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BABES-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF PSYCHOLOGY AND EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES
APPLIED COGNITIVE PSYCHOLOGY DOCTORAL SCHOOL

SUMMARY OF Ph.D. THESIS
PERFECTIONISM AND SOCIO-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT
IN ADOLESCENTS

AUTHOR: Ph.D. CANDIDATE **DIANA VOIS**

SCIENTIFIC ADVISOR: PROFESSOR **OANA NEGRU-SUBTIRICA**, Ph.D.

CLUJ-NAPOCA

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Appendix 1. Statement Attached to the Doctoral Thesis

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Notes

(1) This is to certify by Diana Vois that:

(a) The thesis includes the original research work of Diana Vois towards the Ph.D.;

(b) Parts of the thesis have been already published, in press, or submitted for publication;

appropriate citations for these publications were included in the thesis. Other co-authors have been included in the publications, if they contributed to the exposition of the published text, data interpretation etc.

(c) The thesis was written according to the academic writing standards (e.g., appropriate scientific acknowledgements and citations have been made in the text by the author of the thesis). All the text of the thesis and its summary was written by Diana Vois who assumes the all responsibility for the academic writing;

Also:

- A software was used to check for the academic writing; the thesis has passed the critical test;

Diana Vois

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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Perfectionism – Definition and the importance of studying perfectionism in adolescence

Perfectionism, a complex personality trait, is defined by a constant striving for exceptionally high standards and a tendency for evaluation of oneself in relation to these standards (Frost et al., 1990; Hewitt & Flett, 1991). In the last few decades, more and more evidence has come to light suggesting young people are becoming more perfectionistic. This has raised concerns about how it could impact their mental health and development (Curran & Hill, 2019; Curran et al., 2026). A recent meta-analysis investigating trends over the past 35 years revealed a consistent rise in various dimensions of perfectionism among college students, including self-oriented perfectionism, concern over mistakes, and doubts about actions. Furthermore, the prevalence of socially prescribed perfectionism has increased since the early 2000s (Curran et al., 2026). Prior research also suggests that younger generations show more pronounced perfectionistic tendencies (Curran & Hill, 2019). These trends are part of broader cultural transformations that support competitive individualism and prioritize achievement. These alterations are often associated with neoliberal social norms that place significant emphasis on self-improvement and the pursuit of an idealized self. Consequently, in these environments, personal value is increasingly contingent upon performance and success; concurrently, factors such as social comparison, escalating income inequality, and the pervasive influence of social media may exacerbate the pressure to attain elevated standards and avoid failure (Curran et al., 2026).

In post-communist societies like Romania, how perfectionism develops and is expressed can be influenced by the surrounding culture and society. While Romanian culture has historically prioritized collectivistic principles and strong familial bonds, contemporary research indicates a generational transition towards more individualistic perspectives. This shift could engender discrepancies between parental aspirations and the developing value systems of adolescents

(Negru-Subtirica & Damian, 2018). Consequently, this transformation may have fostered intergenerational variations in both expectations and socialization methodologies.

Simultaneously, the Romanian educational system places a strong emphasis on academic achievement, with grades serving as the primary criterion for advancement within the school system (Damian et al., 2016; Negru-Subtirica & Damian, 2018). Longitudinal studies suggest that academic success significantly influences the development of adolescents' identity and personality, especially when social comparison is a factor (Negru-Subtirica et al., 2020). In these situations, academic achievement can become a primary indicator of personal accomplishment, potentially intensifying competitive pressures from parents, educators, and the wider social context. As a result, the demands associated with academic performance and competition may foster the emergence and strengthening of perfectionistic traits during adolescence (Damian et al., 2016).

Simultaneously with these societal transformations, there has been a growing concern regarding the mental health and general well-being of adolescents. Anxiety and depression are common mental health challenges affecting young people, and studies suggest a deterioration in adolescent mental health across various countries, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic (OECD, 2025). Adolescents between the ages of 15 and 19 are more likely than others to have anxiety disorders, and indicators of psychological distress and health complaints among young people have risen relative to pre-pandemic conditions (OECD, 2025). Within this context, perfectionism is recognized as a transdiagnostic vulnerability factor, which could foster maladaptive affect regulation. This reflects underlying cognitive and affective processes, including heightened self-criticism, a fear of failure, and increased sensitivity to evaluation, which are observable across various manifestations of psychopathology (Egan et al., 2011;

Limburg et al., 2017). Studies supporting this perspective show that perfectionistic concerns are linked to a wide range of internalizing problems, such as anxiety, depression, eating disorders, and stress-related symptoms (Hewitt & Flett, 2002; Smith et al., 2021). Therefore, perfectionism may contribute to psychological maladjustment by shaping how individuals interpret, experience, and regulate emotional and evaluative experiences.

To understand perfectionism in adolescents, we need to examine both the underlying psychological processes and the specific environments where it appears. From a process-oriented standpoint, the Integrated Model of Affect-Related Individual Differences (Hughes & Evans, 2018) posits affect regulation as a crucial mechanism through which personality traits influence emotional experiences. Within this framework, perfectionism may affect emotional functioning by modulating affective reactivity and goal-directed behaviors, thus positioning affect regulation as a dynamic mediator that links perfectionistic traits to affective outcomes. Nevertheless, despite existing research documenting bidirectional associations between perfectionism and affective outcomes (e.g., Damian et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2021), as well as between affective outcomes and affect regulation (e.g., Dawel et al., 2021; Dryman & Heimberg, 2018), empirical investigations directly assessing these reciprocal relationships are still scarce, especially within longitudinal studies.

Simultaneously, these processes emerge within certain developmental contexts. Ecological models of adolescent development indicate that school is an extremely important environment influencing adolescents' cognitive, social, and emotional development (cf. Governale & Garbarino, 2019). In addition to its educational function, the school environment is marked by ongoing assessment, performance expectations, and social comparison; it has been both theoretically implicated (Flett et al., 2002) and empirically linked to the emergence and

reinforcement of perfectionistic tendencies (Damian et al., 2017b; Stricker et al., 2019). In this context, adolescents might employ perfectionistic self-presentation as a social strategy, aiming to maintain a favorable self-perception and avoid unfavorable judgments. This thesis employs a developmental and transactional framework, integrating regulatory and contextual factors, to examine how perfectionism influences adolescents' daily lives and its evolution associated with affect regulation over time.

1.1.1 Theoretical Models of Multidimensional Perfectionism

An influential early conceptualization of perfectionism was proposed by **Frost et al. (1990)**, who introduced a multidimensional framework and developed the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS-F) to operationalize it. *Personal standards* refer to the tendency to set exceptionally high goals for oneself and to attach considerable importance to meeting these standards when evaluating one's performance. *Concern over mistakes* reflects a tendency to react negatively to errors, interpret mistakes as indicators of failure, and fear that mistakes may lead to disapproval from others. *Doubts about actions* involve chronic uncertainty regarding the adequacy of one's performance, often accompanied by a persistent sense that tasks have not been completed satisfactorily.

Hewitt and Flett's (1991) multidimensional model sees perfectionism as a complex personality trait, including both how people see themselves and how they interact with others. *Self-oriented perfectionism* reflects an increased tendency to establish exceedingly high standards for oneself and to assess one's behavior with rigorous criticism. *Socially prescribed perfectionism*, in contrast, reflects the perception that others hold unrealistically high expectations and that acceptance or approval is contingent upon meeting them. The third

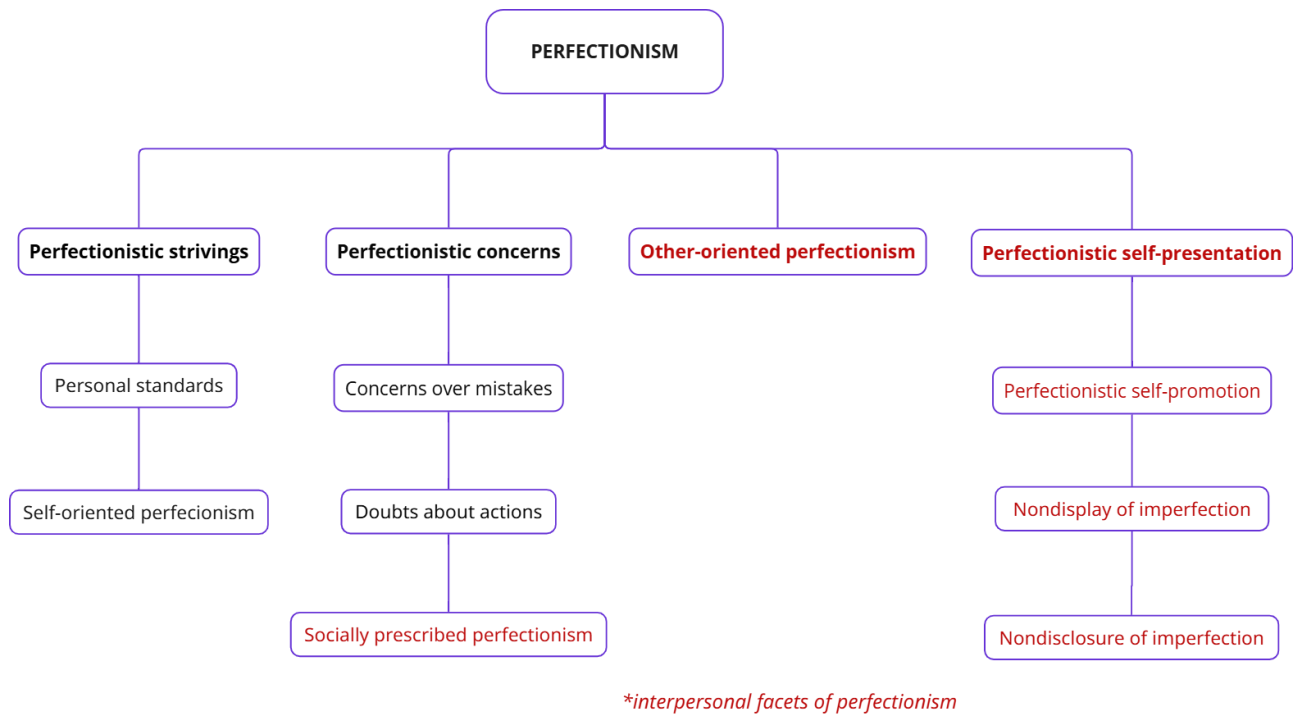
dimension, *other-oriented perfectionism*, involves holding excessively high expectations for the performance and behaviour of others.

