

Self Compassion, Perfectionism, Emotional Approach Coping, And Psychological Distress Among East Asian International Students.

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ABSTRACT

The present study investigated the roles of self-compassion and emotional approach coping in the relationship between maladaptive perfectionism and psychological distress among East Asian international students. Data were collected through an online survey completed by 255 East Asian international students in a large public Midwestern university. Hierarchical regression analyses showed that maladaptive perfectionism and self-compassion were predictive of depression and anxiety, while emotional approach coping did not contribute unique variance in the prediction of depression and anxiety. An exploratory factor analysis for the Self-Compassion Scale yielded two factors: the Self-Compassion factor (i.e., Self-Kindness, Common Humanity, and Mindfulness), and the Self-Disrespect factor (i.e., Self-Judgment, Isolation, and Over-Identification). Results from Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) indicated that Self-Disrespect partially mediated between maladaptive perfectionism and psychological distress. In addition, Self-Disrespect moderated the relationship between maladaptive perfectionism and psychological distress.

INTRODUCTION

- A large body of research has underscored the link between maladaptive perfectionism and psychological distress, such as depression, low self-esteem, suicidality, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and eating disorders (Axtell & Newlon, 1993; Broday, 1988; Hamilton & Schweitzer, 2000; Hewitt & Dyck, 1986; Hewitt & Flett, 1991; Preusser, Rice, & Ashby, 1994).
 - Self-compassion is developed on the basis of Buddhism and Eastern healing practice, characterized as three basic components: (a) self-kindness, (b) common humanity, and (c) mindfulness. Self-compassion is negatively related to maladaptive perfectionism, anxiety, depression, self-criticism, and negative affect. (Neff, 2003b; Neff et al., 2007)
 - With the emphasis of positive functions of emotions, emotional approach coping is developed to assess one's ability to process and express emotions. (Stanton, Kirk, Cameron, & Danoff-Burg, 2000)
 - There is a paucity of literature focusing on international students. In particular, Asian international students from collectivistic culture tend to have high standards of performance with high parental expectations. (Mordkowitz & Ginsburg, 1987; Yee, 1992).
- ### Hypotheses
- Maladaptive perfectionism, self-compassion, and emotional approach coping contribute unique and shared variance in the prediction of psychological distress among East Asian international students.
 - Self-compassion and emotional approach coping mediate the relationship between maladaptive perfectionism and psychological distress among East Asian international students.
 - Self-compassion and emotional approach coping moderate the relationship between maladaptive perfectionism and psychological distress among East Asian international students.

METHOD

Participants and Procedure

- 255 East Asian international students at a Midwestern public University completed an online survey.
- Gender: 157 (62%) women and 98 (38%) men
- Country of origin: China (61%), Korea (25%), Japan (4%), Taiwan (1.5%), and Other (2%).
- Undergraduate students (48%) and graduate students (50%).

Measurements

- Maladaptive Perfectionism: Discrepancy (APS-R; Slaney, Rice, Mobley, Trippi, & Ashby, 2001), Concern Over Mistakes, Doubts About Action, Parental Criticism, and Parental Expectation subscales (FMPS; Frost, Marten, Lahart, & Rosenblate, 1990).
- Self-Compassion Scale (SCS; Neff, 2003a): Self-Kindness, Self-Judgment, Common Humanity, Isolation, Mindfulness, and Over-Identification.
- Emotional Approach Coping Scale (EACS; Stanton et al., 2000): Emotional Processing, Emotional Expression
- Psychological Distress (Depression and Anxiety): Hopkins Symptom Checklist (HSLC 21; Green, Walkey, McCormick, & Taylor, 1988)

Analyses

- Descriptive Analysis, Hierarchical Regression Analyses, Principal Axis Factor Analysis, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with R software

RESULT

Hierarchical Regression Analyses

- 1) Maladaptive perfectionism was a significant predictor for anxiety ($\Delta R^2 = .27, p < .001$) and depression ($\Delta R^2 = .34, p < .001$).
- 2) Self-compassion also contributed additional variance in anxiety ($\Delta R^2 = .09, p < .001$), and in depression ($\Delta R^2 = .11, p < .001$).

Exploratory factor analysis for Self-Compassion Scale identified two factors:

- 1) Self-Compassion: Self-Kindness, Common Humanity, and Mindfulness.
- 2) Self-Disrespect: Self-Judgment, Isolation, and Over-Identification

▪ **Mediation Analysis:** Emotional approach coping was not significantly correlated with psychological distress; thus, it served as neither mediator nor mediator. We revised our original model to incorporate two Self-Compassion factors as separate mediators with Emotional Approach Coping as an exogenous variable (Figure 2). Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with R software found the revised model an acceptable fit to the data: $\chi^2(78)=266.88, p < .01, CFI=.93, NNFI=.91, RMSEA=.08$ (CI: .07, .09). This also indicated Self-Disrespect partially mediated the relationship between maladaptive perfectionism and psychological distress (Figure 2).

