PERFECTIONISM AND RELIGIOUS WELL-BEING: EXPLORING THE MEDIATING

EFFECTS OF SENSE OF BELONGING AMONG CHRISTIAN COLLEGE STUDENTS

by

Charity L. Frazier

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

Perfectionism has predominately been linked to lower relational and religious well-being among young adults. Perfectionists who report more positive relationships with others, however, tend to experience better outcomes such as life satisfaction, lower self-criticism, and greater religious well-being. The perfectionism social disconnection model (PSDM) provides a framework for understanding how relational factors, such as a sense of belonging, may contribute to divergent outcomes among perfectionists. The purpose of this study was to explore (1) whether adaptive and maladaptive aspects of perfectionism have opposite effects on belonging and religious well-being, and (2) whether perfectionists who feel they belong experience greater religious well-being. A cross-sectional survey was used to explore perfectionism, belonging, and religious well-being among religious college students ($N = 137$). Data was analyzed using Pearson correlations and regression analysis using Hayes's (2022) PROCESS macro. The results indicated that high personal standards made a small but significant contribution to higher belonging among students. Regression analysis also indicated that high personal standards did not affect religious well-being directly. Conversely, maladaptive perfectionism contributed to lower religious well-being independently and by lowering students' sense of belonging. The results suggest that both adaptive and maladaptive aspects of perfectionism play a role in students' religious well-being by influencing belonging in opposite directions. Maladaptive perfectionism also lowers religious well-being above and beyond the effects of belonging. The overall model accounted for a moderately small amount of variance, suggesting that while perfectionism and belonging are significant predictors of religious well-being, they should be considered in combination with other factors in future research.

Keywords: perfectionism, religious well-being, sense of belonging

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Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

List of Abbreviations

Brief Multidimensional Measure of Religiousness/Spirituality (BMMRS)

Perfectionism social disconnection model (PSDM)

Personal Resource Questionnaire-2000 (PRQ-2000)

Religious and spiritual well-being (RSW)

Relational spirituality (RS)

Almost Perfect Scale–Revised (APS-R)

Spiritual Assessment Inventory (SAI)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Perfectionism, a multidimensional personality trait linked to diverse outcomes, is becoming more prevalent among young adults in Western countries (Curran & Hill, 2019; Gnilka et al., 2013). Perfectionism is the tendency to hold oneself to excessively high standards while being highly self-critical (Hewitt & Flett, 1991). The extensive literature on perfectionism shows that perfectionists experience a variety of adverse outcomes, including decreased life satisfaction, low self-esteem, suicidal ideation, and higher rates of mortality (Dunkley et al., 2012; Fry & Debats, 2009; Gaudreau et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2018). Moreover, individuals who are religious experience a distinct form of perfectionism that interferes with their religious well-being. Perfectionists who are religious report higher rates of scrupulosity (fear of sinful activities; Allen et al., 2021), religious and spiritual struggles (Wang et al., 2021), anxiety about their relationship with God (Allen et al., 2021), and shame related to a sense of failure to meet perceived expectations from God and others (Allen et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2018). However, perfectionism is a multifaceted trait. Although much of the research on perfectionism has focused on adverse outcomes, some research indicates that in the absence of self-criticism, high personal standards lead to more adaptive outcomes. High personal standards have been associated with positive affect, greater life satisfaction, increased religious commitment, and intrinsic religious orientations (Crosby et al., 2011; Steffen, 2014; Suh et al., 2017). While several studies have examined the multidimensional nature of perfectionism, further studies are needed to clarify why perfectionism leads to divergent outcomes among those who are religious.

Even though some perfectionists report positive outcomes, perfectionism generally contributes to decreased well-being in several areas (Stoeber & Otto, 2006). Researchers have especially focused on how perfectionism affects relational well-being. Perfectionists report lower

satisfaction with intimate relationships (Gingras et al., 2020), a tendency to use conflictual styles

of coping in relationships (Haring et al., 2003), and anxious styles of attachment (Chen et al.,

2015; Han et al., 2022; Rice & Mirzadeh, 2000). Insecure attachment styles may be especially

problematic for perfectionists due to the deleterious effects of anxious and avoidant behaviors on

relationship quality. According to Li and Chan's (2012) meta-analysis of attachment and close

relationships, anxiety and avoidance are associated with greater conflict between partners, less

support for one's partner (e.g., care, forgiveness, and social support) and lower acceptance and

cooperation between partners.

Relational problems among perfectionists may relate to a low sense of belonging.

According to Hewitt, Flett, and Mikail's (2017) perfectionism social disconnection model

(PSDM), early attachment difficulties leave perfectionists vulnerable to low self-worth and a low

sense of belonging. Essentially, perfectionists feel fundamentally flawed and believe that others

see them as inadequate. Perfectionists subsequently strive to be perfect to feel valued and to

belong. According to the PSDM, even as perfectionists strive for belonging, they view others as

unreliable in their ability to meet that need. For example, perfectionists expect that others will be

highly critical of them (Sherry et al., 2013), so they adopt self-protective behaviors that leave

them further alienated from others. For example, Slaney and colleagues (2006) observed a

tendency toward hostile, dominant, and submissive interpersonal behaviors among perfectionists.

Hewitt, Flett, and Mikail (2017) further explained how behaviors like these develop in response

to unmet needs—cold and aloof behaviors represent a defensive posture, while submissiveness

arises from attempts to avoid abandonment. These behaviors further increase social isolation and

a low sense of belonging among perfectionists. A low sense of belonging may explain several of

the common emotional problems among perfectionists, such as higher rates of depression

(Besser et al., 2020) and anxiety (Neumeister, 2004), as well as higher mortality (Fry & Debats, 2009).

Since perfectionists struggle to feel they belong with others, they may find it challenging to engage in relational aspects of their religious faith. Among monotheistic faiths such as Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, relational themes are prevalent in theology and religious practices (E. B. Davis et al., 2021; Simpson et al., 2008). Recently, relational spirituality (RS) theory has emerged to describe the embeddedness of these themes within religious and spiritual traditions (Tomlinson et al., 2016). In general, RS theory describes how spirituality develops in family and community contexts and involves relational connections with others and with the transcendent.

Hall's (2004) theory of RS further explains that religious well-being is shaped by attachment-based working models of relationships (Hall, 2004). According to Hall (2004), implicit relational models affect how people approach their faith, including how likely they are to participate in religious activities, their approach to religious community, and whether they experience a positive relationship with God. Research on view of God and attachment to a religious community supports this theory, indicating that people with negative relational models are likely to experience lower religious well-being due to seeing God and others in their religious group as unreliable sources of support (Freeze, 2017; Moriarty et al., 2006). Since perfectionists experience increased distress and social isolation, low religious well-being may keep them from accessing an important source of meaning and coping with stress (C. L. Park & Edmondson, 2012). Based on the PSDM and RS theory, this study explores whether maladaptive perfectionism decreases religious well-being and if a sense of belonging contributes to improved religious well-being.

Background of the Study

Perfectionism

Perfectionism research has focused on outcomes associated with perfectionism, including whether its overall effect is adaptive or maladaptive. Maladaptive perfectionism is associated with adverse physical, emotional, and achievement problems (Crocker et al., 2014; Dahlenburg et al., 2019; Hewitt, 2020; Smith et al., 2018). Conversely, some aspects of perfectionism contribute to more adaptive effects, such as life and academic satisfaction and an increased sense of meaning in life (Gaudreau et al., 2017; Gnilka et al., 2013; Suh et al., 2017). Research has focused on the various ways perfectionism affects well-being and factors that contribute to these divergent outcomes.

Maladaptive perfectionism involves holding oneself to high performance standards and judging oneself intensely when failing to achieve perfection (Hewitt & Flett, 1991). A sense of not measuring up to one's personal standards is associated with increased emotional and performance problems, even among high achievers (Houltberg et al., 2017; Mor et al., 1995). Studies have identified low performance self-efficacy among perfectionistic athletes (Crocker et al., 2014), anxiety about disappointing others among gifted students (Neumeister, 2004), and debilitating performance anxiety among perfectionistic artists (Mor et al., 1995). Other studies show that dissatisfaction with one's performance may contribute to increased rates of depression (Besser et al., 2020; Dunkley, Blankstein, et al., 2006; Sironic & Reeve, 2015) and health problems such as cardiovascular disease and gastrointestinal illnesses (Flett et al., 2016).

Perfectionists also tend to struggle in their interpersonal relationships because they engage in self-protective behaviors that alienate them from others. For example, some perfectionists report tendencies toward dominance, aloofness, and vindictiveness within their

relationships (Stoeber et al., 2021). Others exhibit patterns of hostility or submissiveness, which may alternately cause problems with intimacy and exploitability (Slaney et al., 2006). A review of five factor personality traits further showed a predisposition toward low agreeableness (i.e., antagonism) and low extraversion (i.e., limited social interaction) among maladaptive perfectionists (Smith et al., 2019). Considering these traits, it is not surprising that perfectionists experience widespread relational problems with family, friends, and intimate partners (Haring et al., 2003; Hewitt, Smith, et al., 2020; Neumeister, 2004).

Perfectionists also experience problems engaging with their religious faith. Perfectionism has been reported among followers of most of the major world religions, including Mormonism, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity (Crosby et al., 2011; Husain et al., 2015; Sorotzkin, 1998; Wang et al., 2021). Perfectionism has been linked with legalism (i.e., feeling one must earn approval from God through strict religious adherence) and scrupulosity (Allen et al., 2015; Allen et al., 2021). Both legalism and scrupulosity are considered unhealthy expressions of religiosity and "a counterfeit to true spirituality" (Mebane & Ridley, 1988, p. 338). Perfectionism may be implicitly reinforced by religious groups that emphasize living a morally perfect life (Sorotzkin, 1998). Other religious groups may explicitly teach that approval from God and others is earned by following a strict religious code. Mebane and Ridley (1988) pointed out that this type of teaching often results in excessive fear, avoidance, and hypocritical behavior among perfectionists. Since perfectionists already tend to feel socially isolated, perceived failure to meet the expectations of their religious group may further lower their sense of belonging. The resulting isolation may be problematic for perfectionists who expect to find a sense of belonging and well-being in their religious faith.

Although most of the research on perfectionism has focused on maladaptive outcomes, research also shows that in the absence of self-criticism, holding oneself to high standards has several benefits. Adaptive perfectionism[1] has been described as the presence of high personal standards without high levels of discrepancy (e.g., concern over mistakes, doubts about actions, and perceived discrepancies between ideal and actual performance; Stoeber & Otto, 2006). Adaptive perfectionists appear to benefit from their high standards, as they report a greater sense of meaning in life, greater subjective happiness, and higher life satisfaction than maladaptive perfectionists and nonperfectionists (Suh et al., 2017). Adaptive perfectionists also report more secure attachment styles and are less likely to experience depression and hopelessness than maladaptive perfectionists (Gnilka et al., 2013).

Although research on adaptive perfectionism and religious well-being is limited, some research shows links between the two. For example, Latter-Day Saints with high personal standards were found to be more committed to their religious faith, be less anxious, experience less depression, and have higher self-esteem and life satisfaction than maladaptive perfectionists and nonperfectionists (Allen & Wang, 2014). These findings indicate that in the absence of self-criticism, high personal standards are a potentially valuable motivator related to more satisfying religious experiences. Since perfectionists report varying degrees of well-being, understanding the etiology of perfectionism may clarify why these dyadic effects exist.

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[1] Because of the maladaptive outcomes associated with perfectionism, researchers have debated whether perfectionism should be referred to as adaptive. Gaudreau (2019) recently introduced excellencism as a construct that better represents the adaptive aspects of setting high personal goals. Since little research has explored excellencism as yet (see Gaudreau et al., 2022 and Goulet-Pelletier et al., 2022), this study continues to use the term *adaptive perfectionism* to discuss existing research on high personal standards. However, it is likely that the adaptive outcomes associated with perfectionism are better attributed to a habit of striving for excellence.

Perfectionism and Attachment

Perfectionism has been attributed to attachment difficulties involving a lack of approval and acceptance from early caregivers (Burns, 1980; Hamachek, 1978; Hewitt, Flett, & Mikail, 2017; Hollender, 1965). Receiving conditional approval affects a child's ability to form a stable and resilient self-concept (Assor et al., 2004). It also creates a disproportionate need for approval or a sense of belonging with others (Chen et al., 2015). Researchers note that despite their need for approval, perfectionists form insecure attachments and anticipate that others will be unsupportive (Han et al., 2022; Rice & Mirzadeh, 2000). For perfectionists, achieving high standards is a way of reassuring themselves and others of their worthiness of being accepted and loved. However, most perfectionists experience low self-worth even when they reach their performance goals. Despite their best efforts, heightened insecurity and fears of abandonment tend to cause further disengagement from others (Hewitt, Flett, & Mikail, 2017).

Social disengagement limits opportunities to connect with relational supports that could mitigate the stress associated with perfectionism. For example, perfectionists are hesitant to seek mental health support because they fear revealing their imperfections to others (Hewitt et al., 2008). Some research also suggests that a lack of quality relationships with family and friends leads to worse outcomes in therapy (Hewitt, Smith, et al., 2020). This research indicates that social disconnection decreases opportunities for repairing poor attachment patterns and finding belonging with others. Social disconnection may also exacerbate low religious well-being among perfectionists by inhibiting healthy religious coping. Since social disconnection seems to reinforce perfectionism, developing a sense of belonging may improve perfectionists' sense of relational and religious well-being.

Sense of Belonging

A sense of belonging with others has long been considered a basic human need (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Maslow, 1943, 1962; Strayhorn, 2018). Belonging involves perceiving oneself as an essential member of a group, feeling appreciated, and seeing oneself as a good "fit" within the group (Anant, 1966; Hagerty et al., 1992, p. 173). Community belonging has been described as "a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together" (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, p. 9). Belonging is closely related to perceived social support, and both are associated with improved mental health (Hovey et al., 2014; Stebleton et al., 2014). While belonging represents perceived fit with one's group, social support is an assessment of one's social resources (Hagerty et al., 1996). Among students, a sense of belonging has been found to enhance academic persistence, resource utilization, and mental health over time, while a lack of belonging has been linked to increased loneliness, a lower sense of meaning, and suicidal ideation (Gopalan & Brady, 2020; Van Orden et al., 2012).

Research indicates that a low sense of belonging among perfectionists contributes to adverse outcomes. For example, Wang et al. (2013) observed that family discrepancy, or perceived failure to meet family expectations, intensified the effect of low sense of belonging on suicidal ideation. Another study found that perfectionistic college students were more likely to experience feelings of shame and report a greater need for belonging (Chen et al., 2015). While maladaptive perfectionism inhibits belonging, research showing whether adaptive perfectionism contributes to increased belonging is lacking. However, adaptive perfectionists have reported more secure attachment patterns within their relationships (Gnilka et al., 2013; Rice & Mirzadeh,

2000), possibly indicating that adaptive perfectionists tend to form more positive connections with others, which may explain why they report better emotional and religious well-being.

A sense of belonging within their religious group may also be important for perfectionists. Some research shows that belonging within one's religious group contributes to a global sense of belonging (Amit & Bar-Lev, 2015; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Shryock & Meeks, 2020). Other research indicates that being part of a religious group with beliefs similar to one's own may provide a greater sense of personal meaning (Zhang et al., 2019). RS theory further argues that positive relationships within a religious community are a means of spiritual growth and transformation (Hall & Hall, 2021; Sandage et al., 2008). Since belonging is an essential relational need among perfectionists and contributes to greater well-being, it is likely that a sense of belonging also improves religious well-being among perfectionists.

Religious Well-Being

Religious well-being has been described as the quality of an individual's interactions with God. Research on religious well-being relates this construct to both existential well-being (i.e., a sense of purpose and life satisfaction) and spiritual well-being (i.e., a combination of religious and existential well-being; C. W. Ellison, 1983). RS theory further assumes that relational factors, such as a person's quality of relationship with God, contribute to religious well-being (Hall, 2004; Hall & Edwards, 1996). Hall (2004) also argued that relational factors and spirituality are interrelated since both focus on internalizing personal meaning in similar ways. Hall maintained that relational representations, or working models based on attachment experiences, directly impact religious well-being. In other words, relationships subconsciously affect how people interact with their religious beliefs (Tomlinson et al., 2016).

Research on religious well-being supports the theory that the quality of interpersonal relationships impacts how people engage with their religious faith. For example, in Augustyn et al.'s (2017) study, Christian college students with secure attachments were more likely to engage in positive spiritual practices, such as relating to God in positive ways, practicing forgiveness, and serving others. Positive spiritual practices, in turn, contributed to greater psychological health among students. In a similar study, Simpson et al. (2008) found that Christian adults who described themselves as having a positive relationship with God (i.e., an inner sense of meaningful interaction with God) reported greater religious and existential well-being. This study also found that positive relationships with others corresponded to more positive relationships with God. These studies indicate that relational experiences with God and others are interconnected and that the quality of these experiences impacts religious well-being. However, for perfectionists, the combination of low self-esteem and sensitivity to rejection make it challenging to have positive relational experiences with God and others in their religious group (Allen et al., 2021).

