

Preface

The drive to improve oneself, to strive for the ideal, to seek better performance, and even higher standards, are in many ways the characteristics of the human condition. Indeed, this striving for betterment has served our species well and driven many great accomplishments throughout history. In today's performance-focused society, an unrelenting pursuit of ideal standards that leave no room for error, or perfectionism, is often revered with little consideration of its consequences. Understanding these consequences is becoming an increasingly important concern, especially in light of evidence that personality can confer risk or resilience for health-related outcomes. Whether we view perfectionism as a situationally bound quality induced by social or intra-psychic pressures for peak performance and flawless outcomes, or as an enduring tendency to have frequent cognitions about the attainment of ideal and often unrealistic standards, research has begun to highlight the ways in which perfectionism may impact health and well-being.

The public health implications of perfectionism are evidenced by the growing body of research demonstrating that perfectionism, (i.e., the setting and striving for unrealistically high standards, often accompanied by harsh self-criticism) can have important consequences not only for mental health, but also for physical health and well-being. Yet, to date there are no books or edited volumes that provide a focused account of the different ways and domains in which perfectionism contributes to health and well-being, for better or worse. Our purpose for this edited volume was to address this surprising gap by presenting the latest theoretical and empirical perspectives from leading researchers in the perfectionism field on this important topic.

A significant limitation plaguing the perfectionism and health field is that aside from a few noteworthy exceptions, research on perfectionism and health has been largely atheoretical. To this end, a central goal in organizing this book was to include contributions that provide an overview of not only the most recent advances on this topic, but also those that present new conceptual models that may help further our understanding of when, how, and why perfectionism may be implicated in health and well-being. Collectively, these contributions provide in depth analyses and discussions of the specific mechanisms and processes that may render certain perfectionists particularly vulnerable to poor health and well-being, but leave other perfectionists less vulnerable to these same consequences.

Perfectionism is a topic that has relevance for not only scholars and researchers, but also for those who work therapeutically with people experiencing issues related to perfectionism, or who work in a setting in which perfectionism may be particularly rampant due to performance pressures and expectations. For these reasons, we have included contributions that focus on how perfectionism may relate to well-being, with a particular emphasis on, health-related and social contexts. For example, this volume includes chapters explicating the role of perfectionism in the context of general and specific chronic illness, psychopathology, and eating disorders, and in the relationship, academic, and work-life arenas. To further highlight the translational value and application of the book, we have also encouraged contributors to include a discussion of prevention and treatment issues surrounding perfectionism, where possible, which may be useful for clinicians and service providers. In doing so, we hope that this volume will be an important resource not only for researchers, but also for those who wish to use it in applied and clinical settings.

The chapters offer important and exciting new insights into the role of perfectionism in health and well-being written by authors who are well-respected international scholars. Each of these chapters presents the most up-to-date and cutting edge research on perfectionism, health, and well-being, and importantly, also highlights how these latest findings impact longstanding debates in these fields such as how perfectionism is best conceptualized and whether or not perfectionism can be healthy. As research on perfectionism has grown exponentially in the past 2 decades, these debates have also grown in their complexity. Accordingly, the contributors have weighed in on these controversial issues from a variety of different critical perspectives to provide the reader with an engaging, comprehensive, and up-to-date understanding of the current field of perfectionism with respect to health and well-being.

This book is structured to first provide an introductory overview of the fundamental conceptualization issues that need to be navigated for understanding the nuances that characterize the research on perfectionism, health, and well-being. Following this, the book is organized into three main sections, each concentrating on important and related topic areas. The first section examines the role of perfectionism in physical health—an area that has been relatively understudied by perfectionism researchers. In the second section, perfectionism as it relates to well-being and psychopathology is explored. The final section of the book focuses on specific social contexts and how they may contour the associations of perfectionism with health and well-being. We then conclude the book with a final chapter that highlights potentially fruitful and important avenues of research on perfectionism, health, and well-being yet to be explored that will hopefully contribute to the momentum of this fast growing field of research.

Given its focus and coverage, we believe that this volume will be useful to a number of different groups. It should serve as a useful reference book for researchers and scholars and also as a textbook suitable for advanced undergraduate and graduate courses dealing with personality and health, and/or personality and well-being. This book may also be of particular interest to those who work in applied settings where perfectionism is more common or more problematic, and where there is a

pressing need to understand the processes linking perfectionism to health and well-being outcomes. As such, it may be a useful resource for those working in clinical, counselling, health, educational, and organizational areas, to name just a few. By presenting the latest theory and research on perfectionism, health, and well-being, we hope that this book makes a unique and useful new addition to the perfectionism literature that helps underscore the need to address the potential burden of perfectionism for health and well-being.



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