

# A Convergence Study on the Relationship between Perfectionism, Stress, and Burnout among College Golf Athletes

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## 대학 골프선수들의 완벽주의성향, 스트레스, 그리고 탈진 간의 관계에 대한 융합적 연구

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**Abstract** The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship among perfectionism, stress, and burnout in college golf athletes. Participants were 221 college students. Self-oriented perfectionism and socially prescribed perfectionism were found to be the antecedent variables causing stress. Self-oriented perfectionism reduced personal accomplishments, and socially prescribed perfectionism increased the level of burnout. Additionally, perceived stress not only engendered emotional exhaustion but also reduced personal accomplishments. Regarding indirect effects, self-oriented perfectionism and socially prescribed perfectionism increased the level of stress and affected athletes' emotional exhaustion and lack of accomplishments. The results will be of use for helping athletes to escape from the perfectionism that occurs due to their obsession with winning, thus laying the foundation for athletes to continue to enjoy their sports.

• **Key Words** : Perfectionism, stress, burnout, college, golf athletes, convergence study

**요약** 본 연구의 목적은 대학 골프선수들의 완벽주의성향, 스트레스, 그리고 탈진 간의 관계를 검증하는데 있다. 연구의 참여자는 대학교에 재학 중인 221명의 학생들이다. 연구의 결과에서 자기지향적 완벽주의성향과 사회부과적 완벽주의성향은 스트레스를 높이는 선행변수임이 밝혀졌다. 자기지향적 완벽주의성향은 개인의 성취도를 낮추었으며, 사회부과적 완벽주의성향은 탈진의 정도를 높이는 것으로 나타났다. 선수들의 스트레스는 감정적 소진과 낮은 개인적 성취도에 영향을 주는 것으로 나타났다. 간접 효과에서 자기지향적 완벽주의성향은 스트레스를 높이고 감정적 소진과 낮은 개인적 성취도에 영향을 주는 것으로 나타났다. 본 연구의 결과는 선수들이 승리에 대한 압박감에서 벗어나 즐기면서 지속적으로 운동을 할 수 있는 문화를 구축하는데 도움이 되고자 한다.

• **주제어** : 완벽주의성향, 스트레스, 탈진, 대학, 골프 선수들, 융합적 연구

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Need for the study

In sports psychology, many researchers consider perfectionism a characteristic of human nature, and its effects on other variables have been researched frequently[1,2]. All human beings try to narrow the gap between the ideal self and realistic self, and in so doing develop the personality trait of perfectionism[3]. However, it is virtually impossible for humans to be perfect, and so perfectionists tend to encounter difficulties achieving their goals[4]. A byproduct of perfectionism is that perfectionists experience relatively high stress, as compared to their less perfectionist counterparts[5].

Sports athletes are likely exposed to stress because they have a tendency to overestimate the complexity of the situation and underestimate their abilities[6]. This would adversely affect their psychological well-being, and could lead to burnout syndrome[6]. That is, when athletes are consistently exposed to stress or fail to deal with stress properly, they are highly likely to experience burnout, a state comprising physical and emotional exhaustion; uncontrollable stress is considered to be a leading contributor to burnout[7]. Based on previous studies and the necessity of studying coaching in golf, it is important to investigate the relationship between perfectionism, stress, and burnout among college golf athletes. This study provides results that coaches could use to reduce stress and burnout among college golf athletes, thus fostering better performance in competition.

### 1.2 Literature review

#### 1.2.1 Perfectionism

Many definitions of perfectionism have been proposed, but most suggest that a perfectionist is someone who sets very high standards to achieve his/her goals and has obsessive personality characteristics with respect to accomplishing those goals[8,9]. Perfectionism has previously had negative connotations and was considered a one-dimensional concept by psychologists[10]. However, more recently perfectionism has been recognized as a

more specific multi-dimensional concept, with both adaptive[11] and maladaptive functions[12-14]. Hewitt and Flett[15] considered perfectionism as a multi-dimensional concept, and classified it into three dimensions, as follows. First, self-oriented perfectionism (SOP) defines overly high standards for oneself and if one's performance falls short of the expectation, excessive self-criticism occurs. Second, other-oriented perfectionism (OOP) requires high standards of others, but not for oneself, and tends to be evaluated strictly; if performance is less than expected, there follows a lack of trust, apportioning of blame, and anger. Third, socially prescribed perfectionism (SPP), unlike the aforementioned dimensions, consists of pursuing perfection to satisfy excessive standards and expectations of others, rather than those generated by individual themselves. Perfectionism in sports is considered a leading variable that positively affects athletic achievement[2,16,17], but also negatively affects performance[18-20]. A review of perfectionism revealed that it is closely associated with stress[21,22]. Specifically, perfectionists were found to be more vulnerable to distress, but not eustress[18,23].