Two aspects of religious well-being are problematic for perfectionists who are religious. First, perfectionists appear to project insecure attachment styles onto their relationship with God, viewing God as an unreliable relational figure (E. B. Davis et al., 2021). Further complicating matters, perfectionists view God as imposing high expectations (i.e., perceived perfectionism from God; Wang et al., 2018). Second, feeling isolated from their religious group may decrease perfectionists' religious well-being. A few studies have examined how individuals relate to their religious group in terms of attachment security. These studies show that those who feel insecure attachment toward their religious group may experience more anxiety toward God, more avoidance of God, and higher negative affect (Freeze, 2017; Knabb & Pelletier, 2014).

Conversely, feeling more secure within one's religious group appears to contribute to greater spiritual well-being (e.g., feeling God's love and experiencing inner peace; Freeze & DiTommaso, 2015). Freeze's (2017) study also noted that feeling supported by a religious community increased participants' sense of comfort from their spiritual beliefs and sense of closeness to God. These studies suggest that people who feel anxious and disconnected from their religious group will find it more challenging to engage in religious practices that support a sense of religious well-being.

For perfectionists who are religious, the consequences of believing they are disappointing God, in addition to themselves and others, present unique challenges. Since perfectionists tend to report lower-quality relationships with God and others, developing a sense of belonging may contribute to more satisfying relational and religious experiences. This study addresses a gap in the literature by exploring whether relational factors, such as a sense of belonging within a religious group, mediate the relationship between perfectionism and religious well-being.

Purpose of the Study

This study examines the effects of adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism on religious well-being among Christian college students. While the impact of multidimensional perfectionism on religious well-being has been moderately well researched (Allen et al., 2021; Crosby et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2018), studies identifying factors that mediate the relationship between perfectionism and religious well-being will improve treatment recommendations for perfectionists who are religious. Specifically, research has not addressed how perfectionism affects religious individuals' sense of belonging and whether a sense of belonging improves religious well-being among perfectionists. This study also extends the research on RS theory by examining the role of relational factors in perfectionists' sense of religious well-being.

Research Questions and Research Hypotheses

The first research question asks how adaptive perfectionism impacts religious well-being among Christian college students. Since research indicates that adaptive perfectionism has several positive outcomes (Allen & Wang, 2014; Gnilka et al., 2013; Suh et al., 2017), adaptive perfectionism is hypothesized to increase participants' religious well-being. The second research question explores whether a sense of belonging mediates the relationship between adaptive perfectionism and religious well-being. Since relationships appear to play a significant role in the outcomes experienced by perfectionists (Hamachek, 1978; Hewitt, Flett, & Mikail, 2017), it is hypothesized that a sense of belonging increases religious well-being among perfectionists. The third research question examines how maladaptive perfectionism impacts the relationship between adaptive perfectionism, a sense of belonging, and religious well-being. Since maladaptive perfectionism has been linked to negative religious and relational outcomes (Han et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2021), maladaptive perfectionism is hypothesized to diminish the impact of perfectionism on a sense of belonging and religious well-being. Figure 1 shows a conceptual model of the proposed relationships between variables.

Figure 1

Conceptual Model
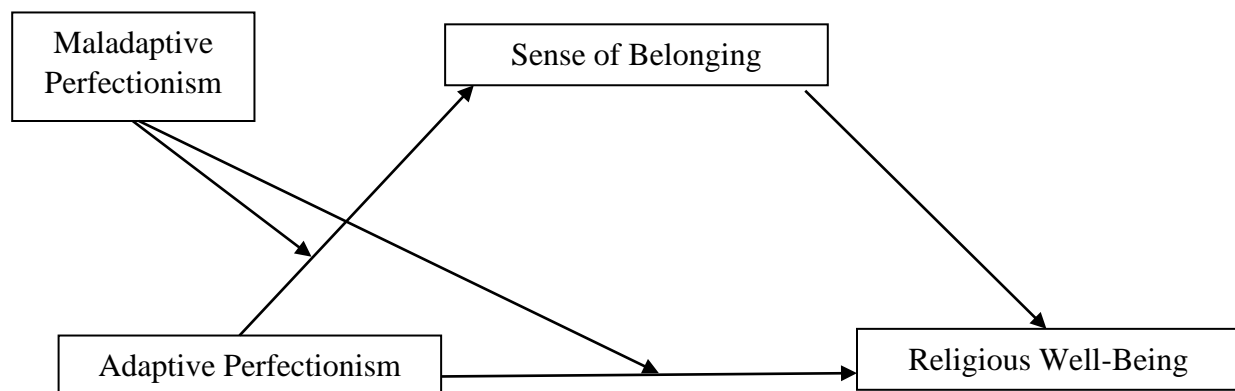
Assumptions and Limitations

Certain assumptions and limitations are involved in this study and may affect the interpretation of results. First, recruiting participants from Christian colleges is expected to produce a sample that represents a subset of perfectionists who are religious. This may limit the generalizability of findings to religious groups that rely on theistic religious frameworks (E. B. Davis et al., 2021). Results should be cautiously generalized since some theistic groups emphasize relational frameworks more than others. Using a sample of young adults may also limit generalizability. Since college students are in a unique phase of transition and development, findings may not equally apply to perfectionists in other stages of life (Pedrelli et al., 2015). In addition, attending a religious college may impact how perfectionists rate their religious well-being. Students at religious colleges and universities may be exposed to theological education that counteracts unhealthy forms of perfectionism, such as scrupulosity and legalism. This training may decrease their tendency toward perfectionism and improve their well-being. On the other hand, college students are exposed to intensified social and academic pressure (Kumaraswamy, 2013), which may exacerbate perfectionism in some students. A final limitation is that cross-sectional studies do not establish causality between variables (Mann, 2003).

Definitions

Adaptive perfectionism – Adaptive perfectionism involves holding oneself to high performance standards without engaging in high self-evaluation or self-criticism (Slaney et al., 2001).

Maladaptive perfectionism – Maladaptive perfectionism involves distress over a perceived failure to meet one's own or others' high standards (Slaney et al., 2001).

Discrepancy – Discrepancy describes a perceived disparity between a person's actual performance and the level of performance they aspire to achieve (Slaney et al., 2001).

Sense of belonging – Belonging describes one's sense of being desired, valued, and a good fit within their social group (Hagerty & Patusky, 1995).

Social disconnection – Social disconnection describes a sense of subjective loneliness that accompanies limited or low-quality relational interactions with others (Hewitt, Flett, & Mikail, 2017).

Religious well-being – Religious well-being is defined in this study as positive emotional and behavioral engagement in religious and spiritual practices, including a sense of cooperation and positive interaction with God (Johnstone et al., 2021). The instrument used to measure religious well-being in this study assesses engagement in religious and spiritual practices, a sense of meaning from one's faith, connection to congregational support, and a sense of connection with God.

Significance of the Study

The focus on relational themes within religious groups makes social disconnection a problem particularly salient for perfectionists who are religious (E. B. Davis et al., 2021; Simpson et al., 2008; Tomlinson et al., 2016). Research to date has not adequately explored factors that support religious well-being among perfectionists, such as a sense of belonging. This study extends the extant research by examining the effects of perfectionism on religious well-being and investigating whether a sense of belonging contributes to greater well-being. Although this study uses a Christian sample, the results are relevant to other religious groups that draw on theistic relational frameworks, such as Islam, Judaism, and Mormonism (Ghorbani et al., 2016; Silverman et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2018).

While the literature on treatments for maladaptive perfectionism is growing (Cheli et al., 2022; Hewitt et al., 2015), best practices for treatment have yet to be identified for perfectionists who are religious. Treatment recommendations for this group are needed since perfectionists are often hesitant to engage in therapy and experience worse treatment outcomes (Hewitt, Flett, & Mikail, 2017; K. R. Rasmussen et al., 2013). Should the study hypotheses be supported, it will suggest that relational factors especially impact the well-being of perfectionists who belong to a religious group. Treatments that focus on improving relational connections with one's group may help perfectionists who are religious access an important means of social support and life satisfaction. This study also provides recommendations for educators on how to address perfectionism among college students. Finally, this study adds to the growing research on the PSDM and RS theory by examining how these models apply to a sample of perfectionists who are religious.

Conceptual Framework

The PSDM provides a conceptual framework for understanding adverse outcomes among perfectionists, such as lower relationship quality (Gingras et al., 2020; Hewitt, Flett, & Mikail, 2017). In particular, the PSDM proposes that although perfectionists experience a heightened need to belong, negative interpersonal traits such as hypersensitivity to rejection contribute to increased relational problems, social disconnection, and a low sense of belonging (Hewitt, Flett, & Mikail, 2017).

In addition to these relational problems, perfectionists who are religious report decreased religious well-being (Allen et al., 2015; Allen et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2021). RS theory provides a framework for understanding the negative outcomes experienced by perfectionists who are religious. Specifically, RS theory explains that implicit relational beliefs impact how

people approach their religious faith. RS theory also provides insight into how relationships shape well-being and how a sense of belonging may improve the outcomes associated with perfectionism.

Organization of the Remaining Chapters

The following chapter summarizes research on perfectionism and its roots in attachment theory. Chapter Two also reviews belonging as an essential psychological need among perfectionists and discusses how relational factors impact religious well-being. Chapter Three outlines the methodology used in this study, including participants, measures, and procedures used to investigate the research questions. Chapter Four presents a statistical analysis of the data collected. Chapter Five interprets and discusses the results, how the data fit within the larger body of perfectionism research, and implications for practice and future research.

Summary

Perfectionism is a multidimensional personality trait with diverse effects on well-being, particularly among those who are religious. The PSDM explains how interpersonal traits that result in social disconnection contribute to low relational well-being among maladaptive perfectionists. RS theory further clarifies why maladaptive perfectionism may contribute to low religious well-being, including negative views of God. RS theory, which argues that relational themes are embedded within religious practices and play a pivotal role in religious well-being, suggests perfectionists' sense of religious well-being may be improved by facilitating a sense of belonging within their religious community.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Perfectionism is a multidimensional personality dynamic that impacts individuals across cultures, ages, genders, and religious orientations (Curran & Hill, 2019; Fry & Debats, 2009; Wang et al., 2020, 2021). Setting high performance standards motivates some to reach high achievements and inhibits performance in others. Perfectionists tend to experience significantly worse emotional and relational problems than nonperfectionists (Besser et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2019; Stoeber & Otto, 2006). Among religious individuals, perfectionism has been linked to negative outcomes such as excessive fear of sinful activities, anxiety about one's relationship with God, and externalized religious orientations (Allen et al., 2021; Crosby et al., 2011). Since relationships with a sacred figure and with others play a significant role in most religious faiths, perfectionists may experience a low sense of belonging and subsequently lower religious well-being (Augustyn et al., 2017; Desrosiers et al., 2011).

Attachment theory, the PSDM, and RS theory provide a conceptual basis for understanding perfectionism among religious individuals. Attachment theory explains how internal models of self and others contribute to relational problems among perfectionists. The PSDM further describes the relational needs of perfectionists, including their heightened need for belonging (Hewitt, Flett, & Mikail, 2017). Finally, RS theory provides a context for understanding the integral role of relationships in religious well-being. This chapter reviews the research on perfectionism and how theories of attachment, social disconnection, belonging, and RS relate to the problems experienced by perfectionists.

Attachment and Perfectionism

Over the past several decades, theories that address internal working models of relationships have emerged to describe how early relational experiences shape personality. One

of these models, Bowlby's (1970) attachment theory, provides a framework for understanding how negative relational models contribute to perfectionism. A primary tenet of attachment theory is that people have an innate need for emotional security in their relationships (Bowlby, 1960). Mary Ainsworth's observations of mother-child pairs allowed her to expand on attachment theory by adding that secure and insecure attachment patterns correspond to positive and negative parenting styles (Ainsworth et al., 2015; Bretherton, 1992). Secure attachments are marked by minimal difficulty trusting others and are associated with adaptive perfectionism (Rice & Mirzadeh, 2000), general well-being (Karreman & Vingerhoets, 2012), and religious well-being (Augustyn et al., 2017). Insecure attachments are characterized by an excessive need to avoid rejection by either seeking reassurance or withdrawing from others (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Insecure attachment styles have been linked to maladaptive perfectionism (Han et al., 2022; Rice & Mirzadeh, 2000), lower relationship satisfaction (Candel & Turliuc, 2019), and religious and spiritual struggles (Exline, 2013). According to attachment theory, problems like relational insecurity and maladaptive perfectionism develop through internal working models.

Working models are templates for how relationships are expected to work and are developed based on early attachment experiences (Bowlby, 1969, 1973). These templates include self-oriented components (working models of self) and other-oriented components (working models of others). Working models serve as maps for navigating relationships based on what people anticipate will meet their needs (Bowlby, 1969). Primary human psychological needs include safety, love, esteem, autonomy, and competence (Maslow, 1943; Rafaeli et al., 2010). Internal working models determine whether others are viewed as reliable sources for meeting

these needs and whether one views oneself as worthy of having these needs met by others (Bowlby, 1973).

One of the environments described by Bowlby (1973) that contributes to negative models is one where caregivers withhold approval until high standards of behavior are met. Theorists agree that perfectionism develops in environments like these where caregivers provide low approval and high criticism (Burns, 1980; Hamachek, 1978; Hollender, 1965; Sorotzkin, 1998). This idea is supported by studies that link conditional regard, high parental expectations, and parental criticism with higher rates of perfectionism (Mendi & Eldeleklioğlu, 2016; Smith et al., 2022).

Working models that develop in highly critical contexts tend to include views of oneself as unlovable and others as distant and difficult to please. Working models may also involve fears of rejection, disconnection, abandonment, social isolation (Rafaeli et al., 2010), and low belonging (Anant, 1966). These models explain the underlying schemas that contribute to emotional and interpersonal problems among perfectionists. For example, low self-worth and self-esteem among perfectionists indicate negative models of self (Hewitt, Flett, & Mikail, 2017; Houltberg et al., 2017), while insecure attachments among perfectionists indicate models that label others as threats (Rice & Mirzadeh, 2000). Perfectionists have also reported increased fears of being disconnected from and rejected by others (Maloney et al., 2014).

Individuals who feel unworthy of affection and view others as emotionally unreliable may cope with these negative models by developing perfectionistic behaviors. High standards become a means of gaining acceptance and avoiding rejection, since perfectionists assume that if they perform perfectly, others will see them as worthwhile. Striving toward lofty goals may also solidify an unstable sense of identity among perfectionists (Hewitt, Flett, & Mikail, 2017).

However, according to Hewitt, Flett, and Mikail's (2017) PSDM, attempts to achieve belonging and self-esteem through performance are usually unsuccessful. Regardless of their actual performance, most perfectionists view their actions as mediocre and believe that others also view their actions as substandard. This cognitive bias reinforces a perfectionist's model of self as defective and others as unreliable, leaving them feeling even more socially disconnected.

The working models common among perfectionists also generate emotions that leave them feeling further isolated, including shame, anxiety, depression, and anger (Hewitt & Flett, 1991; Hewitt, Flett, & Mikail, 2017; Houltberg et al., 2017). These emotions make it more difficult to engage in relationships in productive and satisfying ways. Studies have consistently linked perfectionism with insecure attachment styles and relational problems (Chen et al., 2015; Gingras et al., 2020; Han et al., 2022; Haring et al., 2003; Rice & Mirzadeh, 2000). The following section reviews perfectionism and its adaptive and maladaptive outcomes, as well as perfectionism's contribution to social disconnection.

Perfectionism

Perfectionism has mixed effects on mental health, making it difficult to comprehensively define (Besser et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2019; Stoeber & Otto, 2006). Mixed outcomes have also led to debate about whether perfectionism has any adaptive features (Gaudreau, 2019; Greenspon, 2000). Recently, theorists have concluded that although there are some positive effects, the total effect of perfectionism tends to be negative (Stoeber & Otto, 2006). Some researchers maintain that perfectionism exists along a spectrum, and perfectionists are likely to experience a combination of adaptive and maladaptive traits (Gaudreau & Thompson, 2010). Recent models propose conceptualizing perfectionism from a person-centered perspective, which accounts for individual differences more effectively than a categorical approach (Gaudreau &

Thompson, 2010; Molnar et al., 2020). This section reviews commonalities in the prevailing definitions of perfectionism and positive and negative outcomes associated with perfectionism.