▪ **Moderation Analysis:** Maladaptive perfectionism and Self-Disrespect contributed the unique variance in psychological distress ($\Delta R^2 = .41, p < .001$). The interaction variable between maladaptive perfectionism and Self-Disrespect was statistically significant ($\Delta R^2 = .013, p = .02$), indicating a Self-Disrespect is a moderator. A high level of Self-Disrespect intensified the association between maladaptive perfectionism and psychosocial distress, whereas a low level of Self-Disrespect buffered this association among those participants with high levels of maladaptive perfectionism (Figure 3).

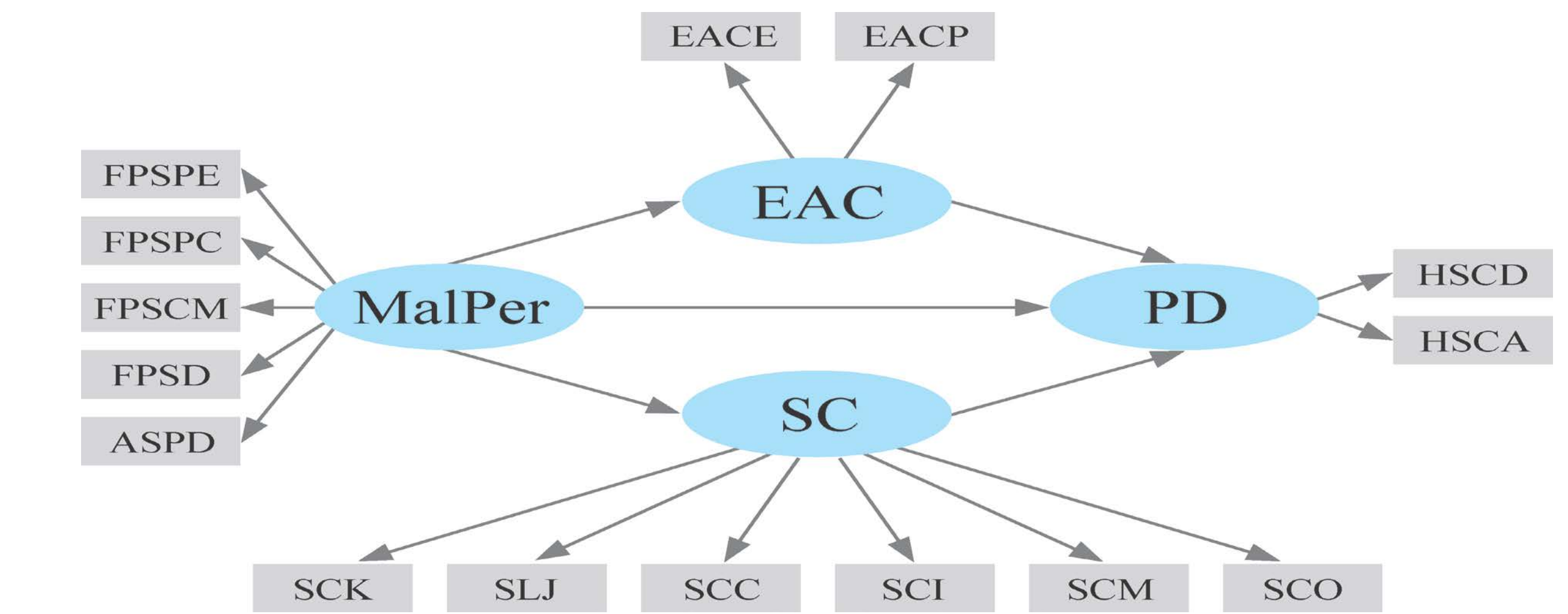
Discussion

- Maladaptive perfectionism and Self-compassion is strong predictors for both anxiety and depression for East Asian international students.
- Self-Disrespect (a factor for Self-Compassion) is a partial mediator: East Asian international students with maladaptive perfectionism can alleviate psychological distress, by learning to become less self-critical and socially withdrawn, and not over-identifying with negative emotions and thoughts.
- Self-Disrespect (a factor for Self-Compassion) is a moderator: East Asian international students with maladaptive perfectionism seem to suffer from greater psychological distress when they tend to be more self-judgmental, isolated, and have the tendency to ruminate. A low level of Self-Disrespect is a buffer from psychological distress.
- Composition of the sample reflected the current body of East Asian international students in the U.S; thus, it can be generalized to a population of East Asian international students, but more applicable to Chinese and Korean students.
- Given that this study is exploratory, replications with East Asian international students are necessary.
- Psychometric soundness of the instruments with East Asian International students must be considered.

