

Perfectionism, Beliefs, and Adjustment in Dating Relationships

GORDON L. FLETT
York University

PAUL L. HEWITT
University of British Columbia

BRENLEY SHAPIRO and JILL RAYMAN
York University

Two studies examined the extent to which dimensions of perfectionism are associated with indices of relationship beliefs, behaviors, and dyadic adjustment. In Study 1, 69 students in dating relationships completed the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS) and a multidimensional measure of relationship beliefs. In addition, participants completed self-report measures of positive and negative relationship behaviors, and global measures of liking and loving. In Study 2, 91 students in dating relationships completed a battery of measures including the MPS and scales assessing perfectionism cognitions and perfectionistic self-presentation. They also completed measures of dyadic adjustment and limerence (i.e., intense, obsessive love with fears of rejection). Collectively, the findings indicated that individuals with high levels of self-oriented perfectionism and other-oriented perfectionism have stronger relationship beliefs in the areas of communication, trust, and support, suggesting that these perfectionists have high relationship standards in these particular areas. Although social prescribed perfectionism had little association with specific relationship beliefs, socially prescribed perfectionism was associated with a tendency to display destructive relationship responses (i.e., exit, neglect, and insensitivity), lower dyadic adjustment, and various aspects of limerence, including obsessive preoccupations and emotional dependence on the dating partner. Perfectionistic self-presentation and perfectionism cognitions were also linked with aspects of limerence. The results suggest that interpersonal aspects of perfectionism are associated with self-defeating tendencies in dating relationships.

For many years, anecdotal reports and descriptive analyses of case studies have suggested that individuals with perfectionistic tendencies have difficult interpersonal relationships (Bums, 1983; Hendlin, 1992; Hollender, 1965; Homey, 1937). Recent understanding of the perfectionism construct has been advanced by research showing that the perfectionism construct itself has interpersonal components. For instance, with the advent of the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale, Hewitt and Flett (1991b) introduced the dimension known as other-oriented perfectionism, which involves a tendency to have exacting standards for other people. The relevance of this perfectionism dimension to interpersonal relationships is quite apparent, in that other-oriented

perfectionism is viewed as a stable interpersonal tendency to demand perfection from others, and to be extrapunitive and hostile towards others. The presence of other-oriented perfectionism may generate a great deal of stress and conflict in interpersonal relationships (see Hewitt, Flett, & Mikail, 1995).

Socially prescribed perfectionism is another important interpersonal dimension that reflects individual concerns about being the target of unrealistic expectancies (Hewitt & Flett, 1991b). Socially prescribed perfectionism is defined as the perception that others are demanding have imposed perfectionistic expectations on the self. Individuals with high levels of socially prescribed perfectionism are highly sensitive to criticism and have a strong need for approval (Hewitt & Flett, 1991b), yet they perceive that approval is not forthcoming from significant others because perfection is expected. A chronic perception that others are being unfair and perfectionistic in their demands is an attribute that should have deleterious effects on relationships. Individuals with high levels of socially prescribed perfectionism have elevated levels of negative affectivity in various forms (Flett, Hewitt, Blankstein, & Mosher, 1991; Flett, Hewitt, Blankstein, & O'Brien, 1991; Hewitt & Flett, 1991a, 1991b, 1993; Hewitt, Flett, & Ediger, 1996). Moreover, a chronic sense of anger that stems from the perceived unfairness of others (Hewitt & Flett, 1991b) is one of the more predominant emotions that should have a negative influence on the relationships of perfectionists. Socially prescribed perfectionism should also be relevant to relationship outcomes and behaviors in terms of how socially prescribed perfectionists respond to conflict and problem situations. General research on coping and problem-solving indicates that socially prescribed perfectionists have a maladaptive coping style that involves avoidance and low problem-solving confidence (Flett, Hewitt, Blankstein, Solnck, & Van Brunshot, 1996; Flett, Russo, & Hewitt, 1994; Hewitt & Flett, 1996; Hewitt, Flett, & Endler, 1995). This negative coping orientation inherent in socially prescribed perfectionism has been regarded as a reflection of a general sense of helplessness and hopelessness that stems from the realization that it is difficult to obtain approval from others because it is impossible to be perfect.

Research on the interpersonal correlates and consequences of perfectionism is in its initial stages and many issues remain to be investigated. However, a growing number of studies have been conducted and have illustrated the link between perfectionism and problems in relationships. For instance, Johnson and Slaney (1996) found a significant positive association between self-reported relationship difficulties and elevated scores on the Burns Perfectionism Scale, which is a general, unidimensional measure of perfectionism. Previously, an extensive investigation of dimensions of perfectionism and family adjustment in chronic pain patients and their spouses by Hewitt, Flett, and Mikail (1995) found that the interpersonal dimensions of perfectionism are associated with poor family adjustment and poor marital adjustment. Specifically, socially prescribed perfectionism in spouses pain patients was associated with low self-reported dyadic adjustment. In addition, pain patients married to an other-oriented perfectionist tended to report lower dyadic adjustment and less spousal support. In related research, Flett, Hewitt, Garshowitz, and Martin (1997) found that socially prescribed perfectionism was associated with the frequency of negative social interactions.

Recently, Habke, Hewitt, and Flett (1999) investigated dimensions of perfectionism and levels of sexual satisfaction in 74 married or co-habiting couples. This study was unique in several respects. First, it included a modified spouse-specific version of the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (Hewitt & Flett, 1991b). That is, participants rated levels of other-oriented perfectionism for their spouse (e.g., I have high expectations for my spouse) and perceived socially prescribed perfectionism coming from their spouse (e.g., I feel that my spouse is too demanding of me). In addition, participants completed the Perfectionist Self-Presentation Scale (Hewitt, Flett, Fehr, Habke, & Fairlie, 1996). This is a multidimensional scale that assesses the extent to which an individual feels a need to present an image of flawlessness to others (i.e., perfectionist self-promotion) or hides flaws and mistakes from others (i.e., nondisplay of imperfection) or is unwilling to communicate shortcomings and flaws to others (i.e., nondisclosure of imperfection). Habke et al. found that spouse-specific socially prescribed perfectionism was associated with lower levels of sexual satisfaction in both men and women. In addition, other-oriented perfectionism and perfectionist self-presentation in women were associated with lower self-reports of sexual satisfaction.

