



A Gender Study on Perfectionism, Self-criticism, and Self- reflection among Visual Artists

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Abstract

Visual artists always desire to create their best artwork possible. They compete with other artists and put their best effort possible to reach the level of excellence. In between the process of creating visual art, they gradually develop perfectionism tendencies too which leads them seeking constant improvement, setting higher standards, and creating masterpieces. However, when these tendencies increase, the chances of self-criticism may increase too. The purpose of this study was to study perfectionism, self-criticism, and self-reflection among male and female visual artists. Standardized scales were used to measure perfectionism, self-criticism, and self-reflection among visual artists. The study included total sample of 60 including 30 males and 30 females' visual artists. The results found out that there is a significant positive correlation between perfectionism and its sub-dimensions i.e., rigid perfectionism, self-critical perfectionism, and narcissistic perfectionism. On the other hand, self-criticism had a significant positive correlation with forms of perfectionism. However, self-reflection and insight had significant negative correlation with perfectionism and no significant difference could be seen on perfectionism, self-criticism, and self-reflection among male and female visual artists. Therefore, this research study showed that in

between creating art pieces, artists may develop tendencies of perfectionism which is positively associated with self-criticism and may affect self-reflection as well. It is suggested for an artist to balance these tendencies so that it doesn't affect their creativity. Practicing self-analysis and self-appreciation, setting achievable goals, and a self-compassion attitude can be helpful in maintaining perfectionism as well as self-criticism.

Keywords: Visual Artist, perfectionism, self-reflection, and self-criticism

Introduction

"The more reflective you are, the more effective you are."

~ Pete Hall

Visual artists are the creative professionals who express, create, and use their imagination in the form of paintings, photography, printmaking, sculptures, and graphic designs. They create visually appealing and expressive artworks using a variety of mediums and fine artists understand the history of art and design. Without the artist and their creation, the world would be far less interesting. Their contribution enriches the human experience. Visual artists inspire others through their magical creation, challenge and motivate humans to think deeper and see problems in a different light. When artists create something, it means that they are expressing their own feelings and emotions. Through creating art, they communicate and share their perception with the world. Artists reflect their inner world through their art. They reflect what they are aware of and the more they are aware of their inner self, the more authentic work they can create.

On the other hand, the reason behind their powerful creative masterpiece is the continuous urge of striving towards perfectionism and excellence. But, sometimes when the tendency of perfectionism increases and crosses extremes, the progress of an artist may go in the wrong direction because the more perfectionist tendencies increase in an artist, the more they can feel dissatisfied and criticize their own work as well as skills. This may affect the creativity level. When perfectionist artists set unrealistic goals for themselves but end up not meeting the expectations, it could lead to higher

chances of self-criticism. When artists start criticizing their own work continuously, it may affect their self-confidence and create fear of failure.

A study conducted by Dunkley et al. (2011) on the university students examined the role of self-critical (SC) and personal standards (PS) higher order dimensions of perfectionism in daily self-esteem, attachment, and negative affect. The results found out the moderating influences of perfectionism dimension on daily self-esteem, attachment, and negative affect. Self-critical perfectionism was strongly related to low self-esteem, attachment fears and negative affect. Study also suggests that both SC and PC perfectionists were emotionally reactive to decreases in self-esteem. On the other hand, only SC perfectionists were emotionally reactive towards increasing fear of closeness with others.

A comparative study was conducted among Indian artists and non-artists aged between 20 to 50 years old to explore the level of mindfulness and self-actualization. The results found that artists possess a higher level of mindfulness and self-actualization than non-artists (Pahlevanzadeh & Swathi, 2019).

Perfectionism

Perfectionism is defined as a “combination of excessively high personal standards and overly critical self-evaluations” (Frost et al., 1990). According to Short and Mazmanian (2013), perfectionism is the “tendency to strive toward personal improvement and setting higher standards for oneself.”

A qualitative study was conducted on perfectionism among self-identified perfectionists in sport and the performing arts to measure their perception and its influence in their life. For the further study, semi-structured interviews were conducted including 15 international/professional athletes, dancers, and musicians. The results found out the characteristics of perfectionism in athletes as well as in performing artists with a greater focus on increasing standards, obsessiveness, dissatisfaction and rigid as well as dichotomous thinking (Hill et al., 2015).

A study was conducted by Johnson (2023) on the role of perfectionism in an artist's creative process and how it is seen in the art industry. The findings of this research study showed that those who are striving to achieve this unattainable sense of self can be negatively affected by it. It can have a sense of being not worth the turmoil it takes. On the other hand, perfectionism can be used as a positive motivator to achieve new heights of success and challenge one to reach their full potential.

Self-Criticism and Self Assurance

Self-criticism is defined as “the tendency to set unrealistically high standards for oneself and to adopt a punitive stance towards the self once these standards are not met” (Shahar, 2015).