Conceptions of Perfectionism

Perfectionism has been described as a personality dynamic that differs according to the perceived source of an individual's perfectionistic standards. According to one of the leading models of perfectionism, high expectations can be self-imposed, imposed by others, or oriented toward others (Hewitt & Flett, 1991). Self-oriented perfectionists believe their value is determined by whether they perform perfectly (Hewitt, Flett, & Mikail, 2017). When they fall short of perfection, they feel insignificant and are motivated to achieve high goals to prove their worth to themselves and others. Socially prescribed perfectionism is similar, except socially prescribed perfectionists believe that society expects them to meet high performance standards. Since socially prescribed perfectionists believe that others impose high expectations on them, they may progressively raise their own standards to maintain the feeling that others are pleased with them. Other-oriented perfectionists hold others to excessively high standards and feel resentment and hostility when others fail to meet their expectations.

Perfectionism has also been defined by the cognitive and behavioral patterns that accompany high performance standards. These patterns include excessive concern or rumination over trivial mistakes and a sense of not measuring up (e.g., doubts about actions and discrepancy; Frost et al., 1990; Hewitt, Flett, & Mikail, 2017; Slaney et al., 2001). Another aspect of perfectionism, perfectionistic self-presentation, involves the need to appear perfect by avoiding asking for help, concealing weaknesses, and engaging in self-promoting behaviors (Hewitt, Flett, & Mikail, 2017). One of the most recent conceptualizations of perfectionism, evaluative concerns perfectionism, unifies the common themes from these definitions: high personal

standards, self-criticism, and self-doubt motivated by perceived social pressure (Gaudreau &
Thompson, 2010; see also Dunkley & Blankstein, 2000).

Researchers have also attempted to define perfectionism by whether the total effect is
adaptive or maladaptive. While most definitions focus on maladaptive aspects, personal
standards perfectionism or perfectionistic strivings involve high personal standards without
evaluative concerns or discrepancy (Dunkley et al., 2000; Gaudreau & Thompson, 2010; Slaney
et al., 2001; Stoeber & Otto, 2006). In contrast with evaluative concerns perfectionism, which
focuses on the self-critical aspects of perfectionism, researchers have identified that, while still
striving for high standards, adaptive perfectionists have the capacity to accept imperfect
outcomes (Sironic & Reeve, 2015).

While these definitions suggest that perfectionism exists in two distinct categories—
either adaptive or maladaptive—perfectionists tend to report mixed features, indicating a more
complex understanding is necessary (Gaudreau, 2019; Stoeber et al., 2020). In addition, some
research suggests that even without evaluative concerns, holding oneself to high standards may
be associated with mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, and eating disorders
(Limburg et al., 2017; Stoeber & Otto, 2006). Stoeber and Otto (2006) explained that these
divergent findings may be due to cross-loading between scales assessing positive and negative
aspects of perfectionism and cautioned that adaptive perfectionism should not be considered a
healthy trait, although in some cases, its outcomes may be viewed as more desirable (see also
Stoeber et al., 2020). The authors concluded that although there is evidence for a positive
dimension of perfectionism, the total effect is usually more harmful than beneficial.

In response to this debate, Gaudreau (2019) recently proposed that while perfectionism
may be adaptive to a point, striving for perfection eventually becomes counterproductive when

the downsides of expending excessive effort outweigh the minor gains in performance. Since perfectionists are often inflexible in their pursuit of perfection, Gaudreau (2019) proposed that excellence may be a more appropriate target than perfection. Those who pursue excellence are more flexible and accept when they have completed a task successfully, even when they fall short of perfection. Two studies support Gaudreau's theory that excellencism is superior to perfectionism. These studies show that compared to those who strive for excellence, perfectionists have worse academic performance, are less creative, and do not experience more benefits than those who strive for excellence (Gaudreau et al., 2022; Goulet-Pelletier et al., 2022). These recent additions to the perfectionism literature may explain why some research indicates that striving for high standards is adaptive, but only in the absence of evaluative concerns and when individuals focus on "good enough" rather than perfect performance.

Maladaptive Outcomes of Perfectionism

In contrast with the goals of perfectionism, those who feel they are not meeting excessively high standards experience significantly lower mental, emotional, and relational well-being. Perfectionists experience lower mental well-being through excessive focus on their mistakes, which are viewed as evidence of their unworthiness. Perfectionists also believe their flaws are obvious to others and are hypersensitive to negative cues in relationships. For example, perfectionists report fears of negative evaluation (R. W. Hill et al., 2004), expectations that others will be critical and disappointed in them (Sherry et al., 2013), and a tendency to pay more attention to cues related to failure or ineptitude (Howell et al., 2016). These studies indicate that perfectionists experience a particular form of confirmation bias in which they overfocus on minute imperfections while ignoring ample evidence of success (Nickerson, 1998). Perfectionists

who overfocus on mistakes work even harder to prove their worth by eliminating mistakes in the future. However, this behavior tends to backfire, contributing to lower emotional well-being.

A recent meta-analysis of five-factor personality traits showed that perfectionism is related to higher rates of neuroticism, or a predisposition to experience emotional problems (Smith et al., 2019). Perfectionists report higher rates of shame, which involves a tendency to judge oneself as defective (Chen et al., 2015; Hewitt & Flett, 1991; Stoeber et al., 2007; Tangney, 2002). Perfectionists also consistently report higher rates of depression, which may relate to seeing oneself as shameful or defective (Besser et al., 2020; Hewitt & Flett, 1991; Smith et al., 2017; Stoeber & Otto, 2006). Similarly, Xie et al.'s (2019) meta-analysis of perfectionism and related cognitive factors found that excessive focus on past mistakes, or rumination, was associated with increased depression and anxiety. This finding is consistent with other studies that show self-critical perfectionism contributes to greater depression, anxiety, and stress (Dunkley, Blankstein, et al., 2006; James et al., 2015).

Perfectionists also report higher social anxiety and more fears of social evaluation (Levinson et al., 2015; Newby et al., 2017; Yap et al., 2016), likely due to low self-confidence, views of others as critical and disapproving, and fear that their inadequacies will be exposed (Sherry et al., 2013). Based on their view of others, it is not surprising that perfectionists tend to see others as unsupportive, receive lower social support, and experience lower gains in treatment due to lower perceived social support (Dunkley et al., 2003; Dunkley, Sanislow, et al., 2006; Gnilka et al., 2019; Hewitt, Smith, et al., 2020). Perfectionists also report social hopelessness (i.e., anticipation of poor relational experiences; Roxborough et al., 2012) and loneliness (Chang, 2017; Flett et al., 2020). Loneliness is associated with adverse outcomes such as higher mortality, depression, and poorer physical health (Cacioppo & Cacioppo, 2014). Research

indicates that even though perfectionists wish to connect with others, they often remain isolated and at risk of increased emotional problems. Their cognitive and emotional patterns make engaging in satisfying interpersonal relationships a challenge (Stoeber et al., 2021) and, more importantly, may contribute to a sense of social disconnection (Hewitt, Flett, & Mikail, 2017).

Even the earliest researchers in the field observed that perfectionists feel inhibited and insecure in their relationships (Burns, 1980; Hamachek, 1978). Perfectionists are predisposed to struggle with relationships due to attachment insecurity, low self-esteem, and perceptions of others as difficult to please (Hewitt, Flett, & Mikail, 2017). For perfectionists, a heightened fear of exposure leads to behaviors that isolate them from others, such as self-concealment, or a compulsion to hide imperfections (Hewitt et al., 2003). The need to conceal imperfections explains why perfectionists often experience greater psychological distress (Kawamura & Frost, 2004), view counseling as a threatening experience (Hewitt et al., 2008), and are less likely to seek psychological help (Abdollahi et al., 2017). Essentially, perfectionists hesitate to engage in therapy due to fear of rejection by the therapist, fear of failure in treatment, and shame over asking for help (Hewitt, Flett, & Mikail, 2017; Sorotzkin, 1998).

Perfectionists also become isolated by their tendency to engage in perfectionistic self-presentation or showcasing only their positive qualities. Perfectionists have reported self-image goals in which they feel compelled to prove themselves by hiding weaknesses within academics and social relationships (Nepon et al., 2016), suggesting that they suppress their authentic selves to present a perfect image to others. While these self-presentational features seem to protect an unstable self-image, they often increase unwanted outcomes such as alienating others, limiting access to social support, and increasing imposter feelings (Hewitt, Flett, & Mikail, 2017).

Perfectionists also distance themselves from others by trying to appear perfect with little apparent effort (Travers et al., 2015). Hewitt, Flett, and Mikail (2017) pointed out that perfectionists who behave this way come across as unrelatable and unlikeable and are ultimately seen as aloof and unfriendly. This idea is supported by several studies that have shown perfectionists often create distance between themselves and others through distrust and hostility (Stoeber et al., 2017) and tendencies to be domineering, vindictive, cold, and arrogant (Slaney et al., 2006; Stoeber et al., 2021). Other perfectionists report passive-aggressive interpersonal traits, hesitancy to deal with confrontation, and avoidant coping with problems such as through denial and disengagement (Dunkley & Blankstein, 2000; Dunkley et al., 2003; Hewitt & Flett, 1991). These behaviors may relate to a need to guard oneself against rejection due to seeing others as threats (Hewitt et al., 2003). Consequently, in their attempts to avoid rejection, perfectionists end up alienating the sources of the support they hope to obtain.

Adaptive Outcomes of High Personal Standards

Although research on the adaptive effects of perfectionism has shown mixed results (Limburg et al., 2017), several studies indicate that in the absence of high self-criticism, high personal standards are associated with more positive behavioral, emotional, and relational outcomes. For example, adaptive perfectionists tend to cope more effectively with stressful events, taking active rather than avoidant approaches to problems (Noble et al., 2014). Adaptive perfectionists may use more proactive coping due to increased self-efficacy or a belief in their capacity to respond to challenges (Crocker et al., 2014). Adaptive perfectionists also report higher rates of conscientiousness, or the tendency to be self-disciplined and engage in goal-directed behaviors (Roberts et al., 2009; Smith et al., 2019). Perfectionists who are more

disciplined and who actively cope with stress tend to be more productive, which may improve their emotional well-being.

Research indicates that adaptive perfectionists are better emotionally adjusted, as they report higher positive affect, vitality, and joy than nonperfectionists and maladaptive perfectionists (Gaudreau et al., 2017). Other research suggests that adaptive perfectionists report lower rates of depression and hopelessness (Gnilka et al., 2013). Adaptive perfectionists also indicate they feel more contented with their accomplishments. For example, students who are adaptive perfectionists have reported higher academic satisfaction (Gaudreau et al., 2017), a greater sense of meaning in life, greater satisfaction with life, and greater subjective happiness compared to nonperfectionists and maladaptive perfectionists (Gnilka et al., 2013; Suh et al., 2017). Because perfectionists have an innate need to feel competent and successful, performance satisfaction may explain the higher rates of self-esteem and life satisfaction among adaptive perfectionists (Deuling & Burns, 2017; H. J. Park & Jeong, 2015; Stoeber & Otto, 2006).

Adaptive perfectionism has also been associated with more positive relational experiences, such as greater satisfaction in one's relationships (Trub et al., 2018). Some studies have found higher rates of secure attachment among adaptive perfectionists, which may explain their increased satisfaction with relationships (Gnilka et al., 2013; Stoeber & Otto, 2006). The presence of secure attachment orientations suggests that adaptive perfectionists may have overcome maladaptive ways of relating to others by engaging in supportive relationships that alter insecure relational schemas (Saunders et al., 2011). Relationships that improve working models may moderate the maladaptive effects of perfectionism on relational outcomes. In either case, adaptive perfectionists seem to have more positive working models of others. For example, in a sample of college students, one study found that self-oriented perfectionists were more likely

to feel empathy and see others as trustworthy than other-oriented perfectionists and socially-prescribed perfectionists. They were also less likely to express aggression and spitefulness toward others (Stoeber et al., 2017). This indicates that adaptive perfectionists see others as more emotionally reliable and connect more easily with others, which distinctly contrasts with the relational outcomes reported by maladaptive perfectionists.

Perfectionism and Religiosity

The maladaptive cognitive, emotional, and relational traits observed among perfectionists may uniquely affect those who are religious. While these outcomes of perfectionism have been well researched, the effect of perfectionism on religious well-being has been less thoroughly explored. So far, research on perfectionism among religious individuals has focused on scrupulosity, perceived perfectionism of God, religious perfectionism, and extrinsic religious orientation.

Perfectionists who are religious tend to experience higher rates of scrupulosity, a religious form of obsessive-compulsive disorder related to intrusive fears of sinning (Abramowitz & Jacoby, 2014). Scrupulous traits mirror those exhibited by maladaptive perfectionists, such as feeling one's performance never measures up to their high ideals. Research indicates that scrupulosity among perfectionists contributes to greater anxiety, higher rates of depression, and lower intrinsic religiosity (Allen & Wang, 2014; Allen et al., 2021). Other research has focused on perceived perfectionism of God, or the perception that God imposes high standards and is disappointed when one fails to meet these standards (Wang et al., 2018). Wang et al. (2018) found that perceiving high standards from God was not necessarily maladaptive and was associated with more positive affect. However, the perception that God is

disappointed related to increased shame, guilt, and negative affect. Both perceived standards and perceived discrepancy from God also contributed to scrupulosity.

Recent studies have also examined the role of religious perfectionism or disappointment in one's ability to perform religious activities. Religious perfectionism may develop within rigid and emotionally disengaged religious families. For example, Craddock et al. (2010) found that maladaptive perfectionists tend to come from families characterized by rigidity and disengagement. Individuals who experienced general maladaptive perfectionism were also likely to experience religious perfectionism. In a related study, Wang et al. (2020) developed a measure of religious perfectionism among Chinese adults from different religious backgrounds (e.g., Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity). The study differentiated zealous religious dedication, or enthusiastic commitment to one's faith, from religious self-criticism, or the perception of not measuring up to religious expectations. While religious commitment was associated with greater life satisfaction and happiness, religious self-criticism contributed to anxiety and somatic symptoms. Wang et al. (2021) found similar results in a follow-up study using a U.S. sample. While zealous religious dedication contributed to religious commitment, religious self-criticism correlated with greater scrupulosity, burnout, anxiety, and religious and spiritual struggles.

Other research has studied whether perfectionists are drawn to their faith for extrinsic or intrinsic reasons. Intrinsic religious orientations involve a deep, internalized commitment to one's faith, while extrinsic orientations entail turning to religious practices for self-serving purposes such as gaining relief from stress (Gorsuch & McPherson, 1989). Intrinsic religious orientation is generally considered a healthier form of religious engagement. A few studies show that maladaptive perfectionists are less likely to engage in intrinsic religious behaviors and are more likely to report extrinsic traits like legalism and scrupulosity (Allen et al., 2015; Allen et

al., 2021). Steffen's (2014) study further demonstrates that perfectionism and religious orientation interact to influence affect and life satisfaction. In this study, maladaptive perfectionists were more likely to report extrinsic religiosity and experience increased negative affect and lower life satisfaction. On the other hand, intrinsic religiosity was positively associated with adaptive perfectionism, which contributed to decreased depression and anxiety and greater satisfaction with life. In their study of religious college students, Crosby et al. (2011) found similar results, noting that intrinsic religiosity had a positive relationship with adaptive perfectionism and extrinsic religiosity had a positive correlation with maladaptive perfectionism.

This research indicates that high religious commitment does not contribute to maladaptive religiosity so much as perceived failure to measure up to religious expectations. When combined with the relational and emotional challenges often experienced by perfectionists, low religious well-being may leave perfectionists further isolated. For perfectionists, a sense of belonging may be particularly relevant to understanding and improving the negative outcomes associated with perfectionism.

Sense of Belonging

A desire for meaningful social connection is considered a fundamental human need and is linked to emotional health (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Maslow, 1943, 1962). Belonging refers to a deep sense of togetherness and acceptance experienced within social groups (Anant, 1966). It involves a sense that one matters to the group and that the group will meet one's personal needs (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). In his discussion of belonging among college students, Strayhorn (2018) stated that belonging is "a cognitive evaluation (i.e., "I think these are my people") that typically leads to an affective response" (p. 79). According to Anant's (1966) theory, belonging includes a sense of immersion within a group and adoption of the group's

purpose. Members who fail to live up to group norms or feel the group is not meeting their needs will experience low belonging and will likely disengage from the group.

Developing a sense of belonging may be especially relevant for perfectionists. According to Hewitt, Flett, and Mikail (2017), a low sense of belonging and feelings of insignificance are core features of perfectionism. Studies also show that maladaptive perfectionists report a low sense of belonging and low perceived social support (Dunkley et al., 2000; Sommerfeld & Malek, 2019). Perfectionists' interpersonal traits, such as sensitivity to rejection, low self-esteem, and feelings of not measuring up make it even more likely they will experience low belonging. Further, perfectionists may be predisposed to overlook the availability of support by misperceiving others as rejecting and unavailable to meet their needs (Dunkley, Sanislow, et al., 2006). According to belonging theory, failed belonging within a group makes it likely that perfectionists will disconnect from others. Consequently, perfectionistic traits perpetuate disconnection by cutting perfectionists off from important sources of validation and support.