Although the multidimensional models proposed by Frost et al. (1990) and Hewitt and Flett (1991) differ in the number and nature of their dimensions, subsequent research has demonstrated that these facets can be organized into two broader higher-order dimensions: *perfectionistic strivings* and *perfectionistic concerns* (Stoeber & Otto, 2006; Stoeber, 2018). *Perfectionistic strivings* refer to the tendency to set and pursue extremely high personal standards and strive for excellence in one's performance. In contrast, *perfectionistic concerns* capture the maladaptive evaluative aspects of perfectionism, including excessive concern about mistakes, chronic doubts about one's actions, and fear of negative evaluation by others.

Within the Comprehensive Model of Perfectionistic Behavior, Hewitt, Flett, and Mikail (2017), **perfectionistic self-presentation** represents the interpersonal form of perfectionism and encompasses the strategies individuals employ to establish or sustain a flawless image in social contexts (Hewitt et al., 2003). **Perfectionistic self-presentation** is characterized by three interconnected dimensions (Hewitt et al., 2003). The first dimension, *perfectionistic self-promotion*, entails the active presentation of oneself as flawless, capable, and accomplished. The second dimension, *nondisplay of imperfection*, signifies attempts to evade circumstances where personal shortcomings or errors might become apparent to others. The third dimension, *nondisclosure of imperfection*, pertains to the practice of refraining from openly addressing or conceding one's errors, deficiencies, or perceived failings.

Figure 1

Facets of perfectionism included in the present thesis



Note. Facets of perfectionism included in the present thesis: perfectionistic strivings and perfectionistic concerns (Stoeber & Otto, 2006; Stoeber, 2018); personal standards, concern over mistakes and doubts about actions (Frost et al., 1990); self-oriented perfectionism, socially prescribed perfectionism and other-oriented perfectionism (Hewitt & Flett, 1991); perfectionistic self-presentation: perfectionistic self-promotion, nondisplay of imperfection and nondisclosure of imperfection (Hewitt et al., 2003).

1.1.2 The Development of Perfectionism in Adolescence

A major development in adolescence is the formation and revision of *self-concept*, how a person thinks and feels about themselves, their traits, strengths, and weaknesses, and their roles in general and in various contexts. During this period, adolescents also engage in *self-evaluation*, which is the process of reflecting on their attributes, skills, and behaviors. Another important aspect is the growing importance of *social comparison*, which involves evaluating oneself in relation to others, including peers, and begins in middle childhood. Adolescents start to compare their skills and achievements to those of their peers, rather than just looking at their past performance. This can lead to self-assessments that are more realistic but also potentially more critical (Crone et al., 2022).

In addition, adolescents develop the ability to consider *how they are perceived by others*, which involves integrating one's own self-perceptions with beliefs about how others evaluate them. These developments are facilitated by enhancements in social-cognitive functions, including perspective-taking and mentalization, which enable adolescents to consider diverse perspectives when assessing themselves (Crone et al., 2022). Simultaneously, this period is characterized by *increased sensitivity to social and affective cues*, particularly those related to peer evaluation and social belonging. Developmental neuroscience studies suggest that pubertal changes within social-affective processing systems enhance adolescents' susceptibility to social feedback and peer viewpoints, thus making social experiences especially influential during this stage of development (Crone & Dahl, 2012).

Adolescence is a crucial developmental stage where **self-presentation** becomes particularly important. As adolescents become more sensitive to how they are evaluated by others and to feedback from their peers, they pay more attention to how they are perceived and

may change their behavior accordingly (Brown & Larson, 2009). Self-presentation involves the strategies people use to control how they are seen by others in social situations (Schlenker, 2012). These strategies can be used to show specific personal qualities, like competence or social desirability, depending on the situation and the audience (Paulhus & Trapnell, 2008). Research suggests that the ability to respond to audience expectations increases with age, as children and adolescents gradually learn to adjust their preferences and behaviors to fit with socially valued traits (Banerjee, 2002).

1.1.3.1 The Perfectionism Social Disconnection Model

The Perfectionism Social Disconnection Model (PSDM) was initially developed to explain how perfectionism can lead to relationship problems and weaken social connections (Hewitt et al., 2006). Later, Hewitt, Flett, and Mikail (2017) expanded the model, offering a more complete view of perfectionism by including perfectionistic personality traits, perfectionistic self-presentation styles, and perfectionistic cognitive processes. Theoretical frameworks rooted in attachment theory, person-centered theory, and self-psychology posit that initial interactions with caregivers shape internalized representations of the self and others, consequently impacting emotional regulation, self-assessment, and stress coping mechanisms (cf. Rice et al., 2018). Regarding perfectionism, parenting that is sensitive and responsive might foster secure attachment and adaptive self-regulation. Conversely, parenting that is inconsistent, demanding, and controlling could lead to self-critical perfectionism. This latter parenting style might cause children to increasingly associate their self-worth with performance and external approval, thereby reinforcing rigid standards and intensified self-assessment (cf. Rice et al., 2018).

The Perfectionism Social Disconnection Model (Hewitt et al., 2017) suggests that perfectionism could be a way to meet important social needs, such as the need for acceptance,

belonging, and connection with others. To address these needs, people might develop perfectionistic behaviors, which are characterized by a constant striving for perfection or the appearance of perfection in themselves and others. However, these behaviors often have unintended effects on relationships, such as appearing distant, unfriendly, or disconnected, along with increased sensitivity to rejection and criticism, psychological distress, dysfunction, or mental health problems (Hewitt et al., 2017). Empirical studies support the main ideas of the Perfectionism Social Disconnection Model. Research with young adults has shown that socially prescribed perfectionism and other-oriented perfectionism are positively related to interpersonal sensitivity and fears of rejection (Flett et al., 2014; Kumari et al., 2012; Mandel et al., 2018). However, evidence among adolescents remains relatively limited.

1.1.3.2. The Integrated Model of Affect-Related Individual Differences

Complementing existing interpersonal models, affect-based frameworks offer crucial perspectives on the processes connecting perfectionism to emotional functioning. The **Integrated Model of Affect-Related Individual Differences** (IMAIID; Hughes & Evans, 2018) is one such framework; it posits emotion regulation as the central mechanism through which personality traits shape affective experiences. Within this context, perfectionism can influence emotional experiences by affecting both how we react emotionally and what motivates us. To better capture potential bidirectional processes, two complementary theoretical perspectives are often considered: the vulnerability and complication models. **The vulnerability model** (Bolger & Zuckerman, 1995) proposes that personality traits act as risk factors that increase individuals' susceptibility to affective symptoms. In contrast, **the complication model** (Bagby et al., 2008) proposes that affective symptoms may play an active role in shaping and modifying personality characteristics over time. Rather than viewing these perspectives as competing explanations, the

reciprocal relations model suggests that vulnerability and complication processes operate simultaneously and dynamically over time (Zuroff et al., 1999, 2004). Overall, existing evidence suggests that the relationship between perfectionism and affective functioning is dynamic and bidirectional. Meta-analytic findings indicate that perfectionistic concerns can function both as a vulnerability factor for depression and as a consequence of depressive symptoms (Smith et al., 2021). Similarly, longitudinal findings in adolescents have shown that perfectionistic concerns and negative affect influence each other over time (Damian et al., 2021), suggesting that emotion regulation may play an important role in linking these constructs.

1.2. Socio-emotional development in adolescence

1.2.1. Affect Regulation

Affect regulation encompasses a wide range of processes that allow individuals to influence how their emotions arise, how strong they are, how long they last, and how they are expressed (Gross & Thompson, 2007). Within this conceptual framework, emotion regulation constitutes one component of a broader system of affect-regulatory processes, which also includes coping mechanisms, mood regulation, and psychological defenses (Gross & Thompson, 2007). These processes are designed to modify the strength, duration, or expression of emotional responses, either by increasing, maintaining, or decreasing emotional experiences based on the situation. Emotions arise from interactions between individuals and their surroundings, leading to changes in how we feel, act, and respond (Gross, 2008, 2015). The modal model of emotion suggests that we can regulate our feelings at different stages, such as by choosing or changing situations, focusing our attention, changing how we perceive things, or adjusting our emotional responses after they happen (Gross & Thompson, 2007; Gross, 2008). Therefore, looking at emotion regulation, coping strategies, and related skills within this larger framework provides a

complete view of how people manage their emotions and respond to what's happening around them.

1.2.1.1 Emotion Regulation

Emotion regulation strategies are often categorized according to their associations with psychological adjustment, with some considered relatively adaptive and others more maladaptive (Aldao et al., 2010). *Cognitive reappraisal*, which involves reinterpreting an emotion-eliciting situation in order to change its emotional impact, is generally viewed as an adaptive strategy. Empirical evidence indicates that cognitive reappraisal is linked to higher levels of positive emotional experience, lower depressive symptoms and neuroticism, as well as greater conscientiousness and life satisfaction (John & Gross, 2004; Gullone & Taffe, 2012; Teixeira et al., 2015). In contrast, *expressive suppression* refers to attempts to inhibit outward emotional expression after an emotion has already been activated. Although expressive suppression may reduce observable emotional displays, it does not necessarily diminish the underlying emotional experience and has been associated with elevated levels of negative affect, depressive symptoms, and greater neuroticism (John & Gross, 2004; Gullone & Taffe, 2012; Teixeira et al., 2015). Existing research suggests that the way individuals regulate their emotions is closely related to mental health outcomes, particularly in adolescence (Schäfer et al., 2017). This developmental stage is characterized by significant endocrinological, cognitive, and socio-emotional changes, which are often accompanied by heightened emotional reactivity and more frequent or intense emotional experiences (Schäfer et al., 2017). Simultaneously, the neural and psychological systems involved in emotion regulation undergo substantial development, making adolescence a particularly important period for examining both vulnerabilities to maladaptive regulatory

patterns and opportunities for promoting adaptive emotional functioning (Ahmed et al., 2015; Schäfer et al., 2017).