Perfectionism and Relationship Beliefs

The present study sought to extend the literature by addressing several issues involving perfectionism and relationships. Our first goal was to assess the link between dimensions of perfectionism and specific relationship beliefs. This research was based on the premise that the perfectionism construct in general, and the interpersonal component in particular, has associated with it interpersonal or relationship schemas (see Baldwin, 1992; Baldwin, Fehr, Keedian, Seidel, & Thomson, 1993) that include particular cognitions about relationships. That is, just as the literature has established that depressed individuals are characterized by dysfunctional beliefs and attitudes about the self (see Beck, 1967; Kuiper, Olinger, & MacDonald, 1988; Power et al., 1994), we maintain that perfectionists are characterized by more extreme beliefs and attitudes about the nature of relationships, and these extreme beliefs and associated evaluative standards are involved in the cognitive interpretation and recall of relationship interactions.

General research has established that perfectionism is associated with the presence of irrational beliefs involving the self and low levels of constructive thinking (Flett, Hewitt, Blanksteiff, and Koledin, 1991; Flett, Hewitt, & Russo, 1994). Unfortunately, this research has focused primarily on the study of perfectionism and irrational beliefs in general, with little attempt to examine perfectionism and specific relationship beliefs. The limited information that is available on perfectionism and relationship beliefs stems primarily from research on the correlates of the sexual perfectionism subscale of the Relationship Belief Inventory (Eidelson & Epstein, 1982). Research has established that there are individual differences in sexual perfectionism beliefs and elevated levels of this belief are associated with relationship dissatisfaction (Eidelson & Epstein, 1982; Jones & Stanton, 1988; Kurdek, 1992) and other dysfunctional relationship beliefs such as it is always destructive when a couple has disagreements (Christian,

O'Leary, & Vivian, 1994). Although research on sexual perfectionism focuses on a specific facet of the construct that may relate only tangentially to the broader perfectionism dimensions assessed by the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (Hewitt & Flett, 1991b), this research highlights the relevance of studying perfectionistic beliefs of an interpersonal nature.

As noted above, the first goal of the current study was to examine the link between dimensions of perfectionism and specific relationship beliefs. Beliefs were assessed by a new measure entitled the Relationship Beliefs Scale (Fletcher & Kininmonth, 1992). The Relationship Beliefs Scale assesses 18 specific relationship beliefs that can be categorized into four general areas that involve the themes of intimacy, passion, individuality, and factors that are external to the relationship. In terms of the present study, if perfectionists have a general propensity to endorse more extreme beliefs, perhaps because they have higher relationship standards, then perfectionists should have stronger relationship beliefs. In particular, other-oriented perfectionists should have rigid standards and beliefs about the behavior of their partners, while self-oriented perfectionists should have extreme beliefs about their own behavior in relationships (i.e., the self in relation to others). In the present study, it was expected generally that the self-oriented and other-oriented measures from the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale would be associated with indices from the Relationships Beliefs Scale. We did not make specific predictions involving the belief subscales due to the paucity of research in this area.

The second goal of the current study was to obtain some initial insights into the association between perfectionism and maladaptive relationship behaviors. The general hypothesis guiding this research is that the interpersonal perfectionism dimensions are associated with a variety of destructive tendencies that should ultimately have a negative influence on relationships. Although it is known that other-oriented and socially prescribed perfectionism are linked with low relationship satisfaction (Hewitt et al., 1995), the precise mechanisms that underly this association are unclear. Individuals with high levels of other-oriented perfectionism should exhibit a general relationship style that indicates a low level of agreeableness and punitiveness toward others, consistent with indications they are quick to blame and exploit others (Hewitt & Flett, 1991b). Similarly, individuals with high levels of socially prescribed perfectionism should have a deleterious relationship style that reflects, in part, the high levels of resentment and hostility that arise from the perception that others are being unfair by imposing perfectionistic demands on the self. Clearly, the general perception that others expect perfection and are harsh in their evaluations is inconsistent with the strong desire that most people have for praise from their partner (see Swann, De La Ronde, & Hixon, 1994).

In the present study, we investigated the link between self-reports of perfectionism and relationship behaviors of various types, including the accommodation processes described by Rusbult and her colleagues (Rusbult, Johnson, & Morrow, 1986; Rusbult & Zembrodt, 1983; Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovick, & Lipkus, 1991). Rusbult and colleagues identified a typology of problem-solving responses in close relationships that vary in terms of whether they are destructive or constructive, and passive versus

active. The four possible responses to conflict are exit, neglect, loyalty, and voice. Exit is a destructive, active response, and neglect is a destructive, passive response, while loyalty is a constructive, passive response, and voice is a constructive, active response. Rusbult et al. (1986) found that the destructive responses of exit and neglect were associated with low levels of functioning in couples. In the present study, we were particularly interested in how individuals with high scores on the interpersonal perfectionism dimensions tend to respond when dissatisfied with his or her partner. Given the general tendency for socially prescribed perfectionism to be associated with avoidance coping and low problem-solving confidence, we predicted that this dimension would be associated with the tendency to respond with exit or neglect when relationship difficulties ensue.

Finally, in addition to examining specific relationship beliefs and relationship behaviors, the other goal of this study was to examine whether perfectionism is associated negatively with global indices of liking and loving. Historical analyses of the nature of love have suggested that reduced levels of affection are likely to be associated with excessive demands for perfection from others (Horney, 1937). A possible negative association between perfectionism and low levels of liking and loving is also suggested by the studies cited above which indicate a connection between beliefs involving sexual perfectionism and relationship dissatisfaction.

Although our primary goal was to examine perfectionism and relationship beliefs and behaviors, the inclusion of multiple measures of relationship tendencies in the present study also enabled us to examine the replicability of past findings on relationship styles and to obtain additional information on the correlates of the Relationship Beliefs Scale. The use of multiple measures in the present study, for instance, enabled us to examine the association between the four types of problem-solving tendencies and indices of liking and loving. Given past indications that destructive responses are associated with lower relationship adjustment, it was expected that exit and neglect responses would be correlated significantly with low levels of liking and loving.