Counseling Implications for East Asian international Students

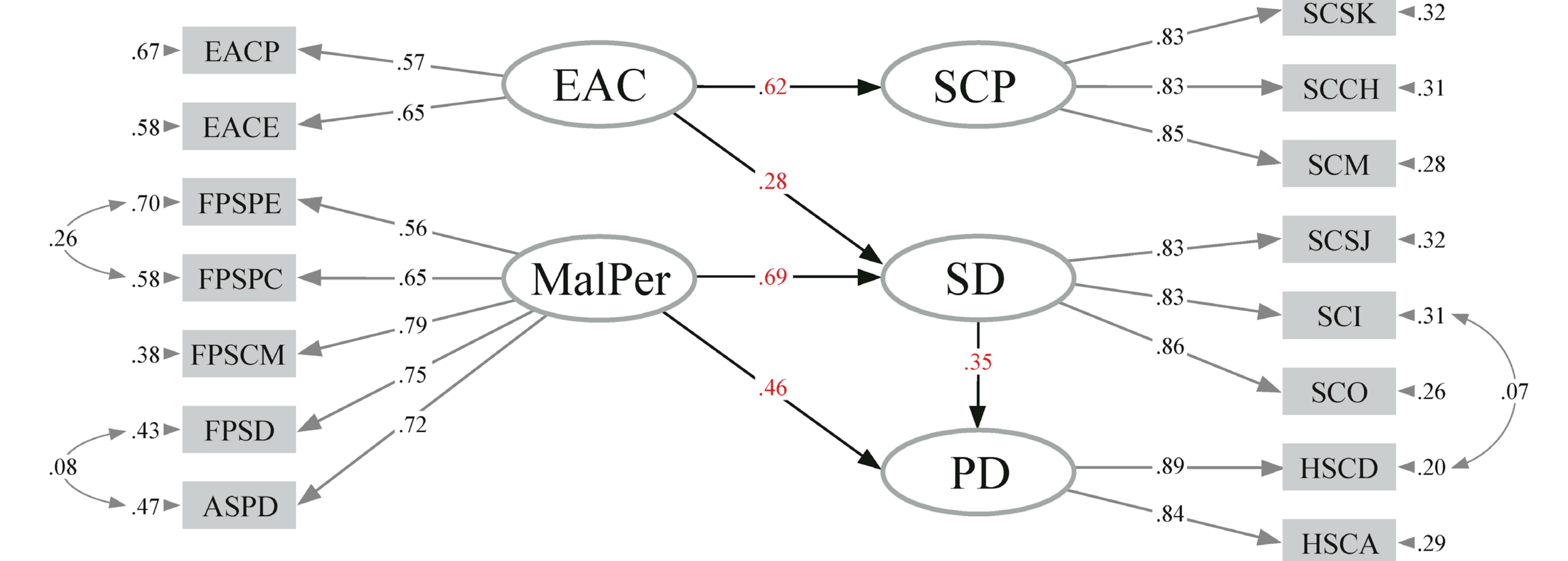
- Important to assess the impact of maladaptive perfectionism on levels of distress .
- Assist students in developing awareness of the harmful impact of maladaptive perfectionism on psychological distress
- Focus on lowering Self-Disrespect (Self-Judgment, Isolation, Over-identification) which leads to the development of self-compassion.
- Educate East international students about the importance of not being self-critical, socially withdrawn, and ruminative.
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) can be utilized to identify and correct irrational thinking to reduce self-judgment.
- Mindfulness workshops for international students.
- Provide East Asian international students with opportunities to develop social support, and increase social connectedness (e.g., Support Groups for international students)

Figure 1. An original conceptual model for Structural Equational Modeling



Note. MalPer: Maladaptive Perfectionism, EAC: Emotional Approach Coping, SC: Self-Compassion, PD: Psychological Distress, FPSPE=Parent Expectation, FPSPC= Parent Criticism, FPSCM=Concern for Mistake, FPSD=Doubt for Action, APSD=Almost Perfect Scale-Revised, Discrepancy, SCK=Self-Kindness, SCI=Self-Judgment, SCC=Common Humanity, SCI=Isolation, SCM=Mindfulness, SCO=Over-Identification. EACP=Emotional Processing, EACE=Emotional Expression, HSCA= Hopkins Symptom Checklist-25-Anxiety, and HSCD= Hopkins Symptom Checklist-25-Depression

Figure 2: Structural Equation Model Explaining Psychological Distress Among East Asian International Students.



Note. MalPer: Maladaptive Perfectionism, EAC: Emotional Approach Coping, SC: Self-Compassion, SD: Self-Disrespect, PD: Psychological Distress. FPSPE=Parent Expectation, FPSPC= Parent Criticism, FPSCM=Concern for Mistake, FPSD=Doubt for Action, APSD=Almost Perfect Scale-Revised, Discrepancy, SCK=Self-Kindness, SCI=Self-Judgment, SCC=Common Humanity, SCI=Isolation, SCM=Mindfulness, SCO=Over-Identification. EACP=Emotional Processing, EACE=Emotional Expression, HSCA= Hopkins Symptom Checklist-25-Anxiety, and HSCD= Hopkins Symptom Checklist-25-Depression

Figure 3: Plot of significant maladaptive perfectionism x Self-Disrespect interaction

