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**DOCTORAL SCHOOL IN APPLIED COGNITIVE PSYCHOLOGY**

**SUMMARY OF Ph.D. THESIS**  
**PERFECTIONISM IN CHILDREN AND**  
**ADOLESCENTS:**  
**RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS**

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## I. CHAPTER I: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### 1.1. The Importance Of Studying Perfectionism

Perfectionism represents one of the most significant transdiagnostic vulnerability factors for the wellbeing and interpersonal adjustment of individuals (Egan et al., 2011; Hewitt et al., 2017; Stoeber et al., 2021), even in children (Hewitt et al., 2002; Affrunti & Woodruff-Borden, 2014; Flett et al., 2016). It is most commonly defined as a tendency of setting excessively high standards, having high aversion to mistakes and imperfections and having overly critical evaluations of the self, performance or others (Frost et al., 1990; Hewitt & Flett, 1991). Recent theory and research (e.g. Hewitt et al., 2017; Flett & Hewitt, 2020; Gaudreau, 2019; Wade, 2017) clarified that perfectionism goes beyond the setting of high standards and striving for excellence to a more maladaptive requirement, or “must” for perfection. The present thesis is concerned with the development of perfectionism; consequently, the discussion here will only focus on perfectionism and not on striving for excellence.

Research suggests a trend of increasing perfectionism for recent generations of young people (Curran & Hill, 2019; Curran & Hill, 2022), concurrently with a rise in mental health concerns (Cosma et al., 2020; Dzielska et al., 2020; Twenge et al., 2019), and school pressure (Cosma et al., 2020) for children and adolescents. Considering these findings, one can argue that perfectionism should not be seen as an inherent personality trait but a learned cognitive and behavioral pattern throughout one’s development shaped by context. The societal pressures may shape the family and school contexts of children and adolescents toward encouraging perfectionism. An investigation in childhood and adolescence accounting for contextual risk and protective factors contributing to perfectionism may inform prevention and early intervention efforts that could sustain the well-being and healthy development of young people.

Perfectionism is inherently relational, with developmental, cognitive (e.g., fear of rejection), and behavioral (e.g., hiding mistakes) aspects (Hewitt et al., 2017). However, the majority of longitudinal studies focus on individual-level factors, with limited attention to protective influences (Damian et al., 2022). The present thesis attempts to fill some of these gaps and contribute to a more contextualized, dynamic, ecologically valid understanding of perfectionism development.

## 1.2. Perfectionism Conceptualisations

Perfectionism is best conceptualized by the most influential models of multidimensional perfectionism used in children and adolescent research detailed below.

**Frost et al. (1990) model of perfectionism** defines it through the following core facets: **personal standards** (i.e., the setting of excessively high standards, **concerns over mistakes** (i.e., preoccupation for avoiding mistakes), **doubts about actions** (i.e., uncertainty over one's actions and beliefs)(e.g., Damian et al., 2013; Wadsworth et al., 2021).

**Hewitt and Flett's (1991) model of perfectionism** defines it as comprised of both intrapersonal and interpersonal aspects: **self-oriented perfectionism** (i.e., requiring perfection from the self and harsh evaluations of the self), **other-oriented perfectionism** (i.e., requiring perfection from others and harsh evaluations of others), and **socially prescribed perfectionism** (i.e., perceptions or beliefs of being required to be perfect by others).

**Slaney et al. (2001) model of perfectionism** defines it as comprised of three dimensions: **high standards** (i.e., striving for excellence), **discrepancy** (i.e., a perceived gap between the present self and the perfect, idealized self), **organization**. According to research, however, one can remove organization from the model (Stoeber, 2018) and the high standards component which is more similar to an indicator of striving for excellence than an indicator of perfectionism (Gaudreau, 2019).

Finally, **Stoeber et al. (2004) and Stoeber and Rambow (2007)** propose a **model of multidimensional perfectionism** in sport and school, differentiating **striving for perfection** (i.e., wanting and striving to be as perfect as possible) and **negative reactions to imperfections** (i.e., having reactions of distress at oneself imperfection and mistakes). All the models presented above bring attention to important and distinct elements of perfectionism. However, a simpler and more streamlined conceptual framework can effectively guide the investigation of how perfectionism develops at younger ages. Factor-analytic studies on perfectionism's structure (Cox et al., 2002; Frost et al., 1993) point to two overarching dimensions of perfectionism, namely **personal standards perfectionism or perfectionistic strivings** (expressed through strivings and high standards) and **evaluative concerns perfectionism or perfectionistic concerns** (expressed through concerns, criticism, socially prescribed pressures, and negative reactions to imperfection). Also, factorial analyses suggest a more accurate representation of perfectionism in children can be achieved by combining elements from multiple models (Sironic & Reeve, 2015). Integrating multiple models could provide a more comprehensive understanding of perfectionism in younger populations. For these reasons, we included multiple models in the conceptualization of perfectionism, as we consider the bidimensional approach in our investigations, without overlooking potential particularities of specific facets of children's perfectionism within their everyday context.

### **1.3. Perfectionism Development**

#### ***1.3.1. Developmental Considerations For Understanding Perfectionism Development***

The seminal work of Hewitt et al. (2017) suggests that perfectionism often takes root early in development, with insecure attachment emerging as a significant risk factor (Hewitt et al., 2017). The Perfectionism Social Disconnection Model (PSDM) further highlights how children with insecure attachment styles may become increasingly sensitive to interpersonal

cues and external evaluations, particularly in contexts involving close relationships and performance expectations (Hewitt et al., 2017). However, since attachment can evolve over time, various developmental influences throughout childhood and adolescence can also shape the emergence and maintenance of perfectionism. Pressures from significant relationships, as well as the expectations and judgments of others, play a crucial role in the formation of perfectionism as children grow and engage with the world. Developmental perspectives emphasize that as children mature, they become more attuned to how others perceive them, with middle childhood and adolescence representing particularly vulnerable periods for the internalization of perfectionistic standards (Harter, 2006; Crone, 2024; van der Aar et al., 2018). Thus, two key stages of development emerge as particularly vulnerable when it comes to perfectionism development: middle childhood and adolescence.

Perfectionism can only be built upon normative **self-concept development** – knowledge and beliefs about the self. Within self-concept development, children need to develop clearly defined beliefs about the self (**self-concept clarity**), and the ability to self-evaluate (**self-evaluation**) and estimate qualities about oneself (**self-appraisal**). Furthermore, not only do children need to be self-aware (**self-awareness**), and attentive (**self-consciousness**, leading to **self-conscious emotions** such as embarrassment, shame, pride, or guilt), but they also need to be aware of the perceived opinions (knowledge and beliefs) of others about the self (**reflected self-concept**). Finally, perfectionism involves an important aspect of self-concept development – **self-esteem** (i.e., how children evaluate their **self-worth** or value as a person; Crone, 2022). For children to perceive that others expect them to be perfect, they need to be able to separate how they see themselves versus how others see them (**perspective taking**). Also, children need to be able to observe the discrepancy between the real and the prescribed ideal self and start integrating feedback from the outside world into the way they see themselves and their performance to develop both perfectionistic strivings and to integrate a



prescribed need for being "perfect" which require advances in **social comparison**, **self-memory systems** and **metacognition**.