METHOD

Participants

The participants were 69 college students (27 men, 42 women) from York University. The mean age of the participants was 22.30 years old. The sample consisted of participants who were involved in monogamous dating relationships, as well as those who were involved in polygamous dating relationships. There were no minimum time requirements for the relationship; thus, the sample included those involved in long-term dating relationships, as well as those involved in short-term dating relationships. The average dating time for subjects with their partners was 21.06 months.

Measures and Procedure

Participants were chosen by random sampling of students who were involved in a

dating relationship, and who agreed to participate in the study. Note that the women and men in this study did not include members of the same dyad; the use of one member of a couple avoided any problems associated with the nonindependence of data. Participants were asked to complete a questionnaire package consisting of the following measures:

Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS). The MPS (Hewitt & Flett, 1991b) has 3 subscales of 15 items each. Subjects make seven-point ratings of statements reflecting self-oriented perfectionism (e.g., One of my goals is to be perfect in every thing I do), other-oriented perfectionism (e.g., If I ask someone to do something, I expect it to be done flawlessly), and socially prescribed perfectionism (e.g., My family expects me to be perfect). A growing amount of evidence indicates that the MPS subscales have adequate reliability and validity (Flett, Hewitt, Blankstem, & Koledin, 1991; Flett, Sawatzky, & Hewitt, 1995; Frost, Heimberg, Holt, Mattia, & Neubauer, 1993; Hewitt, Flett, Turnbull-Donovan, & Milkail, 1991; Slaney, Ashby, & Trippi, 1995). For instance, scores on the MPS are correlated with ratings of perfectionism made by significant others and by clinicians (Hewitt & Flett, 1991b).

Relationship Beliefs Scale. The Relationships Belief Scale (RBS; Fletcher & Kininmonth, 1992) is a 54-item scale that consists of 18 subscales with three belief items each. The subscale measures include communication (e.g., partners must be able to speak freely with each other on any topic), love (e.g., in successful relationships partners constantly show how much they love one another), trust (e.g., partners must be completely faithful to one another in close relationships), independence (e.g., it is essential for partners to remain individuals no matter how close they are), support (e.g., partners must provide practical support for each other to the utmost of their capabilities), acceptance (e.g., partners in the best relationships have unconditional approval of one another), sex (e.g., the best relationships are built on strong sexual attraction), equity (e.g., the best relationship is one in which the partners take equal responsibility for its maintenance), compromise (e.g., partners must be prepared to compromise for the sake of a relationship), relationship vitality (e.g., romance is an essential part of a relationship), commonality (e.g., sharing interests and hobbies keeps relationships healthy), personal security (e.g., if both partners come from secure and caring families the relationship is more likely to succeed), friendship (e.g., relationships cannot survive without a very close friendship between partners), finance (e.g., financial problems wreck relationships), children (e.g., having children leads to total fulfillment in close relationships), important others (e.g., not getting along with each other's friends or families wrecks relationships), coping (e.g., the success of a relationship depends on how well any conflict is dealt with), and respect (e.g., in most successful relationships partners are completely sensitive to each other's feelings). The 18 belief categories are more broadly defined by four belief categories labeled intimacy (i.e., acceptance, communication, compromise, coping, friendship, love, respect, support, and trust), external factors (i.e., children, commonality, finance, important others, and personal security), passion (i.e., sex and vitality), and individuality (i.e., equity and independence) (see Fletcher & Thomas, 1996). Research by Fletcher and Kininmonth with the RBS has suggested that the various factors have adequate reli-

ability, as well as convergent and discriminant validity. Moreover, they have found that the belief factors are associated generally with relationship attachment dimensions. Fletcher, Rosanowski, and Fitness (1994) showed that stronger beliefs are associated with increased cognitive processing of relationship-related material.

Relationship Styles Scale. The Relationship Styles Scale (Davis & Oathout, 1987) is a 25-item inventory that measures positive and negative behaviors toward one's partner. There are four positive behavior subscales measuring how often subjects exhibit good communication (e.g., open up to the other person), warmth (e.g., act in an affectionate or loving way), even temper (e.g., act in a patient or understanding way), and positive outlook (e.g., act friendly or outgoing around partner). There are three negative behavior subscales measuring untrustworthiness (e.g., act in an untrustworthy manner), insensitivity (e.g., act in a selfish or egocentric way), and possessiveness (e.g., act in a possessive way toward partner). Subjects are required to make five-point ratings based on the extent to which they exhibit each behavior in their current dating relationship. The initial study by Davis and Oathout (1987) established that these interpersonal behaviors are related significantly to partners' level of relationship satisfaction.

Relationship Behavior Questionnaire. The Relationship Behavior Questionnaire is a multidimensional measure of negative and positive behaviors in a relationship. The four subscales in this measure are exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect. Exit behaviors reflect attempts to terminate the relationship (e.g., when I'm unhappy with my partner, I consider breaking up. When things are going really poorly between us, I do things to drive my partner away). Voice refers to constructive attempts to improve relationship quality (e.g., when my partner says or does things I don't like, I talk to him/her about what's upsetting me. When my partner and I are angry with one another, I suggest a compromise solution). Loyalty is a complex variable that involves avoiding action while optimistically waiting for conditions to improve (e.g., when my partner and I are angry with each other, I give things some time to cool off on their own rather than take action. When we have troubles, no matter how bad things get I am loyal to my partner). Finally, neglect refers to a tendency to allow the relationship to deteriorate without taking action to ameliorate the situation (e.g., when I am upset with my partner I sulk rather than confront the issue. When I am upset with my partner, I ignore him/her for awhile). Research with this measure has shown that a preponderance of destructive relationship behaviors in the form of exit and neglect are associated with greater distress and relationships of poorer quality (see Rusbult et al., 1986; Rusbult, Yovetich, & Verette, 1996).

Romantic Love. This 26-item measure by Rubin (1970) has separate liking and loving subscales. Extensive research by Rubin (1970) has indicated that the liking and loving measures have adequate psychometric properties. The validity of the measures has been demonstrated in a variety of contexts (e.g., Rempel, Holmes, & Zanna, 1985; Zuroff & de Lorimier, 1989).

