

More Educated, Less Irrational: Gender and Educational Differences in Perfectionism and Irrationality

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The current study sets out to identify and analyze gender and educational level differences concerning irrationality and perfectionism. A total of 62 participants (29 men, 33 women; 32 persons with higher studies, 30 persons with average/primary studies) completed the General Attitude and Belief Scale (Lindner, Kirkby, Wertheim & Birch, 1999) and Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (Frost, Marten, Lahart & Rosenblate, 1990). Data analysis revealed significant gender differences regarding perfectionism, men proving to be more concerned with mistakes than women. At the same time, significant educational differences were identified at the level of all the variables studied, the subjects with higher studies showing a lower level of irrationality, concern over mistakes, personal standards, parental expectations, parental criticism, and doubt about actions, as compared to the participants with average or primary studies. There were no significant gender differences concerning irrationality. The practical and theoretical implications of these findings are further discussed.

Keywords: irrationality, perfectionism, gender and educational differences

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The way we react when facing everyday situations implies three major aspects: (1) the cognitive aspect, regarding beliefs about people, relationships, activities; (2) the affective aspect – we like or dislike various elements of the situation, some more, others less; (3) the behavioral aspect, i.e. the tendency to act in a particular way in relation to the elements of the situation, according to what we think and feel under those circumstances.

Irrationality

Evaluative cognitions are cognitive structures connected to descriptions and inferences; they possess linguistic doubling, and can be rational or irrational. “Irrational” expresses something that does not have a logical, empirical and/or pragmatic support. Evaluative cognitions are general cognitive structures and at the same time general vulnerability factors involved in the human subject’s structures of personality and in his/her philosophies of life.

Albert Ellis (1991) described the most important general evaluative cognitive structures involved in etiopathogenetic mechanisms – through this association they are also dysfunctional – (irrational cognitions) and/or in promoting health and adaptive behavior (rational cognitions). The irrational evaluative cognitive processes are described below (David, 2006; Ellis, 1991).

Absolutist thinking

The human species is characterized by having targets/wishes/aspirations. These are expressed in information processing of the ideal expectations type (hopes) and/or of the real expectations type – marking the difference between the “Real Self” and the “Ideal Self”.

Catastrophizing

Irrationality – as expressed here – refers to the fact that, no matter how severe a negative event should be,

appraising it as the worst possible thing that could happen is wrong and dysfunctional.

Low frustration tolerance

Low frustration tolerance, seen as an irrational process, refers to appraising a situation as being intolerable, in the sense that the situation is impossible to accept and to live with. It is based on promoting short term pleasure instead of long term pleasure. The person is not able to bear the frustration, but, on the other hand, considers change to be difficult and unnatural.

Global evaluation

We have a natural tendency to appraise ourselves (incapable/worthy), others (good/bad) and the surrounding reality (just/unjust). These assessments are often made starting from just a few punctual elements.

Irrationality means any thought, emotion or behavior that leads to self-defeating or self-destructive consequences, which significantly interferes with the survival and happiness of the organism. More specifically, irrational behavior usually has several aspects: (1) people who have an irrational behavior significantly denigrate or refuse to accept themselves; (2) irrational behavior interferes with their ability to get along in a satisfactory manner with the members of their significant social groups; (3) it seriously blocks their ability to achieve the kind of interpersonal relationships that they would like to achieve; (4) it hinders their ability to work joyfully and in a gainful manner and (5) it interferes with their own best interests in other important respects. (Ellis, 1989, 1991).

The consequences of irrational, rigid convictions regarding negative trigger events will be uncomfortable and are called inadequate negative consequences, whereas the consequences of rational, flexible convictions regarding negative trigger events will not be embarrassing, and are called adequate negative consequences (Dryden & DiGiuseppe, 1990).

Perfectionism

Perfectionism has been defined as the tendency to set excessively high standards and to engage in exaggerated critical self-assessment (Kawamura, Hunt, Frost & DiBartolo, 2001).