### 1.3.1.1. Developmental considerations in middle to late childhood

Multiple milestones in middle to late childhood (8 to 10 years) indicate that children start acquiring several abilities that support striving for perfection and making negative evaluations of the self and one's self-worth. This period represents a critical point in self-concept and self-evaluation development, which is possible in relation to new acquisitions in the self-memory system, mentalization and theory of mind, perspective taking, social comparison, the social self, supported by neurodevelopmental changes that occur through middle childhood (Crone et al., 2022; Crone & van Drunen, 2024; Pfeifer & Peake, 2012). Middle childhood represents a beginning point for the development of perfectionism, as children begin to be able to **integrate the perspective of others onto their self-concept**, perceive salient others' expectations and high standards, and they can start having **negative evaluations of the self** and their performance in **comparison** to others (Pfeifer & Peake, 2012). Also, neuroscience research on self-concept points out that self-evaluations are inherently social; at a biological level, we construct an image of ourselves based on **reflected appraisals** by others (Crone, 2024). This aligns with the PSDM (Hewitt et al., 2017) asserting that perfectionism development is fundamentally relational. As critical abilities develop and positive bias in self-concept reduces, children can start exhibiting perfectionistic tendencies and struggle with perfectionism as they navigate building their self-concept and appraisals, in evaluative and even pressure-inducing contexts. Although perfectionism has previously been investigated in children, very little research has looked into perfectionism over time for children younger than 12 years old. Furthermore, little is known about the emergence of perfectionism and how it is represented in this crucial developmental transition.

*Academic context in middle childhood.*

Another critical element in middle childhood refers to the transition to school, requirement of increased engagement in academic tasks (e.g. increasing amount of homework), and exposure to evaluations. Perfectionism tends to thrive in academic and performance contexts (Hill et al., 2018; Rice et al., 2015), given the highly evaluative nature of this context. Adding to this, the Romanian school context tends to be overly focused on performance and grades (Negru-Subtirica, 2024). Furthermore, there is an alarming disparity between pressures for high achievement, a large number of Olympics and laureates of national and international school competitions and contests, and at the opposite end, increased drop-out rates (Balaceanu et al., 2020; Mirica et al., 2023). Currently, in Romania, children already go through graded National Evaluation exams in grades II and IV (Parlamentul României, 2011; Ministerul Educației, 2024). While they are intended to have a formative role and inform teachers in developing individual learning programs, identifying knowledge gaps, and implementing remedial plans, the focus of performance evaluation may impact children's academic self-concept and emerging perfectionism in currently unknown ways. Considering this, perfectionism should be investigated in children as soon as they enter school and begin to be immersed in a highly evaluative environment within the broader societal context.

### **1.3.1.2. Developmental considerations in adolescence**

Adolescence is another pivotal period in the development and maintenance of perfectionism. Building upon early developments during middle childhood, adolescence (10-19 years old) continues to further advancements in **self-concept development** (Crone et al., 2022; Crone & van Drunen, 2024), which can provide a fertile ground for striving for perfection and the making of negative evaluations of the self and one's self-worth.

Adolescents may be biologically wired to construct the self as an adaptation to the social environment (e.g. social relations with family, friends, school and others; Casey et al., 2025).

This developmental stage involves particular cognitive **advancements in perspective-taking** (Gilman et al., 2014) and **heightened sensitivity to social comparison, social reward, peers, and threats** that facilitate greater reactivity and adaptation to the expanding social environment of adolescence (Casey et al., 2025), which may foster perfectionism development. It also includes **heightened levels of self-consciousness** (Pfeifer & Peake, 2012). Adolescents seem to experience a dip in their self-appraisals in mid-adolescence (Van der arsen et al., 2018) and recover in late adolescence (van der Crujsen et al., 2023). Research on adolescent perfectionism development also noticed significant changes in perfectionism from early to late adolescence, with perfectionism peaking at around 15 years of age (Leone & Wade, 2018). Consequently, these results suggest a **heightened sensitivity** for developing the self to relational contexts, which, given the conditions, may elevate the impact of relationships on perfectionism development. Additionally, **peers and peer connection** becomes increasingly important (Allen, 2024), their presence being enough in adolescence to influence cognition and behavior (Casey et al., 2025). Given this heightened social sensitivity, negative experiences—such as peer rejection, criticism, or toxic school environments—can significantly impact adolescent perfectionism. In light of this, external influences become increasingly important when considering the development of overly critical self-evaluations, internalized excessive standards, socially prescribed perfectionism, and low self-esteem. Considering this, adolescence could be a pivotal period of prevention and intervention to alleviate perfectionistic tendencies and related difficulties and create circumstances that foster a healthy development of the self.

### ***1.3.2. Theoretical Considerations For Understanding Perfectionism Development Within The Relational Context***

In investigating perfectionism development in children, one must also consider how perfectionism is defined from an etiological perspective arguing why may someone become

perfectionistic. Hewitt et al. (2017) suggested a relational model of perfectionism that comes as an expansion to previous theory (see Flett et al., 2002). The perfectionism social disconnection model (Hewitt et al., 2017), informed by attachment theory (Thompson, 2021; Groth et al., 2025), views perfectionism as a personality trait developed in relationships as the child develops their view of the self, others, and the world.

Firstly, the theory suggests that attachment plays a pivotal role in the *development of perfectionism*. Children learn that in order to attain love, safety, acceptance and protect themselves from rejection, criticism or abandonment must be perfect, or appear perfect. However, this attempt to attain these needs of connection via perfectionism is maladaptive as perfection is in reality unattainable, and it ends up being a battle set for failure, which self-sustains a cycle of disconnection and perfectionism (Hewitt et al., 2017).

Secondly, the model proposes a reciprocal process inside relationships, where experiences of disconnection and aloneness shape perfectionism and perfectionism subsequently shape relationships (Hewitt et al., 2017). Thus, a second component of the model addresses ***the social disconnection of perfectionism*** and its role in furthering a vicious cycle of perfectionism and disconnection within relationships. More specifically, PSDM argues that perfectionism can contribute to objective or subjective social connection failure, which further alters the relationships of the perfectionistic individual. Perfectionistic tendencies previously developed in the relationship context may subsequently guide perceptions, as well as specific patterns of behaviors within relationships, leading to a cycle of increasing perfectionism and disconnection. Theory suggests socially prescribed perfectionism to be more prone to this dynamic through high interpersonal sensitivity, leading to more maladaptive appraisals of relationships and feelings of social disconnection (Hewitt et al., 2017). Empirical research supports the link between perfectionism and interpersonal sensitivity (Visvalingam et al., 2024). Evidence found that socially prescribed perfectionism

was associated with social hopelessness in children and adolescent outpatients (Roxborough et al., 2012). Additionally, perfectionistic tendencies may contribute to interpersonal hostility, increasing negative interactions and hindering relationships. Correlational analyses indicated that socially prescribed perfectionism was associated with self-concealment (i.e., a lack of willingness to discuss issues with family and friends) in adolescents (Abdollahi et al., 2017). Even though parents and significant others play an important role in the development of perfectionism, not all children with attachment insecurity and who are exposed to perfectionism-prone parenting will develop perfectionism. Individual factors predispose the child to react in different ways to external pressures: they may internalize or reject external pressures (Flett et al., 2002). Furthermore, perfectionism seems to have a significant genetic component (30% heritability) on average. Thus, individual genetic factors expressed in child tendencies might explain differences in the adoption of perfectionism as a strategy, particularly when looking at the perfectionistic strivings facet, which seems to be less related to parental behaviors, but predicted by parental perfectionism (e.g., Appleton & Hill, 2010). Additionally, when considering a potential genetic component we must consider temperamental traits. While research suggests that temperamental traits, such low novelty seeking, high reward dependence, high persistence, high harm avoidance, negative affects contribute to perfectionism development (e.g., Affrunti et al., 2016; 2017; Fletcher et al., 2023; Kobori et al., 2005), the present paper focuses on understanding malleable family and school factors involved in perfectionism development that can be involved in targeted approaches to mitigate perfectionistic tendencies.

