recognizes that they can be susceptible to disappointments and discouragements. Holding space for both is key

101. Allen and others, "I Worry That I Am Almost Perfect!," 317, 320–22.

102. Allen and others, "Examining Legalism," 255; Allen and Wang, "Examining Religious Commitment," 262.

103. Allen and Wang, "Examining Religious Commitment, Perfectionism, Scrupulosity, and Well-Being," 258; Crosby and others, "Examination of the Relationship," 125–26.

to well-being and growth.[104] In addition, assisting these individuals to possess a more accurate perspective of the nature of God and their relationship with him could allay the effects of toxic perfectionism.[105]

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104. Allen and others, "Psychological Adjustment Among LDS Individuals," 255; Allen and Wang, "Examining Religious Commitment, Perfectionism, Scrupulosity, and Well-Being," 262.

105. Allen and others, "Examining Legalism," 255.