

# Striving for Perfection: Multiple Roles and Well-Being

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## Abstract

Past research has yielded conflicting results on the relationship between an individual's involvement in multiple roles (such as intimate partner, parent, and professional) and his or her psychological well-being. There has been a particular emphasis on women's role pressures, as indicated by recent theories such as the "triple bind" (Hinshaw, 2009). The present study investigated the association between excellence in role achievement and several measures of mental health. Our results suggested that there are fewer gender differences in the experience of multiple roles than anticipated. Though the majority of our sample scored highly in well-being, among those who reported a lower quality of life, a significant link between the triple bind and psychological health did emerge as anticipated. Furthermore, perfectionism was found to be an important risk factor for weight concerns.

## Introduction

- Conflicting evidence as to effect of investment in multiple roles on psychological well-being
- Role enhancement perspective argues that multiple roles provide structure and social support (Taranis & Johnson, 2012)
- Multiple burden hypothesis posits that simultaneous involvement in many roles places the individual at greater risk of stress and conflict (Kuntsche et al., 2009)
- Past research has primarily focused on women's experiences
- Theories such as the "superwoman ideal" (Mensing et al., 2007) and the "triple bind" (Hinshaw, 2009) suggest women face an inordinate amount of pressure to excel
- We developed a scale to assess achievement pressures in three different role domains: stereotypically masculine, stereotypically feminine, and appearance-oriented
- This questionnaire, along with supplementary measures, was administered to a sample of young adults in order to uncover gender differences as well as contribute to the literature on the link between multiple roles and well-being
- Multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine the relationship between two predictors (the triple bind and perfectionism) and two criterion variables (drive for thinness and well-being) in both women and men

## Hypotheses

- Women's triple bind scores will be positively associated with drive for thinness and psychological well-being.
- Beyond that, perfectionism will make a significant contribution to both regression equations for women.

## Method

### Participants

Young adults between the ages of 18 and 30 were recruited for participation through Amazon Turk. We limited our sample to those who identified as unmarried and currently residing in the U.S. (222 women and 381 men). Participants were compensated \$2 for their participation.

### Measures

**The Triple Bind.** First, we created a scale to measure the triple bind. We developed items associated with three role domains: stereotypically masculine, stereotypically feminine, and appearance concerns. Sample items include "Secure a high status job" (stereotypically masculine), "Find the "perfect match" in a romantic partner" (stereotypically feminine), and "Command a lean, toned physique" (appearance-oriented). For each role domain, participants were asked to indicate the importance of achievement in the role and capability of achievement in the role. There were a total of 15 items, 5 in each role domain.

**Importance of achievement in role.** Participants were first asked to indicate how important they consider achievement in each role domain, either now or in the future. Responses ranged from 1 = not at all important to 5 = extremely important.

**Capability of achievement in role.** Participants also reported how capable they feel of achieving in each domain. The same 15 items were used. Responses were scored on a similar scale where 1 = not at all capable and 5 = extremely capable.

**Discrepancy Score.** In each of the three role domains, discrepancy scores were calculated by subtracting participants' "capability" scores from their "importance" scores. Thus, a positive result indicates a greater discrepancy in achievement, suggesting the participant's aspirations exceed his or her ability in that domain.

**The Triple Bind Score.** Overall discrepancy scores in each of the three role domains were combined as an attempt to measure the phenomenon Hinshaw (2009) refers to as the "triple bind". Because he describes this trend as the result of cumulative societal pressures, we opted to add the discrepancy scores in all three role domains, thus yielding one total score.

### Table 1.

Gender Differences in Variables

Variable	Women M (SD)	Men M (SD)	t	$\eta^2$
Imp-Masc	14.55 (4.54)	15.11 (4.74)	-1.42	<.01
Imp-Fem	15.51 (3.66)	15.36 (3.94)	0.47	<.01
Imp-App	14.34 (4.26)	14.46 (4.40)	-0.335	<.01
Cap-Masc	14.52 (4.87)	15.42 (4.86)	-2.18*	0.01
Cap-Fem	16.08 (4.39)	16.08 (4.51)	-0.01	<.01
Cap-App	15.17 (4.60)	15.88 (4.61)	-1.80	<.01
Disc-Masc	0.00 (4.74)	-0.28 (4.53)	0.70	<.01
Disc-Fem	-0.40 (4.00)	-0.77 (3.96)	1.14	<.01
Disc-App	-0.83 (4.09)	-1.45 (4.06)	1.78	<.01
Triple Bind	-1.08 (11.42)	-2.75(10.63)	1.72	<.01
Perfect	2.35(.52)	2.24(.47)	2.53*	0.01
Drive Thin	2.96(1.09)	2.37(.90)	7.25***	0.08
Well-Being	4.96(1.28)	5.00(1.30)	-0.36	<.01

Note: Imp = importance; Cap = capability; Disc = discrepancy; Masc = masculinity; Fem = femininity; App = appearance; Perfect = perfectionism score; Drive Thin = drive for thinness score  
\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

**Perfectionism.** Participants' perfectionism was evaluated using the Maladaptive Evaluative Concerns (MEC) and Personal Standards (PS) dimensions of Frost's (1990) Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS). Sample items from the MPS include "I have extremely high goals" and "People will probably think less of me if I make a mistake". Responses ranged from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. An average perfectionism score was computed by adding up all the response values and dividing by the number of items.

