

# The Relationship Between Self-Efficacy and Lifestyle Patterns

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The author examines lifestyle patterns that relate to the feeling of self-efficacy. College students ( $N = 185$ ) completed the *Basic Adlerian Scales for Interpersonal Success—Adult Inventory* (Wheeler, Kern, & Curlette, 1993) and the General Self-Efficacy subscale of the *Self-Efficacy Scale* (Sherer et al., 1982). Students with strong senses of belonging and social interest and strong desires to strive for perfection exhibited higher general self-efficacy than those without those characteristics. Students with strong senses of belonging and social interest and weak to moderate desires for recognition also exhibited higher self-efficacy than those not described by those characteristics. This study provides further construct validation of lifestyle personality traits based on the theory of Individual Psychology and an examination of how social interest can positively influence perfectionism. Furthermore, it provides clinicians with insight for planning interventions.

A young child takes a look at his or her environment and makes decisions about how he or she perceives other people and how he or she can find a way to belong, or fit in, with these people. Because these decisions are made from personal perceptions, they tend to be faulty and constitute a person's private logic (Manaster & Corsini, 1982). The formation of this private logic develops into patterns of perceptions and behaviors. At a very young age, these patterns form and consolidate into the lifestyle of an individual (Adler as cited in Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). This lifestyle is the approach an individual takes to handle life tasks throughout his or her lifetime. Although lifestyle can be modified through therapy and new life experiences, people tend to revert to following set lifestyle patterns during times of stress (Adler as cited in Ansbacher & Ansbacher).

Another aspect of lifestyle central to Individual Psychology is the sense of inferiority. Adler (as cited in Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956) stated that children are born with the sense of being inferior because they are physically small and dependent on adults. Such characteristics "bring about the impression that we are hardly equal to life" (p. 115). This sense of inferiority represents the feeling of not being capable and, as such, not belonging in one's family, in a group, or in society as a whole. The degree to which a person feels inferior is dependent on individual perceptions of self and surroundings (Adler). In other words, inferiority is dependent on one's private logic. Adler further claimed that people strive to overcome the sense of inferiority "toward greater competence" (Manaster & Corsini, 1982). However, some individuals will

become discouraged in their pursuits to overcome inferiority. Discouragement is reached when an individual "cannot conceive that if he makes realistic efforts he will improve the situation" (Adler, p. 257). Discouragement can hold people back from furthering their pursuits, lead to a lack of courage in approaching life tasks, and foster a pathological lifestyle (Manaster & Corsini). Adler theorized that mental health clinicians should focus on the holistic lifestyle of their clients and on encouraging their clients to find the courage to overcome the sense of inferiority in socially useful ways. By approaching life in this manner, clients gain the feeling of efficacy.

With the responsibility of encouraging clients, mental health professionals need to look at ways that will help their clients overcome feelings of inferiority and gain a sense of capability. Self-efficacy is defined as the self-expectation that one can successfully perform a behavior (Bandura, 1977). This sense of capability and expectation of success, which are influenced by past experiences and present perceptions of these experiences (Bandura), are part of a person's private logic. To have a good sense of self-efficacy regarding a behavior suggests that one has overcome the feelings of inferiority related to that behavior. According to Bandura (1982), when a person lacks self-efficacy, even when he or she knows how to do the appropriate behaviors, he or she will be blocked from doing so because of these self-perceptions of incapability. Moreover, Bandura stressed that "a capability is only as good as its execution" (p. 122). Research has shown that self-efficacy affects reactions to stress, coping ability, interactions with authority, overcoming failures, independence, goal-orientation, pursuit of one's own interests, and pursuit of career (Bandura). As such, clinicians need to address clients' lack of self-efficacy for clients to be able to make therapeutic progress (Bandura, 1977). Sherer et al. (1982) described feelings of self-efficacy as the "most powerful determinants of behavior change because self-efficacy expectancies determine the initial decision to perform a behavior, the effort expended, and persistence in the face of adversity" (p. 663). With this in mind, counseling therapists need to know a client's lifestyle and to educate him or her about it.

