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Perfectionism in Dance

Reina Teh, March 2021

High level technique and tricks have become the norm for a 21st century dancer. Given that movement precision is key to putting up a great performance, dancers constantly strive to hone their craft in order to produce a flawless performance through hours of deliberate practice. Expectedly, this generates perfectionist tendencies and goals.

So is perfectionism a good or bad trait? Read on to find out!

What defines perfectionism?

Perfectionism is commonly defined as a personality trait of an individual who sets extremely high standards for themselves with personal goals that are hard to achieve, often over-evaluate themselves and have negative reactions to imperfection⁶. Various research tell us that there are multiple profiles of perfectionism and it is usually co-related to various

multidimensional factors of an individual personality trait, for example, motivation and environment factors resulting in different levels of passion and burn out.

If you read more into the world of perfectionism, you will find different theoretical models of perfectionism. However, in this article, we will only focus on one approach, the Gaudreau and Thompsons 2 x 2 model of perfectionism..

In Table 1, you are able to identify the multiple profiles of perfectionism supported by Gaudreau and Thompson's 2 x 2 model of perfectionism.

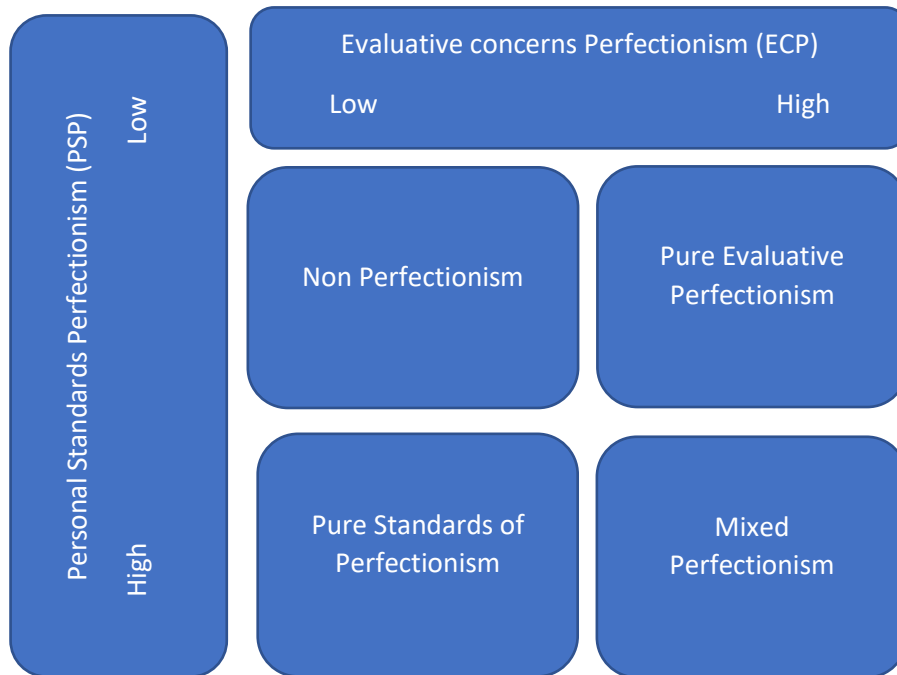


Table 1. 2 x 2 model of perfectionism

The impact of perfectionism

From literature review, perfectionism can have a positive and/or negative impact on a dancer based on the profile of perfectionism identified. Below are some of the traits identifiers and their association with the multidimensional factors such as motivation, burn out and passion.



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Pure Personal Standards Perfectionism (PSP) can be identified by high personal standards and low evaluative concerns. These individuals are often flexible while evaluating their performance and are able to consider mistakes as a part of learning. Dancers who possess PSP are less likely to experience burn out, more likely to be intrinsically motivated and has a stronger sense of accomplishment⁵.

Mixed Perfectionism can be identified by high personal standards and high evaluative concerns. More than often, these individuals do not allow themselves to make mistakes. When mistakes are made, they tend to punish themselves and identify it as a form of failure. Dancers who possess mixed perfectionism can be seen to have higher level of exhaustion. Hence, they are likely to experience burnout easily⁵. In fact, other research studies on sports athletes tell us that possessing mixed perfectionism may affect individual's performance negatively⁴.

Non-perfectionism can be identified by low personal standards and low evaluative concerns. Individuals who exhibit non-perfectionism tend to be less bothered by mistakes made during class, which may or may not be a good thing, as this might propose that mistakes are not translated into learning.

Pure evaluative concerns perfectionism (ECP) can be identified by low personal standards and high evaluative concerns. Individuals who possess pure evaluative concerns tend to be extrinsically motivated and doubtful of their actions. Dancers with who possess traits of ECP tends to experience burnout easily, requires extrinsic motivation and is driven by consequences (e.g. working hard to avoid punishment).

How to identify the type of perfectionism?

In order to assess perfectionism, dancers will have to take a questionnaire called the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS)². This is usually administered by dance scientists, psychologists and/or researchers to assess the degree in perfectionism thinking. The other method to identify perfectionism is through the Performance Profiling Wheel. Although the performance profile is designed to enhance an athletes awareness regarding characteristic that facilitate successful performance, it is also a tool where dance scientists and educators can use to identify perfectionism characteristics. You can read more about the performance profile wheel [here](#).



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So what does this tells us about perfectionism?

There are positive and negative sides to perfectionism and it is heavily dependent on an individual's personality trait as well as environment. With the increasing demand placed on dancers, it is important for dancers to have a positive and encouraging environment as compared to negative reinforcements where dancers are punished over mistakes made, and subjected to constant comparison between dancers. Possessing positive personality traits can support healthy intrinsic motivation, performance enhancement as well as sustaining a longer and healthier career with greater satisfaction.

End



Graduated with an MSc in Dance Science from Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, Reina is currently volunteering to write for the programme *SCAPEdance Science as she hopes to share the knowledge and concept of dance science in Singapore. Reina was also a graduate from LASALLE College of the Arts, Diploma in Dance and has experience in teaching adolescents, youth as well as adult in ballet and creative movement.

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