



## Influence of Cultural Values on Perfectionism and Self-esteem

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**Abstract:** This study investigates the intricate relationship between cultural values, perfectionism, and self-esteem among young adults. In the context of increasing globalization and identity negotiation, the influence of individualistic and collectivistic cultural orientations on personality traits and psychological well-being becomes particularly relevant. The research utilizes standardized psychometric tools including the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, Singelis' Self-Construal Scale, and the Almost Perfect Scale-Revised to measure self-worth, cultural orientation, and perfectionism respectively. Through correlational analysis, the study reveals that interdependent cultural values are significantly negatively correlated with self-esteem, while other dimensions showed weak or no correlations. The findings support theoretical models that emphasize the role of social expectation and cultural identity in shaping perfectionistic tendencies and global self-worth. Implications for culturally adaptive interventions and future longitudinal research are discussed, emphasizing the need for holistic approaches in youth mental health support.

**Keywords:** *Cultural values, Perfectionism, Self Esteem*

### 1. Introduction

As young adults undergo the physical and identity-shaping changes associated with emerging adulthood, they face challenges and opportunities to grow. This particular stage integrates multiple psychosocial stressors such as relative independence, academic workload, career goals, interpersonal friendships, and social identity formation. Each of these factors

profoundly affects the person's perception of themselves, success, and general life satisfaction. The interplay between cultural values, self-esteem, and perfectionism represents a significant area of inquiry in the field of psychology. As individuals navigate diverse sociocultural landscapes, their beliefs, behaviours, and sense of self are deeply influenced by cultural frameworks. These values serve as internalized social blueprints, shaping how people perceive themselves, evaluate their accomplishments, and establish goals or standards. In a world characterized by rapid globalization, cultural norms and identity constructs are no longer confined within national boundaries but intersect dynamically across regions, institutions, and communities.

The focus of the current research is to explore the connection among cultural values, perfectionism, and self-esteem, considering how these factors interact and affect psychological coping during the young adulthood stage.

### ***Cultural Values***

“Cultural values, the shared beliefs, principles, and norms that guide behaviour and social interactions within a group, provide a framework for understanding the world and shaping individual choices” (Hofstede, 2001). One of the most prominent dimensions of cultural values is the distinction between individualism and collectivism. Individualistic cultures prioritize personal autonomy, independence, and self-reliance, emphasizing individual achievement, competition, and self-expression (Triandis, 1995).

In these societies, the "self" is often defined in terms of individual attributes, achievements, and aspirations. Examples of predominantly individualistic cultures include the United States, Australia, and many Western European nations. Conversely, collectivistic cultures emphasize “interdependence, social harmony, and the prioritization of group needs over individual desires” (Hofstede, 2001). The ‘self’ is often described concerning other people and one’s position as an individual in the social order. Such groups place greater value on the family, community, and other in-groups as they exhibit heightened social responsibility and conformity. Predominantly collectivistic cultures include most of the East Asian countries, as well as some nations from Latin America and Africa.

### ***Perfectionism***

Perfectionism, a multifaceted personality trait, is characterized by a “relentless striving for flawlessness and the setting of excessively high standards for performance” (Frost & Hewitt, 2002). It often involves a fear of failure, self-criticism, and a tendency to evaluate oneself based on the achievement of these unrealistic standards. While sometimes associated with high achievement, Perfectionism can negatively impact one's wellbeing and mental

health. Hewitt and Flett (1991) proposed a multidimensional model of perfectionism, identifying three distinct components: self-oriented perfectionism (setting unrealistically high standards for oneself), other-oriented perfectionism (holding others to excessively high standards), and socially prescribed perfectionism (perceiving that others hold unrealistic expectations for one's performance). Hamachek (1978) distinguished between adaptive perfectionism (a positive striving for excellence) and maladaptive perfectionism (characterized by fear of failure and self-criticism). According to Frost et.al., maladaptive perfectionism has been associated with a range of negative outcomes, including anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem.