There has been a lack of research on the feeling of inferiority (Ashby & Kottman, 1996). Consequently, the purpose of this study was to examine lifestyle patterns that relate to a feeling of self-efficacy in order to provide information for clinicians who wish to encourage their clients in the direction away from feelings of inferiority and toward being self-efficacious. Knowing what lifestyles relate to self-efficacy may help clinicians identify clients who are more ready for therapeutic movement compared to those who are likely to require more encouragement and support in order to make significant progress.

## **Participants**

A sample of 195 college juniors and seniors volunteered in their psychology or physical education courses in a university in the southeastern United States. The sample consisted of 73 female participants and 122 male participants ages 18 to 54, with the majority of students being between the ages of 18 and 25. Twenty-nine students reported their previous year's annual family income as "below \$33,000"; 129 reported family income as "between \$33,000 and \$53,000"; and 37 reported family income as "above \$53,000."

## **Instruments**

*Basic Adlerian Scales for Interpersonal Success—Adult Inventory (BASIS-A).* The BASIS-A (Wheeler, Kern, & Curlette, 1993) has been developed over the last 20 years to provide a quick, easy assessment tool that clinicians can use to obtain a holistic understanding of an individual's lifestyle characteristics (Kern, Wheeler, & Curlette, 1993). It is considered to be the primary instrument used to measure lifestyle (Watts & Carlson, 1999). More specifically, the BASIS-A measures five lifestyle themes and five additional supporting themes that expand and enhance the interpretation of the primary themes to yield a holistic personality profile. Curlette, Wheeler, and Kern (1997) reported that the coefficient alpha for internal consistency of the primary scales ranged from .82 to .87. They also reported that the two-week test-retest reliability ranged from .66 to .87 and that the coefficients of agreement for the five supporting scales range from .92 to 1.00. Following are brief descriptions of the primary themes or personality descriptors of the BASIS-A Inventory.

1. **Belonging/Social Interest** indicates the degree to which a person felt a sense of belonging as a child. A person who scores high on this scale generally is a person who enjoys being with people, is good-natured, and is interpersonally effective. A low score on this scale denotes a person who generally is introverted and not as comfortable among others.
2. **Going Along** measures concern for following rules. A high score on this scale indicates someone who desires structure and prefers to avoid conflict. A low score indicates someone who tends to be independent and desires unique experiences.

3. Taking Charge indicates the degree to which an individual desires to lead others. A high score indicates a person who may be seen as a leader and, at times, controlling. A low score indicates a person who does not desire to lead others and may seem nonassertive.
4. Wanting Recognition describes the tendency for a person to be achievement-orientated and approval-seeking. An individual who scores high tends to strive for success and to want the approval of others. An individual who scores low tends to be internally driven and does not need validation from others.
5. Being Cautious describes the degree of stability and predictability that an individual perceives about his or her family of origin. An individual who scores high tends to perceive his or her family of origin as an untrustworthy environment and tends to be either very cautious or risk-taking in situations. An individual who scores low on this scale tends to be trusting and socially effective.

The five supporting scales are given raw scores. A person who scores 18 or higher (out of 25) on the Harshness scale perceives his or her family of origin as more difficult than it actually was. A person who scores 21 or higher (out of 30) on the Entitlement scale desires and expects to be treated as special. A person who scores 28 or higher (out of 30) on the Liked By All scale shows a strong desire to please others. A person who scores 19 or higher (out of 30) on the Striving for Perfection scale sets high standards for himself or herself, and he or she is sensitive to making mistakes. He or she may also be able to use his or her skills effectively to cope with or to solve problems. Finally, a person who scores 24 or higher (out of 25) on the Softness scale exhibits an optimistic regard for his or her family of origin and, perhaps, to other areas of life.

*Self-Efficacy Scale.* The Self-Efficacy Scale (SES; Sherer et al., 1982) is a validated instrument to measure an individual's perceptions about his or her own ability to complete a behavior successfully (Sherer & Adams, 1983). Respondents are asked to complete 30 items using a 5-point Likert scale. Fourteen of the items require reverse coding. Seven of the 30 statements are considered filler statements and are not scored. Out of the 23 remaining statements, 17 represent the General Self-Efficacy subscale (GSE), which Sherer and Adams (1983) and Sherer et al. (1982) have reported as valid and highly reliable. Sherer & Adams (1983) have shown that a high score on the GSE subscale relates to less pathology. The internal consistency alpha of the GSE has been reported to be .86 (Sherer et al., 1982). Sherer and Adams (1983) and Sherer et al. (1982) also reported criterion, convergent, discriminant validity, and construct validity.