Perfectionism refers to a set of self-sabotaging convictions and behaviors that aim at reaching exaggeratedly high and unrealistic goals. Perfectionism is usually seen as a personality style characterized by the endeavor to be flawless and by setting excessively high performance standards along with the tendency to excessively criticize behavior (Otto & Stoeber, 2006).

Frost et al. (1990) suggested six faces of perfectionism: personal standards, self-organization, and concern over mistakes, doubts about actions, parental expectations and parental criticism – indicating that perfectionists have high standards, value order and organization, try to avoid mistakes and are undecided about their actions.

Concern over mistakes represents the tendency to interpret mistakes as failures and to believe that one loses the respect of others following a failure. The person cannot minimize the mistake and considers that he/she has failed the task completely if a mistake, however small, should appear (Bouvard, 2003). *Personal standards* refer to establishing too high criteria and attributing excessive importance to these high standards when assessing oneself (Bouvard, 2003). *Parental expectations* represent one's tendency to believe that one's parents had had high personal standards towards themselves or towards others (Bouvard, 2003). *Parental criticism* represents one's tendency to believe that one's parents had been very critical and that one could never meet their standards (Bouvard, 2003). *Doubt about actions* represents one's tendency to think that projects are never finalized (Bouvard, 2003). *Self-organization* refers to the importance that one attributes to order, organizing, concern with details (Bouvard, 2003).

Hewitt and Flett (as cited in Otto & Stoeber, 2006) suggested three faces of perfectionism: self-oriented perfectionism, socially prescribed perfectionism and other-oriented perfectionism – indicating that perfectionists see their high standards as self-imposed or imposed by others, and that they have equally high expectations of others. Self-oriented perfectionism was favorably directed to avoid self-criticism, whereas socially prescribed perfectionism was favorably directed to avoid the disapproval of others.

One can distinguish between two types of perfectionism: a positive form known as normal perfectionism and a negative form – neurotic perfectionism. Normal perfectionism describes individuals who set high goals, accept “less than perfect” performances and obtain a pleasant feeling from activities that necessitate a significant amount of effort. Neurotic perfectionism, on the other hand, describes individuals incapable of feeling satisfied. In their own perception they never do things well enough to obtain this feeling (Tozzi et al., 2004).

Seeking perfection can be painful because it is influenced by the will to succeed, as well as the fear regarding the consequences of failure, perfectionism thus being a two edged sword (Ramirez Basco, 1999).

Among the negative consequences of this perfectionist *modus vivendi* are: depression, anxiety (Flett, Besser & Hewitt, 2005; McCreary, Joiner, Schimdt & Ialongo, 2004), maladaptive eating behaviors (Miller-Day

& Marks, 2006) or even suicidal ideation and suicide attempts (Hunter & O'Connor, 2003).

Perfectionism and irrationality: previous findings

Perfectionism is the irrational conviction that one and/or one's environment has to be perfect; one's attitude that everything one tries to do in life has to be done perfectly, without deviations, mistakes or inconsistencies.

Flett, Hewitt, Blankstein & Koledin (1991) indicate that self-oriented, other-oriented and socially prescribed perfectionism is strongly connected to irrational thinking.

The hypothesis of research on perfectionism has aimed at studying the way the three dimensions of perfectionism are associated with cognitive mediators of emotional states (irrational convictions). The belief in perfectionism and in high expectations represents the central cognition that leads to emotional distress and self-criticism. Both irrational convictions and perfectionism are associated with impaired adaptation (Otto & Stoeber, 2006).

Research conclusions support this association between perfectionism and central irrational convictions. Self-oriented perfectionism is positively connected to irrational convictions regarding high expectations of oneself and to the conviction that there is a perfect solution to everything. Socially prescribed perfectionism is positively connected to irrational convictions on topics such as social dependency and approval. Other-oriented perfectionism is associated with reduced frustration tolerance and with general hostility towards others. Therefore, research results show that a perfectionist person's motivations and expectations of him/herself are components of irrational cognitions and are associated with maladaptive patterns of thinking (Parker & Adkins, 1995).