1.2.1.2. Coping

Coping refers to the cognitive and behavioral efforts that individuals use to manage internal or external demands that are perceived as stressful (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004). Coping processes are particularly important during adolescence, a developmental period characterized by increased exposure to academic, social, and interpersonal stressors. Simultaneously, regulatory abilities are still developing, making coping strategies critical for emotional and social adjustment (Compas et al., 2017; Erath & Pettit, 2021). Research suggests that adolescents increasingly rely on cognitively mediated strategies such as planning, cognitive reappraisal, and acceptance, although coping responses remain strongly influenced by contextual factors (Zimmer-Gembeck & Skinner, 2011). Engagement-oriented coping strategies are generally associated with better adjustment, whereas disengagement-oriented strategies are more consistently linked to maladaptive outcomes, particularly under conditions of chronic stress (Compas et al., 2017).

1.2.1.3. Mindfulness

Mindfulness is commonly defined as the self-regulated capacity to direct attention toward present-moment experiences while adopting an attitude of openness, curiosity, and acceptance toward internal states, such as thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations (Bishop et al., 2004; Kabat-Zinn, 2003). In the present work, mindfulness is considered from a trait perspective, referring to the tendency to experience mindful awareness more frequently in everyday life (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Bishop et al., 2004). Mindfulness may be particularly relevant during adolescence, a developmental stage characterized by increased emotional reactivity, heightened

sensitivity to stress, and still-developing self-regulatory capacities (Amada & Shane, 2018). At the same time, adolescents develop cognitive and metacognitive abilities, such as self-reflection, perspective-taking, and awareness of internal states, that make mindful processes increasingly accessible (Roeser & Pinela, 2014). Empirical evidence suggests that mindfulness is linked to lower levels of stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms, as well as greater psychological well-being among adolescents (Burke, 2009; Zhang et al., 2022). Overall, these findings suggest that trait mindfulness represents an important self-regulatory disposition during adolescence and may influence the development and expression of personality characteristics related to self-evaluation and regulation, like perfectionism, and their association with emotional functioning.

1.2.2 School as a social context for adolescent development

The relational developmental systems perspective (Lerner et al., 2011) posits that adolescence is a time of continuous development, shaped by ongoing interactions between individuals and their environments. In this context, school is especially important, because adolescents spend a lot of their time in educational environments. These environments structure their activities, social interactions, and opportunities for growth (Li, 2011). In addition to its educating function, school serves as a setting for the development of cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioral skills while facilitating social integration and identity formation (Shernoff, 2013). The degree of adolescents' involvement and commitment to their educational environment, known as school engagement, has been consistently associated with better developmental outcomes (Li, 2011; Shernoff, 2013).

School engagement is commonly conceptualized as a multidimensional construct reflecting students' active involvement in academic and school-related activities. Given that perfectionism is closely tied to achievement, evaluation, and performance standards, it is likely

to play a significant role in shaping adolescents' engagement with school. One of the most widely used frameworks is the model proposed by Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004), which distinguishes three complementary dimensions of engagement: behavioral, emotional, and cognitive. *Behavioral engagement* refers to students' participation in academic and school-related activities, including effort, persistence, compliance with classroom rules, and active involvement in tasks (Fredricks et al., 2004). *Emotional engagement* refers to students' affective reactions toward school, including feelings of interest, enjoyment, belonging, and identification with the school environment (Appleton et al., 2006; Finn, 1989; Voelkl, 1997). *Cognitive engagement* represents students' investment in learning, including the use of self-regulated learning strategies, persistence in challenging tasks, and a willingness to exert effort to understand complex material (Pintrich & De Groot, 1990).

CHAPTER II. OBJECTIVES OF THE PRESENT THESIS

2.1 Summary of existing research in the scientific literature

Research has examined the link between *perfectionism and affect regulation* processes. Findings from cross-sectional studies consistently indicate that perfectionistic strivings are associated with more adaptive *emotion regulation* patterns, including greater use of cognitive reappraisal and lower levels of emotional dysregulation, whereas perfectionistic concerns are linked to greater reliance on maladaptive strategies such as suppression and higher emotional dysregulation (Aldea & Rice, 2006; Castro et al., 2017; Dobos et al., 2021; Hayatbini et al., 2021; Richardson et al., 2014; Rudolph et al., 2007; Rukmini et al., 2014). Longitudinal research on this topic remains scarce. One study conducted with adolescents found that perfectionistic strivings predicted higher levels of reappraisal and lower levels of emotion dysregulation over time, whereas perfectionistic concerns predicted increases in dysregulation strategies (Vois &

Damian, 2020). Additional longitudinal research suggests that perfectionistic concerns are also associated with experiential avoidance, highlighting their role in maladaptive emotional responding (Dunkley et al., 2017; Moroz & Dunkley, 2019; Richard & Dunkley, 2024).

Studies examining coping processes suggest that the association between *perfectionism and coping strategies* is also dimension-specific. Self-oriented perfectionism is typically linked to greater use of task-focused and engagement-oriented coping strategies, including planning, problem solving, persistence, and organization (Rice et al., 2001; Luo et al., 2016). However, when accompanied by elevated self-criticism or concern over mistakes, it may also be linked to rumination and other emotion-focused coping responses (Flett et al., 2012). In contrast, socially prescribed perfectionism is more consistently associated with disengagement-oriented coping strategies such as avoidance, withdrawal, and behavioral disengagement, and it prospectively predicts greater academic burnout and emotional distress during adolescence (Flett et al., 2012; Luo et al., 2016; Mofield et al., 2016). Daily diary research further indicates that self-critical perfectionism is associated with heightened negative affect and stress through maladaptive coping processes (Dunkley & Blankstein, 2000; Dunkley et al., 2003; Richard et al., 2021).

Another line of research has focused on the relationship between *perfectionism and mindfulness*. Across studies, perfectionistic concerns consistently show negative associations with mindfulness, whereas perfectionistic strivings demonstrate weaker or more context-dependent relations. Cross-sectional research indicates that perfectionistic concerns are associated with lower levels of mindfulness facets, such as acting with awareness, nonjudging, and nonreactivity (Short & Mazmanian, 2013), with similar patterns observed among adolescents (Lamarre & Marcotte, 2021). Longitudinal evidence further suggests that individuals high in perfectionistic concerns experience lower mindfulness over time and greater psychological

distress when mindfulness is low (Tobin & Dunkley, 2021). In contrast, perfectionistic strivings appear largely unrelated to mindfulness and distress, although some studies report positive associations with socio-cognitive facets of mindfulness, such as novelty seeking and novelty producing (Manova & Khoury, 2023). Daily diary research further suggests that mindfulness may buffer the emotional impact of perfectionistic concerns, with higher daily mindfulness associated with improved emotional experiences among individuals high in perfectionism (Tobin & Dunkley, 2025). Intervention studies similarly indicate that mindfulness-based programs may reduce perfectionistic strivings and alleviate distress associated with perfectionism (Olton-Weber et al., 2020; Bearden et al., 2024; Zhou et al., 2023).

In educational contexts, *perfectionistic tendencies* may influence adolescents' *engagement with school* and their motivational orientation toward academic achievement. Research on university students suggests that perfectionistic self-presentation is associated with lower academic self-esteem and higher academic stress (Cowie et al., 2018; Hewitt et al., 2003; Schrick et al., 2012). In particular, nondisplay of imperfection has been identified as a strong predictor of academic difficulties among undergraduates (Cowie et al., 2018). These findings suggest that individuals high in perfectionistic self-presentation may be motivated by self-image goals, striving to maintain a flawless academic identity and to gain recognition as “perfect” students (Nepon et al., 2016).

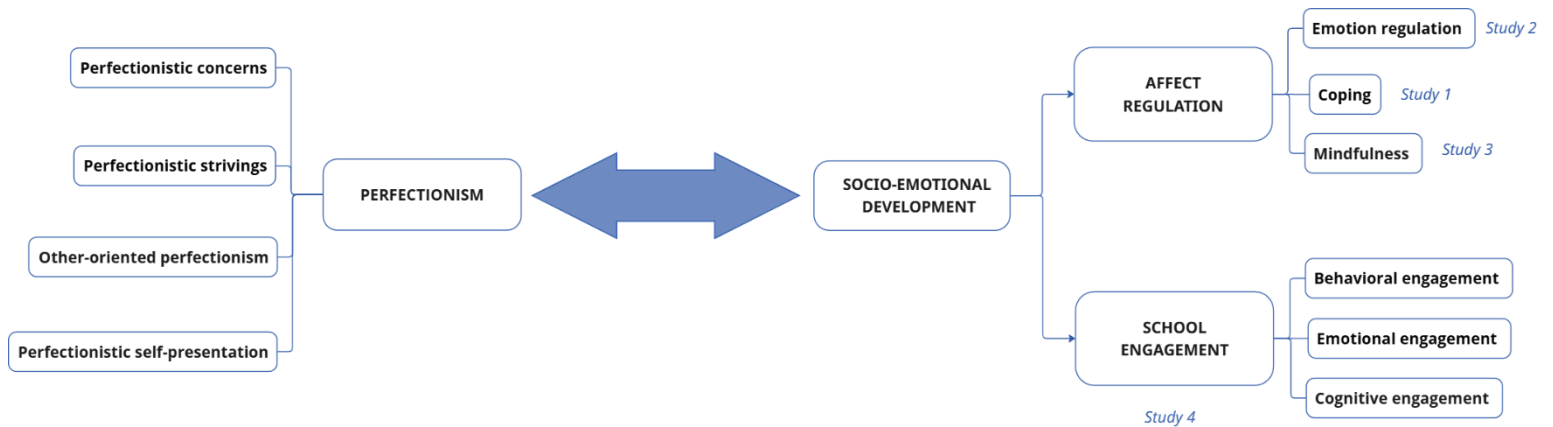
2.2. Present thesis research questions, objectives and studies

The study on perfectionism within the field of socio-emotional functioning is growing. However, a key gap in the literature concerns the limited longitudinal and developmental understanding of how multidimensional perfectionism is linked to self-regulatory processes and school functioning during adolescence. In order to address this, the present thesis examines the

longitudinal interplay between perfectionism and key processes of affect regulation during the course of adolescence across four longitudinal studies. The current studies contribute to our understanding of perfectionism as a dynamic self-regulatory system that is shaped by and interacts with various aspects of adolescents' emotional, behavioral, and contextual experiences.