## Procedure

Research packets containing the consent forms and the research instruments were given to two instructors who agreed to solicit volunteers from their departments. Students were offered extra credit if they completed the instruments. The packets contained written instructions, and both instructors also read these instructions to the students before the students began to complete the instruments. Participants were asked to complete the forms during their classes. I received no identifying information regarding the participants. After the students completed their packets, they placed the consent forms and the instruments back into the original envelope and returned them to their instructors.

## Analysis and Results

Out of the total sample of 195 participants, 4 did not complete the GSE. Consequently, these 4 participants were excluded from the analysis. Also, for no apparent reason, other than mere oversight, 5 participants skipped 1 item from the GSE and 1 participant skipped 1 item on the BASIS-A. After the analysis was completed, I replaced the skipped items with the mean score of the entire sample for the items that were skipped and reanalyzed the data. The substitutions did not significantly change the outcome of the analysis. Therefore, for the study reported, 185 were used in the analysis. The mean and standard deviation of GSE scores ( $M = 66.16$ ,  $SD = 9.21$ ) in this study were very similar to the mean and standard deviation ( $M = 64.31$ ,  $SD = 8.58$ ) found in a construct validity study, which was conducted on a similar sample (101 college students), for the GSE subscale (Sherer & Adams, 1983). The means and standard deviations of the results are presented in Table 1. The BASIS-A scales significantly correlated with each other (see Table 2) in a similar way as interscale correlations reported in previous research (Curlette et al., 1997). Six of the BASIS-A scales were significantly correlated with self-efficacy as measured by the GSE subscale. These scales are Belonging/Social Interest ( $r = .34$ ,  $p < .001$ ), Going Along ( $r = .18$ ,  $p < .05$ ), Being Cautious ( $r = -.27$ ,  $p < .001$ ), Harshness ( $r = -.23$ ,  $p < .01$ ), Striving for Perfection ( $r = .47$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and Softness ( $r = .32$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

I conducted a multiple regression analysis with the 10 scales of the BASIS-A entered as the predicting variables and with GSE as the dependent variable. All of the BASIS-A scales were found to be significant ( $\alpha = .05$ ) and accounted for approximately 28% of the total variance. I conducted a stepwise regression with all of the BASIS-A scales as the predicting variables and with

**Table 1**  
Summaries of BASIS-A and General Self-Efficacy Scores for  
185 College Students

Scale or Subscale	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>BASIS-A</i>		
Belonging/Social Interest	52.81	11.10
Going Along	53.17	9.36
Taking Charge	50.15	9.68
Wanting Recognition	51.18	9.88
Being Cautious	45.31	9.64
Harshness	12.60	2.57
Entitlement	16.75	5.33
Liked by All	23.90	3.09
Striving for Perfection	22.97	3.38
Softness	19.27	3.33
<i>Self-Efficacy Scale</i>		
General Self-Efficacy	66.16	9.21

*Note.* BASIS-A: Basic Adlerian Scales for Interpersonal Success—Adult Inventory (Wheeler, Kern, Curlette, 1993). Self-Efficacy Scale (Sherer et al., 1982).

GSE as the dependent variable. Three of the BASIS-A scales were found to be significant ( $\alpha = .05$ ). The first variable to enter the equation was Striving for Perfection. This variable was positively related and accounted for 22% of the variance. The next variable to enter was Wanting Recognition. This variable was negatively related to general self-efficacy, and it raised the contribution to the accounting of variance to 24.5%. The last variable to enter was Belonging/Social Interest, which was positively related and which raised the accounting of variance to 26%. I analyzed the data for outliers, but they were not found to affect the analysis significantly.