### ***Self-Esteem***

Self-esteem, a key component of psychological health, is “a person's overall assessment of their own value and worth” (Rosenberg, 1965). It reflects the extent to which individuals feel positive about themselves and accept themselves as they are. While low self-esteem can result in anxiety, sadness, and social challenges, high self-esteem is linked to increased resilience, confidence, and a sense of belonging (Baumeister et al., 2003). Rosenberg (1965) defined self-esteem as "a global judgment of self-worth or self-acceptance." It is deeply rooted in personal and social experiences, as well as the feedback individuals receive from others. This research adopts a multidimensional perspective on self-esteem, recognizing that it can be influenced by various factors, including cultural values and experiences.

## **1.2 Theoretical Frameworks**

### ***Cultural Dimensions Theory by Hofstede***

One of the most influential frameworks for understanding cultural values was proposed by Geert Hofstede (1980, 2001), who identified six primary dimensions along which cultures vary:

- a) *Individualism vs. Collectivism*: Individualist societies place a higher value on individual objectives, independence, and self-expression. Collectivist cultures, on the other hand, place a higher value on mutual reliance, social responsibility, and group solidarity.
- b) *Power Distance*: The extent to which a culture tolerates hierarchy and inequality.
- c) *Uncertainty Avoidance*: The extent to which societies tolerate ambiguity and risk.
- d) *Masculinity vs. Femininity*: Societies with higher masculinity scores place more importance on success and competition, while those with higher femininity scores place more importance on teamwork and quality of life.
- e) *Long-term vs. Short-term Orientation*: This dimension shows how much emphasis is placed on future benefits as opposed to adherence to customs and social duties.

These dimensions do not only reflect societal structures—they are internalized by individuals and influence their standards for success, definitions of failure, and ways of measuring self-worth.

### ***Triandis' Cultural Syndromes***

Complementing Hofstede's work, Harry Triandis (1995) proposed that cultural values can be understood in terms of cultural syndromes—patterns of shared attitudes, beliefs, norms, roles, and values. Notably, he emphasized:

- a) *Tight vs. Loose Cultures*: Whereas loose cultures, like the U.S., are more lenient and adaptable, tight cultures like South Korea have rigid social rules and little tolerance for deviation.
- b) *Complexity*: Refers to the number of different roles available in a society. More complex societies tend to have greater role specialization and autonomy.
- c) *Individualism-Collectivism*: Like Hofstede, Triandis emphasized this dimension but introduced horizontal and vertical distinctions:
  - a. Horizontal individualism stresses equality and autonomy.
  - b. Vertical collectivism stresses hierarchy and group identity.

This granularity helps explain why perfectionism may take different forms across cultures, even those similarly categorized.

### ***Cultural Values and Internalization***

The internalization of cultural norms occurs through socialization processes in family, education, and media. Children in collectivist societies may be praised for obedience and fulfilling expectations, while those in individualistic societies may be rewarded for uniqueness and personal achievement (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). These cultural templates create the foundation for how perfectionism is perceived—is it a personal strength, a neurotic flaw, or a social obligation?

Moreover, cultural values affect the benchmarks individuals use to evaluate themselves. In societies with high power distance and strong uncertainty avoidance, perfectionism may be seen as necessary to navigate hierarchical structures and avoid failure (Stoeber & Damian, 2016). These pressures directly influence how individuals view themselves and their self-worth.

***Perfectionism*****Hewitt & Flett's Multidimensional Model of Perfectionism**

One of the most important frameworks for comprehending perfectionism was put forth by Hewitt and Flett (1991). The Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS) made by them identifies three different types of perfectionism:

- a) *Self-Oriented Perfectionism*: Characterized by personal demands for excellence and unrealistic self-imposed standards. Individuals high in this trait are highly motivated and disciplined but may also experience burnout and self-criticism when goals are unmet.
- b) *Socially Prescribed Perfectionism*: Involves the perception that others expect one to be perfect. This form is strongly linked with anxiety, depression, and feelings of inadequacy.
- c) *Other-Oriented Perfectionism*: Entails imposing unrealistic expectations on others, which can lead to interpersonal conflict and disappointment.

Among these, socially prescribed perfectionism is most sensitive to cultural influence. In collectivist societies, where family honour, group harmony, and academic or career success are emphasized, individuals may internalize high external expectations, leading to chronic stress and emotional dysregulation (Flett et al., 2016).