Self-criticism is defined as “the tendency to engage in negative self-evaluation that results in feelings of worthlessness, failure, and guilt when expectations are not met.” It was originally seen as particularly relevant to the development of depression (Naragon-Gainey & Watson, 2012). Additionally, self-criticism is the “habit or act of criticizing yourself, especially your own behavior, work or performance” (Cambridge Advanced Learner’s dictionary & Thesaurus, 2023).

Self-assurance is the self-confidence which refers to “people’s sense of competence and skill, their perceived capability to deal effectively with various situations” (Shrauger & Schohn, 1995, p. 256).

A study done by Stoeber et al. (2008) on undergraduate students to investigate the correlation of perfectionism striving and self-criticism with self-efficacy, aspiration level, and performance and how manipulated success and failure feedback affected these relationships. The findings suggests that perfectionism has both adaptive and maladaptive aspects, whereas self-criticism is associated with low self-efficacy and makes perfectionists lose confidence after failure. Perfectionists are associated with higher aspiration levels and after success, they prepare themselves to reach higher aims.

Another study done by Hakes (2001) on performing artists experiencing self-criticism with the aim of providing recommendations for educational and therapeutic purposes. The findings suggest the connection of self-criticism in performing artists with the low confidence, being afraid, a pattern of thinking and an unending experience. The clinicians and teachers who work with the performing artist and performing art students guide them, which includes communicating with them in a clinical context the perpetual, self-regulatory purpose of self-criticism; identifying and challenging the pattern of thinking associated with self-criticism; and knowing not only the fear, but also the courage is involved in performance. In an educational context, the findings of the study are to increase students' confidence by providing specific and detailed feedback, balancing critical with non-critical comments, and encouraging student self-awareness of strength in performance.

Self-Reflection

Self-reflection can be defined as a “temporary phenomenological experience in which self becomes an object to oneself” (Gillespie, 2007).

Self-reflection is “the inspection and evaluation of one’s thoughts, feelings and behavior” whereas insight is “the clarity of understanding of one’s thoughts, feelings and behavior” (Grant et al., 2002). Additionally, self-reflection is the “activity of thinking about your own feelings and behavior, and reasons that may lie behind them” (Cambridge Advanced Learner’s dictionary & Thesaurus, 2023).

Autry and Walker (2011) conducted a qualitative study on the use of artistic representation to promote student’s creativity and enhance their ability to self-reflect. Authors found out the influences on self-reflection identified under emotions elicited during the creative process and classroom presentation and under responses following completion of the assignment.

A study conducted on Fine Art students to examine what and how they learn. Study showed that Fine Art education play a major role in developing learner identities, independence, self-responsibility and promotes student engagement (Logan, 2013).

Purpose

The purpose is to study the effect of creating visual art on perfectionism, self-criticism, and self-reflection among male and female visual artists.

Hypothesis

- There will be significant positive correlation between perfectionism and self-criticism among visual artists.
- There will be significant negative correlation between perfectionism and self-reflection among visual artists.
- There will be gender differences in perfectionism, self-criticism, and self-reflection in male and female visual artists.

Methods

Sample

Total 60 participants including 30 male artists and 30 female artists participated in this study in the age between 20-35 years. The sample was collected from Jalandhar city.

Measures

- **The Big three perfectionism scale – short form**, a short version of BTPS (Smith et al., 2016), is a self-report questionnaire (Feher et al., 2019) used to assess the three dimensions of perfectionism: rigid perfectionism, self-critical perfectionism, and narcissistic perfectionism. It includes 16 item scale graded on a 5-point Likert scale.
- **Self-Criticizing & Self-Reassuring scale** (Gilbert et al., 2004) is a 22-item scale used to measure self-criticism and the ability to self-reassure. It is measure on a 5-point Likert scale.

- **The Self-reflection and Insight scale** (Grant et al., 2002) is a 20 items scale used to measure self-reflection and insight. Responses are measured by a six-point scale.

Procedure

The participants were informed about the purpose of the research and the questionnaires were filled through google forms, each participant was thanked for their cooperation. Standardized psychological Tests were administered to the participants.

Table 1

N, Mean and Standard Deviation

	Perfectionism	Rigid perfecti onism	Self- critical perfecti onism	Narcissi stic perfecti onism	Self- criticism	Self- reflectio n	Engage ment in self- reflectio n	Need for self- reflecti on	Insight
N	60	60	60	60	60	60	60	60	60
Mean	44.4	12.5	16.3	14.8	41.7	66.9	20.8	21.9	24.2
Standard deviation	12.0	3.55	5.33	4.91	14.0	9.18	4.08	4.64	4.80

Table 2

Correlation between perfectionism, self-criticism, and self-reflection among male and female visual artists

