



Family Expectations, Self-Esteem, and Academic Achievement among African American College Students

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Abstract

Previous research (Elion, Slaney, Wang and French, 2012) found that adaptive perfectionists as measured by the Almost Perfect Scale-Revised and the Family Almost Perfect Scale had higher self-esteem and higher academic achievement. Based on this research the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965), the Almost Perfect Scale-Revised (Slaney, Mobley, Trippi, Ashby and Johnson, 1996) and the Family Almost Perfect Scale (Wang, Methikalam and Slaney, 2010) were administered to thirty African American college students. The students also filled out a demographic questionnaire which included cumulative grade point average. The research found a positive correlation between adaptive perfectionism, positive self-esteem and grade point average. Additionally, there was a negative correlation between maladaptive perfectionism, positive self-esteem and grade point average. Family expectations were examined as a major factor in adaptive versus maladaptive perfectionism.

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between family expectations, college students' expectations, self-esteem and academic achievement among African Americans. This research could lead to a better understanding of the impact of high individual and family expectations on academic achievement for African Americans. Moreover, it will explore if the same family dynamics concerning perfectionism that have been found for European Americans and Asian Americans exist for African Americans.



Wang (2010) defines perfectionism as “having excessive striving for high standards, with discrepancy as a core factor differentiating whether a person’s perfectionism is adaptive or maladaptive” (p.186). Wang (2010) completed two studies to measure perfectionism. Study 1 was an explorative analysis to develop a scale of perfectionism from the family perspective on 283 college students. Of the 283 participants, 59 were men and 224 were women. Factors that were examined to determine perfectionism were personal perfectionism, parental aspects of perfectionism, depression, anxiety and self-esteem. Wang (2010) found that there was a significant positive correlation between family perfectionism and personal perfectionism.

Study 2 was a multiple group confirmatory analysis to validate the scale of perfectionism from the family perspective on Asian/Asian American and European American college students. Group 1 consisted of 252 Asian/Asian American college students. Of the 252 participants, 48 were men and 204 were women. Group 2 consisted of 386 European American college students. Of the 386 participants, 68 men were men and 317 were women. Factors that were examined to determine the Family Almost Perfect Scale were perceived family perfectionism, collectivism, personal perfectionism, depression and self-esteem. Wang (2010) found evidence to support that the FAPS was a valid measure and was able to show that Asian Americans were harder on themselves than European Americans.

Elion, Wang, Slaney & French (2012) conducted a cross-sectional study on 219 African American undergraduate students at two large predominately white institutions with a focus on perfectionism. Of the 219 participants, 105 were women and 114 were men collectively. Factors that were examined to determine perfectionism were racial identity, academic achievement, self-esteem and depression. Elion et al. (2012) found that adaptive perfectionists as measured by the Almost Perfect Scale-Revised and the Rosenberg Scale had higher self-esteem than maladaptive perfectionists but there was little difference in their academic achievement. Vandiver (as cited in Elion et al., 2012), stated that ‘a speculative explanation would be that as African American individuals ...have higher self-esteem,’ the more likely they are to set higher standards.



This study posited three hypotheses based on Vandiver (as cited in Elion et al., 2012) and Elion (2012) Hypothesis 1 stated that there will be a significant positive correlation between self-esteem and GPA as measured by the Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale. Hypothesis 2 stated that there will be a significant positive correlation between perfectionism and GPA and hypothesis 3 stated that there will be a significant negative correlation between family perfectionism and GPA.

Method

Participants

The participants in this study were a convenience sample of thirty African American male and female college students from a mid-sized public university in Central Pennsylvania. Students were recruited from classrooms, around campus and African American student organizations over a five-day period. Of the thirty participants, 14 were male and 16 were female. The median age was 21 and the mean age was 20.5. This sample included six freshman, six sophomores, fourteen juniors and four seniors.