As far as gender differences among perfectionists are concerned, studies are divided into two categories. The first category claims the absence of gender differences among perfectionists (Kawamura, Hunt, Frost & DiBartolo, 2001). The second category claims the presence of gender differences in some dimensions of the perfectionist person. McCreary, Joiner, Schmidt & Ialongo (2004) find significant differences at the level of perfectionism, boys showing higher scores than girls in the case of socially prescribed perfectionism. Modi & Thingujam (2007) mentioned that the only dimension for which differences were recorded is the need for comfort, women scoring slightly higher than men.

As far as educational differences among perfectionists are concerned, study results are not convergent. Storneli, Flett & Hewitt (2009) examined the association between dimensions of perfectionism and levels of academic achievement and affect in school-aged children. There was little evidence of group differences in levels of perfectionism. Also, perfectionism was mostly unrelated to levels of reading and mathematics achievement, with the exception of a positive association between mathematics achievement and perfectionism for students in the gifted program. Other analyses showed that self-oriented and socially prescribed perfectionism were associated with elevated levels of fear and sadness. LoCicero and Ashby (2000) found no difference between the gifted and their general cohort peers on an overall perfectionism score.

As far as irrationality is concerned, studies are rather precarious with regard to educational differences. Tobacyk and Milford (in Prola, 1988) reported that Ellisionian irrationality was associated with reduced ability to make

critical inferences by college students. They demonstrated a similar inverse relationship between irrationality and reading comprehension and later with both reading comprehension and writing performance.

Aim this study

This study sets out to identify and assess differences regarding irrationality and perfectionism, depending on the persons' gender and educational level (higher studies or average/primary studies).

The irrational cognition of perfectionism makes its presence known in every domain of the individual's life: socio-professional, ethical, of personal identity, emotional, sentimental, relational, and sexual, of appearances, of health. Therefore, the beneficiaries of this study's results can be: psychologists, physicians, sociologists, social workers, teachers, parents or any person interested in the optimal personal development.

Knowing the gender and educational differences in perfectionism, the counselors or therapists can adjust their message, in order to make it more comprehensible and to achieve optimal results.

Method

Participants and design

62 persons ($N = 62$) aged between 30 and 55 years from the western part of Romania took part in this study. The group of subjects was intended to be homogenous, thus being made up of adults. Age was chosen as criteria of inclusion because cognitions are a time-dependent aspect. According to gender, the sample is made up of 33 women and 29 men respectively. Among the studied subjects, 30 have primary or average studies (primary school, secondary school, apprentice school, vocational school, high school, postgraduate school), and 32 have higher studies (college, master's degree, PhD). The average age for the male subjects in the sample is $M = 37.48$, $SD = 6.52$, and for the female subjects $M = 41.12$, $SD = 7.82$. Regarding these persons' educational level, the average age of those with higher studies is $M = 39.06$, $SD = 6.53$, and the average age of those with primary studies is $M = 39.80$, $SD = 8.34$. All participants were informed about the study protocol and gave their written consent.

Irrationality

Shortened General Attitude and Belief Scale (SGABS - Lidner, Kirkby, Wertheim & Birch, 1999) includes 26 items that are assessed on a Likert scale in 5 steps, from 1 – “strong disagreement” to 5 – “strong agreement”, which includes 7 subscales: 1) rationality; 2) global assessment of one's own worth; 3) self-actualization; 4) the need for approval; 5) the need for comfort; 6) the absolutist need for justice, 7) global assessment of others. For the current study it was opted for irrationality subscales only. The Cronbach coefficient alpha for each subscale is as follows: rationality $\alpha = .74$, global assessment of one's own worth $\alpha = .83$, the need for self-actualization $\alpha = .88$, the need for approval $\alpha = .71$, the need for comfort $\alpha = .81$, the absolutist need for justice $\alpha = .72$, global assessment of others $\alpha = .62$, irrationality total $\alpha = .85$.