The PSDM is in accordance with the family systems theory (Rasmussen & Troilo, 2016) which emphasizes the interdependence of family members and the mutual influence they exert on one another's emotions and behaviors. Consequently, an individual's perfectionistic behaviors and attitudes may contribute to changes in the other. Thus, parents' behaviors and

perfectionism may contribute to changes in the child and parents' attitudes, behaviors and even parents' perfectionism may also be shaped by their relationship with their child. Considering this proposed dynamic, a strained relationship with their child or perceived disconnection from them, may contribute to heightened pressure for the parent to strive to meet perceived relational or parenting expectations, which can also increase their parenting behaviors.

To explore how perfectionism manifests and develops in children and adolescents, it is fundamental to account for the relational context, more specifically, to investigate the role parents and family relationships play in contributing to changes in children's perfectionism. Furthermore, perfectionism as a characteristic may influence how individuals perceive their relationships and how one acts inside relationships. Still, research exploring the contribution of perfectionism on the subsequent caregiver-child relationship is very limited. Most research exploring the role of perfectionism inside relationships focused on couples (Flett et al., 2001; Haring et al., 2003; Sherry et al., 2014). Thus, little is known whether perfectionism in children and adolescents and in their parents hinders the parent-child relationship subjectively or objectively, thus contributing to a cycle of disconnection. Understanding the role of perfectionism as it develops and the dynamic within the family can provide valuable insights for addressing relational dynamics, promoting well-being, and creating healthier family systems.

### ***1.3.3. The Role Of Parenting In Perfectionism Development***

Parents are an important contributing element to the parent-child and family relational climate. They also engage in directed action for their child's social, emotional, and cognitive development through parental socialization practices (Bornstein et al., 2019). Parents are tasked with doing their best in raising their children and responding to their everchanging

physical, cognitive, and socio-emotional needs as children go through each stage of development (Kobak et al., 2018).

During middle childhood and adolescence, they play a crucial role in fostering the increasing development of the autonomous self while providing necessary support. During these stages, effective parenting requires recalibrating boundaries—offering guidance without overcontrol, balancing warmth with autonomy promotion, and ensuring that developmental needs are met within a structured yet flexible family environment (Teuber et al., 2022). Self-determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) offers a framework regarding three fundamental psychological developmental needs within the parent-child relationship: **the need for autonomy** (i.e., psychological freedom, authenticity, and ownership of one's behaviors and choices), **the need for competence** (i.e., a sense of self-efficacy, satisfaction and being able to deal with challenges), **and the need for relatedness** (i.e., needing to feel loved and appreciated).

Parents can support these needs by providing autonomy support (i.e., acknowledgment of adolescent's perspective, encouragement of initiative, provision of choice, and formulation of relevant rationale), providing structure (i.e., clear expectations, help and assistance, and positive, process-oriented feedback), and providing warm, supportive, and sensitive parenting. However, parental support for these needs requires adapting to middle childhood and adolescence developmental changes.

Notably, **in the middle to late childhood**, parenting begins to shift to using explanations and reasoning to help children understand the consequences of their actions, feedback and praise (Lansford et al, 2013; Vrantidis et al., 2024). The extensive use of reasoning as a parent socialization strategy was also observed in studies on Romanian mother-toddler dyads (Benga et al., 2019; Corapci et al., 2018). In this context, a perfectionistic parent may infuse their reasoning with their own perfectionistic beliefs and concerns, holding a perfectionistic lens onto children's actions. In their socialization practices parents can start employing

children's new abilities of internalizing expectations, better inhibitory control, self-consciousness, perspective taking, and mentalization (Crone & van Drunen, 2024; van Drunen et al., 2021).

**In adolescence**, parents are required to adapt to more emotional instability and sensitivity to social rewards and rejections (Crone et al., 2022), peer connections becoming increasingly important, and their children going to friends for support and advice (Allen, 2024), thereby facing a normative distancing between the parent and their child. However, parents need to navigate and negotiate this increasing autonomy of their child while maintaining connectedness and a secure relationship with their adolescent (Oudekerk et al., 2015).

Navigating these changes, parents are inevitably facing societal messages and pressure regarding parenting and themselves (Curran & Hill, 2022); they are fighting their own battles (Aunola et al., 2016) and come with their characteristics (Carmo et al., 2021; Sergin et al., 2020) shaping their parenting decisions and actions. Also, modern parents are expected to excel in both their professional and parenting roles and be defined by their success or failure in these impossible tasks (Meeussen & Van Laar, 2018). This can lead to parental burnout (Lin et al., 2021). Consequently, parents may exert strategies of over-control and involvement that may hinder their children's authentic needs. Accordingly, they may contribute to a healthy and strong self-concept development (van Houtum et al., 2022) or contribute to vulnerability for perfectionism development. The whole context may contribute to more struggle, especially for parents with perfectionism, which in turn may foster perfectionism in their children.

### **1.3.3.1. Perfectionism in parents**

Research suggests that perfectionism in parents is linked to perfectionism in their children (Appleton et al., 2010; Smith et al., 2017; Soenens et al., 2005). This connection between perfectionism in parents and their children/adolescents can be explained through multiple



pathways. Firstly, the presence of perfectionism intergenerationally can be explained through a moderate heritability of perfectionism (Bucaş & Creţu, 2021; Iranzo-Tatay et al., 2015), with the component of perfectionistic strivings being more heritable than the perfectionistic concerns facet (Tozzi et al., 2004). Additionally, this connection can be explained through intergenerational high achievement encouraging increasing performance standards (Damian et al., 2017). Additionally, this link can be explained parental perfectionism could also be transmitted via modeling behavior (Flett et al., 2002). *The social learning model* (Flett et al., 2002) states that perfectionism may develop due to the child or adolescent's exposure, observation and imitation, of perfectionistic parents' beliefs and behaviors. This model is supported by research finding a clear association between parents' and their children's perfectionistic strivings (e.g., Appleton et al., 2010; Smith et al., 2022), completed by qualitative accounts of gifted children modelling parents' perfectionism (Speirs Neumeister et al., 2009).

Finally, the transmission of perfectionism might also happen due to perfectionistic parents employing strategies of overparenting (Mohr & Sonnentag, 2023) to cope, using controlling behaviors, anxious rearing, and intrusiveness in their parenting. These pathways will be elaborated on in the next section.

### **1.3.3.2. Parenting perfectionism**

What parents do, say, and think, seems to be extremely relevant for children and even for adolescents in their development of the self (Measelle, 1998; Van der Crujisen et al., 2019; Van Houtum et al., 2022), which renders an investigation on parents and parenting behaviors in relation to perfectionism fundamental. An overview of the current research on parental factors relating to perfectionism points to controlling parenting and anxious parenting, as well as parents' own perfectionism.