**Self-esteem*****Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Theory***

Morris Rosenberg (1965) provided the most widely recognized definition of self-esteem, characterizing it as a general attitude toward oneself, either positive or negative. The most popular tool for evaluating self-esteem is the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), which was created by him. It contains items that gauge a person's level of self-like and self-competence, which indicates how much they believe they are valuable as a person.

Rosenberg emphasized the stability of self-esteem over time but also acknowledged its dynamic nature—it is susceptible to fluctuations based on feedback from the environment. Importantly, his theory emphasizes that self-esteem arises through interaction with social agents—parents, teachers, peers—and the broader community.

***Sociometer Theory***

Another dimension is added by sociometer theory (Leary et al., 1995), which postulates that self-esteem serves as a barometer for social acceptance. This idea states that perceived inclusion or exclusion affects how self-esteem changes. This theory is especially relevant in collectivist cultures where interpersonal harmony and group belonging are highly valued. In

such settings, self-esteem may be more reactive to relational dynamics than to individual achievement.

### ***Relationship between cultural values, perfectionism and self esteem***

The relationship between cultural values, perfectionism, and self-esteem is likely complex and multifaceted. Self-esteem can be impacted by perfectionism, which can be influenced by cultural beliefs. Young adults from collectivistic cultures, for example, where social peace and interdependence are valued, could feel pressured to be flawless in order to prevent embarrassing or dishonouring their family. Socially dictated perfectionism, which has been connected to decreased self-esteem, may result from this (Hewitt & Flett, 2002). In contrast, young adults may be more prone to acquire self-oriented perfectionism, where they strive for excellence to demonstrate their value, in individualistic cultures that place a strong emphasis on personal accomplishment and independence. This can have different implications on self-esteem depending on how well they believe they can satisfy these self-imposed norms.

Culture influences not only the development of self-esteem but also its acceptable expressions. For example, in Western cultures, overt self-confidence and assertiveness are signs of healthy self-esteem. However, in many Asian, African, and Latin American societies, such behaviour may be viewed as arrogance or disrespect. Instead, modesty and humility are prized—even when individuals feel confident internally.

Cultural values shape perfectionism by establishing the standards individuals are expected to meet and the consequences of failing to meet them. In societies with strong collectivist values, individuals are often raised with a high degree of social responsibility, where fulfilling roles and meeting expectations is central to identity. In such contexts, perfectionism—particularly the socially prescribed type—can be seen as a reflection of moral character or familial obligation. For instance, children may feel responsible for their family's reputation and academic success may be tied to honor. On the other hand, individualistic cultures may encourage self-imposed standards, driving self-oriented perfectionism. Here, the perfectionist tendency is often framed positively as ambition or drive, and failure may be internalized but not necessarily linked to shame or social rejection.

## **2. Review of Literature**

Khossousi et al. (2024) carried out a comprehensive evaluation of 83 publications to examine the connection between adults' self-esteem and perfectionism. Results reveal that self-esteem and perfectionistic worries were significantly negatively correlated, with a moderate

pooling effect. The findings indirectly support the cognitive-behavioural model of clinical perfectionism by showing that lower self-esteem is linked to increased perfectionistic concerns.

Md. Dilsad Ahmed et al. (2022) studied the relationship between perfectionism, self-esteem and will to win among athletes. It was noted that the aspects of perfectionism, the will to succeed, and self-esteem were all positively and strongly correlated. Additionally, male athletes outperformed female athletes on tests of self-esteem and perfectionism (i.e., rumination and the need for approval).

Truong (2022) conducted a study to examine how culture affects perfectionism. Sample was collected from 32 female and 18 male participants wherein they answered self report questionnaires measuring perfectionism and individual vs collectivist culture. The findings showed a strong relationship between strict, self-critical, and narcissistic perfectionism and several Collectivistic (Advice, Harmony) and Individualistic (Compete, Unique, and Responsibility) ideals.

Monica et al. (2022) conducted a study to understand the mediating effect of self-critical rumination and metacognitions on perfectionism and self-esteem. The relationship between perfectionistic concerns and self-esteem was partially mediated by positive metacognitions about self-critical rumination, self-critical rumination, and negative metacognitions about self-critical rumination, while the relationship between perfectionistic striving and self-esteem was fully mediated by these three types of metacognitions.