Perfectionism

The Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (Frost, Marten, Lahart & Rosenblate, 1990) includes 35 items that are assessed on a Likert scale in 5 steps, from 1 – “strong disagreement” to 5 – “strong agreement”, and 6 subscales: the concern over mistakes (9 items), personal standards (7

items), parental expectations (5 items), parental criticism (4 items), doubt about actions (4 items), self-organization (6 items). “Self-organization” was not included in the scale's total score (Frost et al, in Bouvard, 2003).

The alpha coefficient for the entire scale of the “Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale” was calculated within the Romanian-speaking population. The investigated sample is made up of 62 persons, of adult age (30-55 years) from the cities of Arad and Timisoara. The sample is categorized according to gender, and level of studies respectively. The sample includes, according to gender, a number of 33 women, and 29 men. Among the subjects studied, 30 have primary or average school, apprentice school, vocational school, high school, postgraduate school) and 32 have higher studies (college master's degree, PhD) The value of the alpha coefficient for the scale is $\alpha = .95$. The following values were obtained for the subscales: concern over mistakes $\alpha = .90$; personal standards $\alpha = .85$, parental expectations $\alpha = .87$; parental criticism $\alpha = .87$; doubt about actions $\alpha = .81$.

These results are consistent with the conclusions of some previous studies on English-speaking populations: .90 for the total and from .83 to .93 for the subscales (Frost et al., 1990); .88 for the total and from .57 to .95 for the subscales (Parker & Adkins, 1995). The subscale “self-organization” was eliminated from the scale because the alpha coefficient for the items' validity was below .40.

Procedure

The subjects took part in the research in the form of voluntary action, and data was collected directly by the authors. Anonymity was ensured for the identity of the participants as well as for the results obtained. The instructions for filling out the questionnaires were given both verbally and in writing. The application of the questionnaires was carried out individually, without time limit. Biographical data (gender and age) and educational level data (level of studies) were also collected from the participant. Regarding the statistical procedure, for highlighting the differences for perfectionism and irrationality, the t test was used for independent samples, thus calculating the effect size and the statistical power. The raw data were analyzed using SPSS for Windows 10.0.

Results

Gender differences

Tables 1 and 2 include descriptive statistics for all the variables studied, according to the two label variables considered – gender and level of education.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics (gender)

	Men ($N = 29$)		Women ($N = 33$)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Irrationality	67.2	15.38	66.57	12.55
Concern over mistakes	28.96	8.48	24.3	6.17
Personal standards	25.48	6.15	23.48	3.97
Parental expectations	16.41	5.17	15.06	3.78
Parental criticism	12.24	3.99	10.87	3.74
Doubts about actions	13.17	4.15	12.24	2.76

Table 2. Descriptive statistics (educational level)

	University degree (N = 32)		Up to high school education (N = 30)	
	M	SD	M	SD
Irrationality	60.93	14.3	73.2	10.18
Concern over mistakes	20.56	4.43	32.8	4.7
Personal standards	21.09	4.48	27.96	3.07
Parental expectations	12.59	3.69	19	2.46
Parental criticism	8.65	2.86	14.56	2.11
Doubts about actions	10.09	2.54	15.43	1.85

Table 3 indicates that between the male and female subjects there are no differences as far as irrationality is concerned, $t(60) = 0.178$, $p > .05$. Of the five dimensions of perfectionism, significant differences were noted only in the case of concern over mistakes, $t(50.56) = 2.44$, $p < .05$, men being more preoccupied with mistakes than women. The effect size, $r^2 = .10$, indicates a difference of medium to large magnitude between the two subject groups (10%). The statistical power is .77, which leads to a probability of 77% of noticing differences in the case of concern over mistakes.