#### 1.2.2 Stress

Stress can be defined as "arousal of mind and body in response to demands made on them"[24, p.6]. Selye[25] categorized stress into two dimensions: eustress and distress. If an individual can adequately control stress, it plays a positive role and thus is called eustress. Stress can also play a dysfunction role if it becomes impossible for one to self-regulate; this is called distress[26], which is commonly used in a negative sense[27-30]. That is, different people may experience different levels of stress in response to the same event, depending on their subjective judgment[31]. In sports, athletes are particularly vulnerable to high levels of stress, due to the high pressure to win[32]. Aligned with this, a high level of stress is significantly related to burnout[33,34]. People cannot completely escape from stress, but the failure to respond to stress appropriately leads to burnout[7,35].

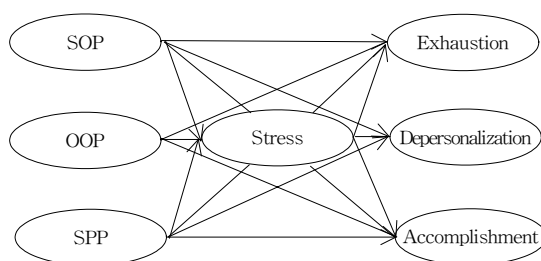
### 1.2.3 Burnout

The broad concept of burnout has appeared very in many previous studies, but there is no uniform definition[36]. Burnout can be referred to as “a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who work with people in some capacity”[37, p.4]. Within the sports context, burnout degrades athletes’ performance and, in severe cases, may cause them to lose interest in exercising[7,38,39]. Maslach[40] classified burnout as consisting of three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion refers to a state when a person’s emotional energy is exhausted due to stress, and they are mentally depressed and experience extreme tiredness, weakness, and depression. Depersonalization refers to an impersonal behavior pattern in which the person ignores interactions with others and shows an overly negative attitude or behavior. A reduced sense of personal accomplishment indicates a person with a lack of fulfillment, who has a tendency to underestimate and think negatively about his/her abilities.

Perfectionism has been related to burnout, due to the personality characteristics of perfectionists[32]. Previous studies have listed positive aspects of perfectionism, such as that it provides high motivation to achieve goals and consequently enhances self-control[41]. However, other studies noted that perfectionism may play a negative role because it defines unrealistic goals and if one fails to accomplish these goals, the disappointment and self-criticism are greater than in non-perfectionists[16]. That is, previous studies have reported inconsistent results, in that perfectionism can foster either positive or negative results. In this respect, most studies until now have analyzed causal effects in the relationships between perfectionism, stress, and burnout. However, here we consider possible relationships among these variables using a structural equation model. We analyzed the direct and indirect effects of these variables among college golf athletes.

Based on previous studies, the hypotheses in the present study were as follows.

- H1: Perfectionism will have a significant impact on perceived stress.
- H2: Perfectionism will have a significant impact on burnout.
- H3: Perceived stress will have a significant impact on burnout.
- H4: Perfectionism will have a significant impact on burnout mediated by perceived stress.



[Fig. 1] Research model

## 2. Methods

### 2.1 Participants

The subjects in this study were university students who were golf athletes. We used the questionnaire to survey golf athletes at six universities. Data were collected from voluntary participants for four weeks, starting in mid-March, 2016. Convenience sampling was used for subject selection, and 237 completed questionnaires were obtained; 16 were excluded from the analysis, due to incomplete responses. The demographic details of the participants are shown in Table 1.

