Maladaptive Perfectionism: A Potential Risk Factor for Smartphone Addiction?

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To The Editor,

A Smartphone is a portable device that could be capable of various tasks on different occasions. With many powerful functions, smartphones permeate into our everyday lives at an astonishing pace. Surely, the smartphone could make our lives much more convenient, but it could also bring quite a few issues, especially when it is used improperly. Nowadays, smartphone addiction is not a novel construct any more. It could be defined as an inability to regulate one's use of the smartphone, which eventually involves negative consequences in daily life [1,2]. Smartphone addiction is becoming a major issue for modern society, for it may cause quite a few negative outcomes such as various kinds of psychological and social problems [3,4].

But what really make smartphone addiction happen, and how can we handle it? The answers to those questions remain unclear. As demonstrated in the previous studies, several personality characteristics might play an important role in the development and maintenance of mobile phone addiction, such as impulsivity, extraversion, and neuroticism [1,5,6], and these relationships has also been proven in the previous study related to Smartphone addiction [7]. However, to our best knowledge, there is no study which has discussed the relationship between perfectionism and mobile phone addiction, not to mention smartphone addiction. And we believe that maladaptive perfectionism which was overlooked in the previous studies might be an important risk factor for smartphone addiction.

Perfectionism, as a personality trait, is often characterized by a person's striving for flawlessness and setting excessively high performance standards, accompanied by overly critical self-evaluations and concerns regarding others' evaluations [8]. It is a multidimensional characteristic with both positive and negative aspects, and could be manifested in an adaptive or maladaptive way [9,10]. According to Frost et al., perfectionism includes six facets: concern over mistakes, personal standards, parental criticism, parental expectations, doubts about actions, and organization [10].

However, in its maladaptive form, perfectionism may play an important role in various mental disorders, such as obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) [11], eating disorders [12], workaholism [13], and exercise dependence [14]. Quite a few neuroimaging, neuropsychological and clinical studies suggested that a common mechanism exists between those disorders with uncontrolled, compulsive features [15,16]. Therefore, it is logically possible that maladaptive perfectionism could also be a risk factor for smartphone addiction which obviously shares many similar characteristics with the aforementioned disorders. Regarding facets of maladaptive perfectionism, it was consistently reported that concern over mistakes and doubts about actions were associated with various addiction-related behaviors in the previous studies [17-19], which imply that those two facets are most likely to play a part in generating and maintaining of smartphone addiction.

In addition, maladaptive perfectionism or its facets may impact on smartphone addiction via some possible mediating factors as well. Since depression, anxiety, and social stress were reported to be the mediating factors between maladaptive perfectionism and other health-related outcomes [20-22], it is reasonable to assume that maladaptive perfectionism could also have an effect on smartphone addiction via these potential mediating factors. For example, maladaptive perfectionism could possibly increase anxiety level [23,24], and then the higher anxiety level as a mediating factor might consequently lead to smartphone addiction [3].

In conclusion, maladaptive perfectionism could be a crucial risk factor for smartphone addiction, and it might potentially affect smartphone addiction both directly and indirectly. Further empirical studies in this area are highly recommended in the future, and the results may provide us a better understanding of smartphone addiction and deliver a promising intervention for it.

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