TABLE 1
Correlations Between Relationship Beliefs and Perfectionism Dimensions

Measures	Self	Perfectionism Other	Social
<u>Relationship Beliefs</u>			
<u>Intimacy</u>			
Acceptance	.07	.09	.19
Communication	.43**	.33**	.11
Compromise	.22	.20	.26*
Coping	.21	.30*	-.10
Friendship	.08	.08	.15
Love	.19	.17	.17
Respect	.19	.25*	.07
Support	.25*	.26*	.02
Trust	.35**	.30*	.10
<u>External Factors</u>			
Children	.06	.18	.05
Commonality	.34**	.27	.19
Finance	.12	.14	.35**
Important Others	-.11	-.13	.19
Personal Security	.04	.23	-.01
<u>Passion</u>			
Sex	-.08	.02	.06
Vitality	.00	.06	.05
<u>Individuality</u>			
Equity	.05	.08	.09
Independence	.01	-.05	.05

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

RESULTS

Correlations With the Relationship Beliefs Inventory

Pearson product-moment correlations were computed among all of the variables. The analyses were restricted to the total sample since explicit gender differences were not predicted, and the relatively low number of men in this study precluded a meaningful test of this issue. The results of correlational analyses involving the MPS dimensions are shown in Table 1. Analyses of the RBS measures showed that other-oriented and self-oriented perfectionism are associated with beliefs in higher relationship standards, but only in certain areas. Both perfectionism dimensions were associated significantly with greater beliefs in communication, trust, and support. In addition, self-

oriented perfectionism was associated with a belief in commonality, and other-oriented perfectionism was associated with a belief in coping and in respect.

We also obtained a positive correlation between socially prescribed perfectionism and beliefs about finances that was not anticipated. There was also a second significant correlation between socially prescribed perfectionism and a belief in compromise. This correlation could reflect the desire for socially prescribed perfectionists to have partners who do not impose rigid expectancies on them.

Perfectionism and Reported Relationship Behaviors

Regarding the Relationship Behavior Questionnaire, it was found that self-oriented and other-oriented perfectionism were not associated significantly with the variables of exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect. However, it can be seen in Table I that socially prescribed perfectionism was correlated significantly with the exit scale, $r = .25, p < .05$, indicating that individuals with high socially prescribed perfectionism engage in destructive relationship behaviors. Socially prescribed perfectionism was also associated with the neglect subscale, $r = .30, p < .05$, indicating that this perfectionism dimension is associated with a tendency to passively allow relationships to deteriorate. Surprisingly, there was also a significant positive correlation between socially prescribed perfectionism and the loyalty subscale, $r = .31, p < .05$. On the surface, these data indicate that socially prescribed perfectionism is also associated with constructive responses. An alternative interpretation of this finding will be discussed below.

The correlational results involving the other relationship style variables are also shown in Table I. Once again, it can be seen that neither self-oriented nor other-oriented perfectionism was associated significantly with the relationship style variables. However, socially prescribed perfectionism was linked with negative relationship styles. Specifically, higher levels of socially prescribed perfectionism were associated with an insensitive relationship style, $r = .31, p < .01$, and the relative absence of a positive outlook on relationships, $r = -.33, p < .01$.

Analyses involving the global measures of liking and loving found that the interpersonal perfectionism dimensions were unrelated to these indices. However, there was an unpredicted positive association between self-oriented perfectionism and loving.

Correlates of Liking and Loving

The correlations between the indices of liking and loving and the indices of relationship beliefs and relationship styles are shown in Table 2. It can be seen that several relationship beliefs were associated with significantly higher levels of loving and liking. Higher loving scores were most strongly associated with beliefs about love, followed by beliefs about commonality, trust, communication, and coping. Higher liking scores were most strongly associated with beliefs about acceptance, commonality, support, friendship, and communication.

The correlations in Table 2 support predictions derived from the model of accommodative responses in problem situations. Loving was associated positively with con-

TABLE 2
Correlations Between Relationship Measures and MIPS Subscales

Measures	Perfectionism		
	Self	Other	Social
<u>Relationship Behaviors</u>			
Insensitivity	.11	.07	.31**
Untrustworthy	.12	.12	.14
Possessiveness	.03	.13	-.08
Warmth	.06	.04	.05
Even Tempered	-.10	-.02	-.13
Positive Outlook	.12	.14	-.33**
Good Communication	.23	.09	.18
<u>Rusbult Dimensions</u>			
Exit	.00	.00	.25*
Neglect	.06	-.05	.30*
Voice	.16	.18	-.16
Loyalty	-.04	-.08	.31*
<u>Affect Measures</u>			
Loving	.27*	.23	.06
Liking	.06	.02	.06

Note. *R(0.05, **I-<.01).

structive voice responses, $r = .38, p < .01$, and it was associated negatively with the destructive responses of exit, $r = -.49, p < .01$, and neglect, $r = -.24, p < .05$. A similar pattern emerged for the liking variable, with exit and neglect being associated significantly with less liking.

Finally, as seen in Table 2, significant associations were obtained between loving and warmth, loving and positive outlook, and liking and even-temperedness.

Correlates of Constructive and Destructive Responses

Secondary analyses examined the belief factors that contribute to the various accommodative responses. As for the constructive responses, voice responses were correlated with greater beliefs in communication, $r = .34, p < .01$, trust, $r = .29, p < .05$, coping, $r = .49, p < .001$, and respect, $r = .28, p < .05$, and decreased belief in sex, $r = -.25, p < .05$, finances, $r = -.27, p < .05$, and important others, $r = -.36, p < .01$. Loyalty was associated with greater belief in compromise, $r = .25, p < .05$, and lower belief in support, $r = -.25, p < .05$, and equity, $r = -.26, p < .05$.

As for the destructive responses, exit was correlated with lower beliefs in a number of areas, including trust, $r = -.44, p < .01$, love, $r = -.36, p < .01$, support, $r = -.31, p < .01$,

coping, $r = -.25$, $p < .05$, and respect, $r = -.31$, $p < .01$. Neglect was associated with a tendency to endorse beliefs involving external factors such as important others, $r = .30$, $p < .05$, and finances, $r = .30$, $p < .05$, and a decreased willingness to endorse coping beliefs, $r = -.33$, $p < .01$.