Figure 2

Conceptual model for the present thesis



Studies	Methodology and main results
Study 1. Vois, D., Damian-Ilea, L. & Negru-Subtirica, O. (2026): <i>A short prospective study on multidimensional perfectionism and coping in adolescents</i> (manuscript accepted for publication in <i>Cognition, Brain, Behavior. An Interdisciplinary Journal</i>)	• For this study we used a two-wave (one-month apart) longitudinal design to measure the relationship between multidimensional perfectionism and coping strategies in a sample of 227 adolescents. • We performed bivariate correlations and hierarchal regression analyses in IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 21). • Results showed that other-oriented perfectionism predicted subsequent increases in behavioral disengagement.
Study 2. Vois, D., Damian-Ilea, L. & Negru-Subtirica, O. (2026): <i>Perfectionism and Emotion Regulation over Time: A Three-Wave Study of Reciprocal Associations in Adolescents</i> (manuscript under review)	• For this study we used a three-wave longitudinal design to measure the bidirectional relationship between perfectionism and emotion regulation in a sample of 454 adolescents. • We performed both cross-lagged panel analyses (between-person) and random intercept cross-lagged analyses (within-person) in Mplus. • Group-level results showed a unidirectional longitudinal relation between perfectionistic strivings and reappraisal, and a bidirectional relation between perfectionistic concerns and suppression. Conversely, due to a small power effect, our within-person results were not significant.
Study 3. Vois, D., Damian-Ilea, L. & Negru-Subtirica, O. (2026): <i>Perfectionism and Mindfulness in Adolescence: A three-wave longitudinal study</i> (manuscript in preparation for publication)	• For this study we used a three-wave longitudinal design to measure the bidirectional relationship between perfectionism and mindfulness in a sample of 454 adolescents. • We performed cross-lagged panel analyses (between-person) in Mplus. • Cross-lagged results indicated that perfectionistic strivings predicted subsequent increases in mindfulness, whereas mindfulness predicted decreases in perfectionistic concerns.
Study 4. Vois, D., Damian-Ilea, L. & Negru-Subtirica, O. (2025): <i>Is there too much school engagement? A longitudinal study on the bidirectional relations between school engagement and perfectionistic self-presentation in adolescents</i>, Educational Psychology, DOI: 10.1080/01443410.2025.2551150	• For this study we used a four-wave longitudinal design to measure the bidirectional relationship between perfectionistic self-presentation and school engagement in a sample of 744 adolescents. • We performed cross-lagged panel analyses (between-person) in Mplus. • Cross-lagged analyses indicated that behavioral engagement predicted relative declines in adolescents' usage of perfectionistic self-promotion and nondisclosure of imperfection strategies. Cognitive engagement, conversely, forecasted relative enhancements in adolescents' usage of perfectionistic self-promotion, nondisplay of imperfection, and nondisclosure of imperfection strategies.

CHAPTER III. ORIGINAL STUDIES

3.1. Study 1: A short prospective study on multidimensional perfectionism and coping in adolescents¹

Abstract

Despite the growing literature addressing multidimensional perfectionism and coping, longitudinal studies on adolescents are scarce and have focused primarily on self-oriented perfectionism and socially prescribed perfectionism, leaving other-oriented perfectionism underexamined. Thus, investigating the longitudinal relation between multidimensional perfectionism and coping strategies was the primary aim of this study. Two-wave self-report data were collected from 227 adolescents (15-18 years old) over a one-month period. Cross-sectional analyses indicated that all three of perfectionism's dimensions were linked to distinct coping profiles, with self-oriented perfectionism linked to engagement-oriented strategies, and the remaining two dimensions linked to emotion-focused and disengagement-oriented strategies. Regression analyses further demonstrated that other-oriented perfectionism uniquely predicted increases in behavioral disengagement over time, whereas no short-term changes in coping strategies were observed for the other two dimensions. The present findings underline the importance of examining all three dimensions of perfectionism and adopting a developmental perspective to better understand how personality characteristics shape stress regulation during adolescence.

Keywords: perfectionism, coping strategies, adolescence, developmental.

¹ Manuscript accepted for publication in *Cognition, Brain, Behavior. An Interdisciplinary Journal*

Vois, D., Damian-Ilea, L. & Negru-Subtirica, O. (2026). A short prospective study on multidimensional perfectionism and coping in adolescents.

The Present Study

Theory posits that perfectionism, as a personality characteristic, could predispose individuals to developing specific coping tendencies and cross-sectional research supports this association. Regarding self-oriented perfectionism, results are mixed, as it seems to be either unrelated or related to both adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies. In contrast, regarding socially prescribed perfectionism, the pattern of results is more consistent, indicating a greater reliance on emotion-focused and disengagement-oriented coping and less frequent use of adaptive coping strategies. Moreover, there is significantly less understanding of other-oriented perfectionism and its relation with coping strategies. Consequently, it remains uncertain if perfectionism is a developmental precursor of coping or merely a correlate, and whether these findings can be extended to adolescence, a critical developmental phase for both coping strategies and multidimensional perfectionism. Therefore, the present study aimed to investigate the relation between multidimensional perfectionism and coping strategies in adolescence using a two-wave longitudinal design with a one-month interval. This time frame was selected based on prior evidence showing that associations between perfectionism and psychological outcomes can emerge over relatively brief periods (e.g., within weeks or a few months; Damian et al., 2017; McGrath et al., 2012), as well as methodological recommendations suggesting that shorter time lags may be well suited to capturing dynamic psychological processes (Dormann & Griffin, 2015).

Method, Results and Discussion

We utilized the **Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale–short form** (MPS-SF; Hewitt et al., 2008) and 13 strategies of **the COPE Questionnaire** (Carver et al., 1989). Results of hierarchical regression hierarchical regression (please see Table 3) indicated that other-oriented perfectionism within T1 predicted relative increases in behavioral disengagement from T1 to T2 ($\beta = .16, p < .05$), with the magnitude of the effect falling within the small range according to conventional benchmarks (Cohen, 2013). Conversely, self-oriented and socially prescribed perfectionism within T1 presented no significant effect on coping strategies.

This study enhances the current literature on multidimensional perfectionism and stress regulation by investigating the longitudinal relation between perfectionism and coping strategies in adolescence. Extending prior work that has relied almost exclusively on cross-sectional evidence, these findings show that the three facets of perfectionism are differently linked to the coping strategies in adolescence. Although self-oriented and socially prescribed perfectionism did not show short-term changes in coping across a one-month interval, other-oriented perfectionism was found to be a predictor of increasing behavioral disengagement, highlighting its distinct and potentially maladaptive role in adolescent stress regulation. By identifying other-oriented perfectionism as a predictor of disengagement-oriented coping, this research underscores the value of investigating all dimensions of perfectionism and points to the relevance of interpersonal standards in shaping adolescents' responses to stress. More broadly, the current findings underline the importance of a developmental perspective when studying personality–coping associations and provide a foundation for future research examining longer-term trajectories, contextual moderators, and mechanisms linking perfectionism to adjustment during adolescence.

Table 3.

Overview of Hierarchical Regression Analyses

	Time 2													
	UMR		PAC		REA		SSE		ACC		EAC		PLA	
	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β
Predictor at Time 1														
Step 1	.335***		.240***		.114***		.440***		.210***		.242***		.394***	
Criterion at T1		.59***		.45***		.29***		.66***		.46***		.46***		.66***
Step 2	.009		.025		.049*		.000		.024		.012		.013	
Self-oriented perfectionism		.12		.05		.12		-.18		.08		.09		-.12
Socially prescribed perfectionism		-.06		-.09		.12		.02		.10		-.02		.13
Other-oriented perfectionism		-.05		.16*		.03		-.00		-.01		.05		-.02
Total R ²	.344***		.229***		.164***		.440***		.235***		.254***		.407***	

Note. $N = 188$. Criterion = (REP) Positive reinterpretation and growth, (PSM) Mental disengagement, (DEM) Focus on and venting of emotions, (SSI) Use of instrumental social support, (CA) Active coping, (NEG) Denial, (UMR) Humor, (PAC) Behavioral disengagement, (REA) Restraint, (SSE) Use of emotional social support, (ACC) Acceptance, (EAC) Suppression of competing activities, (PLA) Planning at T1 (Analysis 11-23).

*** $p < .001$.

3.2. Study 2: Perfectionism and Emotion Regulation over Time: A Three-Wave Study of Reciprocal Associations in Adolescents²

Abstract

Objective: Empirical evidence suggests that perfectionism significantly influences emotion regulation, however, longitudinal data on this relation is still scarce. Hence, the current three-wave longitudinal study's purpose was to investigate the interplay between perfectionism and emotion regulation both at the group-level, as well as at the within-person level, in an adolescent sample.

Method: The total sample comprised of 454 adolescents (69% girls) aged 10-18 years. Adolescents from five public schools completed a paper-pencil questionnaire over three consecutive school semesters.

