LDS Doctrine and Perfectionism

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Introduction
Perfectionism has become a topic of widespread interest within the social sciences. Many of the studies testing and measuring perfectionism have been associated with constructs such as trait achievement and level of aspiration. Though it has been found that there may be links between religiosity and perfectionism (Edgington et al., 2008; Zohar et al., 2005), only a small amount of studies have actually researched if and how perfectionism is affected by religiosity.

Our study specifically looked at BYU students who were members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church). Latter-day Saint doctrine is notoriously different than the culture associated with the LDS. There are many common cultural practices among Latter-day Saints that are not meant to reflect LDS doctrine. According to Edgington et al., “many people are overwhelmed and may misinterpret the commandment ‘Be therefore perfect’ (DEB), and Latter-day Saints tend to interpret this in ways that could possibly create social pressures. We found relevant research that shed some light on the interaction between Latter-day Saint doctrine and culture with socio-behavioral constructs. Past research with Latter-day Saints revealed lower self-esteem after being exposed to LDS culture and higher self-esteem after being exposed to LDS doctrine. Therefore, exposure to LDS culture and doctrine can have opposite effects (Furr et al., 2007). In a study of Latter-day Saint perfectionism by Edgington et al., “participants were quick to mention that it was not Church doctrine that created this pressure [to be ideal]; rather it was a pressure they felt socially and culturally from members of the Church” (2008). Specific studies have experimented with LDS population and religiosity in a general sense, but none have brought the focus specifically to LDS BYU students and how doctrine affects their perfectionism.

This study aims to discover possible links between perfectionism and religiosity in LDS BYU students. Our primary hypothesis was that exposure to a video discussing religious doctrine would result in higher scores on adaptive dimensions of perfectionism. Our secondary hypothesis was that exposure to a doctrinal video would cause lower scores on maladaptive perfectionism.

Method
Participants
- 123 LDS BYU students – 2 of these were excluded for not completing the questionnaire
- Recruited through SONA and Qualtrics
- Voluntary participants
- Randomly separated into control and experimental groups

Design
- Between-subjects experimental design
- Questionnaire administered online through Qualtrics
- Independent variable: video viewing vs. not
- Dependent variable: perfectionism score on the Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (FMPS), including subscales measuring adaptive vs. maladaptive perfectionism

Procedure
- Experimental group watched a short video clip reflecting a general LDS doctrine
- Control group did not watch a video
- Participants completed the FMPS
- Experimental group answered two short manipulation check questions

Results
- No significant demographic difference between control and experimental groups.
- No significant difference existed between the control and experimental groups on maladaptive, adaptive, or overall perfectionism scores.
- A significant interaction effect was found between gender and video exposure for single participants. Single men who watched the video had lower overall perfectionism scores, and single women who watched the video had higher overall scores.

Discussion
Hypotheses
- Primary hypothesis: Exposure to a religious video would result in higher scores on adaptive dimensions of perfectionism.
- Secondary hypothesis: Exposure to a religious video would result in lower scores on maladaptive dimensions of perfectionism.

Findings
- Exposure to a religious video actually had no significant effect on perfectionism scores.
- Exposure to a religious video did result in higher perfectionism scores for single females and lower scores for single males.

Implications
- Religion may not affect perfectionism in a simple, direct fashion. The same religious message may be interpreted differently by different individuals and different groups.
- Perfectionism may also operate differently in men versus in women (Agerström, Möller, & Archer, 2006).

Limitations
- All participants were undergraduate students of Brigham Young University and members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
- The majority of the participants were single and between 18 and 24 years old.
- Most of the students were recruited out of courses in psychology.

Future Research
- Future study should focus on other populations, including married BYU students, students who are not Latter-day Saints, and people of all ages.

References
Mentor: Dr. Patrick Steffen
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