<Table 1> Demographic details of the participants

Variables	Categories	Frequency (n=221)	Percent(%)
Gender	Males	166	75.1
	Females	55	24.9
Grade	Freshman	79	35.7
	Sophomore	51	23.1
	Junior	59	26.7
	Senior	32	14.5
Types of golfers	Amateur	187	84.6
	Profession	34	15.4

## 2.2 Measures

We used the Korean Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale[42] (K-MPS), which is based on the original version of Hweitt and Flett's MPS[43]. The instrument is classified into SOP (five items), OOP (four items), and SPP (four items) sub-scales. All the sub-scales consist of 13 items that are rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)[44], translated by Lee[45], was used to determine degree of perceived stress. This instrument consists of ten items that are rated on a 4-point Likert scale (0 = not at all, 4 = very often). Items 4, 5, 7, and 8 are positive items that are reverse-coded. Fender[46] developed the Sport Adaptation of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (SAMBI). In this study, we used the Korean SAMBI. The Korean SAMBI consists of sub-scales assessing emotional exhaustion (nine items), depersonalization (five items), and reduced sense of personal accomplishment (eight items), via 22 items that are rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). The items for personal accomplishment are positive and reverse-scored in this study.

## 2.3 Statistical analysis

The data were analyzed using SPSS 18.0 and AMOS 18.0 program. First, a frequency analysis was performed to examine the characteristics of the extracted sample. Second, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was performed, and then confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to remove measurement items that impeded uni-dimensionality. Third, Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) was calculated to determine the reliability of the responses to the questionnaire. Finally, structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to test the study hypotheses.

# 3. Results

## 3.1 Exploratory factor analysis

Using principal component analysis, exploratory factor analysis was conducted to verify the validity of

the measurements. In addition, varimax was used as a factor rotation method. The items which were under 0.4 were removed in the EFA.

As shown in Table 2 and 3, the eigen values are over 1.0. However, the EFA of PSS was not conducted as a single factor.

<Table 2> The EFA results of perfectionism

Items	1	2	3
OOP3	.867	-.061	-.016
OOP4	.829	.073	.057
OOP2	.806	.016	.144
OOP1	.777	.098	.107
SOP4	-.035	.829	.048
SOP5	.045	.774	.065
SOP3	-.017	.762	-.052
SOP2	.134	.640	.139
SOP1	.014	.627	.233
SPP3	.098	.101	.858
SPP2	.024	.072	.835
SPP4	.052	.019	.816
SPP1	.131	.199	.713
Eigenvalue	2.745	2.744	2.726
Variance (%)	21.113	21.110	42.223
Cumulative (%)	21.113	20.967	63.191

<Table 3> The EFA results of burnout

Items	1	2	3
Accomplishment8	.810	.184	.123
Accomplishment4	.761	.157	.136
Accomplishment2	.732	.159	.251
Accomplishment7	.725	.178	.152
Accomplishment1	.704	.171	.209
Accomplishment3	.658	.198	.123
Accomplishment5	.654	.231	.083
Exhaustion1	.294	.747	.147
Exhaustion9	.245	.728	.147
Exhaustion3	.059	.711	.243
Exhaustion5	.173	.701	.168
Exhaustion8	.254	.697	-.018
Exhaustion2	.237	.672	.244
Exhaustion7	.095	.671	.203
Depersonalization1	.043	.075	.823
Depersonalization2	.154	.242	.742
Depersonalization4	.186	.170	.738
Depersonalization5	.285	.197	.610
Depersonalization3	.312	.297	.608
Eigenvalue	4.202	3.866	2.948
Variance (%)	22.115	20.348	15.517
Cumulative (%)	22.115	42.403	57.980

### 3.2 Confirmatory factor analysis

In the CFA, the items were removed since the values of squared multiple correlations (SMC) were under .40. The model fit indices for the CFA were  $\chi^2 = 290.546$ ,  $p = .057$ ,  $df = 254$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 1.144$ ,  $GFI = .906$ , Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = .984, Tucker Lewis Index (TLI) = .981, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = .026. GFI, CFI, and TLI were greater than .90, while RMSEA was less than .05, which meets the criterion for acceptable model fit. Regarding regression weights, the critical ratio was greater than  $\pm 1.96$  ( $p < .001$ ). Construct reliability for all variables was greater than .70. This means that the convergent validity was verified. To verify the average variance extracted (AVE), the squared value of the correlation did not exceed the AVE value, and thus, discriminant validity was established. The reliability coefficient ranged from .786 to .866.