At the level of perfectionism, significant differences did not occur between male and female subjects with regard to: personal standards $t(46.799) = 1.495$, $p > .05$, parental expectations $t(60) = 0.241$, $p > .05$, parental criticism $t(60) = 0.171$, $p > .05$ and doubt about actions $t(47.650) = 0.312$, $p > .05$.

Table 3. Gender and educational level differences (N = 62)

	Gender differences				Education level differences			
	F	Sig	t	df	F	Sig	t	df
1. Irrationality	,889	,347	,178	60	4,763	0.3	-3,908*	56,067
2. Concern over mistakes	5,121	,027	2,445*	50,566	,010	,919	-10,539*	60
3. Personal standards	4,906	,031	1,495	46,799	7,785	,007	-7,075*	55,134
4. Parental expectations	2,127	,150	1,185	60	3,230	,077	-7,973*	60
5. Parental criticism	,022	,881	1,385	60	1,454	,233	-9,186*	60
6. Doubts about actions	8,722	,004	1,022	47,650	,935	,337	-9,395*	60

* for $ps < .05$ (F = Levene's Test for Equality of Variances; Sig = signification level for Levene's Test; t = test for equality of means)

Differences according to the level of education

As outlined in Table 2, there are significant differences between the persons with higher studies and those with average or primary studies as far as irrationality is concerned, $t(56.06) = -3.90$, $p < .05$. One can notice that the persons with higher studies show a lower level of irrationality as compared to those with average or primary studies. The effect size, $r^2 = .21$, indicates a difference of large magnitude (strong) between the two groups (21%). The statistical power is .97, which leads to a probability of 97% of noticing educational differences in the case of irrationality.

Therefore, at the level of concern over mistakes there are notable differences between persons with higher studies and those with average or primary studies, $t(60) = -10.539$, $p < .05$. Descriptive analysis reveals the fact that persons with average or primary studies are more concerned with mistakes than persons with higher studies. The effect size, $r^2 = .64$, indicates a difference of large

magnitude between the two groups (64%). The statistical power is approximately 1, leading to a probability of approximately 100% of remarking educational level differences with regard to concern over mistakes.

Quantitative data analysis suggests that there are differences between persons with higher studies and persons with average or primary studies concerning personal standards, $t(55.134) = -7.07$, $p < .05$. By analyzing the mean values one can notice that persons with higher studies show a lower level of personal standards as compared to persons with average or primary studies. The effect size, $r^2 = .47$, indicates a large magnitude difference between the two groups (47%). The statistical power is approximately 1, leading to a probability of approximately 100% of noticing educational level differences regarding personal standards.

As far as parental expectations are concerned, there are statistically significant differences between the persons with higher studies and those with average or primary studies, $t(60) = -7.97$, $p < .05$. In order to see the direction

of the differences one only needs to consult the values of the means obtained. Thus, one will notice that persons with higher studies show a lower level of parental expectations as compared to those with average or primary studies. The effect size, $r^2 = .51$, indicates a large magnitude difference between the two groups (51%). The statistical power is approximately 1, which leads to a probability of approximately 100% of noticing differences in terms of educational level in the case of parental expectations.

Regarding parental criticism, there are differences between persons with higher studies and persons with average or primary studies, $t(60) = -9.18$, $p < .05$. Analyzing the direction of these differences, one remarks that persons with higher studies show a lower level of parental criticism as compared to persons with average or primary studies. The effect size, $r^2 = .58$, indicates a large magnitude difference between the two groups (58%). The statistical power is approximately 1, which leads to a probability of approximately 100% of noticing differences on an educational level regarding parental criticism.