As a follow-up, I calculated independent group *t*-tests to determine group differences of general self-efficacy regarding the relationships found in the

**Table 2**  
Interscale Correlations of the BASIS-A Inventory Administered to  
185 College Students

Scale	BSI	GA	TC	WR	BC	H	E	L	P
Going Along (GA)	.145*								
Taking Charge (TC)	.222**	-.469***							
Wanting Recognition (WR)	.103	.221**	.057						
Being Cautious (BC)	-.460***	-.459***	.062	-.224**					
Harshness (H)	-.610***	-.459***	.064	-.237**	.524***				
Entitlement (E)	.299***	-.196***	.357***	.186**	-.166*	-.121			
Liked by All (L)	.023	.265***	-.046	.836***	-.266***	-.186**	.131		
Striving for Perfection (P)	.484***	.354***	.050	.352***	-.486***	-.366***	.088	.300***	
Softness	.675***	.456***	-.023	.097	-.599***	-.660***	.043	.056	.505***

Note. \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ ; (2-tailed). BASIS-A: Basic Adlerian Scales for Interpersonal Success—Adult Inventory (Wheeler, Kern, & Curlette, 1993). BSI: Belonging/Social Interest scale.

**Table 3**  
**Summary of General Self-Efficacy Scores for College Students Associated with Three Lifestyle Conditions**

Comparison Groupings	M	SD	n	Percentage of Sample	<i>t</i> *
<i>Condition 1</i>					
With High BSI and Low WR	72.50	6.56	4	2.1	1.934
Without High BSI and Low WR	66.02	9.22	181	97.9	
<i>Condition 2</i>					
With High BSI and High P	72.07	6.95	46	23.6	5.378**
Without High BSI and High P	64.22	9.05	139	76.4	
<i>Condition 3</i>					
With High BSI and Low to Moderate WR	71.76	7.39	34	17.4	4.674**
Without High BSI and Low to Moderate WR	64.91	9.13	151	82.6	

Note. \*For Condition 1 and Condition 2, unequal variances were assumed because the Levene's test revealed a probability of less than .05. For Condition 3, the Levene's test suggested that the variances were equal.

\*\**p* < .001.

BASIS-A: Basic Adlerian Scales for Interpersonal Success—Adult Inventory (Wheeler, Kern, & Curlette, 1993). BSI: Belonging Social Interest scale. P: Striving for Perfection scale. WR: Wanting Recognition scale.



above analysis (see Table 3 for means, standard deviations, percentages, and *t*-test results). The first comparison grouping included only participants that had both high scores on Belonging/Social Interest and low scores on Wanting Recognition for this *t*-test with General Self-Efficacy as the dependent variable. Because the Levene's test revealed a probability greater than .05 ( $p = .44$ ), equal variances were assumed. The *t*-test for this grouping was not significant ( $t = 1.396$ ,  $df = 184$ ,  $p = .165$ ). Therefore, those participants with both high Belonging/Social Interest and low scores on Wanting Recognition did not have significantly more or less self-efficacy than those who lacked this combination.

In the second comparison grouping, the Levene's tests revealed a probability greater than .05 ( $p = .07$ ); consequently, equal variances were assumed. This *t*-test showed that participants who had high Belonging/Social Interest and high Striving for Perfection were found to have a significantly greater sense of self-efficacy ( $t = 5.378$ ,  $df = 184$ ,  $p < .001$ ) compared to those that did not fit this combination. There was an approximately 8-point difference between the means of these groups (see Table 3).

The third grouping tested consisted of students with high Belonging/Social Interest scores and low to moderate Wanting Recognition scores. The Levene's test resulted in a probability greater than .05 ( $p = .21$ ). Consequently, equal variances were assumed. This group of participants was found to have a significantly greater sense of self-efficacy ( $t = 4.089$ ,  $df = 184$ ,  $p < .001$ ) compared to those who did not fit this combination. The means of these groups differed by approximately 7 points (see Table 3).

## Discussion

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate the feelings of inferiority of college-age students by examining lifestyle patterns that relate to a feeling of self-efficacy. The results of this research provide insight for mental health clinicians who wish to encourage their clients in the direction of being self-efficacious, which is crucial for therapeutic change. This study produced similar correlational results as a study by Kern, Gfroerer, Summers, Curlette, and Matheny (1996) on effective coping resources and personality variables and thus provides further construct validation of lifestyle personality traits based on the theory of Individual Psychology.

