

Abstract

We examined the impact of self-compassion in positive help-seeking attitudes and the effects of perfectionistic self-presentation related to help-seeking attitudes in a sample of Asian American college students at two Pacific Northwest 4-year institutions (N = 101). We first predicted that perfectionistic self-presentation would be related to more unfavorable help-seeking attitudes (Hypothesis 1). Second, we predicted that self-compassion perfectionistic self-presentation would be related to more favorable help-seeking attitudes (Hypothesis 2). We also explored the impact of cultural elements (emotional self-control, family recognition through achievement) as correlates of help-seeking attitudes. Our results indicated that non-disclosure of imperfection and emotional self-control were significantly correlated with unfavorable help-seeking attitudes. Unwillingness to talk about imperfections and cultural values of emotional restraint might act as barriers to seeking psychological services for Asian American college students.

Introduction

- Asian American college students tend to underutilize mental health services (Kearney et al., 2005) and might have more unfavorable attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help (Masuda et al., 2009). To address this mental health disparity, we examined three correlates of help-seeking attitudes among Asian American college students. Data collection is currently ongoing, but in this poster we present a preliminary analysis based on 101 Asian American participants.

Perfectionism

- Factors such as the rise of social media and increased competition have led to elevated levels of perfectionism among young people in recent years (Curran & Hill, 2017). The desire to appear perfect has been found to be correlated with negative mental health outcomes (Shannon, 2018).
- Perfectionistic Self-Presentation** refers to a dimension of perfectionism involving impression management that seeks to display perfection in social contexts. The facets involved in perfectionistic self-presentation are perfectionistic self-promotion, nondisplay of imperfection, and nondisclosure of imperfection (Hewitt et al., 2003).
- Perfectionistic self-presentation involves a demonstration of perfectionistic behavior and can be seen as maladaptive (Hewitt et al., 2003).
- Past research on perfectionism indicates that a perfectionistic front could help mask psychological distress in order to avoid mental illness stigma (Shannon, 2018).
- We predicted that high levels of perfectionistic self-presentation will be correlated to more unfavorable help-seeking attitudes.

Self Compassion

- Self-compassion** is defined as the ability to be kind to oneself, accept imperfection, and hold a balanced perspective of one's own suffering (Raes et al., 2011).
- Having compassion for oneself allows for one's ability to see their success and failings clearly, and often involves desiring good health and well-being for oneself (Neff, 2003).
- Self-compassion has been shown to be a protective factor in psychological distress in its ability to promote emotional resilience, resulting in lower levels of depression and anxiety (Raes et al., 2011).
- We predicted that high levels of self-compassion would be related to positive help-seeking attitudes among Asian American individuals.

Asian Cultural Values

- Cultural values**, defined as what people view as attractive or desirable, can be unique to Asian American individuals (Smith & Bond, 1994).
- B. S. K. Kim et al. (2005) empirically identified key cultural values among Asian Americans: collectivism, conformity to norms, emotional self-control, family recognition through achievement, and humility.
- In our study, we examined emotional self-control and family recognition through achievement as a correlate of help-seeking attitudes.
- Emotional self-control:** One's adherence to cultural values can determine how one manifests psychological problems and expresses emotions (B. S. K. Kim et al., 2005). Adherence to emotional self-control has found to be correlated with negative help-seeking attitudes (P. Y. Kim & Lee, 2014).
- Family recognition through achievement:** Although this variable has not been found to be significantly related to help-seeking attitudes, given the other variables in the study (e.g., perfectionism), we reasoned that it might be important to include this cultural value in our study.

Study Hypotheses

- Hypothesis 1:** Perfectionistic self-presentation would be related to more unfavorable help-seeking attitudes.
- Hypothesis 2:** Self-compassion would be related to more positive help-seeking attitudes.
- Exploratory question:** We explored how elements of culture (emotional self-control, family recognition through achievement) might be related to help-seeking but also the other two predictors (perfectionism and self-compassion).