Research indicates that a low sense of belonging is associated with significantly worse emotional and relational outcomes, particularly among perfectionists. For example, low perceived social support, a factor closely associated with a sense of belonging, increases depression. In a sample of university students, Sherry et al. (2008) found that maladaptive perfectionism had significant positive relationships with low perceived social support and depression. Low social support mediated up to 28% of the total effect of perfectionism on depression. Another study explored the longitudinal effects of perfectionism on depression. This study revealed that perfectionists with personality disorders were at greater risk of experiencing depression due to higher rates of neuroticism, low perceived social support, and negative social interactions (e.g., experiencing anger, insensitivity, or interference from others; Dunkley,

Sanislow, et al., 2006). This finding indicates that perfectionists who experience problems connecting to others are at increased risk of worse emotional outcomes. Perhaps the most significant outcome associated with a low sense of belonging among perfectionists is increased suicidal ideation. In a study of Israeli adolescents, perfectionistic youth who felt a low sense of belonging and disconnection from family and friends were more likely to report suicidal ideation (Sommerfeld & Malek, 2019). This finding is consistent with other research showing that family perfectionism (i.e., perceived failure to meet family expectations) contributes to suicidal ideation among those with a low sense of belonging (Wang et al., 2013).

While low belonging contributes to increased emotional problems, a sense of belonging to a particular group seems to have a protective effect. For example, college students who experience a sense of belonging have demonstrated increased persistence in college (G. M. Davis et al., 2019; Gopalan & Brady, 2020) and are more likely to report a greater sense of meaning in life (Lambert et al., 2013). A sense of belonging to one's group may be even more important for those who otherwise feel low social belonging, such as minority groups. For example, Indigenous Peoples who reported a low sense of community belonging had higher rates of depression and anxiety during the recent pandemic than those who reported a greater sense of community belonging (Burnett et al., 2022). Similarly, sense of belonging was higher among immigrants who affiliated with their religious group values (Amit & Bar-Lev, 2015). Another study revealed that belonging to a specific group, such as a religious group, fraternity, or sorority, increased minority students' sense of belonging in college (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). These studies suggest that feeling connected to one's group improves responses to stressors, such as times of transition or feeling low belonging outside of one's group. For perfectionists who

experience low belonging, feeling connected, such as to a religious group, may improve their religious well-being.

Recent developments in treatments for perfectionism support the conclusion that relational belonging plays a role in altering outcomes among perfectionists. Since perfectionists struggle with relationships, emerging treatments have begun to use relational interventions for perfectionism. Therapies such as dynamic-relational treatment address relational themes, including transference and countertransference, attachment needs, and relational needs (Hewitt, Mikail, et al., 2020). Other treatments involve a combination of individual and group therapy to address relational themes and teach self-compassion (Cheli et al., 2022). These therapies show promise as treatments for maladaptive perfectionism. One controlled trial using a psychodynamic-relational treatment showed that the majority of participants (92%) experienced posttreatment improvement in at least one measure of perfectionism, which was accompanied by reduced depression and anxiety (Hewitt et al., 2015). This finding suggests that improving perfectionists' attachments to others may mediate the relationship between perfectionism and more adaptive outcomes. Specifically, a sense of belonging with others, such as those within a religious group, may address the core unmet needs of perfectionists by providing reassurance of personal value and significance. The following section explores religious well-being and how relational factors affect religious outcomes.

Religious Well-Being

Religious and spiritual well-being (RSW) have been studied simultaneously as factors interconnected with more adaptive social, emotional, and behavioral functioning (Gomez & Fisher, 2003). While religion involves "the search for significance that occurs within the context of established institutions . . . designed to facilitate spirituality" (Pargament et al., 2013, p. 15),

spirituality has been described as "the search for the sacred" (P. C. Hill et al., 2000, p. 66; see also P. C. Hill & Pargament, 2003). This section reviews research on RSW, including positive and negative outcomes associated with religiosity among perfectionists. In addition, this section discusses factors that contribute to RSW, particularly relational factors.

Research indicates that religiosity can have both positive and negative effects on general and religious well-being. For example, studies have shown that religiosity contributes to greater mental health (Garssen et al., 2021) and personal well-being (e.g., quality of life, satisfaction with health, psychological well-being, and social well-being; Hoogeveen et al., 2022). Religiosity among adaptive perfectionists has also been associated with more favorable outcomes, such as a greater sense of comfort from God and higher self-worth (Houltberg et al., 2017). On the other hand, research on religious and spiritual struggles (e.g., problematic relationships with God, interpersonal problems in religious groups, and religious doubts) has shown that certain types of religiosities decrease well-being (C. G. Ellison & Lee, 2010). Religious and spiritual struggles increase psychological distress (e.g., hopelessness, sadness, worthlessness, depression, and anxiety) and decrease self-esteem, posttraumatic growth, life satisfaction, and optimism (Bockrath et al., 2022; C. G. Ellison & Lee, 2010). Religious and spiritual struggles may be particularly salient to perfectionists who feel low belonging. For example, Exline (2013) observed that religious struggles are more common among those with insecure attachment styles and those who are socially disconnected.

Research has attempted to identify the psychological and behavioral factors that lead to these divergent RSW outcomes. Instead of focusing on one factor, most researchers consider RSW to be a multidimensional construct with relational, existential, and behavioral aspects (Fetzer Institute & National Institute on Aging Working Group, 1999). Researchers have

investigated several factors as indicators of RSW, including religious commitment, religious

maturity, religious practices (P. C. Hill & Edwards, 2013), existential purpose (C. W. Ellison,

1983), intrinsic and extrinsic religious orientations (Allport & Ross, 1967; Gorsuch &

McPherson, 1989), attitude toward oneself, connection with nature (Gomez & Fisher, 2003), and

relational factors (Hall, 2015).

A recent review indicated that RS factors contribute to greater quality of life among

diverse individuals facing life stressors (Counted et al., 2018). Relational spirituality research has

specifically focused on how relational factors influence religious functioning (Hall, 2015), such

as view of God (Exline et al., 2015), attachment to God (Beck & McDonald, 2004), and

belonging within a religious group (Freeze & DiTommaso, 2015). For example, those who view

God as cruel or distant tend to experience increased anger and doubt about their religious faith

(Exline et al., 2015). In contrast, secure attachment to God and one's religious group has been

associated with greater inner peace, an increased sense of God's love, and greater self-

acceptance (Freeze & DiTommaso, 2015). A recent study further revealed that collaborative

religious coping (i.e., perceiving oneself as cooperating with God to solve a problem) and

perceptions of God as intervening on one's behalf during times of struggle contributed to

spiritual growth (Wilt et al., 2019). These studies indicate that relationships uniquely contribute

to RSW. Over the past two decades, RS theory has developed to describe how relational factors

such as these are integral to religious functioning.

Relational Spirituality

While religion and spirituality involve a search for the sacred, RS can be described as

"ways of relating to the sacred" (Shults & Sandage, 2006, p. 18). Ways of relating to the sacred

include both positive and negative responses, "ranging from hostile to loving, active to passive"

(Shults & Sandage, 2006, p. 18). According to RS theory, these relational styles are shaped by implicit knowledge that develops from social interactions. Positive social experiences are especially important within RS theory, which assumes that humans are social beings who function optimally within secure interpersonal relationships.

Relationships teach vital coping skills that contribute to religious well-being, such as conflict resolution skills (Worthington & Sandage, 2016) and how to self-regulate when facing traumatic life events (Sandage et al., 2020). In contrast, negative relational experiences, such as abuse from religious leaders (Worthington & Sandage, 2016) or rigid and enmeshed family dynamics, tend to negatively affect religious well-being (Craddock et al., 2010). The relational knowledge or rules that develop from these experiences can impede an individual's view of God and others as reliable sources for meeting psychological needs, thereby contributing to disconnection, a low sense of belonging, and ultimately lower well-being. Recently, research on quality of relationship with God and with others in a religious community has attempted to clarify how relationships affect religious well-being. This section reviews how relational factors, such as view of God and one's religious community, impact religious well-being. The final section explores how transformation of negative working models may occur within supportive relationships, such as those found within a religious community.

View of God

Although the sacred represents an intangible entity, several studies indicate that people interact with God in ways that are similar to interactions within human attachment relationships (Granqvist et al., 2010; Shults & Sandage, 2006). Granqvist (2014) described this phenomenon as a metaphorical relationship in which God serves as a symbolic attachment figure (p. 781). Patterns of attachment to God are based on working models known as God images. God images

are mental representations of God accompanied by emotionally-laden reactions to God (E. B. Davis et al., 2013). God concepts are closely related to God images and represent an individual's beliefs about what God is like. God images have been described as implicit or "heart knowledge" and God concepts as explicit or "head knowledge" (E. B. Davis et al., 2013, p. 52; see also Hall & Fujikawa, 2013).

Research on God images has identified at least three views of God held by religious groups: cruel, distant, and loving (Exline et al., 2015). Viewing God as cruel has been linked to feelings of anger toward God, while viewing him as distant is associated with doubts about his existence. Viewing God as loving, on the other hand, has been associated with higher self-worth (Grimes, 2007), increased confidence, higher self-efficacy (Smither & Walker, 2015), and a greater sense of meaning in life (Stroope et al., 2013). These studies indicate that negative views of God contribute to religious struggles, while favorable views of God contribute to a greater sense of well-being.

A perfectionist's view of God may contribute to increased religious and spiritual struggles if they believe they are failing to meet God's expectations. Exline (2013) observed that viewing God as an adverse authority figure contributes to anger, fear, spiritual questions and doubts, and disappointment in oneself over perceived moral failures. Research among perfectionists supports this conclusion. For example, a study of elite athletes revealed that feeling one did not measure up to God's standards led to shame and anger toward God (Houltberg et al., 2017). Athletes who experienced perceived discrepancy from God also reported lower self-worth and tended to view future competitive events as more threatening. On the other hand, highly religious athletes experienced a greater sense of comfort from God following disappointing competitive events, reporting higher self-worth, lower shame, and more positive expectations for

future sporting events (Houltberg et al., 2017). These findings indicate that perceived high standards from God are not necessarily problematic, but the perception that God is disappointed in oneself contributes to worse outcomes. A recent study using a sample of Latter-Day Saints also supports this conclusion (Wang et al., 2018). Participants who believed God had high expectations for them reported more positive affect, but those who felt they disappointed God experienced shame, guilt, and negative affect. These studies indicate that perfectionists' view of God contributes to how they relate to God or their style of attachment toward God.

Two models of how attachment to God develops have been proposed. The compensation model hypothesizes that individuals counteract insecure human attachments by developing a secure attachment to God, who is viewed as the ultimate secure base (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990). Research partially supports this conclusion, showing that insecurely attached individuals report higher rates of positive religious change over time, a shift attributed to the development of a secure relationship with God (Kirkpatrick, 1998). In contrast, the correspondence model proposes that individuals relate to God in ways that mirror their human attachment relationships. Hall et al.'s (2009) article argues that greater support exists for the latter model when considering that insecure attachment to God operates at an implicit level (see also Hall & Fujikawa, 2013). Hall et al.'s (2009) assumption proposes that when insecurely attached individuals report secure relationships with God, their gut-level response is still likely to be insecure.

Religious individuals with insecure attachments report worse outcomes, such as psychological distress, negative feelings toward God, and depression (Eurelings-Bontekoe et al., 2005; Paine & Sandage, 2017). Those with insecure styles of relating to God may experience increased fear and anxiety, potentially explaining why some individuals report lower religious well-being. On the other hand, secure attachment to God has been associated with greater self-

acceptance and life satisfaction (Freeze & DiTommaso, 2015). Hall et al.'s (2009) study also

showed that individuals with secure attachments to God had better relational and religious

outcomes, such as increased forgiveness and stronger connections to a spiritual community. This

research indicates that RS factors, such as one's relational experience of God, may explain why

religious individuals experience divergent outcomes related to religious well-being.

View of Religious Community

For those who are religious, attachment styles appear to be fluid in that the way one

relates to God mirrors how they relate to others in their religious group (Knabb & Pelletier,

2014). Some research has therefore investigated whether anxiety towards one's religious group

affects religious well-being. One study showed that religious well-being (measured as quality of

interaction with God and use of spiritual practices) was higher among those with more secure

attachments to God and their religious group (Freeze & DiTommaso, 2015). Freeze (2017)

conducted a follow-up study to clarify whether these effects were due to attachment style toward

a religious community or to social support. While insecure attachment to a religious group did

not predict participants' levels of engagement in spiritual practices, it did explain increases in

negative affect. This result implies that increased anxiety and disengagement from one's

religious community are associated with greater psychological distress. Freeze's (2017) study

also showed that social support from a religious community predicted higher engagement in

religious practices, while social support from family and friends contributed to greater life

satisfaction and positive affect. These findings suggest that both attachment security and social

support play unique roles in furthering well-being among members of religious groups.

In spite of these adaptive effects, perfectionists who are religious may find it difficult to

participate in their religious group due to low self-esteem and attachment insecurity. Research on

social support among perfectionists suggests this may be the case. For example, in a sample of

university students, maladaptive perfectionists experienced lower social support and greater

depression and anxiety, while adaptive perfectionists reported they received higher social support

(Gnilka et al., 2019). This finding implies that maladaptive perfectionists who struggle to

connect with others experience increased distress, while adaptive perfectionists experience lower

distress when they engage with others. Other studies indicate that lower social support mediates

the relationships between perfectionism and maladaptive outcomes such as depression and

avoidant coping (Dunkley, Sanislow, et al., 2006; Sherry et al., 2008). Based on these studies,

the effects of perfectionism on religious well-being appear to be mediated by relational factors,

such as a sense of belonging within a religious group. Therefore, religious well-being among

adaptive perfectionists may be due in part to a greater sense of belonging with others.

Reparative Experiences Within Religious Community

In addition to clarifying how relationships shape ways of relating to God, RS also

describes how relationships serve as a means of recovery from negative experiences. Sandage et

al. (2008) described how supportive relationships that communicate safety lead to transformation

in how one relates to the sacred. Positive relational experiences may contribute to religious well-

being among perfectionists by providing new social learning and reparative experiences that

increase a sense of belonging. According to RS theory, people are shaped throughout their

lifespans by positive and negative experiences with parents, teachers, and role models

(Worthington & Sandage, 2016). Since negative working models are internalized within these

relationships, Worthington and Sandage (2016) argued they are primarily changed through

relationships that develop new relational templates. E. B. Davis and colleagues (2021) described

two ways that working models of God are altered: change that occurs in explicit beliefs through

social learning and evolution of implicit beliefs through reparative relational experiences.

Religious traditions rely on social learning techniques such as modeling to teach religious

and spiritual values (Oman, 2013). Relational experiences, such as communal worship, sharing

of stories, and modeling by mentors and peers, communicate explicit (i.e., through didactic

instruction) and implicit (i.e., through relational experiences) messages about how to experience

religious health. For those with low religious well-being, social modeling may teach new ways of

relating to God, oneself, and others. E. B. Davis et al. (2021) described how healthy RS involves

balance among an individual's implicit and explicit beliefs about their faith. In their model,

doctrinal beliefs about God, which develop through what is taught about God, should be

cohesive with experiential beliefs about God, which develop through attachment-based working

models.

Individuals may be more likely to experience religious well-being when negative

working models are transformed through corrective relational experiences (i.e., developing new

experiential knowledge that contradicts prior assumptions about how to relate to others;

Castonguay & Hill, 2012; Knox et al., 2012). So far, research has primarily focused on reparative

experiences in mental health therapy. Clients who go through corrective experiences have

reported increased trust and improved interpersonal relationships (Huang et al., 2016; Knox et

al., 2012). Reparative experiences have also been explored in group therapy, in which positive

change is facilitated through interventions like emotional attunement, corrective emotional

experiences, and a sense of group belonging (Marmarosh et al., 2013). These interventions are

aimed at creating reparative experiences that decrease isolation and build trust. Based on an RS

understanding of spiritual health, reparative experiences may similarly alter relational beliefs

about God and others that limit religious health. Healthy religious communities may be ideal for facilitating corrective relational experiences since several religions emphasize loving and collaborative community relationships. Groups that practice these beliefs can create an atmosphere of belonging and trust that contradicts maladaptive beliefs about oneself, God, and others. While religious communities and personal therapy function differently, their goals are similar—growth through learning more adaptive ways of relating to oneself and others. This study explores whether relational factors influence religious and spiritual health among perfectionists.