The regression analysis also follows the theory of Individual Psychology. Interestingly, the first variable to enter the stepwise regression equation for predicting general self-efficacy was Striving for Perfection. Adler (as cited in Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956) stated that striving for perfection was a natural way to overcome feelings of inferiority and that, as long as this striving was approached in a socially useful manner, it was a positive trait. That

Striving for Perfection accounted for 22% of the variance in general self-efficacy further validates previous research done on multidimensional perfectionism (e.g., Ashby & Kottman, 1996; Kottman & Ashby, 1999; Rice, Ashby, & Preusser, 1996; Rice, Ashby, & Slaney, 1998). They found perfectionism to be more than the traditionally thought of maladaptive trait: Perfectionism also has a positive, adaptive component. Furthermore, Striving for Perfection has been found to be positively and significantly correlated to overall Coping Resource Effectiveness and to 9 out of the 12 subscales of the Coping Resources Inventory for Stress (Kern et al., 1996; Matheny, Curlette, Aycock, Pugh, & Taylor, 1987).

The second variable to enter the stepwise regression equation to predict general self-efficacy was Wanting Recognition with a negative standardized beta weight. Because people who score low on this scale tend to be internally driven and not to need validation from others, this result is logical and consistent with theory. It is possible that those who score low on this scale may not need the recognition because they already feel good about themselves.

The last variable to enter the stepwise regression equation to predict general self-efficacy was Belonging/Social Interest. According to Curlette et al. (1997) various researchers have found the Belonging/Social Interest scale to be moderately to strongly inversely correlated with the Beck Depression Inventory and the MMPI Depression Scale. Also, as stated earlier, a high Belonging/Social Interest score has been found to be positively correlated with overall coping resource effectiveness. In addition, Belonging/Social Interest has been found to be significantly correlated with 11 out of the 12 coping resource subscales of the Coping Resources Inventory for Stress, including its "self-directedness" subscale and the "confidence" subscale (Kern et al., 1996).

My results also provide an additional step in examining the social interest component of adaptive perfectionism as suggested by Ashby and Kottman (1996). In their research, Kottman and Ashby (1999) were surprised to find no evidence of a relationship between social interest and perfectionism. In that study, they used Crandall's (1991) Social Interest Scale instead of the Belonging/Social Interest scale of the BASIS-A. In my results, Belonging/Social Interest and Striving for Perfection were significantly correlated ( $r = .484, p < .001$ ). Perhaps the additive component of "belonging" contributes to the relationship between social interest and perfectionism. Also, the fact that the BASIS-A measures adult perceptions of early childhood, whereas the Crandall instrument does not, may affect the evinced relationship between social interest and perfectionism. Replication of this study would provide more clarification and validation about this relationship.

This study has limited generalizability because of its college student sample. Also, because I examined college students, the sample was relatively

self-efficacious ( $M = 66.16$ ) and 84% ( $n = 163$ ) of the sample were in the high range for Striving for Perfection. Sherer et al. (1982) stated that such samples of college students have more opportunities for and experiences of success and, therefore, are expected to have higher general self-efficacy. However, this large sample of perfectionists provided a good sample for analyzing the relationship of perfectionism and general self-efficacy. In any event, a similar investigation should be conducted using a more heterogeneous sample. Such an investigation may reveal more about lifestyle personality traits that account for more of the variance in general self-efficacy. Also, a similar investigation may provide a sample with more people than the mere four in this study who fit the condition of having high BSI and low WR and, thus, reveal a more significant relationship between this lifestyle pattern and general self-efficacy.

The results of this study suggest that the BASIS-A can provide clinicians with a useful tool for identifying lifestyle themes that can facilitate treatment planning. For example, a client's BASIS-A lifestyle profile with the combination of a high score on Belonging/Social Interest, a moderate to low score on Wanting Recognition, and a high score on Striving for Perfection suggests that the client strives to overcome a sense of inferiority in a socially useful way. Furthermore, my results suggest that such clients have a good sense of self-efficacy. These clients may be more likely to be people experiencing situational stressors, as opposed to those with significant pathology, and, thus, they may respond more readily to the therapeutic process. In contrast, clients who lack these lifestyle traits may need a more lengthy period of encouragement to help them develop a stronger ability for self-validation and to help them overcome discouragement and sense of inferiority in socially useful ways.

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