Results: At the group-level, cross-lagged panel analyses showed a unidirectional longitudinal relation between perfectionistic strivings and reappraisal and bidirectional longitudinal relations between perfectionistic concerns and suppression. Conversely, at the within-person level, random-intercept cross-lagged panel analyses showed non-significant longitudinal relations.

Conclusions: Insights into how perfectionism influences the development and maintenance of emotion regulation strategies in adolescence, as well as their bidirectional relation are discussed.

Keywords: perfectionistic strivings; perfectionistic concerns; emotion regulation strategies; adolescents; longitudinal analyses.

² Study 2 is currently under review for publication.

Present study

The current literature brings valuable perspectives on the relation between perfectionism and emotion regulation. However, the majority of the studies are cross-sectional and the only longitudinal study was a two-wave, short-term one (one month; Vois & Damian, 2020), examining this relation only at group-level (i.e., using traditional cross-lagged panel model analyses in which the within-person variance cannot be partialled out; cf. Curran & Bauer, 2011). In these analyses, changes in the longitudinal relations are depicted based on rank order differences between persons at the group level). Moreover, no study so far has investigated the relation between the current concepts using a theoretical reciprocal model. At the same time, adolescence is characterized by mean-level changes in both perfectionism and emotion regulation that may shape their reciprocal associations: perfectionistic concerns often increase during this period, whereas perfectionistic strivings remain relatively stable or show modest increases (Damian et al., 2022). Adolescents also tend to display notable increases in reappraisal capacity that plateau in late adolescence, without corresponding increases in its use (Silvers, 2022). Concurrently, they may become more motivated to suppress emotions, although findings on developmental changes in suppression remain mixed (Gross & Cassidy, 2019). Such developmental shifts highlight the relevance of examining bidirectional associations between perfectionism and emotion regulation strategies.

Therefore, the current study aims to extend the existing literature by examining the bidirectional relation between perfectionism and emotion regulation strategies using a longitudinal design with three waves in a sample of adolescents. As recently recommended (Hamaker, Kuiper, & Grasman, 2015; Lucas, 2023), the present study will investigate the longitudinal relations both at

the group-level as well as at the within-person level of analysis for which results may differ (cf. Curran & Bauer, 2011).

Method and Results

Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (FMPS; Frost et al., 1990) which comprises a total of six subscales, out of which only three were used in the present project: personal standards, concern over mistakes, and doubts about actions. Emotion Regulation Questionnaire for Children and Adolescents (Gullone & Taffe, 2012): reappraisal and suppression.

Group-level cross-lagged analyses

To investigate the longitudinal bidirectional relations between perfectionism and emotion regulation at the group-level, we employed cross-lagged panel analyses in Mplus 8.4. Figure 1 depicts the significant cross-lagged effects. When interpreting effect sizes, please note that, according to Orth et al. (2022), cross-lagged effect sizes should be interpreted as follows: small effect: $\beta = .03$, medium effect: $\beta = .07$, large effect: $\beta = .12$. As can be seen, perfectionistic strivings showed a positive longitudinal unidirectional effect on reappraisal (medium effect), meaning that perfectionistic strivings positively predicted reappraisal over time. Also, perfectionistic concerns and suppression showed a positive longitudinal bidirectional effect (medium and large effect), meaning that perfectionistic concerns and suppression positively predicted each other over time.

Within-person level cross-lagged analyses

To investigate the longitudinal bidirectional relations at the within-person level, we employed random-intercept cross-lagged panel analyses in Mplus 8.4, including random intercepts for each construct (i.e., a factor with all loadings constrained to 1) to partial out stable between-person variance (Hamaker et al., 2015; Lucas, 2023). All coefficients are reported in

Table 4. The within-person cross-lagged paths that we depicted showed non-significant within-person effects between perfectionism and emotion regulation.

Discussion and Conclusions

The current study brings valuable insights into the development and maintenance of perfectionism, as well as its relations with emotion regulation. First, perfectionistic strivings plays an important role in the development of reappraisal as an adaptive emotion regulation. Second, the current longitudinal study is the first to show bidirectional effects at the group-level between perfectionistic concerns and suppression as an unhealthy emotion regulation strategy. According to the reciprocal relations model (Zuroff et al., 2004; Zuroff et al., 1999), this means that perfectionistic concerns and suppression reinforce each other over time. Moreover, the link between perfectionistic strivings and cognitive reappraisal suggests that high-achieving adolescents could benefit from environments that promote learning through mistakes, emphasize mastery goals, and support emotional reflection. In contrast, the reciprocal association at the group-level between perfectionistic concerns and suppression highlights the need to support adolescents who fear failure or judgment. Creating emotionally safe classrooms that normalize imperfection, validate emotional expression, and reduce performance-based pressure can help prevent the development of maladaptive coping and psychological distress. Therefore, the current findings bring a significant contribution to literature being the first investigation of the longitudinal emotion regulation in a large sample of adolescents.

Table 2

Model Fit Indices and Model Comparisons for Longitudinal Measurement Invariance

Models	Model fit indices				Model comparisons					
	χ^2_{SB}	<i>df</i>	CFI	RMSEA [90% CI]	Models	$\Delta\chi^2_{SB}$	Δdf	<i>p</i>	ΔCFI	$\Delta RMSEA$
<i>Longitudinal Measurement Invariance for Perfectionism</i>										
Model 1: Configural	2660.987***	1614	.880	.039 [.036-.041]						
Model 2: Metric	2712.985***	1648	.878	.039 [.036-.041]	M ₂ -M ₁	51.60	34	.027	-.002	.000
Model 3: Full scalar	2764.825***	1688	.877	.038 [.036-.041]	M ₃ -M ₂	50.67	40	.120	-.001	-.001
<i>Longitudinal Measurement Invariance for Emotion Regulation</i>										
Model 1: Configural	713.215***	360	.882	.048 [.043-.053]						
Model 2: Metric	730.990***	376	.882	.047 [.042-.052]	M ₂ -M ₁	16.52	16	.042	.000	-.001
Model 3: Full scalar	750.357***	396	.882	.046 [.041-.051]	M ₃ -M ₂	17.91	20	.059	.000	-.001
<i>Cross-Lagged Panel Model</i>										
Model A	58.744***	38	.981	.036 [.015-.053]						
Model B	53.196***	30	.979	.042 [.023-.061]	M _A -M _B	5.40	8	.713	.002	-.006
<i>Random Intercept Cross-Lagged Panel Model</i>										
Model A2	60.820***	44	.986	.030 [.004-.047]						
Model B2	59.653***	36	.980	.029 [.020-.056]	M _{A2} -M _{B2}	1.91	8	.983	.006	-.009

Note. CFI = Comparative Fit Index; RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation and 90% confidence interval (CI); $\Delta\chi^2_{SB}$ model

comparisons are based on Satorra and Bentler's (2001) scaled difference chi-square test statistic. Model A = cross-lagged effects constrained to be equal across time; Model B = cross-lagged effects unconstrained to be equal across time (free to vary); Model A2 = random intercept cross-lagged effects constrained to be equal across time; Model B2 = random intercept cross-lagged effects unconstrained to be equal across time (free to vary).

* $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$

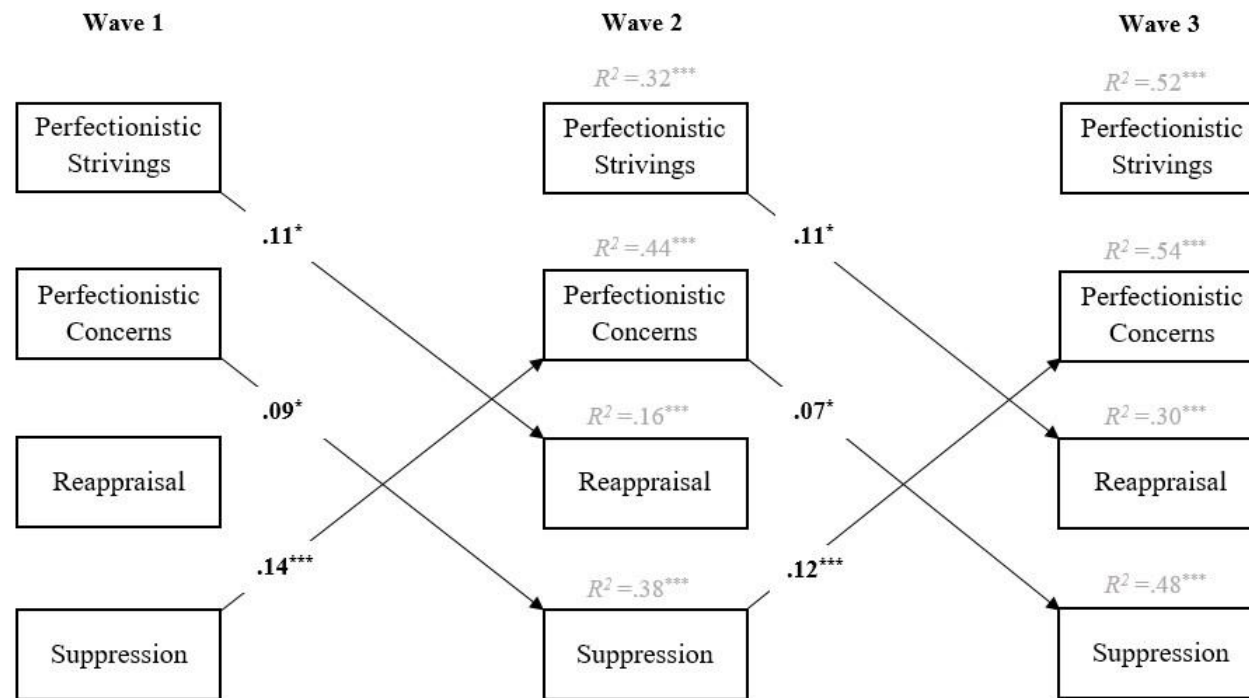


Figure 1. Significant standardized cross-lagged paths between perfectionism and emotion regulation (Model A, the time-invariant model). To reduce model complexity, only longitudinal relations that are significant ($p < .05$) are shown.