Summary

This chapter reviewed the current literature on the multidimensional effects of perfectionism on relational and religious well-being. Maladaptive perfectionists are more likely to experience relational problems, mental health pathology, and social isolation (Chen et al., 2015). In addition, maladaptive perfectionists report lower religious well-being, as evidenced by excessive fears of sinning, participation in religion for self-serving reasons, and dissatisfaction with religious performance (Allen et al., 2021; Steffen, 2014; Wang et al., 2018). On the other hand, adaptive perfectionists report more active coping with stress (Noble et al., 2014), greater satisfaction with life (Suh et al., 2017), greater security in attachment relationships (Gnilka et al., 2013), and more intrinsic religious orientations (Steffen, 2014). Research suggests that perfectionism's twofold effects on religious well-being may relate to the degree that perfectionists experience a sense of belonging with others. This idea is supported by the PSDM and RS theory, which emphasize the role of relational experiences in adaptive social and religious functioning. The next section explains the methodology used to study the relationships among perfectionism, a sense of belonging, and religious well-being in a religious sample.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

This chapter reviews the research methods used to examine the relationship between perfectionism and religious well-being and whether a sense of belonging mediated this relationship. This study also examined whether maladaptive perfectionism moderated the relationships among adaptive perfectionism, a sense of belonging, and religious well-being. This chapter discusses the design and research questions for testing these relationships. In addition, this chapter reviews the population, instrumentation, procedures, and data analysis techniques used to analyze the relationships between variables.

Research Design

This study used a cross-sectional research design to investigate the relationships among multidimensional perfectionism, a sense of belonging, and religious well-being. A convenience sample was drawn from member colleges of a Christian higher education association according to the parameters specified below. Adaptive perfectionism served as the predictor variable and RSW as the outcome variable. Sense of belonging was treated as a variable that mediates the relationship between adaptive perfectionism and religious well-being. Maladaptive perfectionism served as a variable that moderates the relationships among adaptive perfectionism, a sense of belonging, and religious well-being.

Selection of Participants

Participants were recruited from undergraduate colleges that are members of a Christian higher education association. Graduate students were excluded from this study since additional factors may impact these students' ratings of perfectionism, sense of belonging, and religious well-being compared to undergraduates. Additional exclusion criteria were anyone under the age

of 18, individuals who did not identify as religious or spiritual, and those who declined consent to participate. The target size for this sample was 150 participants.

<div align="center">**Instrumentation**</div>

Demographics

The following demographic information was collected: age, gender, race, denominational affiliation, college class standing, university attended, and relationship status.

Perfectionism

Perfectionism was measured using the Discrepancy and High Standards subscales of the Revised Almost Perfect Scale (APS-R; Slaney et al., 2001). Although the APS-R contains a third subscale (Order), researchers agree that this subscale is not a necessary component of adaptive perfectionism (Rice & Ashby, 2007; Stoeber & Otto, 2006). Sample items include "doing my best never seems to be enough" (discrepancy) and "I have a strong need to strive for excellence" (standards). Nineteen items are measured on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The APS-R has demonstrated reliability and validity with internal consistency alphas ranging from .82 to .94 (Rice et al., 2007; Slaney et al., 2001).

Sense of Belonging

Participants' sense of belonging was measured using the Personal Resource Questionnaire-2000 (PRQ-2000; Weinert, 2003). The PRQ-2000 assesses perceived social support related to worth, social integration, intimacy, nurturance, and assistance (Weinert & Brandt, 1987). The PRQ-2000 has 15 items and uses a 7-point Likert scale that ranges from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Sample items include "I belong to a group in which I feel important," "I have a sense of being needed by another person," and "I know that others appreciate me as a person." The instructions were modified for participants to rate statements as

they relate to their religious or spiritual community. One item was reworded to remove a

reference to friends and family, and an outdated reference to homemaking was removed. Meta-

analysis of the PRQ-2000 shows consistent reliability and validity, with internal consistency

ranging from .82 to .93 (Tawalbeh & Ahmad, 2013; Weinert, 2003).

Religious Well-Being

Religious well-being was measured using an adaptation of the Brief Multidimensional

Measure of Religiousness/Spirituality (BMMRS; Fetzer Institute & National Institute on Aging

Working Group, 1999; Johnstone et al., 2021). This study used the five-factor structure proposed

by Johnstone et al. (2021) as a better model of fit for a college student sample with the exception

that the Negative Congregational Support subscale was not included in this study. Cronbach's

Alphas from the Johnstone et al. (2021) study are reported for each of the subscales below. Item

wording was updated to refer to God instead of a higher power and a reference to synagogue was

removed since data were collected from a Christian sample. One item was reworded to refer to

religion *and* spirituality. Since the original BMMRS subscales used rating scales with differing

ranges, this study used the method adopted by Johnstone et al. (2021) for standardizing subscale

scores. The subscales were combined in the final analysis for a total RSW score.

The Positive Spiritual Experience subscale (16 items) measures a sense of positive

engagement with God and spiritual purpose/mission ($\alpha = .96$). Samples of items are "The events

in my life unfold according to a divine or greater plan" and "I feel the love of God for me,

directly or through others." The Religious Practices subscale (four items) measures the frequency

with which religious behaviors are practiced ($\alpha = .77$). Samples of items are "How often do you

read the Bible or other religious literature?" and "Besides religious services, how often do you

take part in other activities at a place of worship?" The Positive Congregational Support subscale

(three items) assesses the availability of support from others (α = .78). One item reads, "If you had a problem or were faced with a difficult situation, how much comfort would the people in your congregation be willing to give?" The item related to saying grace before meals was considered irrelevant to the study and was removed from the Congregational Support scale. The Forgiveness subscale (three items) assesses forgiveness of self and others (α = .70). Items include "I have forgiven those who hurt me" and "I feel deep inner peace or harmony."

This study also measured religious well-being using the Instability subscale of the Spiritual Assessment Inventory (SAI), which assesses instability with God (Hall & Edwards, 1996). Samples of items include "I am afraid that God will give up on me," and "my emotional connection with God is unstable." The SAI Instability subscale has shown consistent reliability and validity across studies (Hall & Edwards, 1996; Hall & Edwards, 2002; Hall et al., 2009).

Research Procedures

Approval to conduct the study was requested from the Liberty University Institutional Review Board. Upon approval, a list of member schools received an invitation from the researcher to participate in the study. These schools received a follow-up email approximately two weeks after the original invitation was sent. Schools in the member association also received a letter of support from the president of the Christian higher education association, encouraging schools to participate in the study. Participating schools were allowed to request a copy of aggregated data upon completion of the study. To encourage participation, the study request offered a $5 gift card to the first 150 participants.

Participants were asked to read a consent document informing them that data would be collected related to perfectionism, a sense of belonging, and religious well-being. The consent document informed participants that their information would be collected anonymously and

stored securely. Finally, the consent document reminded participants that involvement in the study was voluntary and that they may discontinue participation at any time. Participants were informed that proceeding with the survey indicated that they had read the consent form and agreed to participate in the survey.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

RQ1: What is the relationship between adaptive perfectionism (x) and religious well-being (y)?

Hypothesis 1: A positive relationship exists between adaptive perfectionism and religious well-being.

Null Hypothesis 1: Adaptive perfectionism has no relationship with religious well-being.

RQ2: Does a sense of belonging (m) mediate the relationship between adaptive perfectionism (x) and religious well-being (y)?

Hypothesis 2: A sense of belonging has a mediating effect on the relationship between adaptive perfectionism and religious well-being.

Null Hypothesis 2: A sense of belonging does not impact the relationship between adaptive perfectionism and religious well-being.

RQ3a: Does maladaptive perfectionism (w) moderate the relationship between adaptive perfectionism (x) and religious well-being (y)?

Hypothesis 3a: Maladaptive perfectionism attenuates the effect of adaptive perfectionism on religious well-being.

Null Hypothesis 3a: Maladaptive perfectionism does not affect the relationship between adaptive perfectionism and religious well-being.

RQ3b: Does maladaptive perfectionism (w) moderate the relationship between adaptive perfectionism (x) and a sense of belonging (m)?

Hypothesis 3b: Maladaptive perfectionism mitigates the effects of adaptive perfectionism on a sense of belonging.

Null Hypothesis 3b: Maladaptive perfectionism has no effect on the relationship between adaptive perfectionism and a sense of belonging.

Data Processing and Analysis

After data collection was complete, the researcher reviewed the results in IBM SPSS Version 29. Invalid responses were removed, and the data were checked for normality. Descriptive statistics and bivariate Pearson correlations were calculated for all study variables. A mediation analysis and a conditional process analysis were conducted in SPSS using Hayes's (2022) PROCESS macro.

Summary

This chapter reviewed the methods used to answer the research questions. Cross-sectional survey research examined the relationship between adaptive perfectionism and religious well-being, the mediating effects of a sense of belonging, and the moderating effects of maladaptive perfectionism in a convenience sample of Christian college students. Hayes's (2022) moderated mediation analysis was used to analyze the data collected and test the research questions and hypotheses.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationships between perfectionism, a sense of belonging, and RSW. This study explored (1) whether adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism had divergent effects on religious well-being and (2) whether a sense of belonging within a religious group mediated the relationship between perfectionism and religious well-being. Based on previous research, it was expected that maladaptive perfectionism, which is marked by high self-criticism, would undermine religious well-being. This study also sought to understand whether high personal standards, in the absence of self-criticism, improved religious well-being. The hypotheses were informed by attachment research and RS theory, both of which suggest that healthy relationships contribute to greater well-being. This chapter describes the survey results and statistical analyses used to examine the research questions. Pearson correlations are reviewed to confirm whether the relationships among study variables were in the expected directions. Results from a moderated mediation analysis and a modified mediation model are also reported. These analyses were used to test whether adaptive and maladaptive perfection affected RSW in opposite directions and whether participants' belonging mediated these relationships.

Participant Demographics

A total of 204 participants met the study criteria and completed the survey in February and March of 2023. Data screening included removal of duplicate and incomplete surveys, surveys with a completion time greater than 300 seconds, and surveys completed by participants who were over the age of 24. Two multivariate outliers were removed, resulting in a total of 137 participants who were included in the final analysis. The sample was 65% female ($n = 89$) and 34.3% male ($n = 47$) and included one participant who chose not to disclose their gender. The

average age of participants was $M = 20.07$ ($SD = 1.40$). Table 4.1 presents full demographics for

participants.

Table 4.1

Participant Demographics

Characteristic	n	%
Gender		
Female	89	65.0
Male	47	34.3
Prefer not to say	1	0.7
Ethnicity		
White	122	89.1
African American	5	3.6
American Indian/Alaskan Native	4	2.9
Asian	4	2.9
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	3	2.2
Hispanic/Latinx/Other	7	5.1
Other	1	0.7
Prefer not to say	2	1.5
Religious affiliation		
Assemblies of God	3	2.2
Baptist	13	9.5
Christian Church	21	15.3
Nazarene	1	0.7
Wesleyan	36	26.3
Nondenominational	35	25.5
Other	28	20.4
Class standing		
Freshman	42	30.7
Sophomore	28	20.4
Junior	40	29.2
Senior	27	19.7
Marital status		
Single	78	56.9
In a relationship	49	35.8
Married	10	7.3

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations are reported in Table 4.2. The internal

consistency of the scales used in the study was high, except for the forgiveness subscale, which

was included in the total RSW scale. Since the three items in the forgiveness subscale were

considered to represent important aspects of RSW, the scale was retained in the analysis despite

low internal consistency ($\alpha = .525$). Due to nonsignificant correlations with study variables, the

religious practices subscale was not included in the final analysis. Overall, participants reported

high personal standards ($M = 41.87$, $SD = 5.05$), high levels of discrepancy ($M = 50.82$, $SD = $

14.65), moderately high sense of belonging ($M = 85.69$, $SD = 11.35$), and moderately high RSW

($M = 47.89$, $SD = 7.45$). RSW was also assessed in a separate analysis with the Instability

subscale of the SAI. Instability with God was moderately low in the sample ($M = 17.62$, $SD = $

6.22).

Table 4.2

Pearson's r*, Means, Standard Deviations, and Cronbach's α*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
(1) APS-R Standards	1							
(2) APS-R Discrepancy	.234**	1						
(3) PRQ Belonging	.196*	-.211*	1					
(4) SAI Instability	.113	.488**	-.272**	1				
(5) Forgiveness	-.148	-.337**	.237**	-.315**	1			
(6) Positive Spirituality	-.038	-.275**	.259**	-.436**	.503**	1		
(7) Congregational Support	.004	-.163	.381**	-.256**	.296**	.327**	1	
(8) Total RSWa	-.061	-.321**	.330**	-.461**	.668**	.959**	.518**	1
M	41.869	50.818	85.693	17.620	5.909	37.256	4.723	47.889
SD	5.051	14.651	11.349	6.218	1.596	5.867	1.469	7.454
Cronbach's α	.768	.932	.890	.822	.525	.830	.819	.850

*Correlation is significant at the .05 level, two-tailed. **Correlation is significant at the .01 level, two-tailed.
aTotal RSW = Forgiveness, Positive Spirituality, and Congregational Support. Correlations among RSW and variables 5–7 reflect collinearity from cross-loading of scales.

Rice and Ashby (2007) recommended classifying maladaptive perfectionists as those who have high scores on personal standards (APS-R Standards score $\geq$ 37) and high scores on discrepancy (APS-R Discrepancy score $\geq$ 45). Based on the cutoff scores, the following groups were observed in the study: adaptive perfectionists ($n = 36$, $M_{standards} = 42.64$, $SD = 3.32$, $M_{discrepancy} = 34.50$, $SD = 6.11$), maladaptive perfectionists ($n = 82$, $M_{standards} = 43.68$, $SD = 3.56$, $M_{discrepancy} = 59.21$, $SD = 10.96$), and nonperfectionists ($n = 19$, $M_{standards} = 32.58$, $SD = 2.65$, $M_{discrepancy} = 45.53$, $SD = 11.20$). Descriptive statistics for perfectionism groups are reported in Table 4.3. Students in this study reported significantly higher discrepancy compared to a sample of college students attending public universities ($N = 1537$, $M = 39.80$, $SD = 15.22$; Rice & Ashby, 2007) and significantly lower adaptive perfectionism than a recent sample of students at a public university (Lin & Muenks, 2022).

Table 4.3

Perfectionism Group Means and Standard Deviations

Subscale	Nonperfectionists ($n = 19$)		Adaptive perfectionists ($n = 36$)		Maladaptive perfectionists ($n = 82$)	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Discrepancy	45.53	11.20	34.50	6.11	59.21	10.96
High Standards	32.58	2.65	42.64	3.32	43.68	3.56
Belonging	80.00	13.86	88.72	9.67	85.68	11.02
RSW	48.45	7.02	49.83	7.33	46.91	7.51
Instability	16.74	6.43	15.03	4.80	18.96	6.39

Hypothesis 1 Results

The first hypothesis stated that adaptive perfectionism would have a positive relationship with RSW. A positive relationship would indicate that religious individuals who adhere to high personal standards experience more satisfying religious outcomes. Contrary to expectations, Pearson correlations revealed that high personal standards did not significantly correlate with

RSW or with instability with God. This suggests that in the present sample, adaptive perfectionism was not associated with greater RSW. High standards had a significant positive correlation with APS-R Discrepancy. Although the correlation was significant in the total sample, when scores were examined separately by gender, the correlation between standards and discrepancy remained significant only for females ($r = .291$, $p < .01$). The positive correlation between standards and discrepancy indicates that females were more likely than males to report maladaptive perfectionism, or disappointment over their failure to meet their own high personal standards. To test whether there was a statistically significant difference in the average maladaptive perfectionism scores reported by females ($M = 52.63$, $SD = 14.80$) and males ($M = 47.49$, $SD = 14.06$), an independent samples t test was conducted. However, since the confidence interval for the test included zero (95% CI [-10.33, 0.05]), the average difference in scores, $t(134) = -1.96$, $p = .026$, one-tailed, was not considered to be statistically significant. Since high personal standards did not significantly correlate with RSW, Hypothesis 1 was not supported.

Hypotheses 2 and 3 Results

Hypothesis 2 stated that a sense of belonging would have a mediating effect on the relationship between adaptive perfectionism and religious well-being. This would indicate that (a) adaptive perfectionism had a positive relationship with a sense of belonging and (b) adaptive perfectionists who experience greater belonging have higher RSW. Hypothesis 3 stated that maladaptive perfectionism would weaken the effects of adaptive perfectionism on RSW and on a sense of belonging. This would indicate that perfectionists who are highly self-critical are less likely to feel they belong with others and more likely to experience worse religious outcomes, both as a function of a lower sense of belonging and of maladaptive perfectionism.