#### *1. Controlling parenting.*

Flett et al. (2002) presented two models describing perfectionism development pathways that suggest how specific forms of controlling parenting (i.e., imposing parents' expectations and excessive standards via criticism, coercitive and intrusive parenting practices meant to manipulate and direct child's thoughts, emotions, and behaviors) contribute to perfectionistic tendencies in children and adolescents. This aligns with developmental considerations of the impact expectations and parent appraisals arguably have on children and adolescents' self-appraisals and self-concept (Crone et al., 2022).

This pathway is illustrated within *the social expectations model* and *the social reaction model* of perfectionism development (Flett et al., 2002). A few longitudinal studies support the role of overcontrol on perfectionism development, noting that parental expectations predict relative increases in socially prescribed perfectionism (Damian et al., 2013), and parental pressure predicts relative increases in concerns over mistakes coupled with doubts about actions (Domocus & Damian, 2018). Relatively recently, support for this model came from two meta-analyses finding the significant effect of parental expectations and criticism on perfectionism (self-oriented perfectionism, other-oriented perfectionism, and socially prescribed perfectionism) (Curran & Hill, 2022; Smith et al., 2022). Additionally, in light of neuroscience studies emphasizing the contribution of parental appraisals on self-appraisals and self-view in children and adolescents (van Drunen et al., 2021; van Houtum et al., 2022; Pfeifer et al., 2007; 2009), evidence suggests that parental expectations and criticism contingent on perfection may likely contribute to building overly critical and negative self-appraisals and internalizing the striving for perfection.

Beyond the theoretical models described by Flett et al. (2002; 2017), various parental practices involving different forms of control, were associated with perfectionism in adolescents: over-protective parenting (i.e., a form of control fostering dependency on the parent) and harsh parenting (i.e., coercitive and punitive parental practices lacking affection)

(Enns, Cox, & Clara, 2002), authoritarian parenting (i.e., parental high demands and low responsiveness) (Hibbard & Walton, 2014; Kawamura et al., 2002), controlling parenting (intrusive control –Kenney-Benson & Pomerantz, 2005; psychological control – Soenens et al., 2008). Moreover, a specific form of control was consistently associated with perfectionism development: parental psychological control (Costa et al., 2016; Damian et al., 2022; Soenens et al., 2005; 2008a; 2008b; Smith et al., 2017). It is characterized by parental behaviors that manipulate and intrude upon children's thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and attachment to parents through guilt-inducing and love withdrawal (Barber & Harmon, 2002, p.15). The pressuring social context (Curran & Hill, 2022), the self-inflicted pressure for perfection coupled with facing increasing amounts of stress may lead to parental burnout (Meeussen & van Laar, 2018) in perfectionistic parents can further the use of controlling parenting to cope with the psychological stress (Aunola et al., 2016), their own anxiety and their children's anxiety (Yaffe, 2021), thus building a vicious cycle of perfectionistic parents fighting for a relief that never comes.

## 2. *Anxious parenting.*

Anxious parents also model avoidant or fearful responses to stressors, which are internalized and replicated by children (Bögels et al., 2001; Murray et al., 2008). This can translate further into perfectionistic concerns and fearfulness regarding mistakes and failure. In accordance with *the anxious-rearing model* (Flett et al., 2002) anxious parents who worry about mistakes and negative consequences and are preoccupied with avoiding anxiety-provoking situations may foster perfectionistic concerns in their children/adolescents. This may be particularly exacerbated for children who are temperamentally more sensitive to threat cues in the environment (Aktar et al., 2013), and if the child is guarded from mistakes or only has experiences of success early on, with failure being given a catastrophic image. Previous research found that parental accommodation of avoidance, through the provision of escape

from anxiety-evoking situations, inadvertently strengthens maladaptive coping (Rapee, 2002; Barrett et al., 2005; Yaffe, 2021), for example, avoiding challenging situations of potential imperfection. Previous evidence notes that maternal anxiety is related to socially prescribed perfectionism in children (Cook & Kearney, 2014), and anxious rearing behaviors are related to self-oriented perfectionism for clinically anxious children (Mitchell, Broeren, Newall, & Hudson, 2013). Furthermore, a longitudinal study found that anxious rearing predicts relative increases in concerns over mistakes and doubts about actions (Domocus & Damian, 2018). Considering that parents spend less and less time with their children from middle childhood through adolescence, anxious parents may struggle with this distancing and employ parental behaviors to feel safer, controlling through anxiety and dependency, preventing children and adolescents from developing autonomy and their sense of self (Soenens et al., 2019) outside of parental influence. Thus, anxious parents may contribute to their children's worry, preoccupations, and concerns – inadvertently developing their children's perfectionism and anxiety. Notably, parental anxiety and child anxiety can foster behaviors of overprotection suggesting an important bidirectionality of the process (Yaffe, 2021), perhaps even in the case of perfectionistic concerns. Furthermore, studies found parental separation anxiety in relation to their adolescent distancing from them and parental maladaptive perfectionism to foster more controlling behaviors in parents (Borelli et al., 2014; Laurin et al., 2015; Soenens et al., 2006), introducing the previously discussed mechanism of perfectionism development. When parents excessively intervene in their child's problem-solving or decision-making out of fear of failure or negative consequences, they may inadvertently transmit that mistakes are intolerable and that the child is incapable of managing challenges independently. Hong et al. (2017) found parental intrusiveness (measured as parental control and interference with the child's problem solving attempts in a laboratory task, regardless of the child's actual needs) to

be linked to increasing trajectories of both perfectionism dimensions. This parental intrusiveness may be driven by anxiety.

### *3. Parental autonomy support as a protective factor.*

Through a different lens, the previously described models can inform us on what potential positive parental behaviors could act as protective factors against the development of perfectionism and nurture optimal self-concept development, academic success and social well-being.

Firstly, if messages of contingent self-worth from parents can construct harsh self-views and an internalized pressure to be perfect, messages of unconditional acceptance could represent a protective factor. Additionally, if children or adolescents feel accepted by their families, that may alleviate their internal pressure to be perfect. One could argue this may even reduce perfectionism in time, leading to less excessive standards and fewer concerns and doubts over mistakes and failures. However, to our knowledge, no study investigated to what extent parental or family acceptance may contribute to reductions in perfectionism.

Secondly, considering the negative contributions of controlling and intrusive parenting on children's self-development and perfectionism, one can expect that parenting attuned to the child's needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, may nurture optimal self-concept development, academic success, and social well-being in children.