**Drive for Thinness.** The 7-item Drive for Thinness subscale of the EDI-3 assesses excessive concern with dieting, preoccupation with weight, and an unhealthy desire to be thin. Sample items are "I feel extremely guilty after overeating" and "I am terrified of gaining weight". The measure uses a 6-point Likert scale from 0 (never) and 0 (rarely) to 4 (always).

**Schwartz Outcome Scale (Well-Being).** The Schwartz Outcome Scale-10 was included to measure individuals' general psychological well-being. An example of an item is, "I feel hopeful about the future."

### Procedure

The anonymous survey was administered online using Survey Monkey.

### Table 2.

Correlations Between Variables

	1	2	3	4
1. Triple Bind	--	.38***	.17*	-.44***
2. Perfectionism	.26***	--	.35***	-.24**
3. Drive for Thinness	.22***	.37***	--	-.10
4. Well-Being	-.36***	-.15**	-.13**	--

Note: Women's values are above the diagonal and men's below. Triple Bind = triple bind score; Perfectionism = perfectionism score; Drive for Thinness = drive for thinness score; and Well-Being = Schwartz outcome score  
\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

## Results and Discussion

### Gender Differences in Variables

Table 1 contains *t*-test results comparing men's and women's importance, capability, and discrepancy scores for each of the three role domains as well as scores on the four variables used in our multiple regression analysis. Fewer gender differences were apparent than anticipated. The only statistically significant difference was in capability-masculinity, in which men reported higher capability in the masculine domain than women. When analyzing the predictors and criterion variables, only two of the four were found to be significantly different, with women tending to score slightly higher on perfectionism,  $t(543) = 2.53, p < .05, \eta^2 = .01$ , and markedly higher on drive for thinness,  $t(601) = 7.25, p < .001, \eta^2 = .08$ . Conversely, our prediction that women's triple bind scores would be higher than men's was not supported by the data.

### Correlations between Variables

Table 2 shows correlations between the four central variables for women and men. As anticipated, women's triple bind scores were positively correlated with drive for thinness and negatively correlated with well-being. Although we did not formulate specific hypotheses about the men, it's worth noting that even more significant relationships appeared when analyzing the men's scores as compared to the women's. This suggests that the concepts of the triple bind and perfectionism are also applicable in the study of men's physical and psychological well-being.

### Table 3.

Results of Simultaneous Multiple Regression Analyses

Criterion:	Drive for Thinness ( $\beta$ )		Well-Being ( $\beta$ )	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
Triple Bind	.08	.12*	-.44***	-.35***
Perfect	.31***	.38***	-.04	-.05
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.11	.18	.20	.13
F	12.78***	34.71***	24.15***	23.96***

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

### Predicting Drive for Thinness

When the triple bind and perfectionism scores were entered into multiple regression equations predicting drive for thinness in men and women, perfectionism emerged as the most significant predictor for both men and women. This finding is backed by prior research which suggests that pathological perfectionism, particularly in the form of evaluative concerns, has a predictive relationship with drive for thinness (Dickie et al., 2012). However, our hypothesis that the triple bind would be a significant predictor of drive for thinness in women did not hold up, indicating that aspects of perfectionism uniquely contribute to drive for thinness.

### Predicting Well-Being

The triple bind and perfectionism were also used to predict men's and women's well-being scores. This analysis yielded a different pattern from the previous equation, as only the triple bind significantly contributed to the prediction of men's and women's well-being. Thus, our hypothesis that the triple bind would be negatively related to women's well-being scores was backed by these results. We also expected that perfectionism would play a significant role in predicting women's well-being, but this theory did not hold true. The regression results suggest that the triple bind on its own should be seen as an integral component of determining one's overall quality of life.

## Conclusion

Although this study partly focused on forms of pathology, such as perfectionism and drive for thinness, our results indicate that men and women generally feel content with their performance of multiple roles. The majority of our sample scored highly in well-being and felt sufficiently capable of achieving in various domains. Among those who struggle with role achievement and quality of life, perfectionism seems to be a prominent risk factor for weight concerns, while the trifold pressures of the triple bind appear to reduce one's overall well-being. Fewer gender differences emerged than anticipated, suggesting that concepts previously viewed as women's issues may be men's issues as well.

## References

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