Pearson Correlation

Consistent with Hypothesis 2, high standards had a significant positive correlation with a sense of belonging. However, this correlation was small, which suggests that high personal standards only made a minimal contribution to relational well-being among participants. Pearson correlations further revealed that a sense of belonging had positive correlations with all of the RSW subscales. A sense of belonging had a significant positive relationship with the Forgiveness subscale ($r = .237, p < .01$). The Forgiveness subscale measured self-forgiveness, other-forgiveness, and a sense of inner peace. Among students, belonging appeared to relate to more adaptive responses toward oneself and others and to a greater degree of serenity. A sense of belonging also correlated with positive spirituality ($r = .259, p < .01$), which measures a person's connection to the transcendent, specifically, relationship with God, a sense of spiritual purpose or mission, and strength derived from one's religious or spiritual beliefs. The correlation between a sense of belonging and positive spirituality indicated that those who had more positive religious experiences felt a greater degree of belonging. A sense of belonging also correlated with congregational support ($r = .381, p < .01$), or the degree of support a person believes their religious group would provide in a crisis. Since this correlation was only moderate, it appears that a person's sense of belonging within their religious group was related to but distinct from beliefs that their congregation was supportive. A sense of belonging also correlated with instability with God ($r = -.272, p < .01$) and with total RSW ($r = .330, p < .01$). These correlations indicate that participants who had a higher sense of belonging in their religious community were more likely to experience a healthy sense of connection to God and a better religious experience overall.

Pearson correlations further identified significant relationships between discrepancy, a sense of belonging ($r = -.211$, $p < .05$), RSW ($r = -.321$, $p < .01$), and instability ($r = .488$, $p < .01$). These correlations indicated that students who were dissatisfied with their performance were less likely to feel they belonged in their religious group, had lower quality religious experiences, and felt they had a more negative relationship with God. The Pearson correlations partially supported Hypothesis 2 by identifying significant positive relationships between high standards and a sense of belonging and between a sense of belonging and RSW. The negative correlations between discrepancy, belonging, and RSW provided partial support for Hypothesis 3, by suggesting that maladaptive perfectionism may be a factor that lowers belonging and RSW.

Moderated Mediation Model

To further test Hypotheses 2 and 3, two moderated mediation models were conducted using Model 8 of Hayes's (2022) PROCESS macro for SPSS. PROCESS enables conditional process analyses by using ordinary least squares regression to predict the degree of relationship between a combination of antecedent and consequent variables. In the first conditional process model, high standards served as the predictor variable and a sense of belonging served as the mediating variable. RSW and SAI Instability were used as separate outcome variables in subsequent models. In both models, discrepancy and standards were mean centered prior to the analysis. Confidence intervals used in all models were based on 5000 bootstrap samples.
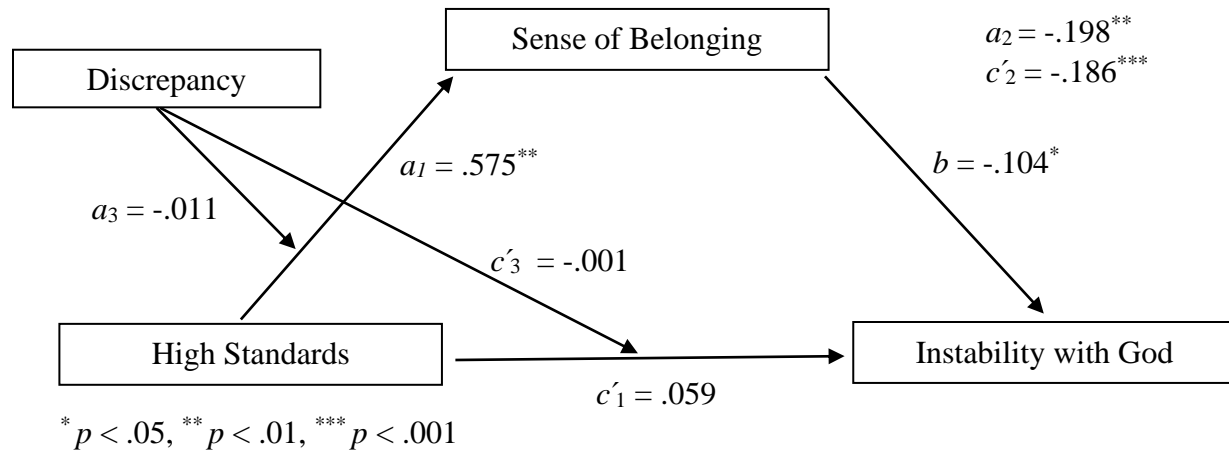
In the first model, high standards predicted an increase in a sense of belonging ($a_1 = .575$, $p < .01$), indicating that adaptive perfectionism was associated with a greater sense of belonging among participants. As expected, a higher sense of belonging also predicted increases in RSW ($b = .187$, $p < .001$), suggesting that experiencing a greater degree of belonging within a religious group contributed to greater overall RSW. Contrary to expectations, high standards did not

significantly predict changes in RSW (c'_1 = -.091, p = .463). This indicated that adaptive

perfectionism may have indirectly affected RSW through a sense of belonging but did not

directly affect RSW. Hypothesis 2, which posited that a sense of belonging would mediate the

relationship between adaptive perfectionism and RSW, was only partially supported since the

relationship between adaptive perfectionism and RSW was not significant.

Model 1 also tested whether discrepancy moderated the relationships between adaptive

perfectionism, a sense of belonging, and RSW. Contrary to expectations, maladaptive

perfectionism did not significantly moderate the relationship between standards and a sense of

belonging (a_3 = -.011, p = .397) or between standards and RSW (c'_3 = -.006, p = .453). However,

discrepancy did predict decreases in a sense of belonging (a_2 = -.198, p < .01), indicating that as

maladaptive perfectionism increased, participants' sense of belonging diminished. Discrepancy

also predicted changes in RSW (c'_2 = -.119, p < .01), indicating that as maladaptive

perfectionism increased, RSW decreased. The first model predicted 11% of the variance in a

sense of belonging (r = .336, p < .01) and 18% of the variance in RSW (r = .427, p < .001).

However, the direct effect of standards on RSW was not significant, and the assumptions about

mediation were not supported. Figure 4.1 shows the statistical diagram for Model 1.

Figure 4.1

Moderated Mediation of Religious Well-being

$^*p < .01, ^{**}p < .001$
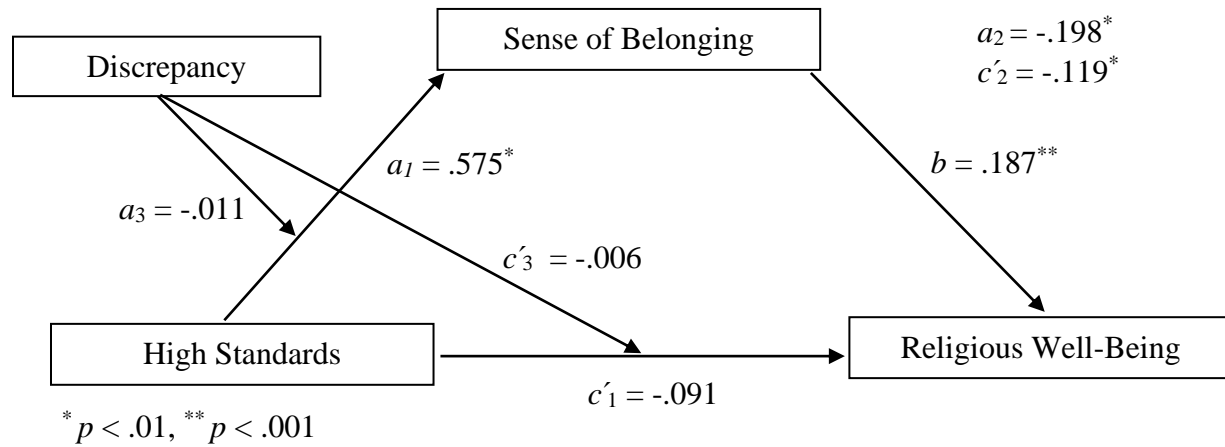
The second model mirrored Model 1 except that instability with God was used as the outcome variable. In Model 2, standards did not significantly predict changes in instability with God ($c_1' = .059$, $p = .546$). This suggests that adaptive perfectionists' quality of relationship with God was not significantly affected by having high personal standards. However, a sense of belonging was predictive of instability with God ($b = -.104$, $p < .05$). This indicates that as participants' sense of belonging increased, instability with God declined. In Model 2, discrepancy did not significantly moderate the relationship between high standards and instability ($c_3' = -.001$, $p = .924$). However, discrepancy was predictive of increases in instability with God ($c_2' = .186$, $p < .001$). This implies that while discrepancy did not interact with high standards to influence students' quality of relationship with God, discrepancy did contribute to higher instability with God independently. Model 2 predicted 27% of the variance in instability with God ($r = .519$, $p < .001$). Figure 4.2 shows the statistical diagram for Model 2.

Figure 4.2

Moderated Mediation of Instability with God

$a_2 = -.198^{**}$
$c'_2 = -.186^{***}$

$a_1 = .575^{**}$

$b = -.104^{*}$

$a_3 = -.011$

$c'_3 = -.001$

$c'_1 = .059$

$^{*}p < .05, ^{**}p < .01, ^{***}p < .001$

Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3 were not fully supported by Models 1 and 2. Although a sense of belonging had relationships in the expected directions with RSW and instability, adaptive perfectionism did not play a significant role in the model. While maladaptive perfectionism significantly interacted with the other variables in the model, it did not moderate the relationships among variables as predicted. This suggests that adaptive perfectionism was not a factor that significantly contributed to perfectionists' RSW in the sample. However, maladaptive perfectionism did appear to influence the quality of perfectionists' religious experiences, their relationships with others, and the quality of their relationship with God. To further investigate these relationships, a modified model was selected and tested.

Model Modification

The original analyses suggested that both discrepancy and high standards contribute to unique variance in a sense of belonging. In addition, discrepancy appears to contribute to unique variance in RSW. Based on these observations, a simple mediation model using Hayes's (2022) PROCESS Model 4 was chosen to test these assumptions. Four mediation analyses were conducted. In the first model, discrepancy was the predictor variable, a sense of belonging was

the mediating variable, and high standards was a covariate. In the second model, high standards was the predictor variable, and discrepancy was a covariate. In Models 1 and 2, RSW served as the outcome variable. Instability with God was the outcome variable in the two subsequent models.

In Model 1, discrepancy had a significant negative effect on a sense of belonging ($a =$ -.210, $p < .01$) and on RSW ($c' = -.125$, $p < .01$). This indicates that as discrepancy rose, participants' sense of belonging with others decreased. When participants' sense of belonging was held constant, discrepancy independently contributed to decreases in RSW. A sense of belonging also independently contributed to RSW ($b = .190$, $p < .001$), which suggests that the quality of participants' religious experience was impacted by the degree of belonging they felt within their religious group. As the covariate, high standards had a significant positive effect on a sense of belonging ($C = .583$, $p < .01$). The total effect of the model was significant ($c = -.165$, $p < .001$). The indirect effect of discrepancy on RSW through a sense of belonging, controlling for high standards ($ab = -.040$, 95% CI = [-.079, -.009]), was also significant. Model 1 accounted for 11% of the variance in a sense of belonging ($r = .329$, $p < .001$) and 18% of the variance in RSW ($r = .422$, $p < .001$). Figure 4.3 shows a statistical diagram of Model 1.

Figure 4.3

Mediation of Religious Well-Being
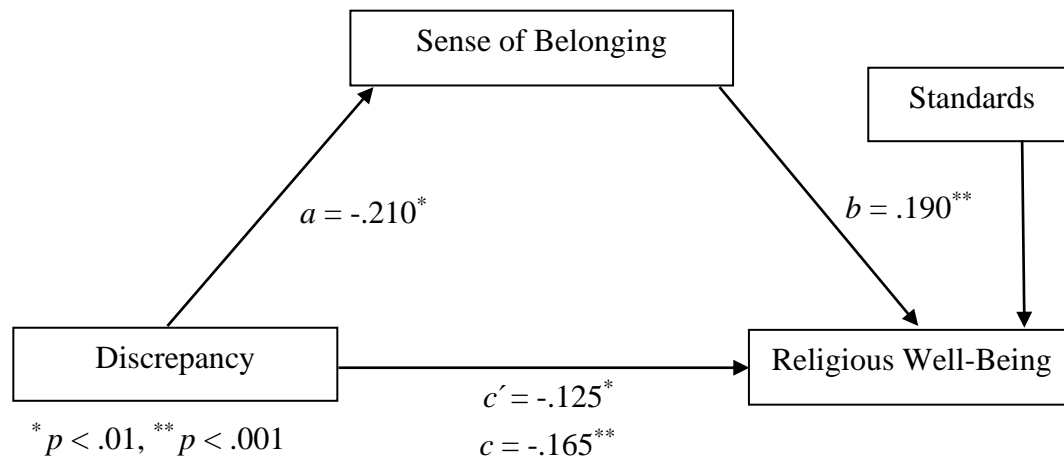
In Model 2, discrepancy contributed to higher instability with God ($c' = .185$, $p < .001$), meaning that instability with God increased as discrepancy rose. In Model 2, a sense of belonging contributed to lower instability with God ($b = -.104$, $p < .05$), indicating that as belonging increased, instability with God lessened. The total effect of the model was significant ($c = .207$, $p < .001$). However, the indirect effect of maladaptive perfectionism on instability was not significant since the confidence interval included zero ($ab = .022$, 95% CI [-.000, .051]). Model 2 accounted for 24% of the variance in instability with God ($r = .488$, $p < .001$). Figure 4.4 shows a statistical diagram of Model 2.

Figure 4.4

Mediation of Instability with God
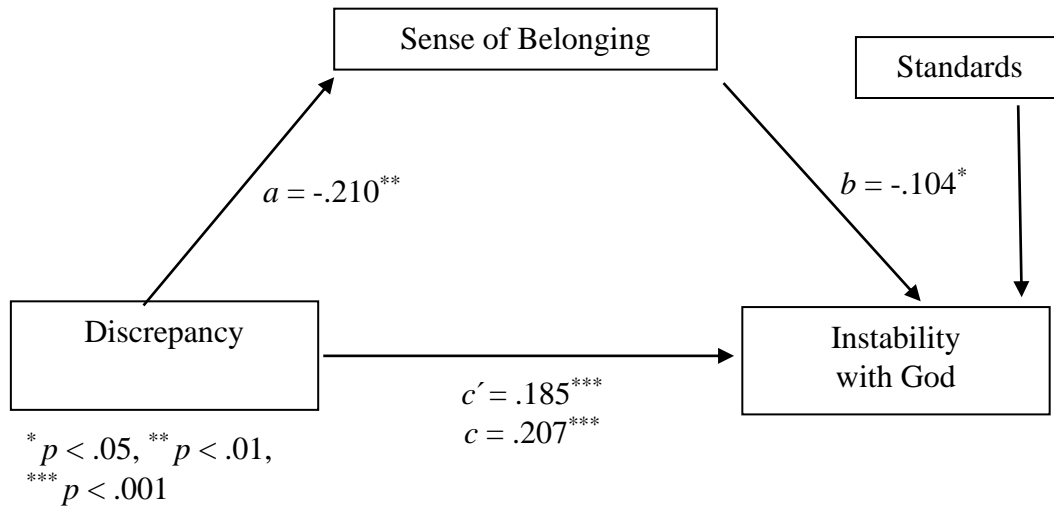
Models 3 and 4 were conducted to test the indirect effect of the models when high

standards was used as the predictor and discrepancy was the covariate. In Model 3, the indirect

effect of high standards on RSW mediated by belonging was significant ($ab = .111$, 95% CI

[.020, .233]). In Model 4, the indirect effect of high standards on instability mediated by

belonging was not significant ($ab = -.061$, 95% CI [-.159, .001]). These findings were consistent

with the findings of the original models, which implies that maladaptive perfectionism

negatively affected relational well-being and RSW while a sense of belonging positively

impacted RSW.

Summary

This chapter presented the statistical analyses conducted to test the three research

hypotheses. Hypothesis 1, that adaptive perfectionism would contribute to greater RSW, was not

supported. Adaptive perfectionism did not contribute to RSW in the tested models. Hypothesis 2,

that a sense of belonging would mediate the relationship between adaptive perfectionism and

RSW, was partially supported. Adaptive perfectionism was associated with an increase in a sense

of belonging among participants. Although adaptive perfectionism contributed to a sense of belonging, which in turn had a positive relationship with RSW, adaptive perfectionism did not independently contribute to RSW. Hypothesis 3, that maladaptive perfectionism would moderate the relationships between adaptive perfectionism, a sense of belonging, and RSW, was not fully supported. While maladaptive perfectionism had negative relationships with a sense of belonging and RSW, perfectionism did not have a moderating effect. A modified model was tested to determine whether a sense of belonging mediated the relationship between maladaptive perfectionism and RSW. The modified model was supported, although it accounted for only a small portion of the variance in a sense of belonging. The results indicated that although adaptive perfectionism did not contribute to belonging and RSW as expected, maladaptive perfectionism decreased belonging and RSW among participants.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Perfectionism is a multidimensional personality trait with diverse effects on well-being. Some perfectionists experience greater vitality and satisfaction with life (Gaudreau et al., 2017), while other perfectionists are overly scrupulous in their religious practices (Allen et al., 2021), experience emotional problems (Houltberg et al., 2017), and struggle with interpersonal relationships (Slaney et al., 2006). Researchers have concluded that perfectionism varies substantially among individuals and that the overall effect depends on individual combinations of perfectionism traits (Lundh et al., 2008). Some researchers have also observed that adaptive perfectionism may only serve as a positive factor when life runs smoothly for perfectionists and becomes a negative factor when perfectionists encounter stress (Gaudreau et al., 2017). As researchers have wrestled with how to understand the diverse effects of perfectionism, one theme that has emerged is that high personal standards, or the pursuit of excellence, is preferable to the excessive pursuit of perfection (Gaudreau, 2019; Gaudreau et al., 2022; Halgin & Leahy, 1989; see also Hamachek, 1978).