GiBaeg Han et al. (2022) conducted a study in 2022 to examine the cross-cultural difference in insecure attachment and bulimic behaviours through several direct and indirect cognitive pathways such as maladaptive perfectionism, lowered self-esteem and depression. Results showcased culturally specific nuances in the separate pathways of mediation, specifically perfectionism and self-esteem.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Aim**

To explore the influence of cultural values on perfectionism and self-esteem among young adults.

#### **3.2 Research Objectives**

- a) To examine the relationship between Interdependent cultural values and perfectionist tendencies.
- b) To examine the relationship between Interdependent cultural values and self-esteem.

- c) To examine the relationship between perfectionist tendencies and Independent cultural values.
- d) To examine the relationship between Independent cultural values and self-esteem.
- e) To examine the relationship between perfectionist tendencies and self-esteem.

### 3.3 Hypothesis

1. There would be a significant relationship between Interdependent cultural values and perfectionist tendencies.
2. There would be a significant relationship between Independent cultural values and perfectionist tendencies.
3. There would be a significant relationship between Interdependent cultural values and self-esteem.
4. There would be a significant relationship between Independent cultural values and self-esteem.
5. There would be a significant relationship between perfectionist tendencies and self-esteem.

### 3.4 Sampling technique

A convenient sampling technique is employed so as to recruit participants from different settings and online forums to investigate the influence of cultural values on perfectionism and self-esteem among young adults.

### 3.5 Sample size

The study will collect data from approximately 100 individuals aged between 18 to 30 in order to explore the influence of cultural values on perfectionism and self-esteem within the age group of young adults.

### 3.6 Measures

The following tools have been used;

**Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale:** The 10 items in this Rosenberg measure are rated on a Guttman scale from 1 to 4, with items measuring the self-esteem. With a Guttman Scale Coefficient of 0.92 and test-retest reliability ranging from 0.85 to 0.88, the questionnaire showed good internal consistency and test-retest reliability. In a prior study, this measure also demonstrated strong construct and predictive validity with well-known self-esteem measures, including Coopersmith Self-esteem Inventory.

**Singelis' Self Construal Scale:** The Singelis' Self Construal Scale was developed by Ted Singelis to evaluate individual differences in cultural values. This 30-item scale measures cultural values across two dimensions- Independent and Interdependent on a 7 point likert

scale. Dimensions had good reliability with Cronbach's alpha above 0.70 for Independent and 0.74 for Interdependent dimensions. It has shown good construct validity in initial analysis along with good cross-cultural adaptability.

***Almost Perfect Scale- Revised:*** Slaney et al. (1996) formulated the questionnaire. 23 items on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 to 7 are intended to assess respondents' attitude towards themselves, their performance and towards others. The total and subscale APS-R scores' showcase excellent Cronbach's alpha (0.85 to 0.92) along with concurrent validity indicated through positive correlations with other measures of perfectionism.

#### 4. Result

**Table 1:** *Pearson product correlation between Independent cultural values and self-esteem and perfectionism*

|                                    | Self-esteem  | Perfectionism |
|------------------------------------|--------------|---------------|
| <b>Independent cultural values</b> | <b>0.023</b> | <b>-0.006</b> |

**Table 2:** *Pearson Product Correlation between Interdependent cultural values and self-esteem and perfectionism*

|                                       | Self-esteem   | Perfectionism |
|---------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| <b>Interdependent cultural values</b> | <b>-0.141</b> | <b>0.059</b>  |

**Table 3:** *Pearson Product Correlation between self-esteem and perfectionism*

| Self-esteem   | Perfectionism |
|---------------|---------------|
| <b>-0.049</b> | <b>-0.049</b> |

#### 5. Discussion

The purpose of this research is to understand how the cultural values of an individual influences their perfectionism and self-esteem.

Cultural values, perfectionism and self-esteem have all been extensively researched but their relationship with each other has not been explored well. Cultural values are broadly understood as the shared principles and standards within a particular group or society that guide behaviour, attitudes, and perceptions. They are not static but evolve over time, influenced by historical, political, and economic factors. Importantly, they play a central role in determining

what is considered acceptable, admirable, or shameful within a given context. Understanding these factors will give a foreplay into how these values can be utilised to understand the working of an individual better.