Finally, further analyses of the relationship style measures showed that a positive outlook was the relationship style measure that was linked most consistently with the constructive and destructive responses. A positive outlook was associated positively with voice, $r = .36$, $p < .01$, and it was associated negatively with exit, $r = -.46$, $p < .01$, neglect, $r = -.28$, $p < .05$, and loyalty, $r = -.24$, $p < .05$.

DISCUSSION

The results of Study I provided general support for our contention that a perfectionistic personality style is associated with particular beliefs and tendencies in interpersonal relationships. Our investigation of students in dating relationships found that dimensions of perfectionism were associated with stronger relationship beliefs in several areas. Other-oriented perfectionism was associated with stronger beliefs in a variety of areas that involve beliefs about intimacy. Specifically, other-oriented perfectionists had stronger beliefs involving themes of communication, trust, support, coping, and respect. These findings are in keeping with the notion that other-oriented perfectionists have high expectations for the relationship behaviors of significant others. Given that these extreme and unrealistic relationship beliefs may become associated with significant conflict and dysfunction responses when relationship problems are experienced, it may be necessary for certain other-oriented perfectionists with relationship problems to undergo treatment with a cognitive-behavioral focus (see Epstein & Baucom, 1992).

Additional analyses of our data indicated that self-oriented perfectionists had significantly stronger relationship beliefs in most of these same areas involving themes of intimacy. The association between self-oriented perfectionism and intimacy beliefs is understandable in that the Relationship Beliefs Scale focuses on beliefs involving both partners, including the self. Although it is usually the case that self-oriented perfectionism is both conceptualized and operationalized with respect to goals and behaviors in achievement settings, the current findings signify that self-oriented perfectionism is not necessarily limited to achievement settings and individuals with high levels of this personality dimension have strong beliefs in areas that are more interpersonally based. These data suggest that individuals with extreme levels of self-oriented perfectionism have elevated goals not only in the achievement sphere but also in terms of their own behaviors within the context of intimate relationships. This possibility is supported by research in another context that has shown that people with high levels of commitment to perfect performance at school or work also have high commitment to perfect relationships (Flett et al., 1995).

Analyses of self-reported relationship behaviors in the present study revealed that neither self-oriented nor other-oriented perfectionism was associated with specific relationship styles in terms of such variables as communication style and responses to conflict. The lack of association with other-oriented perfectionism was somewhat sur-

prising in that it was anticipated that the extrapunitive nature of other-oriented perfectionism would be reflected in hostile tendencies toward others. The finding that this tendency was not evident in the present study could be due to the fact that observer ratings of relationship behavior were not obtained; perhaps the lack of association between other-oriented perfectionism and self-reported relationship behaviors is due to some sort of defensive tendency on the part of other-oriented perfectionists to perceive themselves in an overly positive manner. This possibility is in keeping with data from family adjustment studies that indicate that other-oriented perfectionism in the self is unrelated to self-reports of marital adjustment problems, but people who live with other-oriented perfectionists tend to report numerous problems in the relationship (Hewitt et al., 1995). Clearly, an important goal for future research will be to examine perfectionism and relationship behaviors with actual indices of behavior rather than relying solely on self-reports.

Although other-oriented perfectionism was not linked with relationship behaviors, socially prescribed perfectionism was associated with several maladaptive response tendencies, including destructive responses of exit and neglect in problem-solving situations involving the relationship. In earlier research, Rusbult et al. (1986) reported that exit and neglect are especially robust predictors of relationship dissatisfaction. Our findings suggest that a characterological tendency to perceive that others are imposing perfectionistic demands on the self is a personality trait that may contribute to these destructive responses (also see Hewitt et al., 1995). The current data suggest that the tendency to perceive that it will be impossible to please others is a factor that is quite deleterious to the interpersonal problem-solving process, just as it is a negative factor when attempting to cope with problems in general (Hewitt & Flett, 1996). Because socially prescribed perfectionism is regarded as a personality trait that should generalize to various interpersonal relationships (Hewitt & Flett, 1999b), it is quite likely that people with high socially prescribed perfectionism exhibit destructive responses in difficult situations with a variety of significant others, in addition to their dating partner.

Rusbult et al. (1991) identified four factors that are determinants of accommodation responses to conflict situations (i.e., happiness with relationships, commitment, importance, and self-centeredness). One interpretation of our findings is that perhaps socially prescribed perfectionism is another key determinant of accommodative processes; to a large extent, how an individual responds to conflict may depend on long-lasting and stable perceptions of reciprocity and attendant beliefs about the relative degree of punitiveness versus positive responsiveness of other people. Socially prescribed perfectionism at a dispositional level may be a distal determinant of accommodative tendencies.

Additional results in the present study indicated that socially prescribed perfectionists reported the absence of a positive outlook and higher levels of insensitivity toward their partners. The absence of a positive outlook is a factor that is tied directly to the process of solving problems and resolving interpersonal conflicts; research in other contexts has shown that the valence of expectancies is a key determinant of subsequent coping and problem-solving efforts (see Butler & Meichenbaum, 1981). A tendency to

feel relatively helpless and hopeless when faced with interpersonal difficulties may have serious consequences at the interpersonal level for socially prescribed perfectionists. It is difficult, for instance, for an individual to remain intimately involved in a relationship and highly committed to the relationship if he or she views the long-term outcome of the relationship in a pessimistic fashion.

Although the perfectionism dimensions were associated with relationship beliefs and relationship tendencies, our data provided little indication that perfectionism is a negative factor in terms of affective responses within the relationship; perfectionism was not associated with lower liking and loving. In fact, the only effect was a significant *positive* association between self-oriented perfectionism and loving. These data are inconsistent with our general belief that a personality comprised of stringent evaluative standards and harsh appraisals of other people has a negative effect on the relationship.

One plausible explanation for the lack of the expected association in the present study is that it may take some time for perfectionism to have a negative influence on a relationship. It is generally accepted that the initial focus in dating relationships is on the positive characteristics of one's partner (see Holmes & Boon, 1990; Weiss, 1980). Davis and Oathout (1987) observed that personality factors are likely to become more important and exert a stronger influence on interpersonal outcomes as the relationship becomes longer. In the case of perfectionism, there may be a deidealization process that unfolds over time as the partners become more aware of each other's faults. This possibility will be investigated in subsequent research.