Theories of perfectionism also point out the extent to which perfectionists struggle with attachment insecurity, which leads to many problems for perfectionists (Han et al., 2022; Rice & Lopez, 2004). Attachment problems contribute to the perfectionist's belief that they are unacceptable to others when they are imperfect. Perfectionism develops as a coping response to counteract a sense of deficiency and to hide one's flaws (Hewitt, Flett, & Mikail, 2017). Perfectionists generally respond to insecurity in ways that create more interpersonal problems and leave them more isolated. In addition, perfectionists who are religious struggle with religious problems (Allen et al., 2021). Perfectionists who are religious appear to face increased risk of problematic outcomes related to a low sense of belonging and low RSW.

Since few studies have explored whether adaptive perfectionists experience positive religious and spiritual outcomes, this study sought to understand whether adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism had diverse effects on RSW. Previous research has indicated that relational well-being has protective effects on health and overall well-being. This study investigated whether relational belonging contributed to RSW among perfectionists. This study used a cross-sectional quantitative survey design to explore how perfectionism impacted Christian college students' sense of belonging and RSW. Participants were sampled from member colleges of a Christian higher education association and completed an online survey assessing rates of adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism, RSW, and the degree of belonging participants felt in their religious group. Correlational and conditional process analyses were used to investigate the nature of the relationships among study variables and test the three study hypotheses. The hypotheses were (1) adaptive perfectionism would contribute to greater RSW, (2) a sense of belonging would mediate the relationship between adaptive perfectionism and RSW, and (3) maladaptive perfectionism would moderate the effects of adaptive perfectionism on a sense of belonging and RSW. Although the first hypothesis was not supported, the second and third hypotheses were partially supported.

Discussion of Findings

Adaptive Perfectionism and Religious Well-Being

The first and third hypotheses proposed that high standards would contribute to a higher degree of RSW among religious students. Participants in this study reported having high standards for their performance and moderately high levels of RSW. Despite this, correlational and regression analyses showed that high standards did not significantly contribute to RSW. This was surprising considering the findings of previous research on religious groups. In contrast with

this study, research by Ashby and Huffman (1999) found that undergraduates who were more religious were more likely to report adaptive perfectionism than less religious students. In addition, two previous studies indicated that adaptive perfectionists approach their faith with intrinsic rather than extrinsic motivations (Crosby et al., 2011; Steffen, 2014). These studies suggest that adaptive perfectionists may experience better religious functioning than maladaptive perfectionists because their faith is meaningful for personal rather than utilitarian reasons. Studies that consider adaptive perfectionism more broadly also indicate that adaptive perfectionists tend to function more successfully overall. These studies have shown that adaptive perfectionists experience higher academic satisfaction, greater satisfaction with life, and greater subjective happiness compared to nonperfectionists and maladaptive perfectionists (Gaudreau et al., 2017; Gnilka et al., 2013; Suh et al., 2017). These findings suggest that adaptive perfectionists may experience a greater degree of fulfillment in life, including in their religious faith, because they expect more from themselves and are able to accomplish their goals without becoming self-critical.

The assumption that adaptive perfectionists would apply high standards to their religious life and therefore have greater RSW does not appear to have been supported in this study. This may have been because the sample included a relatively small percentage (approximately 26%) of adaptive perfectionists ($n = 36$). In contrast, in a recent sample of public college students, approximately 40% of the sample were adaptive perfectionists (Lin & Muenks, 2022). While Lin and Muenks's (2022) sample was more culturally diverse than the present study's, this difference does reflect that this study may have had a disproportionately low number of adaptive perfectionists. It is conjectured that the correlation between adaptive perfectionism and RSW may have been significant in a larger sample that included a higher number of adaptive

perfectionists. The low number of adaptive perfectionists may relate to the religious background

of students, which may have influenced the degree of healthy versus unhealthy perfectionism

observed in the study. Participants were sampled from conservative religious colleges and

represented a relatively small subset of Christian denominations. Researchers have noted that

religious groups may inadvertently perpetuate perfectionism (Mebane & Ridley, 1988), and it is

possible that this occurs more frequently within conservative religious groups. For example, in a

study of college students, Helm et al. (2001) hypothesized that traditional religious groups may

produce worse emotional outcomes for their adherents by promoting religious perfectionism.

This hypothesis was partially confirmed, as religious fundamentalism was associated with higher

rates of perfectionism among males. Although females did not have higher perfectionism in

relationship to fundamentalism, females did report a lower sense of pride in themselves related to

their fundamentalist beliefs (Helm et al., 2001).

This study did not directly assess whether rates of perfectionism were tied to

fundamentalism. However, it can be inferred that the conservative nature of the sample may have

contributed to higher rates of unhealthy perfectionism. At least one previous study has reported

that religious fundamentalism does not contribute to perfectionism (Rickner & Tan, 1994).

However, this study only assessed Protestant males; the sample was not fully representative of

fundamentalist and perfectionistic groups. Interestingly, Rickner and Tan's (1994) study did

observe that participants who reported healthier functioning in their family of origin reported less

perfectionism. This finding suggests that outside of religious factors, perfectionism may be tied

to early family life. Other studies have noted that perfectionism seems to be more common in

certain families, such as those with rigid, enmeshed, or disengaged dynamics (Craddock et al.,

2010), those with low emotional connection (K. E. Rasmussen & Troilo, 2016), and those in

which children observe perfectionism in their parents and are held to perfectionistic standards (Neumeister, 2004). While family dynamics are known to play a role in perfectionism, more research is needed on perfectionism in conservative religious groups.

The current study adds to the existing research by suggesting that conservative groups may have lower rates of adaptive perfectionism. This finding could be of concern if it means that conservative students expect less from themselves (e.g., are nonperfectionists) or are more likely to engage in toxic self-criticism when they fail to meet their high standards (e.g., are maladaptive perfectionists). Although researchers caution against promoting adaptive perfectionism, recent studies indicate that pursuing excellence may enhance creativity (Goulet-Pelletier et al., 2022) and academic performance (Gaudreau et al., 2022). It is therefore relevant to consider whether certain factors keep highly religious students from reaching their full potential by contributing to nonperfectionism or maladaptive perfectionism.

Adaptive Perfectionism and A Sense of Belonging

Some research suggests that adaptive perfectionists have more secure attachment styles (Gnilka et al., 2013; Stoeber & Otto, 2006). Based on this research, the second hypothesis suggested that adaptive perfectionists would experience greater belonging within their religious group. This appears to have been the case in this study. The regression analysis provided evidence that adaptive perfectionism contributed to unique variance in participants' sense of belonging. That is, when disappointment over not measuring up to one's standards was held constant, high standards contributed to increases in students' sense of belonging. This finding contrasts with the results of a previous study, which found no differences among adaptive and maladaptive perfectionists on a measure of belonging (LoCicero et al., 2000). However, LoCicero's et al.'s (2000) study did find that perfectionists reported higher belonging than

nonperfectionists. Two other studies are consistent with the current analysis. Rice et al. (2006) found that adaptive perfectionism was associated with increased social connectedness (i.e., a sense of closeness and belonging with others) among college students, and Ward and Ashby (2008) found that adaptive perfectionists reported higher belonging than maladaptive perfectionists using cluster analysis of perfectionism groups.

The current study corresponds with previous research suggesting that students who have high standards but are not highly self-critical experience a better sense of connection in their relationships. This finding may have been less pronounced in the current study since there was a low number of adaptive perfectionists. Even so, the regression analyses detected a significant effect between high standards and belonging. In addition, although maladaptive perfectionists reported a lower sense of belonging than adaptive perfectionists, they still reported higher belonging on average than nonperfectionists in the study. This may suggest that some perfectionists experience a combination of adaptive and maladaptive traits that compete in their effect on relational outcomes. In other words, although some perfectionists in the study may have derived a sense of belonging from their high standards of achievement, at the same time, they may have struggled with belonging because of high self-criticism. This was evidenced by the low total effects of the models tested, which show that the negative effects of discrepancy on RSW competed with the positive effects of belonging.

Interestingly, the group that reported the lowest average sense of belonging and experienced the most variability in belonging was nonperfectionists. This finding is consistent with LoCicero et al.'s (2000) study. LoCicero et al.'s (2000) measure of belonging assessed students' social interest or desire to cooperate with others, which was lower among nonperfectionists than among adaptive perfectionists. These results may indicate that

nonperfectionists are less socially connected because they are less motivated to get along with others. The results of these studies may also indicate that perfectionists, whether adaptive or maladaptive, are more persistent in their pursuit of belonging due to an unusually strong desire to be accepted by others. In other words, perfectionists' excessive need to feel accepted may drive them to pursue social belonging more persistently than nonperfectionists. Previous research has also identified that nonperfectionists experience lower sense of meaning, life satisfaction, and subjective happiness compared to adaptive perfectionists (Suh et al., 2017). This may mean that nonperfectionists take less initiative for reaching personal goals and therefore experience less satisfaction in a variety of areas, including their relationships. Lin and Muenks (2022) found that although nonperfectionists had confidence in their ability to complete a task, they were less likely to see a task as important. This suggests that nonperfectionists have different motivations for reaching goals than perfectionists. It is evident that several differences exist between perfectionists and nonperfectionists, including their sense of social connection and belonging. Although nonperfectionism was not a focus of this study, future research that explores the differences in motivation for nonperfectionists and perfectionists may lead to a better understanding of the divergent outcomes in these groups.

The current study also seemed to suggest that belonging was not largely contingent on adaptive perfectionism. The overall correlation between high personal standards and a sense of belonging was relatively small. Regression analysis, which included both adaptive and maladaptive aspects of perfectionism, only accounted for 11% of the variance in a sense of belonging. While this finding may have been due to the low number of adaptive perfectionists in the sample, it also indicates that factors other than perfectionism contribute to a sense of belonging. In a recent study, Australian university students identified several factors they

believed contributed to a sense of belonging during college (van Gijn-Grosvenor & Huisman, 2020). Students stated that it was important to be included in an environment that was welcoming, accepting, and respectful, to have connections with friends and other students, and to have opportunities for interaction (e.g., clubs and activities). Many of these factors are present to varying degrees on college campuses. Since most students in this study reported moderate to moderately high belonging, it can be inferred that other factors at their university contributed to their sense of belonging. In addition, preexisting factors likely contributed as well, such as family and social support networks developed prior to college. The current study did not assess how factors other than perfectionism contributed to belonging. However, this study extended existing research on belonging and perfectionism by examining these factors in a religious sample. The moderately high rates of belonging among this group may mean that religious groups are positive sources of belonging for students. On the other hand, religious groups may create certain barriers to belonging, such as undue pressure to meet religious expectations. These factors should be examined further in future research.

A Sense of Belonging and Religious Well-being

The second hypothesis proposed that students who felt they belonged within their group would have greater religious and spiritual health. This hypothesis was based on RS theory and attachment theory, both of which emphasize the importance of healthy relationships to a sense of well-being. This study found that a greater sense of belonging did indeed relate to greater RSW among students. Few previous studies have addressed the effects of belonging on RSW. One study did find that women who attended religious services reported a greater sense of belonging than women who did not attend religious services (Hagerty et al., 1996). However, Hagerty et al.'s (1996) analysis only briefly discussed belonging and religiosity. Although research on

belonging and RSW is limited, more studies have explored RSW in connection to social support and attachment styles. Results from the current study were similar to results reported by Freeze (2017), which revealed that people who received more social support from their religious group were more likely to engage in religious practices. The current study also aligned with Freeze and DiTommaso's (2015) finding that people who had more secure attachments with God and their religious community reported greater use of spiritual practices and more positive interactions with God. The current study did not explore attachment styles, but the RSW measure used did address relational factors (e.g., it assessed the quality of a person's overall experience of God, forgiveness of self and others, and the supportiveness of their religious group). Correlational and regression analyses indicated that participants who had higher belonging were more likely to report higher forgiveness, greater support from their congregation, and a better spiritual experience overall. Follow-up analyses also assessed whether participants' sense of belonging specifically contributed to instability with God. When adaptive and maladaptive aspects of perfectionism were controlled, participants who reported greater belonging also reported more stable relationships with God. These results support the conclusion that belonging is linked to greater RSW, both in how students view God and how they experience their faith.

One assumption of this study was that a sense of belonging preceded and therefore contributed to RSW and lower instability with God. Theorists have discussed whether the reverse may be true and have proposed that those with unhealthy attachment styles may turn to God as an alternate attachment figure (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990). However, RS theorists note that RSW is likely to mirror the quality of a person's existing relationships (E. B. Davis et al., 2021; Hall et al., 2009). The current study was not designed to detect which of these theories is more accurate. It is possible that both may be true for different people (i.e., insecure attachment styles

may cause some to have lower religious outcomes, while for others, positive religious experiences may improve their relationships with others). As Hall et al. (2009) suggested, it is also possible that insecure attachment styles are reflected in implicit beliefs about God and may contrast with an individual's explicit beliefs about God. In either of these cases, the current study supports the idea that healthy relationships contribute to better religious outcomes, including more positive ways of relating to God, while maladaptive perfectionism and unhealthy relationships diminish these effects.

This study concurred with previous research that has shown relational and religious health are interrelated. This study also suggested that healthy relationships may be a way to promote greater RSW among perfectionists. E. B. Davis et al. (2021) indicated that healthy spirituality involves congruence between one's doctrinal and experiential beliefs about God. Healthy spirituality is evidenced by flexibility in facing difficulties, greater personal well-being, and behaviors that are consistent with one's beliefs. These authors proposed that corrective relational experiences can diminish incongruence in one's beliefs about God (E. B. Davis et al., 2021). In their writings on RS, Hall and Hall (2021) agreed with this conception, noting that healthy bonds within a religious community are an important means of religious growth. Hall and Hall (2021) suggested that religious communities can promote growth by intentionally facilitating safe and reliable relationships and by encouraging belonging through a common mission and relational experiences. RS theory suggests that religious communities can help perfectionists achieve greater RSW by providing secure relationships that promote growth.

Maladaptive Perfectionism and A Sense of Belonging

The third hypothesis proposed that maladaptive perfectionism would decrease the adaptive effects of perfectionism on a sense of belonging. It was not surprising that students who

reported greater maladaptive perfectionism experienced lower belonging. That is, the more

disappointed participants were with their performance, the less likely they were to feel they

belonged with their religious group. This finding aligns with Rice et al.'s (2006) study of college

students, which found that higher discrepancy contributed to lower social connectedness (i.e.,

belonging) over the course of a semester. Sommerfeld and Malek's (2019) study achieved

similar results. In their study, socially prescribed perfectionism (i.e., the need to meet others'

high expectations) was related to lower belonging among adolescents, which was associated with

concerning consequences in their study, since the combination of low belonging and

perfectionism led to increased suicidal ideation among adolescents (Sommerfeld & Malek,

2019). These findings suggest that not only is low belonging more common among

perfectionists, but that the combination of the two may jeopardize the health of perfectionists.

These studies indicate that the degree to which perfectionists experience satisfying relationships

is pivotal to their well-being.

Overall, a large body of research links maladaptive perfectionism with ineffective

interpersonal patterns. According to the PSDM, relationship problems stem from excessive fear

of rejection and behaviors meant to protect the perfectionist from rejection. Several other reasons

can be drawn from existing research that explain why belonging may be low among

perfectionists. Maladaptive perfectionists have a greater tendency to engage in conflict in their

relationships (Gingras et al., 2020), have anxious patterns of relating to others (Han et al., 2022),

feel the need to conceal weaknesses from others (Chen et al., 2015), and engage in behaviors that

jeopardize relationships, such as being vindictive and hostile (Slaney et al., 2006; Stoeber et al.,

2021). A recent study also found a significant relationship between perfectionism and personality

pathology, including obsessive-compulsive, narcissistic, and passive-aggressive personality traits

(Dimaggio et al., 2018). The authors of that study concluded that perfectionism plays a role in several personality disorders and should be considered along with an individual's tendency to suppress their emotions. The present study did not assess relational patterns or behaviors, just students' perception of whether they mattered to their group. However, the low belonging among maladaptive perfectionists suggests that this group struggles to engage in relationships in positive ways. Since maladaptive relational patterns likely contribute to greater distress and isolation among perfectionists, future research should focus on developing counseling interventions that help perfectionists develop more effective ways of relating with others.