In the case of the last dimension of perfectionism, i.e. doubt about actions, there are differences between the two categories of subjects, $t(60) = -9.39$, persons with higher studies showing a lower level of doubt about actions as compared to persons with average or primary studies. The effect size, $r^2 = .59$, indicates a large magnitude difference between the two groups (59%). The statistical power is approximately 1, which leads to a probability of approximately 100% of noticing differences on an educational level concerning doubts about actions.

Discussion

The aim of the current study was to identify and assess differences existing at the level of irrationality and perfectionism according to the subjects' gender and educational level.

The results of the study reveal the fact that the educational level variable plays an important part in irrationality and perfectionism, significant differences being present between the persons with higher studies and those with average or primary studies at the level of the dimensions studied.

Regarding the gender variable, differences between men and women only exist at the level of concern over mistakes as a dimension of perfectionism.

Gender differences

The results obtained reveal the fact that the gender variable does not play a differentiating role for the subjects as far as irrationality is concerned. In this process based on what is logical and without empirical and pragmatic consistency, male and female subjects are similarly hindered by their own self-disturbance, in reaching the fundamental goals in life.

The presence of the gender variable extends the analysis into the social field, by taking gender stereotypes into consideration. The multitude of researches dedicated to gender has led to establishing two main approaches: one that implies profound and persistent differences and another that tends to diminish gender differences.

In supporting the current results reference will be made to more recent tendencies in the field of research which reexamine the problem of gender, as an attempt to extract authentic differences from under the influence of stereotypes. An example of this approach is Hyde's meta-

analysis (1984) of gender differences (the cognitive variable being one of the variables studied). The hypothesis launched and confirmed by the latter is that men and women are much more similar than different. The results obtained show that with most psychological variables, gender differences are close to zero (d 0.10) or very small (0.11 d 0.35), there are few moderate ones in the interval (0.36 d 0.65), and very few are large (d 0.66-1.00) or very large (d 1.00).

In the case of perfectionism there were significant differences between male and female subjects only with regard to concern over mistakes. In the case of socially prescribed perfectionism, one considers that unrealistic standards are imposed on him/her by external sources. These external unrealistic expectations must be maintained and satisfied because they are necessary for social acceptance and approval. (Flett, Besser & Hewitt, 2005).

In the shift from industrial society to modernist and postmodernist society and up until the present day, one can notice a destructuring of well-established roles in society, women carrying out men's tasks and obtaining positions that seemed to be specific of men, and men increasingly developing their relationship side, usually specific of women. Nevertheless, in Romania, the image of the man as the "head of the family", responsible for the family's existence and material-financial welfare, is still widely retained. It seems that this thought is so interiorized by the male subjects, that the fear of making mistakes, the fear of failure determines them to focus excessively on problems.

At the level of personal standards, both men and women have similar high demands of themselves. Men and women attribute importance to tasks and situations, and must therefore be perfect in everything they do, although they cannot achieve this objective. They are never satisfied, because the criteria of success are too high and inaccessible for them or for anyone else. They are, therefore, more motivated by the fear of failure than by the need for success.

Quantitative data analysis revealed the fact that there aren't any notable differences at the level of parental expectations according to one's gender. Parental behavior or model refers to actions and attitudes of parental figures towards the child. Adler (in Frost, Turcotte, Heimberg, Mattia, Holt & Hope, 1995) stated that the training for life starts right after birth, and this training is mostly provided by the mother. He attributes the maternal figure a main role in the child's socializing.

Many authors consider that parents are responsible for acquiring the cognitive scheme of perfectionism from a very early age (Frost et al., 1995).

The fact that there aren't any notable differences by gender at the level of parental criticism, reveals the fact that parents' critical attitude is not sensitive to the subjects' gender, but is more likely linked to the culture to which the parents belong and to their personality.