Method

Sample Characteristics

- Number of participants:** 101 Asian American college students
- Age range:** 18-29 years old (M = 20.25, SD = 1.771)
- School year:** 35 first year, 16 second year, 23 third year, 26 fourth year, 1 other
- Gender:** 69 female, 31 male, 1 non binary
- Data Collection Sites:** Two universities in the Pacific Northwest
- Ethnicities:** 36 Chinese, 20 Japanese, 21 Filipino, 3 Indian, 2 Thai, 13 Vietnamese, 5 Other

Procedure

Participants completed an online questionnaire that included the measures assessing the study variables.

- Attitudes toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale-Short Form** (Fischer & Farina, 1995)
 - 10 items (0 = disagree; 3 = agree)
 - $\alpha = .84$
- Perfectionistic Self-Presentation Scale** (Hewitt, Flett, Sherry, Habke, & Parkin, 2003)
 - Three scales (perfectionistic self-promotion [$\alpha = .86$], nondisplay of imperfection [$\alpha = .83$], and nondisclosure of imperfection [$\alpha = .80$])
 - 21 items total
- Self-Compassion Scale** (Raes et al., 2011)
 - 12 items (1= almost never, 5= almost always)
 - $\alpha = .76$
- Emotional Self-Control** (B. S. K. Kim et al., 2005)
 - 8 items (1= strongly disagree, 7= strongly agree)
 - $\alpha = .75$
- Family Recognition Through Achievement** (B. S. K. Kim et al., 2005)
 - 14 items (1= strongly disagree, 7= strongly agree)
 - $\alpha = .90$

Results

- Non-disclosure of imperfection was negatively correlated with attitudes towards seeking professional psychological help ($r = -.24, p < .05$), therefore our Hypothesis 1 was supported.
- Self-compassion was negatively correlated with all dimensions of perfectionistic self-presentation, including perfectionistic self-promotion ($r = -.24, p < .01$), non-display of imperfection ($r = -.47, p < .01$), and non-disclosure of imperfection ($r = -.40, p < .01$).
- Emotional self-control was negatively correlated with attitudes towards seeking professional psychological help ($r = -.35, p < .01$) and self-compassion ($r = -.36, p < .01$).

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Inter-correlations Among Study Variables.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	M	SD	α
1. Attitudes towards seeking professional psychological help	--							1.73	.60	
2. Self-compassion	.15	--						2.78	.61	
3. Perfectionistic self-promotion	.10	-.34**	--					4.50	1.06	
4. Non-display of imperfection	-.01	-.47**	.68**	--				5.16	.93	
5. Non-disclosure of imperfection	-.24*	-.40**	.47**	.52**	--			3.61	1.09	
6. Emotional self-control	-.35**	-.36**	.14	.17	.56**	--		3.64	.97	
7. Family recognition through achievement	-.03	-.26**	.47	.43	.40**	.28**	--	4.62	1.13	

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

Discussion

- Our results indicated a significant relationship between non-disclosure of imperfection and unfavorable help-seeking attitudes. This finding may suggest that psychological help-seeking environments may not align with how a person wants to present themselves in terms for acknowledging shortcomings nor would it be conducive for preventing the disclosure of imperfections.
- Additionally, consistent with prior studies (e.g., P. Y. Kim & Kendall, 2015; P. Y. Kim & Lee, 2014), emotional self-control was also related to unfavorable help-seeking attitudes, indicating that individuals who express high emotional regulation are less likely to see professional psychological help as beneficial and are therefore less likely to engage in help-seeking behaviors. Further research is needed to see if this relationship is explained by aversive attitudes towards settings that involve emotional vulnerability or rather an expression of self-sufficiency in regulation of emotions.
- Our study did not show a significant relationship self-compassion was not related to positive help-seeking attitudes, however there were several significant correlations between self-compassion and perfectionistic self-presentation. Overall, trends showed that individuals with lower self-compassion scores were more likely to express perfectionistic self-promotion, variants of non-presentation of imperfection, and emotional self-control.
- The results of our study inform psychological practice in ways that involve the need to acknowledge the role of perfectionistic self-presentation in therapeutic settings, as well as investigating how familial and cultural influences may inform perfectionistic tendencies. Models of therapy oriented around developing self-compassion can be particularly helpful to individuals who express perfectionism, as Mehr and Adams (2016) study depicts self-compassion as a mediator between maladaptive perfectionism and depressive symptoms.