The current study also shows that religiosity does not protect against the negative effects of maladaptive perfectionism on relationships. Even though students in this study were highly religious, they reported high rates of maladaptive perfectionism accompanied by lower belonging. Researchers have observed that interpersonal problems in one's religious group are associated with lower RSW in the form of religious and spiritual struggles (C. G. Ellison & Lee, 2010). This study seems to agree with this conclusion since unhealthy perfectionism was indeed related to interpersonal problems among those who were religious. This is important to address, since religiosity can be an important source of coping and help people respond more positively to difficulties in life (C. L. Park & Edmondson, 2012).

Maladaptive Perfectionism and Religious Well-Being

Hypothesis 3 also assumed that maladaptive perfectionism would independently lower RSW. This hypothesis was supported in the current study since discrepancy contributed to lower RSW among students. This was not a surprising finding given existing research on how maladaptive perfectionism lowers general well-being and contributes to less positive religious coping. Allen et al.'s (2021) study among Latter Day Saints showed that perfectionism led to

more anxiety about God and increased scrupulosity (i.e., obsessive fears of committing a sin). In addition, maladaptive perfectionists were less likely to have intrinsic motivations for practicing their religious faith (Allen et al., 2021). In the current study, maladaptive perfectionists also reported higher instability with God, which is essentially fear of being rejected or punished by God. Instability with God may be related to perceived perfectionism from God. In their study of professional athletes, Houltberg et al. (2017) found that those who felt they were not meeting God's expectations were more likely to be angry at God, feel lower self-worth, and experience greater shame. The effects of religiosity among these athletes appeared to depend upon their beliefs about disappointing God, since some religious athletes felt comforted by God following disappointing performances (Houltberg et al., 2017). These results indicate that individuals in a variety of religious contexts may be anxious about whether God is pleased with their performance. However, whether individuals fear disappointing God seems to depend on their perception of God.

In the current study, an interesting finding was that perfectionism seemed to be more predictive of a perfectionist's view of God than of RSW. In the regression analysis, perfectionism and belonging explained a higher degree of variance in instability with God than in RSW. Correlational analysis also revealed that discrepancy had a more robust relationship with instability than with total RSW. According to these data, discrepancy increased the likelihood that students would feel insecure with God. Students who felt insecure with God were also more likely to feel they did not belong in their religious group. Overall, these findings suggest maladaptive perfectionists may have unhealthy views of God and others that inhibit their RSW.

This study examined two outcomes of perfectionism that have not been sufficiently explored to date among religious groups (low belonging and low RSW). Studies so far have

shown that adaptive perfectionists tend to feel more connected to others, while maladaptive perfectionists report lower belonging. Several studies have also connected worse religious and spiritual outcomes with perfectionism. The current study sheds light on how these factors interact among perfectionists. Overall, several observations can be made. First, adaptive aspects of perfectionism seemed to facilitate greater belonging among religious students. Although this effect was not large in the current group, it is hypothesized that groups with more adaptive perfectionists would show an even stronger relationship between adaptive perfectionism and belonging. Second, perceived belonging was significantly correlated with religious health. Belonging contributed to lower instability with God and more positive religious experiences among students. This relationship held true even when perfectionism was held constant. Third, maladaptive perfectionism had detrimental effects on belonging, RSW, and stability with God. This was consistent across all models examined in the study. Although not all hypotheses were supported in the current study, the relationships among variables were generally in the expected directions. This study further provided support for the PSDM, which describes the importance of achieving a sense of belonging for perfectionists (Hewitt, Flett, & Mikail, 2017). In addition, this research supported observations made by RS theorists that relationships, spiritual health, and view of God are interconnected factors that should be addressed holistically.

Implications

Implications for Counselors

The maladaptive effects of perfectionism, low belonging, and low RSW may cause perfectionists to seek mental health treatment. Perfectionists are a challenging group to treat, perhaps because perfectionism becomes a core aspect of a perfectionist's identity (Flett & Hewitt, 2020). As Greenspon (2008) stated, "Perfectionism is difficult to alter because of the

inherent difficulty in altering one's experience of oneself" (p. 277). Perfectionists also bring their

interpersonal dynamics into therapy, such as by being sensitive to rejection and being critical of

their counselor (Hewitt, Flett, Mikail, Kealy, & Zhang, 2017). Because of these factors,

counselors should be prepared to address countertransference that may arise when working with

these clients. Findings from this study further inform considerations for working with

perfectionists, especially those who are religious.

Counselors should first understand that perfectionists may be hesitant to enter treatment

because of their need to hide what they perceive to be failure (Hewitt, Flett, & Mikail, 2017).

Perfectionists who do enter treatment will likely seek help for other issues, such as relationship

problems (Halgin & Leahy, 1989). Based on the current study, counselors should be mindful of

themes that suggest perfectionism is present, such as loneliness, isolation, excessive worry about

performance, and shame over unmet expectations, including unmet religious expectations. When

counselors recognize that maladaptive perfectionism is contributing to a client's presenting

problem, they can use several treatments to address the underlying thoughts, emotions, and

behaviors that are problematic for perfectionists. As indicated by the current study, treatments

that focus on relational patterns are especially important.

Current treatments for perfectionism include cognitive-behavioral interventions

(Fairweather-Schmidt & Wade, 2015; Rozental, 2020), compassion-focused treatments (Cheli et

al., 2022), and dialectical behavior therapy (Little & Codd, 2020). These treatments target

perfectionistic beliefs and behaviors by combatting self-criticism, improving self-acceptance,

and increasing flexibility. Dynamic-relational treatment more specifically addresses relational

patterns among perfectionists (Hewitt, Flett, & Mikail, 2017). Dynamic-relational treatment

addresses a low sense of belonging by teaching perfectionists to be more accepting of themselves

and more secure in their relationships. This treatment focuses on understanding how perfectionism began in early relationships, how it impacts current relationships, and how altering relational patterns can more effectively satisfy the need for connection and acceptance. Dynamic-relational treatment may be especially useful for treating low belonging among perfectionists.

Perfectionists who are religious may also benefit from addressing how their religious beliefs contribute to perfectionism. This study suggests that perfectionists may struggle to have a healthy view of God. They may view God as angry when they sin and fear displeasing God. Research suggests that fears of disappointing God may lead to shame and low self-worth (Houltberg et al., 2017). Counselors who work with perfectionists who are religious should be aware of these potential fears and address maladaptive views of God. Clients may need help identifying the origins of maladaptive beliefs about God. While many religious groups teach that God is loving and merciful, people often develop implicit views of God as harsh and judging. These beliefs may originate from misunderstandings of key scriptural texts and teachings or from insecure attachment experiences that are projected onto God. Assessments such as Exline et al.'s (2015) scale assessing views of God may be useful in helping individuals identify their perception of God as cruel, distant, or loving. Hall's (2015) Spiritual Transformation Inventory may also be helpful, since it assesses patterns of how people relate to their religious community and to God based on attachment theory. Hall's (2015) inventory also provides a personalized growth plan for clients that uses religious and relational practices to shift interaction patterns. Compassion-focused interventions (see Cheli et al., 2022) may also be beneficial for perfectionists who struggle with low self-forgiveness over perceived religious failures.

Another consideration that arises from this study is that counselors should be aware of the role of religious community in a client's life. Students in this study seemed to receive comfort from their religious community while at the same time struggling to feel a high degree of belonging. It is unclear if their low sense of belonging is related to factors in their community or the student's perception of their community. There also seems to be a great deal of diversity in the experiences people have with their religious community. Many people report positive experiences with their religious group, while others experience relational ruptures that may be quite painful (C. G. Ellison & Lee, 2010; Worthington & Sandage, 2016). Counselors working with religious clients should be aware that a religious community may contribute to a client's low sense of belonging. If the client has experienced relational injuries in the context of their religious group, these may need to be processed and resolved for clients to progress in treatment of perfectionism. On the other hand, counselors may find that a client's religious community has been a source of comfort and support. In the latter case, counselors may consider involving this support network in the client's treatment. For example, it may be particularly useful for clients to hear a trusted person in their religious community combat perfectionistic religious beliefs.

Implications for Counselor Educators

Counselor educators are tasked by CACREP with addressing a wide range of educational standards, leaving little time to cover additional material outside the core competency areas. However, certain classes may lend themselves to brief education about perfectionism. Since perfectionism is a problem that is becoming more prevalent among young adults (Curran & Hill, 2019), beginning counselors would benefit from becoming aware of the behaviors and risks associated with perfectionism. Perfectionism has been described as a personality dynamic (Flett & Hewitt, 2020) and has been linked to various traits of personality disorder (Dimaggio et al.,

2018). This suggests that education on perfectionism could be provided in courses that cover the

diagnosis and assessment of mental and emotional disorders. Supervisors and counselor

educators can also provide information about perfectionism to supervisees in practicum and

internship. Perfectionism has been associated with several presenting problems, including

suicidal ideation (Smith et al., 2019), eating disorders (Dahlenburg et al., 2019), depression

(Besser et al., 2020), anxiety (Neumeister, 2004), and relationship distress (Gingras et al., 2020).

Supervisees who are aware of the warning signs of maladaptive perfectionism can better address

the underlying cognitive and relational patterns that drive perfectionism.

Implications for Supervisors

Perfectionism may also affect how supervisees interact with supervisors and clients.

Maladaptive perfectionism has been associated with more tenuous working alliances with

supervisors among counseling and counseling psychology trainees (Ganske et al., 2015). This

relationship was moderated by self-efficacy, in that supervisees with high maladaptive

perfectionism and high self-efficacy had worse alliances from the supervisor's perspective.

Ganske et al. (2015) conjectured that these trainees may be more attuned to their mistakes and

more likely to avoid discussing their mistakes with a supervisor. To address these concerns,

supervisees can assess their tendency toward perfectionism at the beginning of supervision and

develop a plan with their supervisor to be more accepting of feedback and less critical of their

performance. Since perfectionism is an ingrained personality trait, supervisors may need to

revisit how supervisees are managing feedback during the course of supervision. Ganske et al.

(2015) also recommended helping supervisees recognize when they are doing well by using

well-defined evaluation measures. Supervisors should also be aware that perfectionism may

affect supervisees' relationships with clients. In their study of supervisees' perfectionism, Gnilka

et al. (2016) found that maladaptive perfectionism contributed to worse working alliances with clients. These authors recommended discussing supervisees' perfectionism in supervision and using cognitive behavioral techniques to address perfectionism. In addition, Gnilka et al. (2016) pointed out that supervisees with anxious attachment styles may need more affirmation in supervision to combat relational insecurity while they are being evaluated.

Implications for Educators

Perfectionism can also significantly affect students' performance and well-being during college. Student affairs staff and educators can proactively address some of the risks associated with perfectionism. These risks include worse academic performance (Gaudreau et al., 2022), suicidal ideation (Smith et al., 2018), and increased risk of dropping out of college (G. M. Davis et al., 2019).

Since this study showed that belonging is an important factor for perfectionists who are religious, educators should focus on ways to promote belonging on campuses. College students are in a unique stage of development in which they are forming new relationships as they transition away from their primary support system at home. Colleges can promote belonging among students by providing opportunities for extracurricular activities and by creating an environment that is welcoming to students (van Gijn-Grosvenor & Huisman, 2020). Activities that promote belonging need not require a great deal of funding or resources. Educators can find creative ways to implement programs that promote belonging. These programs will benefit all students but especially those who struggle with perfectionism. Creative ideas include promoting campus activities that are student led, developing opportunities for students to work together on service projects in the community, and offering psychoeducational or personal growth groups led by school counseling staff. An example of one such group is the Creative Arts Personal Growth

Group developed by Sosin et al. (2022). This intervention targets fear and shame and could be adapted to address perfectionism as well.

Educators can also address academic perfectionism. Students often bring unhealthy expectations to their academic work, which tends to contribute to worse academic performance (Gaudreau et al., 2022). Perfectionism may show up in the classroom in the form of test anxiety, procrastination, and academic burnout (Osenk et al., 2020). Educators can address these problems early in the semester by setting realistic expectations with students about performance on assignments. In addition, offering greater flexibility on assignments, such as by allowing students to drop a limited number of assignments during the semester, communicates that professors do not expect perfect performance from students. Rice et al. (2007) also recommended offering tutoring and counseling at the beginning of the school year for students at risk of academic problems related to perfectionism. These strategies would proactively address some of the challenges associated with perfectionism among students.

Limitations

A few limitations are noted for the current study. First, this study offered a small incentive ($5 gift card) for completion of the survey. This may have influenced the validity and quality of the responses. To address this concern, responses from surveys completed in less than five minutes were filtered out of the data analysis. In addition, Qualtrics fraud detection was used to detect and filter out several duplicate responses to the survey. A second limitation was that participants were drawn from a convenience sample of institutions who chose to respond to the survey invitation. The final sample included students from a relatively small number of schools and denominational affiliations. The limited representation of denominations may have skewed the results based on factors within each denomination. The number of participants in each

denominational group was too small to allow for additional analysis of potential differences among groups. The small number of religious groups represented limits the generalizability of the findings since perfectionism may look different in other religious groups. A third limitation was this study did not assess for overlap in religious perfectionism and general perfectionism. One scale has been designed to assess religious perfectionism (Wang et al., 2020) and another to assess perceived perfectionism from God (Wang et al., 2018). Although this study assessed general perfectionism, it is likely that some participants also experienced religious perfectionism. A final limitation is related to the small sample size. Although the sample size was adequate for the statistical analyses, a larger sample may have allowed for results that more accurately represented perfectionists who are religious.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies could consider what factors lead to differences in outcomes between perfectionists and nonperfectionists. In this study, it appeared that nonperfectionists had lower belonging than perfectionists. This has been observed in at least one other study (LoCicero et al., 2000). In addition, other research shows that nonperfectionists may fare worse than perfectionists in their degree of satisfaction with life (Suh et al., 2017). Understanding of the motivations behind nonperfectionism and perfectionism may lead to recommendations that improve functioning for both groups. One potential area for future research to extend the current study is whether perfectionists have higher belonging than nonperfectionists because of a greater desire to please others.

It appears that conservative groups may have higher rates of maladaptive perfectionism (Allen et al., 2021; Helm et al., 2001). Since this study did not have a large number of adaptive perfectionists, future studies should consider whether less conservative religious groups have

similar rates of perfectionism. If less conservative groups have lower maladaptive perfectionism and higher rates of belonging, clinicians may be able to use this information to formulate ideas for lowering rates of perfectionism among more conservative groups. For example, it would be useful to know whether higher perfectionism in religious groups is related to extreme expectations for the quality of one's religious performance. Studies using larger samples and including a broader range of denominations would also be able to assess whether adaptive perfectionism contributes to belonging across groups. If a greater sense of belonging is indeed more common among adaptive perfectionists, this could indicate that at least one means of promoting RSW among perfectionists is leveraging healthy relationships.

Many religious groups rely on relational activities as part of their religious practices. According to the present study, perfectionists who feel less connected to their group are more likely to experience low RSW. Future research should seek to replicate the finding that maladaptive perfectionism contributes to lower belonging among religious individuals. If this is the case, then specific treatment strategies that consider religious factors could be developed for this group. In particular, future studies should seek to identify attachment-informed strategies for promoting greater RSW among perfectionists. Based on E. B. Davis et al.'s (2021) and Hall and Hall's (2021) recommendations, relationships that promote congruence in one's cognitive and emotional beliefs about God may be especially useful for religious perfectionists. Future studies could explore how to adapt group protocols to be used with perfectionists who are religious, such as the one proposed by Sosin et al. (2022) for treating shame.

Some research indicates that RSW may develop as a function of spiritual maturity as people age. Olson's (2011) study demonstrated that older adults reported more spiritual vitality (i.e., closeness with God and others) and less anxiety in their relationship with God than young

adult students. Freeze's (2017) study with religious individuals showed similar results, as older participants reported higher social support, greater participation in daily spiritual experiences, and lower anxious attachment to their religious group. Future studies should assess whether perfectionists develop RSW and belonging across the lifespan and whether this relates to the quality of their interpersonal relationships.

Finally, this study focused on only one aspect of belonging among religious perfectionists. However, belonging is a complex phenomenon impacted by several factors (van Gijn-Grosvenor & Huisman, 2020). Future research should compare factors that contribute to belonging so that a better picture of belonging among religious students can be developed. It is suggested that these studies assess environmental factors such as the campus climate and whether opportunities are provided for extracurricular activities that promote belonging among students.

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