Instruments

Instruments used consisted of an informed consent form, a demographic form and three scales. Students were presented with an author developed informed consent form to sign giving permission for their survey responses to be used within the study that explains that they are free to withdraw at any time. If a participant chose to withdraw, they could request that their responses be excluded from the study. Students were also presented with an author developed demographic form that requested information such as age, classification by number of credits earned, race/ethnicity, sex and QPA/GPA.

Personal and Family perfectionism was measured by using the Almost Perfect Scale-Revised (Slaney, Mobley, Trippi, Ashby and Johnson, 1996) and Family Almost Perfect Scale (Wang, Methikalam and Slaney, 2010), and self-esteem was measured by the Rosenberg Self-Esteem (Rosenberg, 1965) Scale (s).



The Almost Perfect Scale-Revised determines perfectionism in regards to high standards, order and discrepancy using a 7-point Likert scale; 1 being strongly disagree and 7 being strongly agree. Wang (2010) explains that ‘the High Standards subscale measures the possession of high standards for achievement and performance. The Order subscale measures a preference for neatness and orderliness. The Discrepancy scale measures the degree to which the respondents perceive themselves as failing to meet their standards for performance.’

Almost Perfect Scale-Revised

Instructions The following items are designed to measure attitudes people have toward themselves, their performance, and toward others. There are no right or wrong answers. Please respond to all of the items. Use your first impression and do not spend too much time on individual items in responding.

Respond to each of the items using the scale below to describe your degree of agreement with each item. Fill in the appropriate number circle on the computer answer sheet that is provided.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

**Strongly Disagree Disagree Slightly Disagree Neutral Slightly Agree Agree
Strongly Agree**

1. I have high standards for my performance at work or at school.
2. I am an orderly person.
3. I often feel frustrated because I can't meet my goals.
4. Neatness is important to me.
5. If you don't expect much out of yourself, you will never succeed.
6. My best just never seems to be good enough for me.
7. I think things should be put away in their place
8. I have high expectations for myself.
9. I rarely live up to my high standards.
10. I like to always be organized and disciplined.
11. Doing my best never seems to be enough.
12. I set very high standards for myself.
13. I am never satisfied with my accomplishments.



14. I expect the best from myself.
15. I often worry about not measuring up to my own expectations.
16. My performance rarely measures up to my standards.
17. I am not satisfied even when I know I have done my best.
18. I try to do my best at everything I do.
19. I am seldom able to meet my own high standards of performance.
20. I am hardly ever satisfied with my performance.
21. I hardly ever feel that what I've done is good enough.
22. I have a strong need to strive for excellence.
23. I often feel disappointment after completing a task because I know I could have done better.

(Slaney, Mobley, Trippi, Ashby, & Johnson, 1996)

Scoring -APS-R

Standards = 1, 5, 8, 12, 14, 18, 22,

Order = 2, 4, 7, 10,

Discrepancy =3, 6, 9, 11, 13, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 23,

Source: Slaney, R. B., Rice, K. G., Mobley, M., Trippi, J., & Ashby, J. S. (2001). The revised Almost Perfect Scale. *Measurement and Evaluation in Counseling and Development*, 34, 130–145.

The Family Almost Perfect Scale quantifies family expectations into family standards, order and discrepancy using a 7-point Likert scale; 1 being strongly disagree and 7 being strongly agree.

Family Almost Perfect Scale (FAPS)

Instructions: The following items are designed to measure your perceptions of the attitudes, beliefs, and values your family has and conveyed to you. There are no right or wrong answers.

Please respond to all of the items. Use your first impression and do not spend too much time on individual items in responding.