Relationship Predictors of Liking and Loving

Although our chief focus was on perfectionism, a more general goal of the present research was to examine the relationship variables that contributed to elevated levels of loving and liking. The results indicated that more positive affective responses toward one's partner are a complex interplay of relationship beliefs, relationship behaviors, and accommodative processes. Students in dating relationships with higher scores in terms of liking and loving had more intense beliefs, especially with respect to issues of intimacy such as love, communication, respect, and support. The finding that a stronger belief in love is associated with higher scores on the loving variable could be regarded as evidence for the criterion validity of the Relationship Beliefs Scale.

Support for the model of accommodative responses was obtained in that it was found that loving and liking were both associated with lower levels of destructive responses in relationships; that is, more positive emotional responses toward one's partner were associated with fewer exit and neglect responses. In addition, greater love was associated with the constructive, active variable known as voice. These data constitute additional support for the view that the problem-solving responses exhibited by people in relationships are important correlates of emotional reactions toward one's partner.

Secondary analyses indicated that relationship beliefs may underlie or contribute to relationship problem-solving responses. Several relationship beliefs were correlated

significantly with the variables of exit, neglect, voice, and loyalty. In many instances, the obtained associations were readily interpretable and understandable. For example, a tendency to exit a difficult relationship situation was associated with diminished relationship beliefs in love, trust, support, and respect. Not surprisingly, a stronger belief in coping was associated with a greater tendency to employ voice responses and a diminished tendency to express destructive responses. The link between coping beliefs and responses is in accordance with other findings which show that an individual's sense of coping efficacy has a strong influence on the type of coping response that is expressed (Aldwin & Revenson, 1987; Zautra & Wrabetz, 1991).

STUDY 2

Our second study was designed to extend research in this area in several respects. First, the focus on perfectionism was expanded to include other dimensions of perfectionism, in addition to self-oriented, other-oriented, and socially prescribed perfectionism. Work in our laboratory has established that perfectionists have a tendency to engage in cognitive rumination about themes that involve the need to attain perfection and the difficulties associated with obtaining perfectionism. A series of studies was conducted to develop and refine the Perfectionism Cognitions Inventory, which is a 25-item unidimensional measure of the perceived frequency of experiencing perfectionistic thoughts (Flett, Hewitt, Blankstein, & Gray, 1998). Flett et al. (1998) established that the Perfectionism Cognitions Inventory is correlated with related measures, such as trait dimensions of perfectionism and negative automatic thoughts, but it also predicts unique variance in levels of distress, over and above these related measures. The Perfectionism Cognitions Inventory was included in the present study to examine the link between relationship factors and the frequency of perfectionism cognitions.

As mentioned earlier, other research in our laboratory has established that certain perfectionists not only experience frequent thoughts involving perfectionistic themes, they also have identifiable tendencies to engage in an excessive form of self-presentation that involves a need to either appear perfect or to avoid the appearance or disclosure of imperfections (Hewitt et al., 1996). By definition, perfectionistic self-presentation is a highly defensive need to project an image of the self that is designed to minimize any perceived flaws or shortcomings, and to enhance desirable characteristics.

The first main goal of Study 2 was to farther explore the association between perfectionism and relationship adjustment by examining the extent to which dimensions of perfectionism were associated with scores on the Dyadic Adjustment Scale. In Study 1, perfectionism was not associated with less loving and liking. However, as indicated earlier, we found in a previous study with chronic pain patients and their spouses that the interpersonal dimensions of trait perfectionism were associated with poorer dyadic adjustment (Hewitt et al., 1995). These conflicting findings suggest that there is a need to re-examine this issue.

Another purpose of this study was to examine the association between the various

TABLE 3
Correlations Between Relationship Measures and Indices of Loving and Liking

Measures	Loving	Liking
<u>Relationship Beliefs</u>		
<u>Intimacy</u>		
Acceptance	.23	.48**
Communication	.29*	.31*
Compromise	.11	-.09
Coping	.29*	.27*
Friendship	.14	.33**
Love	.51**	.29*
Respect	.20	.22
Support	.28*	.38**
Trust	.31*	.17
<u>External Factors</u>		
Children	.04	.19
Commonality	.39**	.43**
Finance	-.19	.01
Important Others	-.04	.02
Personal Security	-.05	.12
<u>Passion</u>		
Sex	.03	.08
Vitality	.04	.18
<u>Individuality</u>		
Equity	.18	.28*
Independence	-.25*	.14
<u>Relationship Behaviors</u>		
Insensitivity	-.01	-.13
Untrustworthy	-.21	-.18
Possessiveness	.15	.10
Warmth	.38**	.21
Even Tempered	-.06	.32**
Positive Outlook	.24*	.15
Good Communication	.17	-.05
<u>Rusbult Dimensions</u>		
Exit	-.49**	-.27*
Neglect	-.24*	-.37**
Voice	.38**	.20
Loyalty	-.04	-.08

Note. *p<.05, **p<.01.

dimensions of perfectionism and the construct known as “limerence.” Limerence is the term used to refer to an intense, extremely emotional form of love that is fueled by fears of rejection (Tennov, 1979). The measure of limerence used in this study was

adapted version of the Limerence Scale (Steffen, McLaney, & Hustedt, 1984), which was used by Feeney and Noller (1990). They found that the limerence subscales were associated with items on love addiction scales that were designed to assess neurotic loving styles.

The general hypothesis guiding this segment of our research was that certain aspects of the perfectionism construct involve neurotic tendencies and are associated often with anxiety. The dimensions of perfectionism that have been linked with neuroticism and anxiety in past research include socially prescribed perfectionism, perfectionism cognitions, and perfectionistic self-presentation (see Flett et al., 1998; Hewitt, Blankstein, & Flett, 1991; Hill, Zrull, & Turlington, 1997). Recent work on attachment styles has also shown that socially prescribed perfectionism and perfectionistic self-presentation are associated with preoccupied, anxious-ambivalent forms of attachment (Flett et al., 2000). Thus, it follows that these dimensions of perfectionism may also be associated with high levels of limerence among those perfectionists in dating relationships. If so, then these dimensions of perfectionism would be associated with various aspects of limerence, including a cognitive preoccupation and emotional dependency on the partner.