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

Table 4

Results of the Random Intercept Cross-Lagged Model

Stability paths	T1-T2		T2-T3		T1-T3
	β 95%CI	R^2	β 95%CI	R^2	β 95%CI
Perfectionistic strivings	.78*** [.73, .84]	.22***	.78*** [.73, .82]	.15***	.82*** [.77, .86]
Perfectionistic concerns	.78*** [.72, .84]	.12***	.83*** [.78, .89]	.16***	.80*** [.75, .85]
Reappraisal	.66*** [.57, .71]	.28***	.64*** [.57, .71]	.24***	.66*** [.60, .73]
Suppression	.81*** [.76, .86]	.22***	.80*** [.75, .84]	.24***	.78*** [.73, .83]
Within-Time Correlations	T1	T2	T3		
PS ↔ PC	.50*** [.34, .65]	.50*** [.37, .62]	.51*** [.38, .65]		
PS ↔ REA	.18* [.01, .35]	.16* [.02, .31]	.20** [.02, .38]		
PS ↔ SUP	.24*** [.07, .42]	.19*** [.04, .35]	.21*** [.05, .37]		
PC ↔ REA	.16 [−.04, .37]	.05 [−.11, .20]	.05 [−.10, .19]		
PC ↔ SUP	.16 [−.06, .37]	.29*** [.15, .43]	.25*** [.14, .37]		
REA ↔ SUP	.16* [.01, .31]	.20*** [.08, .30]	.20*** [.07, .33]		

Cross-lagged paths	T1 → T2	T2 → T3
PS → REA	-.03 [-.21, .15]	-.04 [-.23, .16]
PS → SUP	-.11 [-.28, .05]	-.11 [-.28, .06]
PC → REA	-.01 [-.22, .22]	-.01 [-.19, .18]
PC → SUP	.08 [-.13, .29]	.07 [-.10, .23]
REA → PS	.00 [-.15, .16]	.00 [-.18, .19]
REA → PC	-.04 [-.22, .14]	-.03 [-.20, .13]
SUP → PS	.01 [-.15, .17]	.02 [-.17, .21]
SUP → PC	.03 [-.14, .21]	.03 [-.13, .19]

Note. $N = 454$. PS = perfectionistic strivings, PC = perfectionistic concerns, REA = reappraisal, SUP = suppression; β 95% CI = estimate confidence interval, R^2 = effect size benchmarks; T1 = Time 1; T2 = Time 2; T3 = Time 3. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

3.3. Study 3: Perfectionism and Mindfulness in Adolescence: A three-wave longitudinal study³

Abstract

Objective. Adolescence is characterized by heightened emotional sensitivity and increasing self-evaluative pressures, making self-regulatory traits such as mindfulness and perfectionism particularly relevant. Although previous studies suggest that mindfulness is negatively related to maladaptive aspects of perfectionism, most research has relied on cross-sectional or unidirectional approaches. Accordingly, the aim of the present study was to examine the bidirectional longitudinal associations between trait mindfulness and perfectionism during adolescence.

Method. To assess reciprocal associations between mindfulness and perfectionism over time, a three-wave longitudinal design was employed. The sample consisted of 454 adolescents (69% girls) aged 10–18 years, and data was collected over the course of three semesters (approximately one year).

Results. Cross-lagged analyses revealed distinct directional relationships between mindfulness and perfectionism. Higher levels of perfectionistic strivings predicted subsequent increases in mindfulness, whereas higher mindfulness predicted decreases in perfectionistic concerns over time. No evidence was found for effects in the opposite direction.

Conclusions. These findings indicate that mindfulness and perfectionism are linked through complementary self-regulatory processes during adolescence. Mindfulness appears to function as

³ Study 3 manuscript in preparation for publication.

a protective self-regulatory disposition that reduces maladaptive self-evaluative tendencies, while achievement-oriented strivings may contribute to the development of mindful awareness.

The present study

Existing evidence suggests that the relation between mindfulness and perfectionism in adolescence is complex and dimension-specific. Perfectionistic concerns, which consistently emerge as a vulnerability factor, was associated with lower dispositional and momentary mindfulness, heightened rumination, and greater emotional distress, whereas perfectionistic strivings showed weaker, more context-dependent relations with mindfulness and may, in some cases, be linked to adaptive socio-cognitive aspects of mindful engagement (Short & Mazmanian, 2013; Lamarre & Marcotte, 2021). Moreover, findings from longitudinal, daily diary, and intervention studies suggest that mindfulness may play a regulatory role in shaping the emotional consequences and developmental trajectories of perfectionistic tendencies over time (e.g., Tobin & Dunkley, 2021; Tobin & Dunkley, 2025; Zhou et al., 2023).

Despite growing evidence linking mindfulness and perfectionism in adolescence, developmental research examining their reciprocal relations remains scarce. This gap is particularly important given that adolescence represents a period of ongoing consolidation of self-regulatory capacities and personality characteristics. Consequently, the present study aims to enhance the existing literature on adolescents by investigating the bidirectional relation between perfectionism and mindfulness with a longitudinal design with three waves.

Method, Results and Conclusions

Three subscales from the Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (FMPS; Frost et al., 1990) were used to measure **perfectionism** and, the Cognitive and Affective Mindfulness

Scale-Revised (CAMS-R; Feldman et al., 2007) to measure **mindfulness**.

We performed cross-lagged panel analyses using Mplus 8.4 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998, 2017) with MLR estimator to examine the longterm relationships between perfectionism and mindfulness. Figure 1 illustrates the significant cross-lagged paths. The findings indicated positive longitudinal unidirectional link between perfectionistic strivings and mindfulness. A negative unidirectional longitudinal effect was observed from mindfulness to perfectionistic concerns.

The present study offers a novel developmental perspective on the interplay between mindfulness and perfectionism during adolescence. By using a bidirectional longitudinal design, this research is among the first to demonstrate that perfectionistic strivings prospectively predict increases in mindfulness, whereas mindfulness prospectively predicts decreases in perfectionistic concerns. Rather than reflecting a single reciprocal loop, these findings point to distinct directional processes through which adaptive and maladaptive dimensions of perfectionism relate to mindfulness. Importantly, these results underscore the need to differentiate between perfectionism dimensions and indicate that mindfulness-based interventions may be particularly effective for adolescents experiencing elevated perfectionistic concerns, while also highlighting the value of supporting mindful awareness among high-striving youth to promote flexible and adaptive goal engagement.

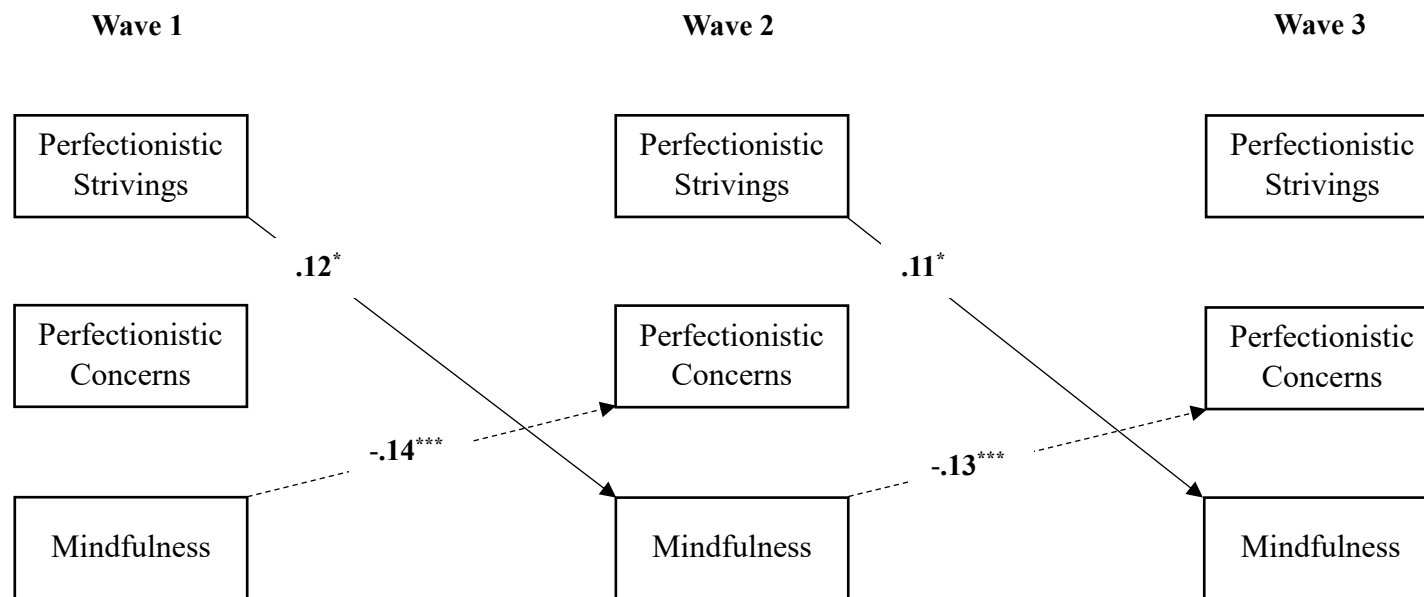


Figure 1. Significant standardized cross-lagged paths between perfectionism and mindfulness (Model A, the time-invariant model).

To reduce model complexity, only longitudinal relations that are significant ($p < .05$) are shown.