Consequently, potential positive parental behaviors could act as protective factors and represent a buffer for perfectionism development. In addition, autonomy-supportive parenting may also represent a way through which parents may reduce children's perceived pressures to be perfect. While parental acceptance focuses on making a child feel emotionally secure and loved, autonomy support targets encouraging self-driven decision-making and personal agency (Lundh, 2004; Soenens et al., 2007). Parental autonomy support represents a child-centered parenting orientation, where parents welcome their child's perspective, encourage

the child to take the initiative, foster authentic preferences of the child, provide relevant choices whenever possible, and provide a meaningful rationale in case no choice can be allowed. According to this, they are still present and attentive to age-appropriate needs, managing to encourage children's volitional functioning without sacrificing connection, monitoring, or healthy control. Unlike controlling or intrusive parenting, which may instill fear of failure and perfectionistic tendencies, autonomy support nurtures self-determined motivation, allowing children and adolescents to develop confidence in their own abilities without a contingency of their self-worth on prescribed perfection. Research found an association between autonomy-supportive parenting and perfectionism in adolescence and emerging adulthood (Damian et al., 2022; McArdle, 2009; Seong et al., 2023; Simon et al., 2021). As children enter school and expand their social world in middle childhood through adolescence, there is a significant increase in needs for autonomy and independence. By supporting their autonomy within the broader social world of school and allowing children to experience failure as a natural part of learning, parents may contribute to the development of adaptive coping strategies rather than perfectionistic avoidance of mistakes. Furthermore, when parents validate their child's emotions and encourage exploration of their authentic self, they reinforce a secure self-concept, decreasing the likelihood that the child will internalize perfectionistic expectations to gain approval or maintain parental acceptance. However, to our knowledge, no research explored this relation at the middle childhood level. Additionally, no research has investigated how autonomy support can still act as a protective factor even when parents themselves hold perfectionistic views of themselves.

#### ***1.3.4. The Role Of The School Context In Perfectionism Development***

For a long time, research on the development of perfectionism has focused primarily on parental factors and influences. However, parent factors are not enough to explain the multiple patterns and experiences of perfectionism development in children and adolescents.

The lack of consistency in results concerning the relationship between parental antecedents and perfectionism dimensions may be due to a portion of perfectionism variance being explained by factors outside the family system.

Children and adolescents' lives go beyond the family context, with a significant amount of time spent in school. According to OECD (2013), students spend 5 to 8 hours in school, with 794 hours of compulsory instruction time per year for primary school students, and receive an average of 111 more hours of compulsory education per year for lower secondary students.

Within the school context, children and adolescents build connections with their peers and teachers (Allen, 2024; Wang, 2023) that may shape their development of the self and the relationship students build with performance and achievement. School experiences and relationships contribute to the meaning children give to performance and achievement.

Acknowledging that middle childhood and adolescence represent critical points for the development of self-concept (Crone et al., 2022; Crone et al., 2024) and children are especially vulnerable to integrating meaning from salient others' messages (Casey et al., 2025; Pfeifer et al., 2007; 2009; van Drunen et al., 2021), in certain situations the school context becomes a fertile ground for exacerbating social comparison, constructing perfectionistic attitudes toward achievement, conditional self-worth in relation to performance results and pressure toward competition. A highly competitive school climate, where academic success is prioritized over holistic development and focuses on grades and results instead of the learning process (Shim et al., 2013), may reinforce perfectionistic concerns and foster excessively high standards and criticism. School and teacher practices may promote performance-oriented climates that support the development of perfectionism. More specifically, a focus on praising and rewarding performance (Bear et al., 2017), competition, contests, and achievement-oriented tracks may inadvertently promote perfectionism, while schools which may support students' identity development, promote

teacher caring, and student choice in their curricula (Rich & Scharcher, 2012), as well as focus on the process of learning, teaching social and emotional competencies, and connection with the students (Butler, 2012; Bear et al., 2017) may buffer perfectionism development. Thus, schools that emphasize rigid performance standards, promote performance-based practices of teaching (Daumiller et al., 2023), frequent comparisons among students, and punitive responses to failure (Butler, 2012; Bear et al., 2017) can instill fear of making mistakes. This fear could lead students to develop self-critical perfectionism, characterized by chronic self-doubt, anxiety, and avoidance of challenges. Additionally, schools that overemphasize external validation—such as grades, rankings, and awards—can shift students' motivation from intrinsic learning to extrinsic achievement, exacerbating their susceptibility to perfectionistic concerns. In this, teacher practices and modeling (Daumiller et al., 2023; Rich & Scharcher, 2012) may become the mechanism through which school policies and orientations and school climate may impact children.



#### 1.3.4.1. Teachers' role in the development of children's perfectionism<sup>1</sup>

After parents, teachers represent secondary caregivers, mentors, and models, especially for young children. Thus, they are an important source of socialization, contributing not only to cognitive development and knowledge acquisition but also supporting children's socio-emotional development in the face of school challenges. As children enter a new environment, the school, they get exposed to academic and social evaluations, competition, and pressures for performance, which may create distress for certain students and enforce their perfectionistic tendencies (Gilman & Ashby, 2006). Teachers may act as facilitators of such pressures, competition, and distress or represent a buffer, helping children in facing challenging situations, building a healthy relationship with achievement and failure, as well as encouraging and supporting them emotionally in times of distress regarding school.

Prior research has suggested that teachers may foster perfectionism in children and adolescents through mechanisms akin to those observed in parents (Flett et al., 2002; Stoeber et al., 2016).

Teachers may contribute to the development of perfectionism in multiple ways: expressing high expectations, being demanding and overly critical of the student's performance, being punitive, harsh, psychologically controlling, pressuring children to be perfect or have a perfect performance in certain tasks, being inconsistent, overprotecting, supporting the importance of being perfect and emphasizing the negative consequences of mistakes, supporting perfectionistic beliefs, having negative reactions to imperfections or negative attitudes toward mistakes and failure, being perfectionistic. Moreover, prior research suggests that children who perceive conditional support from teachers are sensitive to error and perceive that even the smallest error might prevent them from receiving support, leading them to become very demanding of themselves (Hascoët et al., 2018).

Teachers may also have a role as "protectors" against the development of perfectionism. **High levels of support and a sense of connectedness** perceived by teachers may contribute to decreases in adolescents' perfectionism (Domocus & Damian, 2018). Teacher-student interactions characterized by support may prove to be corrective experiences. Prior research investigating teacher-student relationships linked student-perceived teacher support to students' self-efficacy and global academic success (Jederlund & von Rosen, 2023). Also, positive teacher-student relationship seems to help students' mental health and students' engagement (Hughes et al., 2008; Roorda et al., 2011), students' learning and intrinsic motivations (Zou et al., 2024), as well as students' growth mindset and mastery goals (Schweder et al., 2025; Vestad & Bru, 2024). Intrinsic motivations, growth mindset, flexibility of goals and mastery orientations are all linked to striving for excellence, rather than rigid perfectionism (Boivin et al., *in press*; Gaudreau & Chamandy, 2024; Pétrin-Pomerleau et al., *in press*). Also, perceiving support, help, friendship, trust, and genuine interest from teachers, students might feel more unconditionally accepted and reduce the use of perfectionism as a coping style to feel accepted (Domocus & Damian, 2018).

Empirical research on the role of teachers in the development of perfectionism is very limited. Research in this direction is still in its infancy, with previous studies focusing on cross-sectional relationships, specific groups of people (athletes, musicians, gifted students), and mainly on college students and adolescents.

## II. CHAPTER II. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND METHODS

This thesis attempts to investigate risk and protective factors within the family and school contexts in relation to perfectionism development, with a focus on middle childhood and adolescence. By integrating theoretical perspectives and empirical evidence, our research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of perfectionism emergence and development within a relational framework of interdependence and reciprocity (Rasmussen & Troilo, 2016). To this aim, the thesis includes four original longitudinal studies on adolescents and on children aged 8-10, respectively.

Our **general objectives** target how perfectionism in children/ adolescents relates to:

**(1) family protective factors**, namely *perceived family acceptance*, *perceptions of parent-adolescent relationship quality*, and *parental autonomy support*;

**(2) risk and protective peer and school factors**, namely *perceived friend support in adolescents*, *everyday school contexts and events*.