<Table 4> The results of CFA & reliability analysis

Items	SRW	CR	AVE	$\alpha$
SOP3	.761			
SOP4	.795	.779	.541	.786
SOP5	.675			
OOP1	.693			
OOP2	.748	.850	.586	.841
OOP3	.813			
OOP4	.777			
SPP2	.761			
SPP3	.795	.782	.547	.824
SPP4	.675			
Stress1	.859			
Stress9	.850	.838	.633	.866
Stress10	.773			
Exhaustion1	.765			
Exhaustion2	.724	.802	.504	.824
Exhaustion3	.687			
Exhaustion9	.766			
Depersonalization1	.659			
Depersonalization2	.751	.836	.560	.804
Depersonalization3	.749			
Depersonalization4	.682			
Accomplishment1	.765			
Accomplishment2	.724	.831	.551	.836
Accomplishment7	.687			
Accomplishment8	.766			

Note. SRW=standardized regression weights

<Table 5> Correlation analysis among the variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	1						
2	.041	1					
3	.120	.161*	1				
4	.302**	.145*	.363**	1			
5	.258**	.081	.388**	.504**	1		
6	.183**	.101	.234**	.185**	.482**	1	
7	.346**	.156*	.362**	.403**	.461**	.449**	1

Note. 1=SOP, 2=OOP, 3=SPP, 4=stress, 5=emotional exhaustion, 6=depersonalization, 7=reduced accomplishment  
\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

### 3.3 Structural equation modeling

The goodness-of-fit indices of the research model in the current study were  $\chi^2 = 247.771$ ,  $df = 253$ ,  $p = .166$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 1.086$ ,  $GFI = .911$ ,  $CFI = .991$ ,  $TLI = .989$ , and  $RMSEA = .020$ . The results for each hypothesis were shown in Table 6. First, SOP (C.R. = 3.969,  $p < .001$ ) and SPP (C.R. = 4.853,  $p < .001$ ) had a significant impact on perceived stress, but OOP did not. Second, SOP (C.R. = 3.609,  $p < .001$ ) had statistically a significant effect on reduced personal accomplishment. SPP had statistically a significant effect on emotional exhaustion (C.R. = 3.173,  $p < .01$ ), depersonalization (C.R. = 2.751,  $p < .01$ ), and reduced personal accomplishment (C.R. = 3.578,  $p < .001$ ). Third, perceived stress significantly predicted emotional exhaustion (C.R. = 5.365,  $p < .001$ ) and reduced personal accomplishment (C.R. = 2.705,  $p < .01$ ), but not depersonalization. The indirect effects of SOP and SPP on emotional exhaustion and reduced personal accomplishment were mediated by perceived stress (see Table 7).

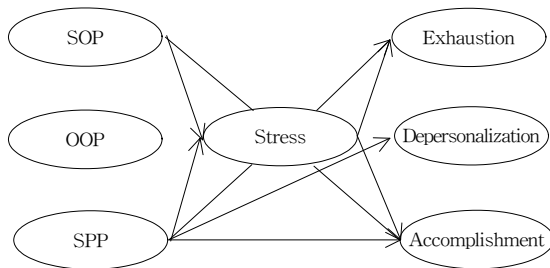
<Table 6> The results of direct effects

Path	Esti.	S.E.	C.R.
H1-1 SOP→stress	.357	.090	3.969***
H1-2 OOP→stress	.113	.096	1.172
H1-3 SPP→stress	.373	.077	4.853***
H2-1 SOP→exhaustion	.088	.065	1.352
H2-2 SOP→depersonalization	.112	.071	1.575
H2-3 SOP→accomplishment	.255	.071	3.609***
H2-4 OOP→exhaustion	-.032	.067	-.482
H2-5 OOP→depersonalization	.089	.073	1.215
H2-6 OOP→accomplishment	.075	.070	1.073
H2-7 SPP→exhaustion	.185	.058	3.173**
H2-8 SPP→depersonalization	.173	.063	2.751**
H2-9 SPP→accomplishment	.219	.061	3.578***
H3-1 Stress→exhaustion	.342	.064	5.365***
H3-2 Stress→depersonalization	.076	.065	1.174
H3-3 Stress→accomplishment	.170	.063	2.705**

\*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

〈Table 7〉 The results of indirect effects

Variables	Esti.	p
SOP→stress→exhaustion	.142	**
SOP→stress→depersonalization	.034	.235
SOP→stress→reduced accomplishment	.070	*
OOP→stress→exhaustion	.039	.216
H4 OOP→stress→depersonalization	.009	.233
OOP→stress→reduced accomplishment	.019	.193
SPP→stress→exhaustion	.172	**
SPP→stress→depersonalization	.041	.270
SPP→stress→reduced accomplishment	.084	**