Parental behavior was linked to the child's emotional and social behavior and to the child's cognitive development (Rice, Ashby & Preusser, 1996). The search for perfection can be painful because it is influenced by the need for success as well as the fear regarding the consequences of failure. When children are constantly confronted with criticism, their mind creates a complex structure of protection, a set of defenses and mechanisms. In time, these mental sets are incorporated in the subconscious and can be triggered automatically. As adults, these strategies can become counter-productive and self-sabotaging.

Educational level differences

The current study reaches the conclusion that there are significant differences between persons with higher studies and those with average studies, as far as irrationality is concerned, in the sense that subjects with higher studies show a lower level of irrationality as compared to persons with average or primary studies. The participants present an average level of irrationality.

University studies offer the possibility to develop a much wider, richer, more ample and more articulate structure of thinking than average or primary studies could provide. The role of cognitive structures' complexity was also highlighted in the field of interpersonal relationships. The more a person is characterized by greater cognitive complexity, the more capable he/she will be to perceive and interpret other people's conducts in a more nuanced way, to differentiate the implications of events, to understand their causality (Bowler, Bowler & Phillips, 2009).

Quantitative data analysis revealed notable differences at the level of concern over mistakes, of personal standards, of parental expectations and criticism, as well as that of doubt about actions, according to one's level of education, in the sense that persons with higher studies show a lower level of these dimensions as compared to persons with average or primary studies.

The level of education leads to significant differences regarding perfectionists' concern over mistakes. University studies, as compared to high school or primary studies, can transform the perfectionists' unrealistic standards into realistic ones, because they offer a superior development of knowledge, of intellectual operations and skills, on a cognitive level.

People's behavior also implies the setting of targets and the endeavor to achieve these aspirations. Adler (1956) mentioned that the pursuit of perfection is an intrinsic necessity for the human being's development. "Normal" individuals aim at reaching perfection, setting hard to meet standards, but these personal standards are realistic and can be modified (Hewitt, Mittelstaedt & Flett, 1990). A positive way of thinking is a state of "normality", not of "neuroticism"; it permits one to create a constructive and efficient attitude, which in turn permits changing the standards to their real parameters.

Measuring the parental educational behavior, Parker, Barnett & Mickie (as cited in Frost et al., 1995) have noticed that parental caretaking is the main dimension that influences socializing, attachment, dependency and intimate relationships.

Parental criticism can hide the parents' own dissatisfactions reflected on the child, or their own perfectionism, which determines them to always be discontent with themselves and everyone else. It is possible to take into account the specific stimuli that triggered parents' criticism and, why not, the extent to which these criticisms have a correspondent in reality. A very plausible method would be to analyze beyond parental words and actions, because these could be a hint of existing love, but which does not know how to manifest itself. The correct analysis of this data can lead to the diminishing of the feeling of being unappreciated.

The persons who realize that they solve their problems in a positive manner every time will increase their confidence in their own powers, will develop high expectations and will strengthen their feeling of self-efficiency. In turn, these "effects" once stabilized, will convert into real motivational forces, helping the individual to get involved in complex situations in a constructive way.

Conclusions

The results of the study show that there are gender differences only at the level of concern over mistakes, men being more preoccupied with mistakes than women.

The results obtained reveal the fact that persons with higher studies can also show irrational cognitions, including that of perfectionism, but in their case this is much lower than in the case of persons with average or primary studies.

In conclusion, a higher level of education does not lead to the disappearance of irrational cognitions, but does produce a decrease in their level and an increase in the level of rationality.

The current study is limited by the relatively small size of the sample (62 persons), therefore future studies could include a larger number of subjects.

Due to the proposed dimensions, the current study represents an important information source in various applicative domains, such as cognitive psychology, the psychology of personality, developmental psychology.

Perfectionism is considered to be a central belief. The conviction in perfectionism and in high expectations represents the central cognition which leads to emotional distress and to self-criticism. Irrational convictions, as well as perfectionism, are associated with impaired adaptation. The perfectionist's motivations and expectations of himself/herself are parts of irrational cognitions and are associated with maladaptive patterns of thinking.

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