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

3.4. Study 4: Is there too much school engagement? A longitudinal study on the bidirectional relations between school engagement and perfectionistic self-presentation in adolescents⁴

Abstract

Over the past decade there has been an increase in studies of adolescents' school engagement. However, fewer studies have focused on the relation between school engagement and adolescents' perfectionistic characteristics. The present four-wave longitudinal study investigates the bidirectional relations between school engagement and perfectionistic self-presentation (as an individual characteristic) in a sample of 744 adolescents ($M_{\text{age}} = 15.2$ years, $SD = 1.9$; 11-19 years). Cross-lagged analyses showed that behavioral engagement predicted relative decreases in adolescents' use of perfectionistic self-promotion and nondisclosure of imperfection strategies. In contrast, cognitive engagement predicted relative increases in adolescents' use of perfectionistic self-promotion, nondisplay of imperfection, and nondisclosure of imperfection strategies. Implications of the findings for the outcomes of school engagement are discussed.

Keywords: school engagement; perfectionistic self-presentation; adolescents; longitudinal analyses.

⁴ Study 4 was published as an original study: Vois, D., Damian-Ilea, L., & Negru-Subtirica, O. (2025). Is there too much school engagement? A longitudinal study on the bidirectional relations between school engagement and perfectionistic self-presentation in adolescents. *Educational Psychology*, 45, 1134-1154.

The Present Study

The increasing importance of being accepted or belonging to a social network in this critical developmental period makes adolescents more sensitive to social pressure. In school contexts where perfect grades and competitive individualism are encouraged, students might be triggered to use self-presentation strategies to develop or maintain a perfect image of themselves. Therefore, this would make them more vulnerable to use perfectionistic self-presentation strategies.

From a theoretical perspective, aside from contextual factors, student characteristics and school engagement could influence each other over time. The current empirical background on the relation between school engagement and perfectionistic personality characteristics suggests that they are closely linked (Damian et al., 2017a; Shih, 2011, 2012). However, these findings are rather mixed. Specifically, cognitive engagement was linked to both perfectionistic strivings (i.e., ambivalent perfectionistic characteristic) and perfectionistic concerns (i.e., maladaptive perfectionistic characteristics). Moreover, school satisfaction (i.e., closely related to emotional engagement in school) was a strong positive predictor of perfectionistic strivings and negative predictor of perfectionistic concerns (Stricker et al., 2019). Considering perfectionistic self-presentation as a maladaptive strategy closely related to perfectionistic characteristics, it may be that it plays a negative role in students' engagement in school.

Notwithstanding the valuable contributions that the aforementioned studies bring to the current literature, there are still some limitations that need to be addressed. Specifically, most of these studies were either cross-sectional or longitudinal focusing only on the unidirectional relations between students' characteristics and school engagement. Furthermore, most of the studies were focused on students' characteristics or perfectionistic characteristics and not on

perfectionistic self-presentation. Considering that situational demands can trigger the use of self-presentation strategies and that school is a relevant demanding context, the present study aims to expand the current literature on the longitudinal bidirectional relations between school engagement and perfectionistic self-presentation.

Consequently, the current study is the first to explore the longitudinal relations between school engagement and perfectionistic self-presentation in adolescents. Because there is no previous study investigating these constructs, our approach was mostly exploratory. However, based on the current theoretical and empirical background presented above, we expected to find bidirectional relations between school engagement and perfectionistic self-presentation.

Method, Results and Conclusions

Measures: School Engagement Measure–MacArthur (SEM–MacArthur; Fredricks et al., 2004) comprising behavioral engagement, emotional engagement and cognitive engagement; **Perfectionistic Self-presentation Scale–Junior Form** (Hewitt, Blasberg, et al., 2011) comprising perfectionistic self-promotion, nondisplay of imperfection and nondisclosure of imperfection.

The significant crossed-lagged effects are presented in Figure 1. When interpreting effect sizes, please note that, according to Orth et al. (2022), cross-lagged effect sizes should be interpreted as follows: small effect: $\beta = .03$, medium effect: $\beta = .07$, large effect: $\beta = .12$. Results of cross-lagged panel model analyses showed longitudinal unidirectional effects from school engagement to perfectionistic self-presentation. Longitudinal unidirectional negative effects were found from behavioral engagement to perfectionistic self-promotion (small effect) and nondisclosure of imperfections (medium effect). Also, longitudinal unidirectional positive effects

were found from cognitive engagement to perfectionistic self-promotion (small effect), nondisplay of imperfections (small effect), and nondisclosure of imperfections (medium effect).

The present study brings a new perspective on how school engagement influences adolescent's use of perfectionistic self-presentation strategies. It is the first longitudinal study showing significant effects of behavioral and cognitive engagement on perfectionistic self-promotion, nondisplay of imperfections and nondisclosure of imperfections. So far, most studies have focused more on the positive outcomes of school engagement. The present study is the first to show that perfectionistic self-presentation strategies (i.e., maladaptive strategies) are a both a negative and positive outcomes of school engagement. Specifically, behavioral engagement predicted decreases in perfectionistic self-promotion and in nondisclosure of imperfection strategies. Contrary, cognitive engagement predicted increases in perfectionistic self-promotion, nondisplay of imperfection and nondisclosure of imperfection. This means that adolescent students who are more compliant (i.e., conform to school rules and norms), disciplined and honest tend to use fewer perfectionistic self-presentation strategies to promote a perfect image of themselves and hide their flaws. Whereas adolescent students who put more mental effort in understanding school subjects tend to use more perfectionistic self-presentation strategies to promote a perfect image of themselves and hide their flaws. Consequently, the present study makes a significant contribution to the literature being the first longitudinal study to show that behavioral and cognitive engagement represent positive and negative factors in the development of perfectionistic self-presentation strategies in adolescence.

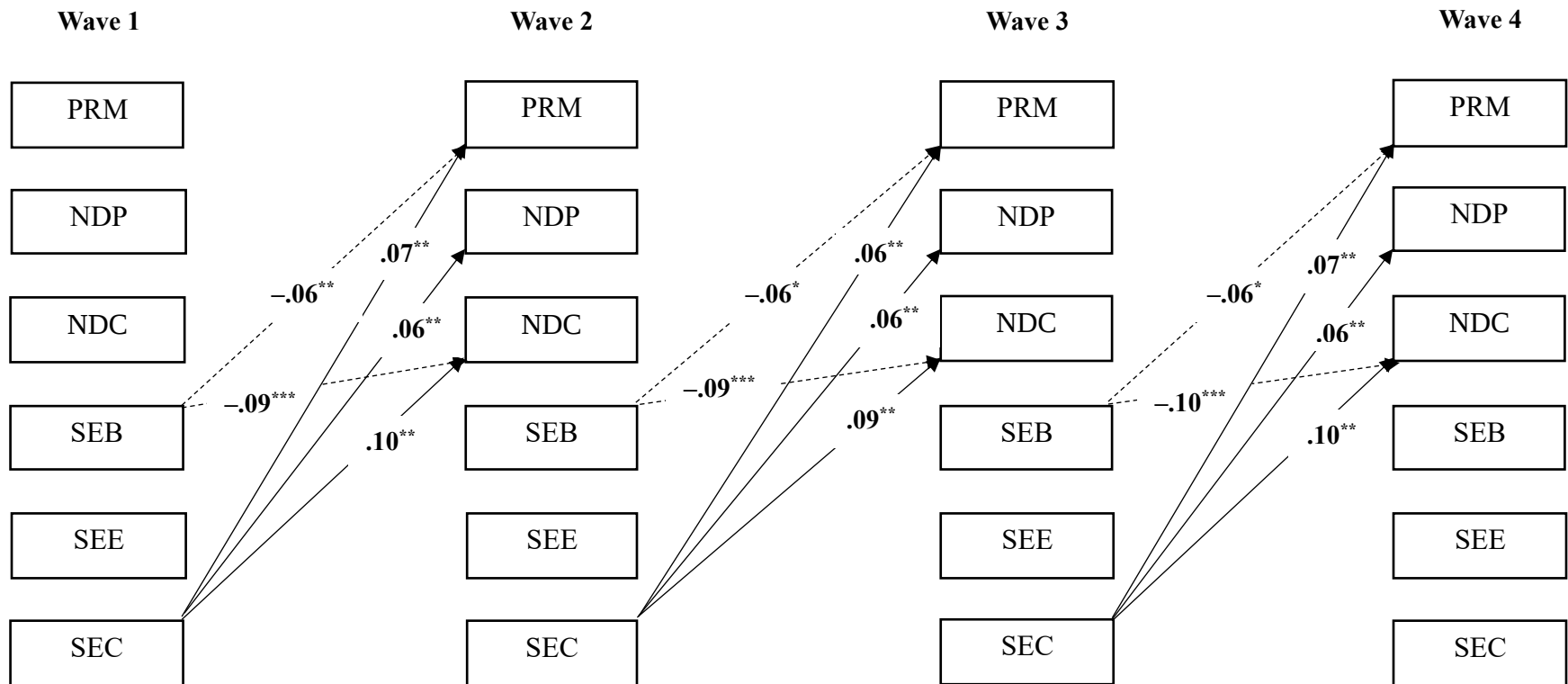


Figure 1. Significant standardized cross-lagged paths between perfectionistic self-presentation and school engagement (Model A, the time-invariant model). PRM = perfectionistic self-promotion, NDP = nondisplay of imperfections, NDC = nondisclosure of imperfections, SEB = behavioural engagement, SEE = emotional engagement, SEC = cognitive engagement. Plain arrows = positive effects; dotted arrows = negative effects.

CHAPTER IV. GENERAL DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

4.1. Theoretical Contributions

Perfectionism is a multidimensional construct that shows strong relations with self-regulation and emotional functioning. In this thesis, a longitudinal and multidimensional approach was adopted to study the development of different aspects of perfectionism (intrapersonal and interpersonal) and their relations with self-regulatory and emotional processes over time. This thesis thus contributes to understanding how perfectionism relates to coping, emotion regulation, trait mindfulness, and school engagement during adolescence.

Instead of limiting perfectionism and self-regulation to unidirectional models, we reviewed evidence and theoretical perspectives focused on the bidirectional and transactional process between perfectionism and self-regulation. This includes the reciprocal relations between perfectionistic concerns and maladaptive strategies such as emotion suppression and the role of mindfulness in reducing perfectionistic concerns. Further, we looked at the role of perfectionism as both a precursor and consequence of continuing processes such as the interplay of personality and self-regulation strategies within this developmental period.