A **third objective (3)** targets investigations of variability in everyday perfectionism in middle childhood, when perfectionistic tendencies are assumed to emerge. In addition, another objective focuses on the qualitative exploration of subjective experiences related to perfectionism in school, in middle childhood.

First, we explore family factors in relation to perfectionism in adolescents. More specifically, we focus on the reciprocal relation between perceived family acceptance and perfectionism over time, on a sample of adolescents, using a longitudinal cross-lagged design.

Second, we investigate non-family factors, namely friends support in relation to perfectionism in adolescents. More specifically, we explore the longitudinal reciprocal relation between perceived friend support and adolescent perfectionism on a sample of adolescents, using a longitudinal cross-lagged design.

Third, we study the parent-adolescent relationship quality, and parent as well as adolescent perfectionism over time, using a dyadic longitudinal actor-partner interdependence model. Within this exploration, we investigate the role of relationship quality on perfectionistic strivings and concerns, then we split perfectionistic strivings and concerns into their corresponding facets to isolate and examine their specific interactions, in order to bring focus to potential differences between interpersonal and intrapersonal aspects of perfectionism inside the actor-partner relation.

Fouth, we explore the role of parental autonomy support and school context in relation to perfectionism in middle to late childhood, using a longitudinal mixed design incorporating intensive daily diary approaches (Laurenceau & Bolger, 2005) and qualitative analysis. Data collection is gathered in three time points: baseline, diary data, follow-up; the daily diary design was interval contingent (Bolger et al., 2003; Larson & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014).

Additionally, we examine the psychometric properties, factor loadings, and measurement invariance of the instruments used for adolescents and children in our longitudinal studies ( the first, as well as the third study).

Lastly, to target the exploration of the nature and dynamics of perfectionism in middle to late childhood, we examine the extent of perfectionism variability from baseline to follow-up across dyads, as well as within-child variability. This examination looks into potential emerging trends, stability/ instability over time, differences in daily perfectionism expressions between children, as well as variations from day to day within children. By addressing these questions, we aim to contribute to a nuanced understanding of how perfectionism manifests and fluctuates in childhood in the context of everyday life. A daily perfectionism checklist was developed to facilitate children's self-reports of their daily perfectionistic behaviors. .

### III. CHAPTER III: ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTIONS

#### 3.1. Study 1. Perfectionism Shapes The Way Adolescents Perceive Family Acceptance Over Time<sup>2</sup>

The multidimensionality of perfectionism has been comprehensively explored in Chapter 1 of this thesis. Moreover, as evidenced by our analysis on existing theoretical approaches and empirical data, two latent dimensions of perfectionism can be delineated, irrespective of the model or the assessment tool employed: **perfectionistic strivings** (indicated by personal standards; Frost et al., 1990) and **perfectionistic concerns** (specified by concerns over mistakes and doubts about actions; Frost et al., 1990).

##### 3.1.1. *Perceived Family Acceptance Through The Lenses Of The Social Disconnection Model (PSDM; Hewitt et al., 2017)*

From a developmental perspective, perfectionism has been associated with specific parental behaviors, particularly conditional acceptance from parents and significant others (Curran et al., 2022; Flett et al., 2002; Lundh, 2004). Perfectionists often feel their parents set unattainable standards, where failure implies a potential loss of acceptance (Frost et al., 1990). The Perfectionism Social Disconnection Model (PSDM; Hewitt et al., 2017) expands on this idea, proposing that perfectionism develops as a way to gain conditional acceptance and protect against rejection, humiliation, or abandonment. In contrast, positive experiences of unconditional acceptance may foster beliefs in one's self-worth regardless of achievement. To date, research has primarily focused on self-acceptance (Flett et al., 2003) or indirectly measured perceived acceptance (e.g., parental involvement; McArdle, 2009), with no studies directly examining the unique contribution of perceived family acceptance to perfectionism. Recent findings show that parental conditional regard is associated with higher perfectionism in adolescents (Curran et al., 2020) and with more fragile, contingent self-esteem (Steffgen et

<sup>3</sup>Bunea, I. M., Damian, L. E., & Benga, O. (accepted, 2025). Perfectionism's role in shaping adolescents' perception of support from friends. *Studia Universitatis Babes-Bolyai-Psychologia-Paedagogia*

al., 2022), suggesting that unconditional positive regard may support less contingent self-worth and reduce the need for perfection.

The PSDM also addresses the social consequences of perfectionism, emphasizing how perfectionistic beliefs—formed in relational contexts—affect perceptions of others and interpersonal relationships (Flett et al., 1998; Hewitt & Genest, 1990). These beliefs, especially perfectionistic concerns, are thought to stem from perceived conditional acceptance and may lead to feelings of disconnection, even within families (Hewitt et al., 2017).

In sum, low levels of perceived acceptance may impair social interactions and contribute to social disconnection, acting as a key mechanism underlying perfectionism. Conversely, high perceptions of unconditional acceptance, as proposed by Brock et al. (1998), may foster supportive relationships and promote adaptive development.

### ***3.1.2. Perceived Family Acceptance And Bidirectional Relations With Perfectionism***

A review of the literature suggests a bidirectional link between perfectionism and perceived family acceptance, highlighting the importance of examining this relationship within the family context. Brock et al. (1998) distinguish perceived acceptance from broader concepts like social support, emphasizing its roots in unconditional love, value, and care. Their measure captures beliefs about being trusted, valued, understood, and not rejected—elements that align with the concept of mattering (Flett, 2018) and Rogers' (1951) unconditional positive regard. According to Flett (2018), someone who feels like they matter will have a tendency to perceive positive reactions and responses in interaction with others, while someone who feels like they do not matter may develop rather negative perceptions.

Despite these connections, no research to date has examined the relationship between adolescents' perfectionism and perceived family acceptance, nor has any longitudinal study explored their reciprocal dynamics. Moreover, the role of perfectionism in shaping how

adolescents interpret family attitudes remains underexplored, with existing studies limited to specific populations like those with anxiety (e.g., Smith et al., 2018), with none targeting perceived family acceptance.

### **3.1.3. *The Present Study***

Against this background, the scope of the present study was to explore the reciprocal longitudinal relations between adolescents' perfectionistic strivings, perfectionistic concerns, and perceived family acceptance. To this aim, we used an exploratory short-term longitudinal design with two time points spaced three months apart.

Based on theoretical models and on previous findings, we expected: (a) perceived family acceptance (mother, father, and family) to predict relative decreases in perfectionistic concerns; (b) perfectionistic concerns to predict relative decreases in perceived family acceptance (mother, father, and family). As for perfectionistic strivings, we had no expectations, because previous research had mixed findings.

### **3.1.4. *Method***

#### **3.1.4.1. Participants**

A sample of 264 adolescents aged 14-19 years ( $M_{\text{age}} = 17.3$  years;  $SD = 1.1$ ), all students from two high schools in Cluj, Romania (9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade,  $M_{\text{grade}} = 10.5$ ,  $SD = 1.1$ ) was recruited for a two-wave panel study.

#### **3.1.4.2. Procedure**

Adolescents completed a paper-and-pencil questionnaire in the classroom during school hours, first at the beginning of the second school semester in 2017 (T1), and again three months later, at the end of the academic year for T2. Participation was voluntary. The study was approved by the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences of authors' university and by the schools' principals through a written collaboration protocol. The

participants' parents received an informed consent letter and could exclude their children from the study at any time.