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

[Fig. 2] The results of SEM

#### 4. Discussion

This study investigated possible relationships between perfectionism, perceived stress, and burnout among college golf athletes. First, SOP and SPP, but not OOP, were found to increase perceived stress. According to a number of previous studies, perfectionists are likely to experience more stress than less perfectionistic people[22,23,47]. Perfectionism has been defined as setting excessively ambitious goals and showing compulsive and obsessive behavior in striving toward those goals[22]. Burns[10] suggested that perfectionists set standards that are difficult to achieve and blame themselves when their actions do not meet those standards. Based on the results of this study, the perfectionist approach can be considered to be psychologically damaging, because it eventually causes uncontrollable stress. Pacht[4] noted that it is virtually impossible for humans to be perfect, and thus

perfectionists tend to experience frustration, which also has a negative emotional impact. This is one reason why perfectionists experience higher stress than non-perfectionists.

Second, SOP was found to be related to reduce personal accomplishments, and SPP was associated with increased burnout in this study. SOP in sports is considered one of the most important antecedents of exhaustion[48]. However, there are two contradictory opinions of whether SOP has positive or negative effects. In positive terms, self-oriented perfectionists can enforce self-control, so as to achieve their goals[41]. In negative terms, a perfectionist experiences frustration when high standards are not achieved, leading to a loss of enjoyment or interest[16]. In this respect, it is assumed that SOP leads to an obsession with exercise, and this reduces personal accomplishment. The results of the current study also showed that SPP was significantly related to burnout.

Many scholars have argued that excessive expectations from significant others are psychologically burdensome, which leads to burnout[16,49,50]. Namely, requiring a person to be perfect, based on unrealistic expectations, may result in exhaustion for the person with excessive expectations[51]. Indeed, it is assumed that if SPP is high, golf athletes will feel fatigue and weakness, due to a lack of mental energy from satisfying others' expectations, which leads to an overly negative attitude about relationships with others. Furthermore, high SPP makes people underestimate their abilities, leading to a loss of self-esteem.

Third, our results showed that perceived stress increased emotional exhaustion and reduced personal accomplishment, but had no statistically significant on depersonalization. Many previous studies found that a high level of stress exhausted the body and the mind, causing burnout[7,35]. In Addition, Smith[6] argued that when sports athletes are continuously exposed to stress, they start underestimating their abilities, but try to deal with and overcome it. This has a negative impact on psychological well-being, causing stress.

Therefore, athletes who experience a high level of stress that they have no control over are prone to mental exhaustion and low self-esteem. An individual's control over their stress level serves a positive function called "eustress," while uncontrolled stress plays a dysfunctional role and is called "distress"[26]. Regardless of how an individual interprets a situation, it is very difficult for him or her to avoid stress completely[27]. For example, different people may experience more or less stress in response to the same event. Therefore, it is necessary for golf athletes to engage in psychological training, to understand their stress levels and maintain appropriate levels thereof, so that stress can play a positive role. Regarding indirect effects, it was found that SOP and SPP increased the level of stress and affected athletes' emotional exhaustion and lack of accomplishment. One interpretation of this is because perfection is impossible for human beings, an athlete's tendency to strive to avoid mistakes and produce good results (i.e., the tendency toward pursuing perfection) engenders negative emotions such as obsession and by rendering excess stress unavoidable, and burnout eventually follows.

## 5. Conclusion

This study found significant relationships between perfectionism, perceived stress, and burnout among college golf athletes. SOP and SPP were found to be significant variables that directly and indirectly affect stress and burnout. This study found that college golf athletes had high levels of perfectionism. This is likely due to the "win at all costs" philosophy in Korean elite sports culture. The excessive obsession with victory fosters perfectionism in athletes[52]. There remain many athletes who train diligently to achieve their goals, but do not experience other important aspects of sports[53]. This may be the primary reason for the early retirement of many sports athletes, after they experience burnout due to excessive stress. Therefore, the results of this study may provide insight for

coaches, parents, and athletes and help establish short-term and long-term solutions for student athletes. According to Jegal[3], everyone has a desire to reach an ideal in their lives, but most recognize the reality that they are faced with obstacles, and therefore, try to narrow the gap between the ideal and reality. This makes people strive to be perfect. Pacht[4] suggested that, because it is virtually impossible for humans to be perfect, perfectionists are likely to encounter difficulties in achieving their goals and, therefore, experience stress.

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