	Perfectionism	Rigid perfectionism	Self-critical perfectionism	Narcissistic perfectionism	Self-criticism	Self-reflection	Engagement in self-reflection	Need for self-reflection	Insight
Perfectionism	—								
Rigid perfectionism	0.758 ***	—							
Self-critical perfectionism	0.825 ***	0.539 ***	—						
Narcissistic perfectionism	0.749 ***	0.492 ***	0.566 ***	—					
Self-criticism	0.385 **	0.296 *	0.393 **	0.240	—				
Self-reflection	-0.156	0.150	-0.248	-0.090	-0.231	—			

Engagement in self-reflection	-0.230	-0.050	-0.155	-0.360 **	-0.057	0.653 ***	—	
Need for self-reflection	0.180	0.367 **	0.003	0.236	-0.064	0.748 ***	0.350 **	—
Insight	-0.276 *	-0.025	-0.346 **	-0.095	-0.332 **	0.634 ***	0.062	0.166

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 3

T – stats on perfectionism, self-criticism, and self-reflection among male and female visual artists.

	Group	N	Mean	Statistic	P
Perfectionism	F	30	42.3		
	M	30	46.6	-1.3903	0.170
Rigid perfectionism	F	30	12.0		
	M	30	13.0	-1.0917	0.279

Self-critical perfectionism	F	30	16.0		
	M	30	16.6	-0.4091	0.684
Narcissistic perfectionism	F	30	14.3		
	M	30	15.2	-0.6804	0.499
Self-criticism	F	30	39.3		
	M	30	44.1	-1.3326	0.188
Self-reflection	F	30	66.8		
	M	30	67.0	-0.0837	0.934
Engagement in self reflection	F	30	20.8		
	M	30	20.8	0.0314	0.975
Need for self-reflection	F	30	22.1		
	M	30	21.8	0.2485	0.805

Insight	F	30	23.9		
	M	30	24.4	-0.4272	0.671

Discussion of Results

The results found out that rigid perfectionism has significant positive correlation with perfectionism ($r=0.758$, $p<.001$) whereas self-critical perfectionism have significant positive correlation with perfectionism ($r=0.825$, $p<.001$) as well as rigid perfectionism ($r=0.539$, $p<.001$). Narcissistic perfectionism has significant positive correlation with perfectionism ($r=0.749$, $p<.001$), rigid perfectionism ($r=0.492$, $p<.00$), as well as self-critical perfectionism ($r=0.566$, $p<.001$).

On the other hand, self-criticism has significant positive correlation with perfectionism ($r=0.385$, $p<.01$), rigid perfectionism ($r=0.296$, $p<.05$) and self-critical perfectionism ($r=0.393$, $p<.01$). Hence, the hypothesis that there will be significant positive correlation between self-criticism and perfectionism among visual artists is accepted.

Engagement in self-reflection has significant negative correlation with narcissistic perfectionism ($r=0.360$, $p<.01$) and significant positive correlation with self-reflection ($r=0.653$, $p<.001$) whereas need for self-reflection have significant positive correlation with rigid perfectionism ($r=0.367$, $p<.01$), self-reflection ($r=0.748$, $p<.001$), as well as engagement in self-reflection ($r=0.350$, $p<.01$). On the other hand, insight have significant negative correlation with perfectionism ($r=0.276$, $p<.05$), self-critical perfectionism ($r=0.346$, $p<.01$), as well as self-criticism ($r=0.332$, $p<.01$), but has significant positive correlation with self-reflection ($r=0.634$, $p<.001$). Hence, the hypothesis that there will be significant negative correlation between self-reflection and perfectionism is accepted. The results found out no significant difference on level of perfectionism, self-criticism, and self-reflection among male and female visual artists.

Similar study done on perfectionism, self-actualization, and personal adjustment was conducted. Findings of the study suggested that there is a significant negative correlation between dimensions of perfectionism and self-actualization (Flett et al., 1991).

Another similar research on self-criticism as a mediator in the relationship between unhealthy perfectionism and distress in which findings suggested that higher levels of self-criticism had an association with unhealthy perfectionism and psychological distress (James et al., 2015).

Conclusion

The research study comprehends the effect of creating visual art on perfectionism, self-criticism, and self-reflection among male and female visual artists. No significant difference was found in the level of perfectionism, self-criticism, and self-reflection among male and female visual artists. The study also found that perfectionism was positively significantly correlated with their subdimension i.e., rigid perfectionism, self-critical perfectionism, and narcissistic perfectionism. The study also revealed that self-criticism had positive significant correlation with forms of perfectionism whereas self-reflection is negatively significant correlated with perfectionism. This shows that if perfectionism tendencies may increase in an artist, this may start criticizing their own work, as they set higher standards for themselves. If they don't achieve it, there will be higher chances of self-criticism. This may affect creativity, self-confidence, create fear of failure. That's why it is important for an artist to set realistic goals, accepting their own uniqueness, learning from mistakes, being kind to themselves. Self-analysis, self-appreciation, and mindfulness may be very helpful in balancing these tendencies and helping artist to reach to the higher level of excellence.

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