### 3.1.4.3. Measures

**Perfectionism.** Perfectionism was measured with the Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (FMPS; Frost et al., 1990). **Perfectionistic strivings** were captured using the subscale personal standards. **Perfectionistic concerns** were captured using the subscales of concern over mistakes, and doubts about actions.

**Perceived family acceptance.** Perceived family acceptance was measured with the Perceived Acceptance Scale (PAS; Brock, et al., 1998), capturing perceived acceptance from mother, father, and family. The scale was translated into Romanian following standard back-translation procedures (cf. Brislin, 1986). Because this instrument was used for the first time with Romanian adolescents, we performed a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) which indicated factorial validity with an acceptable fit of the three-factor model to the data:  $\chi^2 (24) = 33.43, p > .05$ , CFI = .987, RMSEA = .044, SRMR = .028.

### 3.1.5. Results and discussion

The aim of the present study was to examine the relation between perfectionism and perceived family acceptance using a longitudinal design with two waves spaced three months apart in a sample of adolescents aged 14-19 years.

The result showing that perfectionistic concerns are associated with relative decreases in perceived mother, father, and family acceptance, suggests, on the one hand, that adolescents who worry over making potential mistakes and tend to be uncertain about their actions and beliefs may also interpret their family's attitudes and behaviors as being less accepting, valuing and caring, and more judgmental. On the other hand, adolescents who already have low concerns about mistakes and fewer doubts about actions may already perceive high levels of family unconditional acceptance which increase over time. From a



theoretical perspective, these results support the propositions of the perfectionism social disconnection model (PSDM; Hewitt et al., 2017). The present results emphasize the role of perfectionism in cognitive appraisals of interpersonal relationships, uncovered by previous research (Laurenti et al., 2008). Considering the potential implications for the relationship of the adolescent with their family, future, ideally multi-method, research should investigate if adolescents' perfectionism can predict the quality of parent-child relationships over time via their perceptions of family acceptance.

The results showing that perfectionistic strivings are associated with relative increases in perceived family acceptance may mean that adolescents who report having higher personal standards may perceive their family as being more accepting, valuing and caring and less judgmental. On the other hand, the results may also suggest that adolescents who report setting low standards for themselves may perceive lower levels of family acceptance from mother, father, and family. From a theoretical perspective, this might be explained by the propositions of the social learning model of perfectionism development (Flett et al., 2002). On the one hand, it may be that setting high standards is supported by the family, resulting in an increase of perceived acceptance, as perfectionistic strivings are thought to have emerged through modeling the attitudes and behaviors of perfectionistic parents. Therefore, parents are more likely to be perfectionistic and to value high standards and achievement strivings, further being more accepting of their children when they adopt parental views and attitudes. In other words, as long as the children mirror parents' own high standards, they are valued, cared for, and accepted. These explanations are in accordance with previous studies showing an association between adolescents' and parents' perfectionistic strivings (Smith et al., 2022a). Therefore, perfectionistic adolescents presumably live in families with perfectionistic attitudes and values. Consequently, perfectionistic strivings can lead to increases in perceived family acceptance due to events of success in the use of perfectionism, as a strategy of

achieving a sense of connection by being accepted for being “perfect”, according to the propositions of Hewitt et al. (2017). Furthermore, the setting of high standards for the self can be a source of motivation for high achievement, which later leads to the family being more accepting, valuing and caring for the individual.

Although perceived family acceptance was, as expected, positively correlated with perfectionistic strivings and negatively correlated with perfectionistic concerns cross-sectionally, contrary to our expectations, the longitudinal effect of perceived family acceptance on perfectionistic concerns was nonsignificant. Changes in family acceptance may need to be more intense to be uncovered or may need a longer time to visibly contribute to relative changes in perfectionism, just as contributions of conditional regard, which require more time to affect perfectionism (Curran et al., 2020).

The present study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the investigation was limited to middle and late adolescence. Future studies should examine whether the current findings extend to younger age groups to provide a more comprehensive developmental perspective. Second, the specific timing of data collection may have influenced the pattern of results. Future longitudinal studies incorporating multiple assessment waves across extended timeframes would help clarify these relationships. Third, the study relied exclusively on adolescents’ self-reported perceptions of family acceptance. While this provides valuable insight into subjective experiences, it fails to capture the dyadic nature of family relationships. Including parental perspectives would offer a more complete understanding of how family dynamics influence perfectionism development. Furthermore, investigating potential mediating mechanisms underlying these associations would help elucidate the processes through which family relationships shape perfectionistic tendencies.

### **3.1.6. Conclusions**

Notwithstanding these limitations, the present study was the first to longitudinally investigate the reciprocal relations between perfectionism and perceived family acceptance. In this, it uncovered that perfectionistic strivings predict relative increases while perfectionistic concerns predict relative decreases in perceived family acceptance, hinting toward cognitive biases of perfectionism in relationships, supported by the perfectionism social disconnection model (Hewitt et al., 2006). Thus, the present results underlined the role perfectionism plays in shaping adolescents' interpretations of their family's acceptance, consequently shedding more light on the dynamics of relations between perfectionism and interpersonal experiences within the family.

### **3.2. Study 2. Perfectionism Shapes The Way Adolescents Perceive Support From Friends<sup>3</sup>**

The PSDM (Hewitt et al., 2017) proposes that nurturing relationships, characterized by safety, acceptance, and belonging, can help shield adolescents from developing perfectionistic tendencies. A source of experiences of support, acceptance, and belonging salient for adolescents may be represented by their friendships. Thus, friends may contribute to lowering perfectionistic tendencies in adolescents, who feel supported and accepted in their friendships. In contrast, less supportive friendships may contribute to furthering perfectionistic tendencies in adolescents. However, to our knowledge, no research investigated friends' support contributions to perfectionism development.

Additionally, perfectionism may affect friendships and friend support, due to a sense of disconnection, social isolation or even perfectionists' hostile behaviors (Hewitt et al., 2017). Nonetheless, to date, no longitudinal research has investigated the links between perfectionism and adolescents' views of friend support, despite the critical importance of friendships in this life stage.

### 3.2.1. *The Present Study*

Considering the previously mentioned gaps in the literature, the present research explores the bidirectional, long-term connections between adolescents' perfectionism and how they perceive support from their friends. In accordance with the PSDM (Hewitt et al., 2017), we expected perceived social support from friends to contribute to relative decreases in perfectionism over time and perfectionism to contribute to relative decreases in perceived support from friends over time. In accordance with previous empirical data, this may be true, particularly for perfectionistic concerns. To examine this, we used an exploratory approach to analyze the links between adolescents' perfectionism and how they perceive support from friends, employing a cross-lagged panel design with two points of data collection three months apart.

### 3.2.2. *Method*

#### 3.2.2.1. **Participants**

The sample for this study corresponds with the sample for Study 1a, however the investigation is focused on friend support, rather than family acceptance. Two hundred and sixtyfive high-school Romanian adolescents aged 14–19 (  $M = 17.6$ ;  $SD = 1.1$ ), from 9th to 12th grade, were recruited for a longitudinal study.

#### 3.2.2.2. **Procedure**

Adolescents completed identical paper-and-pencil questionnaires during school hours at both time points.