METHOD

Participants

The participants consisted of a sample of 91 York university students (80 women, 11 men). The mean age of the participants was 19.64 years ($S_{D} = 1.86$). All of the participants were in introductory psychology and were volunteers who participated for one course credit. It was stipulated that participants had to be involved only in monogamous dating relationships for at least one month in order to participate. The study included students in both long-term and short-term dating relationships, with the average length of relationships being 17.3 months. Only one member of the couples involved was included in this research.

Materials and Procedure

If the participants met the criteria for inclusion, and gave their consent to participate, they were asked to complete a battery of personality and relationship questionnaires. In addition to the MPS, the participants completed the following measures:

The Perfectionism Cognitions Inventory. Participants completed the 25 PCI items. The PCI instructions were patterned after the measures of automatic thoughts. Note that the 25 items which comprised the final version of the PCI were selected on the basis of extensive item analyses, including ratings of the appropriateness of scale content by perfectionism researchers (see Flett et al., 1998).

Perfectionism Self-Presentation Scale (PSPS). The PSPS is a 27-item multidimensional scale that assesses an individual's need to appear perfect to others (Hewitt et al., 1996). The PSPS consists of three subscales that assess perfectionistic self-promotion

(i.e., the need to appear perfect to others), the nondisplay of imperfection (i.e., the need to avoid appearing imperfect to others), and nondisclosure of imperfection (i.e., the need to avoid disclosing imperfections to others).

A representative item for perfectionistic self-promotion is “I strive to look perfect to others.” The nondisplay of imperfection factor is represented items such as “I do not care about making mistakes in public; reverse-keyed.” Finally, the nondisclosure of imperfection factor is reflected by such items as “Admitting failure to others is the worst possible thing.”

The authors reported support for a three-factor solution in various samples. A high degree of internal consistency was found for each of the three subscales. The respective alpha coefficients were .86, .83, and .78 for the perfectionistic self-promotion factor, the nondisplay of imperfection factor, and the nondisclosure of imperfection factor.

Research has indicated that the three PSPS factors are correlated significantly with the MI'S factors (see Hewitt et al., 1999; Hewitt, Flett, & Ediger, 1995). The authors also reported that the three PSPS factors had a high level of test-retest reliability over a two month period, with test-retest correlations ranging from .74 to .84.

The Limerence Scale. The Limerence Scale (Steffen et al., 1984) consists of four subscales that measure obsessive preoccupation with one's partner and the relationship (e.g., When I am away from my partner, I experience vivid reminders of him/her), self-conscious anxiety in relationships (e.g., When I am with my partner, I am awkward, confused, and shy), emotional dependence toward one's partner (e.g., When I can be with my partner, all other things get pushed aside), and idealization of one's partner (e.g., Everything about my partner seems wonderful and special). This instrument has not been used extensively in past research, but Feeney and Noller (1990) did provide evidence of the instrument's concurrent validity in terms of its associations with measures of love addiction.

Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS). The DAS (Spanier, 1976) consists of 32 items designed to measure the quality of relationship adjustment in committed romantic dyads. The scale has content that measures dyadic satisfaction, dyadic cohesion, dyadic consensus, and affectional expression. Higher scores indicate greater dyadic adjustment. Although factor analyses have confirmed the multidimensional nature of the DAS (Eddy, Heyman, & Weiss, 1991), some concerns have been raised about the use of the DAS subscales (see Crane, Busby, & Larson, 1991). Thus, we focused on total scores in this study.

RESULTS

The first set of analyses focused on the internal consistencies (Cronbach, 1951) for each of the measures, given that several scales used in this study are relatively new. The analyses found that the perfectionism dimensions had adequate internal consistency, with alphas ranging from .73 for other-oriented perfectionism to .91 for the PCI. The alphas for the PSPS measures ranged from .81 to .89. The DAS also had a high level of internal consistency with an alpha of .83. Analyses of the data from the

TABLE 4
Perfectionism Measures Relationship

Relationship Measures	Perfectionism Measures						
	Self	Other	Social	PCI	PSPS1	PSPS2	PSPS3
Self-Conscious Anxiety	.05	-.04	.36**	.33**	.31**	.44***	.27*
Emotional Dependency	.03	.26*	.31**	.16	.31**	.34**	.33**
Obsessive Preoccupations	.11	.24*	.22*	.22*	.24*	.21*	.23*
Idealization	.04	.09	-.14	.03	.00	-.04	-.11
Dyadic Adjustment	.02	.01	-.24*	-.13	-.09	-.21*	-.16

Note. * $1 < .05$, ** $1 < .01$, *** $1 < .001$. The following abbreviations were used: Self (Self-oriented perfectionism), Other (Other-oriented perfectionism), Social (Socially prescribed perfectionism), PCI (Perfectionism Cognitions Inventory), PSPS1 (Perfectionistic Self-Promotion), PSPS2 (Need to Avoid Appearing Imperfect), and PSPS3 (Need to Avoid Disclosing Imperfections).

Limerence Scale yielded alphas of .88 for self-consciousness anxiety, .75 for obsessive preoccupations, .51 for emotional dependency, and .66 for idealization. In light of these data, the findings for emotional dependency in particular should be interpreted with a degree of caution.

The correlations between the perfectionism dimensions and the other measures are shown in Table 4 for the total sample. The respective correlations for women and men were not determined due to the low number of men in this study. In terms of the correlations involving the DAS, it can be seen that the only perfectionism dimensions associated negatively with dyadic adjustment were socially prescribed perfectionism and the PSPS subscale that assesses the need to avoid appearing imperfect. No other perfectionism dimensions were correlated significantly with the measure of dyadic adjustment.

As can be seen in Table 4, the findings with the Limerence Scale were generally in accordance with our views. That is, self-conscious anxiety in relationships was correlated significantly with socially prescribed perfectionism, perfectionism cognitions, and all three PSPS subscales. Similarly, all of these perfectionism dimensions and other-oriented perfectionism were associated significantly with obsessive preoccupations. Moreover, socially prescribed perfectionism and the three PSPS dimensions were associated significantly with emotional dependency, with r 's ranging from .31 to .34. There were no significant correlations between perfectionism and idealization.