Respond to each of the items using the scale below to describe your degree of agreement



with each item.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly Disagree Disagree Slightly Disagree Neutral Slightly Agree Agree Strongly Agree

1. My family has high standards for my performance at work or at school.
2. My family expects me to be an orderly person.
3. Neatness is important to my family.
4. My best just never seems to be good enough for my family.
5. My family thinks things should be put away in their place.
6. My family has high expectations for me.
7. I rarely live up to my family's high standards.
8. My family expects me to always be organized and disciplined.
9. Doing my best never seems to be enough for my family.
10. My family sets very high standards for me.
11. Nothing short of perfect is acceptable in my family.
12. My family expects the best from me.
13. My performance rarely measures up to my family's standards.
14. My family expects me to try to do my best at everything I do.
15. I am seldom able to meet my family's high standards of performance.
16. I am aware that my family sets standards that are unrealistically high.
17. My family expects me to have a strong need to strive for excellence.

Source:

Wang, K. T., Methikalam, B., & Slaney, R. B. (2010). *Family Almost Perfect Scale*. Unpublished manuscript, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park.



The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale measures an individual's concept of self using a 4-point Likert scale; 1 being strongly agree and 4 being strongly disagree.

Rosenberg Scale:

Instructions: Below is a list of statements dealing with your general feelings about yourself. Please

indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement.

1. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

2. At times I think I am no good at all.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

3. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

4. I am able to do things as well as most other people.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

6. I certainly feel useless at times.

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Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

7. I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

8. I wish I could have more respect for myself.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

9. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

10. I take a positive attitude toward myself.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

Scoring:

Items 2, 5, 6, 8, 9 are reverse scored. Give "Strongly Disagree" 1 point, "Disagree" 2 points,



“Agree” 3 points, and “Strongly Agree” 4 points. Sum scores for all ten items. Keep scores on a continuous scale. Higher scores indicate higher self-esteem.

Procedure

African American undergraduate college students were asked to take a survey measuring family influence on academics at Millersville University of Pennsylvania. Participants were supplied with an informed consent form to sign to acknowledge their participation within the study. The students also filled out a demographic questionnaire form prior to the attached scale assessments. Students spent ~10 minutes completing the surveys. The students completed the survey at a convenient place near where they were approached.

Results

The first hypothesis was not supported. There was not a significant correlation between GPA and self-esteem as measured by the Rosenberg Scale. The second hypothesis was also not supported. There was not a significant relationship between GPA and scores on the Almost Perfect Scale-revised. There was also not a significant correlation between GPA and the scores of the discrepancy, standards, and order sub-scales of the Almost Perfect Scale-Revised. Hypothesis three was confirmed. There was a significant negative correlation between GPA and the score on the Family Almost Perfect Scale total. There was also a significant negative correlation between GPA and scores on the standards and order sub-scales, but not the discrepancy Family sub-scale (see Table 1 below) according to a Spearman’s rho test.

Table 1. Correlations

	GPA	Family Almost Perfect Total



Spearman's rho	GPA	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.339*
		Sig. (1-tailed)	.	.042
		N	27	27
	Family Almost Perfect Total	Correlation Coefficient	-.339*	1.000
		Sig. (1-tailed)	.042	.
		N	27	30

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).

Discussion

This research did not support previous research on European Americans and Asian Americans concerning the relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement. Conversely, it does support research on stereotype threat that indicates that African Americans disconnect self-esteem and academic achievement. Adams (2013) states that ‘stereotype threat refers to the pressure or threat a person experiences when a negative stereotype about one’s identity group could potentially be confirmed by one’s individual performance.’ The lack of confirmation of the second hypothesis may be a result of African American students attributing grades more to faculty bias than to their effort or ability as a way of preserving their self-esteem. The confirmation of the third hypothesis may possibly be the result of parents’ expectations creating high levels of stress which work against academic achievement.



Limitations

A small sample size was used. The study was conducted using a convenience sample. Also, the survey was kind of long.

Further Research

To improve upon this study, a larger non-convenient sample size is needed. Plus, the addition of some open-ended questions or focused interviews to determine the relationship between GPA, personal expectations, self-esteem, and parent's expectations.

References

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