The perception of perfectionism as either unhealthy or attractive is greatly influenced by cultural beliefs. High standards for excellence are frequently concealed by indirect communication and subtle social indicators in high-context cultures (like East Asia). Although they may not be stated directly, people are socialized from an early age to strive for "perfection" in the social, moral, and academic spheres (Hamachek, 1978).

On the other hand, self-oriented perfectionism may be fostered by Western individualistic cultures, which push people to create and achieve personal objectives. This behaviour is reinforced by the social incentive for high achievers, but unlike in collectivist countries, there is less social guilt and less familial repercussion. Walton et al. (2020) found that Middle Eastern participants, typically from more collectivistic cultures, reported higher levels of parental expectations and self-oriented perfectionism compared to US participants, suggesting a possible link between cultural values and the pressure to achieve. In collectivistic cultures, where interdependence and social harmony are emphasized, individuals may feel a strong obligation to meet family and societal expectations, leading to heightened perfectionistic tendencies. This aligns with the idea of socially dictated perfectionism, as defined by Hewitt and Flett (2002), in which people believe that other people have irrational expectations for their performance.

Self-esteem is a culturally bound construct. While the need for self-worth is universal, the criteria used to evaluate it vary considerably across cultures. These differences are not merely surface-level. They influence how people respond to success and failure, how they set goals, and how they interpret feedback. Cultural scripts also affect how openly self-esteem is expressed. In collectivist settings, modesty norms may prevent individuals from expressing high self-esteem, even when it exists. Bleidorn et al. (2016) found significant cross-cultural variations in age and gender differences in self-esteem, highlighting the influence of cultural norms and expectations on self-esteem development. Their findings suggest that cultural factors, such as gender equality and socioeconomic status, can moderate the relationship between age, gender, and self-esteem. Moreover, studies exploring the role of cultural identity (Hoersting & Jenkins, 2011; Osborne & Taylor, 2010) have shown that a strong sense of cultural belonging can be a protective factor for self-esteem.

Although, the research findings do not align with the hypothesis well. The analysis supports hypothesis 3, indicating a significant negative correlation between interdependent

cultural values and self-esteem. The notion that greater perfectionism can cause or suggest low self-esteem is further supported by the weakly negative association that has been observed between self-esteem and perfectionist tendencies. As highlighted by Chen et al. (2017) and Athylya et al. (2016), adaptive perfectionism, is often associated with higher self-esteem and life satisfaction whereas Lower self-esteem is consistently associated with maladaptive perfectionism, which is characterized by an unrelenting quest for perfection, fear of failing, and self-critical rumination (Khossousi et al., 2024; Wang, 2012). This supports the cognitive-behavioral model of perfectionism, which holds that self-worth can be undermined and negative emotional effects might result from an ongoing pursuit of unachievable standards and the self-criticism that goes along with it.

Conversely, the analysis does not reflect strong correlations between other variables leading to the rejection of hypothesis 1, 2 and 4 indicating the lack of relationship between these variables. Additionally, the constraints of a limited sample may be adding onto the difficulty in analysing a correlation between these variables.

## 6. Conclusion

In summary, this study confirms that cultural norms have an impact on young people's development of perfectionism and self-esteem. The results show that interdependent cultural orientations are linked to poorer self-esteem, possibly as a result of internalized social norms and a preference for group cohesion over individual freedom. Perfectionism and self-esteem have a complex relationship; self-directed perfectionism is less harmful than maladaptive, socially dictated kinds of perfectionism. These outcomes support previously proposed theoretical frameworks, reinforcing the need to understand psychological constructs within their cultural contexts. While the results are correlational and do not imply causation, they suggest that cultural conditioning might play a critical role in how young adults perceive their worth and strive toward achievement. The study encourages future research to explore these dynamics longitudinally and across more diverse populations. It also recommends incorporating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to better capture the intricacies of cultural experience. Most importantly, this research emphasizes the need for culturally competent psychological practices that affirm diverse identity experiences rather than pathologizing them.

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