DISCUSSION

Study 2 examined the extent to which dimensions of perfectionism were associated with dyadic adjustment and facets of limerence in a sample of students in dating relationships. Overall, the findings continue to illustrate the inherent vulnerabilities associated with socially prescribed perfectionism for individuals in a dating relationship. In Study 2, it was found that socially prescribed perfectionism is associated with neurotic aspects of love such as self-conscious anxiety in dating relationships, obsessive preoccupation with the partner, and emotional dependency on the partner. Moreover, socially prescribed perfectionism was one of the few perfectionism dimensions in this study that was associated with low dyadic adjustment.

Previously, it was found in Study I that socially prescribed perfectionism is associated with maladaptive styles of coping with relationship conflict, insensitivity toward the romantic partner, and a negative outlook on the relationship. These findings are generally consistent with past evidence linking socially prescribed perfectionism with relationship difficulties (Hewitt et al., 1995; Habke et al., 1999).

This study also found that certain limerence subscales were associated with a tendency to experience frequent perfectionism cognitions and perfectionistic self-presentation. Specifically, higher levels of perfectionism cognitions were associated with self-conscious anxiety in the relationship and obsessive preoccupations with one's partner. Previous research with the PCI has shown that it is associated with anxiety and depression (Flett et al., 1998). The current findings indicate that perfectionism cognitions are also associated with a cognitive preoccupation with one's partner, and an anxious self-focus when with the partner.

The findings obtained with the dimensions of perfectionistic self-presentation tend to parallel the findings obtained with socially prescribed perfectionism. That is, all three PSPS dimensions were associated with emotional dependency, obsessive preoccupations, and emotional dependency on the partner. Moreover, the PSPS subscale assessing the need to avoid appearing imperfect was the only other perfectionism dimension associated with low dyadic adjustment. These findings extend previous results by Habke et al. (1999) indicating that perfectionism self-presentation is associated with low sexual satisfaction in women.

Overall, the findings of Study 2 are in keeping with our suggestion that an anxious, preoccupied form of attachment is an aspect associated with socially prescribed perfectionism. Individuals characterized by a preoccupied form of insecure attachment tend to be quite anxious, and tend to react poorly to separations from their partners (Feeney, 1998). Analyses conducted in Study 2 with the limerence subscales found that interpersonal dimensions were associated with emotional dependency on the partner and obsessive preoccupations focused on the partner. An important goal for future research will be to examine the possibility that this anxious attachment style mediates the link between relationship outcomes and perfectionism dimensions such as socially prescribed perfectionism and perfectionistic self-presentation.

Although two dimensions of perfectionism were associated with low dyadic adjustment in the current study, it must be acknowledged that the significant correlations

that we obtained were relatively small in magnitude. Moreover, the results of Study 1 showed that no perfectionism dimensions were associated with reduced liking and loving; in fact, self-oriented perfectionism in Study I was associated with greater loving. What factors may have contributed to this outcome? We can suggest at least two possibilities that should be explored in future research. First, Habke et al. (1999) demonstrated the importance of including measures of perfectionism that are spouse-specific. Similarly, subsequent research on perfectionism and dating outcomes should include a direct focus on the interpersonal aspects of perfectionism, as they apply to one's partner. Second, we believe it is important to supplement the measures of perfectionism with some assessment of the extent to which perfectionism has or has not been obtained in the relationship, according to the views of the respective partners (i.e., a discrepancy measure). That is, the perfectionist who acknowledges problems in the self and/or the partner is likely to report significant relationship problems, but this will not be the case with the perfectionist who perceives little or no discrepancy between his or her idealistic standards and the extent to which these standards have been attained.

Limitations of the Current Research

The results of the present study are noteworthy in that they represent initial evidence that aspects of the perfectionism construct are associated with relationship beliefs and behaviors in romantic dyads. However, the findings must be interpreted within the context of certain limitations. First, it is evident that the findings are constrained by the lack of observer ratings. There is little doubt that the exclusive reliance on the subject's self-report may have influenced the results. On a related note, it would have been more useful to examine both partners in the dating relationship in order to determine whether the structure of the dyad is important. Both of our samples consisted primarily of women and it was not possible to explore possible gender differences. In future research, it will be important to include both partners. Finally, it is important to acknowledge that the current data are cross-sectional in nature and a prospective design was not employed in either study. Thus, perfectionism is associated with relationship styles and beliefs, and there exists the implicit assumption in this research that the perfectionistic personality style causes or at least predicts relationship variables, but it cannot be assumed that perfectionism exerts a causal influence on relationships until conclusive evidence is provided.

CONCLUSIONS

In summary, the main purpose of the present research was to investigate the hypothesized link between perfectionism and variables involving interpersonal relationships. Overall, our findings clarified the association between perfectionism and relationship variables. Specifically, the following results emerged: (1) other-oriented perfectionism and self-oriented perfectionism were associated with stronger relationship beliefs in topics pertaining mostly to attitudes about intimacy; (2) socially prescribed perfection-

ism was associated with destructive problem-solving responses and maladaptive relationship tendencies; and (3) although perfectionism was not associated with lower levels of liking and loving, socially prescribed perfectionism and perfectionistic self-presentation were associated with lower dyadic adjustment; and (4) socially prescribed perfectionism, perfectionism cognitions, perfectionistic self-presentation, and other-oriented perfectionism were all associated with tendencies involving obsessive preoccupation, self-consciousness, and emotional dependency on partners.

Overall, the current findings highlight the importance of regarding perfectionism as a construct that is not focused exclusively on the attainment of achievement goals. Consistent with a multidimensional approach, our data indicate that perfectionism is a personality construct with identifiable interpersonal correlates. These results illustrate the potential usefulness of future research on the interpersonal aspects of perfectionism and the relationship outcomes that people experience.

NOTES

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Address correspondence to: Gordon L. Flett, Department of Psychology, York University, 4700 Keele Street, North York, Ontario, M3U-1P3, Canada

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