Studies	Key results and conclusions
Study 1. Vois, D., Damian-Ilea, L. & Negru-Subtirica, O. (2026): <i>A short prospective study on multidimensional perfectionism and coping in adolescents</i> (manuscript accepted for publication in <i>Cognition, Brain, Behavior. An Interdisciplinary Journal</i>)	• The results from Study 1 extend perfectionism and coping literature in adolescence by applying a multidimensional developmental approach. • Cross-sectional analyses showed that self-oriented perfectionism was associated with engagement-oriented strategies, while socially prescribed and other-oriented perfectionism were associated with emotion-focused and disengagement-oriented strategies. • Other-oriented perfectionism uniquely predicted increases in behavioral disengagement over time, whereas no short-term changes in coping strategies were observed for the other two dimensions. This could indicate that adolescents who expect others to be flawless tend to give up, pull away or disengage when they don't meet their excessively high standards or interpersonal situations become uncomfortable. • The current study brings substantial contribution to literature as it is the first to show a significant association between other-oriented perfectionism and coping strategies in adolescents.
Study 2. Vois, D., Damian-Ilea, L. & Negru-Subtirica, O. (2026): <i>Perfectionism and Emotion Regulation over Time: A Three-Wave Study of Reciprocal Associations in Adolescents</i> (manuscript under review)	• Study 2 is the first to examine the bidirectional relationship between perfectionism and emotion regulation strategies across three time points among adolescents. • The between-persons level results demonstrated a unidirectional longitudinal relationship between perfectionistic strivings and reappraisal. This suggests that adolescents who set high performance standards may rely on cognitive reframing as a strategy to manage emotional experiences. • The between-persons level results demonstrated bidirectional relationship between perfectionistic concerns and suppression. This reflects a cycle in which adolescents who suppress their emotions become increasingly focused on avoiding mistakes, while heightened concerns about mistakes further promote emotional inhibition. • Although within-person results were not significant, the current study brings a substantial contribution to literature as it is the first to examine the longitudinal interplay between perfectionism and emotion regulation in adolescence.

Study 3. Vois, D., Damian-Ilea, L. & Negru-Subtirica, O. (2026): <i>Perfectionism and Mindfulness in Adolescence: A three-wave longitudinal study</i> (manuscript in preparation for publication)	• Study 3 advances the literature by integrating mindfulness into the study of perfectionism as a core self-regulatory disposition and by examining their interplay during adolescence using a three-wave longitudinal design. • Results showed that perfectionistic strivings predicted increases in mindfulness which could mean that adolescents who set very high standards for themselves may become more attentive and aware of their thoughts and experiences over time. • Results showed that mindfulness predicted decreases in perfectionistic concerns which could mean that adolescents who are more mindful may become less self-critical and less preoccupied with mistakes over time. • The current study brings a substantial contribution to literature as it is the first to examine the longitudinal interplay between perfectionism mindfulness in adolescence.
Study 4. Vois, D., Damian-Ilea, L. & Negru-Subtirica, O. (2025): <i>Is there too much school engagement? A longitudinal study on the bidirectional relations between school engagement and perfectionistic self-presentation in adolescents</i>, Educational Psychology, DOI: 10.1080/01443410.2025.2551150	• Study 4 focused on the overarching developmental context of school and the interpersonal expression of perfectionism through perfectionistic self-presentation. • Results indicated that behavioral engagement predicted decreases in adolescents' use of perfectionistic self-promotion and nondisclosure of imperfection strategies. This could mean that adolescents who are more compliant and disciplined in school tend to rely less on trying to present themselves as perfect or impress others over time. • Results indicated that cognitive engagement predicted increases in adolescents' use of perfectionistic self-promotion, nondisplay of imperfection, and nondisclosure of imperfection strategies. This could mean that adolescents who are highly involved in learning and put more effort into understanding school materials may increasingly try to present a perfect or competent image to others. • These findings expand the study of school engagement, as they account for the possibility that school engagement functions as both a protective factor and a risk factor in perfectionistic development. • The present study extends the literature by demonstrating, for the first time longitudinally, that behavioral and cognitive engagement differentially contribute to the development of perfectionistic self-presentation, functioning both as protective and risk factors.

4.2 Methodological Contributions

Beyond its theoretical contributions, the present thesis offers methodological contributions to the adolescent perfectionism literature. **First**, the key strength of this thesis includes the use of longitudinal designs in all four studies undertaken. Because the current thesis adopts a longitudinal design and goes beyond mostly cross-sectional research in the perfectionism literature, it has a stronger ability to examine developmental change and the temporal ordering of perfectionism and related processes, allowing for stronger conclusions about how perfectionism develops over time. **Second**, there was a more explicit investigation of bidirectional associations as this thesis examined reciprocal relations between perfectionism and emotion regulation, mindfulness, and school engagement, instead of solely the unidirectional effects of perfectionism on emotion regulation, mindfulness, and school engagement. This approach is in line with modern transactional models of development and allows for the utility of investigating the interplay of personality characteristics and self-regulatory processes across time for a more subtle investigation. **Finally**, the present thesis adopts a multidimensional approach to measuring perfectionism. Besides the higher-order dimensions of perfectionistic strivings and concerns, specific dimensions of perfectionism are assessed, including self-oriented perfectionism, socially prescribed perfectionism, other-oriented perfectionism, and perfectionistic self-presentation. A multidimensional approach helps to improve construct validity of perfectionism in general and, more specifically, to understand the role of regulatory processes and contextual variables for specific dimensions of perfectionism.

4.3 Recommendations and Practical Implications

Findings of the current thesis provide significant implications for facilitating adolescents' psychological adjustment and well-being.

- reducing maladaptive self-evaluation processes, promoting adaptive emotion regulation strategies (e.g., reappraisal), decreasing maladaptive strategies (e.g., suppression) and mindfulness-based interventions could be especially helpful for adolescents who have high perfectionistic concerns.
- teaching adolescents to set goals with a focus on learning and effort instead of on specific targets and performance may help support motivation and buffer against rigid or critical self-evaluation.
- early detection of adolescents who are at risk for becoming perfectionists, based on measures of personality dispositions (self-criticism) and problems in emotional regulation could help to prevent the consolidation of maladaptive regulatory practices and to avoid psychopathology.
- pedagogical approaches that normalize mistakes, encourage mastery goals over performance goals, or include reflection during learning may help students stay focused on cognitive tasks and reduce impression management. Creating learning environments that stress mastery or improvement over social comparisons may help adolescents shift their focus to the process of improvement rather than perfection.

4.4 Limitations and Further Directions

Despite the contributions of the present thesis, several limitations should be acknowledged. Addressing these limitations provides important directions for future research on perfectionism and self-regulation during adolescence. **First**, all studies were longitudinal (i.e., measured across multiple time points) but differed in terms of the number of waves and the length of the intervals between measurement time points. Additional longitudinal research with longer time lags and more measurement waves could consider the role of trajectories and

nonlinear processes over adolescence and emerging adulthood. **Second**, the findings highlight potential difficulties in longitudinal studies to disentangle between-person and within-person processes. Future studies should aim to investigate within-person variations in more fine-grained samples such as a daily diary study or experience sampling method, which may target short-term fluctuations in regulatory processes and their interaction with perfectionistic tendencies more accurately and sensitively than between-person studies can. **Third**, as the present thesis relied on self-report measures, it may be susceptible to shared method variance, social desirability bias, and limited introspective accuracy bias. Future studies may wish to consider multi-method approaches, such as behavioral, observational, or multi-informant approaches such as parents, teachers, or peers. **Finally**, our samples consisted entirely of Romanian adolescents, which both allowed for new perception on an under-researched cultural context, but also limited the generalizability of our findings as they related to other cultural contexts. Cultural attitudes towards achievement, failure, and social interactions may influence perfectionism and its relationship with regulatory processes; other contextual variables were not assessed. Future research using more fine-grained contextual measures and across diverse cultural settings is needed to better how environmental factors shape perfectionistic tendencies.

4.5 Concluding Remarks

Summing up, the present thesis describes a developmental and integrative conceptualization of perfectionism in adolescence in its dynamic, multidimensional, and situational character. In addition, the longitudinal relationships between perfectionism and key self-regulation processes (i.e., coping, emotion regulation, and mindfulness) and with adolescents' school engagement are described to further the understanding of perfectionism in adolescents' everyday life.

Across studies, the findings demonstrate that perfectionism is closely embedded within broader systems of self-regulation and is characterized by both reciprocal and asymmetrical associations with affective and behavioral processes. **Perfectionistic concerns** appear to be associated with maladaptive self-regulation and more consistently so than **perfectionistic strivings**. Study 2 showed a reciprocal association between **perfectionistic concerns** and **suppression**, and Study 3 showed that **mindfulness** predicted decreases in this dimension over time. In contrast, **perfectionistic strivings** were more context-dependent and complex. Study 2 and Study 3 showed that there was a unidirectional association between perfectionistic strivings and **reappraisal**, and **mindfulness**. Furthermore, a less examined dimension in adolescence (**other-oriented perfectionism**) predicted increases in **disengagement-oriented coping**. These findings underscore the importance of differentiating perfectionism dimensions and taking a developmental and transactional approach to better understand perfectionism in adolescence.

By considering the interaction of individual and contextual characteristics, the current thesis contributes to a more integrated understanding of perfectionism as a dynamic system that develops through the reciprocal transactions between adolescents and their personal and contextual environments. Furthermore, by including **perfectionistic self-presentation** and **school engagement**, the thesis situates perfectionism in the adolescent's ecology and accounts for its interplay with the wider social systems. These findings also have theoretical implications and could be used to inform future research and empirical interventions to support healthy development and psychological wellbeing.

CHAPTER V. REFERENCES

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