#### 3.2.2.3. **Measures**

**Perfectionism.** Perfectionism was measured with the Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (FMPS; Frost et al., 1990) and the Child–Adolescent Perfectionism Scale (CAPS; Flett et al., 2016). **Perfectionistic strivings** were captured using the of self-oriented perfectionism from CAPS (Flett et al., 2016), and personal standards from FMPS (Frost et al.,

1990). **Perfectionistic concerns** were captured using the subscales of socially prescribed perfectionism from CAPS, concern over mistakes, and doubts about actions from FMPS (Frost et al., 1990).

**Perceived support from friends.** Perceived support from friends was assessed using the Perceived Social Support from Friends scale (PSS-Fr; Procidano & Heller, 1983). All scales demonstrated strong psychometric properties.

### ***3.2.3. Results and discussion***

The present research investigated the reciprocal longitudinal relations involving perceived support from friends and perfectionism in adolescents by employing a longitudinal cross-lagged design with two waves.

Contrary to our hypothesis, perceived support from friends did not significantly contribute to changes in perfectionism (Figure 7). An explanation for the present results may be that strong cognitive appraisals of relationships pertaining to perfectionism had already developed in childhood inside the caregiver-child relationship (Flett et al., 2016; Prestele & Altstötter-Gleich, 2018).

Consistent with our expectations, perfectionistic concerns predicted relative declines in adolescents' perceived support from friends, while perfectionistic strivings showed no significant longitudinal associations (Figure 7). These findings support the idea that perfectionistic concerns undermine adolescents' connections with their friends, aligning with the social disconnection model, which proposes that perfectionism may foster interpersonal struggles and further result in feelings of being socially disconnected (Hewitt et al., 2017). These suggest that adolescents who are preoccupied with mistakes, doubtful about their actions, and who adhere to socially prescribed pressures may experience social disconnection in their friendships, indicated by decreasing perceived support from friends. Our results emphasize that perfectionistic strivings and perfectionistic concerns may act very differently

within friendships. The current results highlight the notion that perfectionistic concerns may be an important risk factor impacting social support and friendship quality.

The present study is not without limitations, which should be carefully considered when interpreting the findings. First, the study specifically focused on adolescents, which limits the generalizability of our findings to this developmental stage. Future studies should aim to replicate and extend these findings by including younger participants, such as children or early adolescents. This is particularly relevant because perfectionism is likely to be less stable and more malleable during earlier developmental periods. Future studies should also employ mixed longitudinal designs, including multiple measurements for shorter and more prolonged effects. In addition, future studies should aim to explore this relationship over extended time periods, incorporating multiple waves of data collection to build upon the current findings and mitigate any potential biases or influences related to the timing of data collection. Moreover, the present study focused exclusively on adolescents' perceptions of support received from friends, which, while valuable, offers only one perspective on the dynamic interplay between social support and perfectionism. Future research should expand this scope by examining both adolescents' and their friends' perceptions of support, as well as incorporating objective measures of the support actually received. By addressing these gaps, future research could offer deeper insights into the complex dynamics between perfectionism and social relationships.

### ***3.2.4. Conclusions***

Although this study has its limitations, it is one of the first to explore the bidirectional relationships between perfectionism and perceived social support from friends longitudinally, during middle to late adolescence, a developmental stage in which friendships grow increasingly significant and influential for the individual. As a result, we found that perfectionistic concerns may contribute to relative decreases in perceived social support from

friends, suggesting potential biases of perfectionism hindering relationships, in accordance with the perfectionism social disconnection model (Hewitt et al., 2017). Complementing the results on the role of perfectionistic concerns within family relationships, the current findings emphasize the role they may play in shaping adolescents' friendships. Their status as potential risk factors for interpersonal relationships is thus reinforced.

### 3.3. Study 3. Perfectionism And Relationship Quality In Parent-Adolescent Dyads<sup>4</sup>

An important component of the relational context for the PSDM is the **parent-child relationship**, whose quality may both influence and be influenced by a child's or parent's perfectionism. Little is known about how relationship quality can contribute to perfectionism development in adolescents, beyond discussions on specific parental practices. Additionally, this mutual influence within the parent-child dyad is emphasized in attachment theory and research when discussing child development (Shaw, 2003; Thompson, 2008; Thompson et al., 2006). Still, research exploring the contribution of perfectionism on subsequent relationship quality mostly focused on couples (Flett et al., 2001; Haring et al., 2003; Sherry et al., 2014). Thus, little is known whether perfectionism in adolescents and in their parents hinders their perceptions on the parent-adolescent relationship quality.

Perfectionism was operationalized via two major superordinate dimensions: **perfectionistic strivings** (including personal standards and self-oriented perfectionism) and **perfectionistic concerns** (including concerns over mistakes, doubts about actions, and socially prescribed perfectionism) (for a review, see Chapter 1). Nevertheless, by only investigating perfectionism development via the use of superordinate dimensions, one may overlook specific pathways and interactions of distinct factors included within the superordinate dimensions. Particularly, Flett et al. (2022) emphasized the unique significance of socially prescribed perfectionism on the individual and their relationships. Within the two superordinate dimensions, socially prescribed perfectionism is unique by representing interpersonal perfectionistic preoccupations (Flett et al., 2017). One should be wary of how different facets of perfectionism can potentially interact with interpersonal correlates.

The PSDM posits that perfectionism „*arises out of early relational experiences and is maintained by enduring relational contexts*” (Hewitt, 2020; p. 108). The model proposes reciprocal processes inside relationships, where experiences of disconnection and aloneness

<sup>4</sup> Bunea, I. M., Damian, L. E., & Benga, O. (under revision for invited resubmission). Perfectionism and relationship quality in parent-adolescent dyads. *European Journal of Personality*



shape perfectionistic behavior and perfectionistic behavior subsequently shapes relationships (Hewitt et al., 2017). Consequently, the development of perfectionism and the relational context of the parent-adolescent dyad, are intertwined. Considering the PSDM model, an important aspect of the relational context in the parent-adolescent dyad may represent their perceived relationship quality or security. This perceived security can be understood via indicators of good communication inside the relationship, feelings of trusting the other, and a low perceived alienation between the parent and adolescent (Andretta et al., 2017), indicating the quality of the parent-adolescent relationship.

The present study investigates relationship quality as an indicator of relationship security (Andretta et al., 2017), and will only use the term relationship quality further, for clarity. To our knowledge, there is no previous longitudinal study observing how perceptions of relationship quality contribute to perfectionism in parent-adolescent dyads.

Furthermore, according to the social disconnection part of the PSDM, perfectionism in turn affects the relationship. Previous research investigating this is mainly cross-sectional (Stoeber et al., 2017), or focuses on clinically depressed adolescents, and their caregivers (Chen et al., 2022). Even for longitudinal studies exploring perfectionism in relation to parental outcomes (Domocus et al., 2022), no study investigated the potential impact of perfectionism on perceptions of relationship quality within the dyad. Additionally, many previous studies focused only on socially prescribed perfectionism (e.g., Boone, 2013; Taylor et al., 2017). However, the complexity of perfectionism as it develops during adolescence warrants a more nuanced exploration in relation to perfectionism dimensions.

Consequently, the current study investigates the longitudinal relation between perceived relationship quality and perfectionistic strivings and concerns, as well as further exploring this relation deconstructing perfectionism into its smaller facets: personal

standards, concerns over mistakes and doubts about actions (Frost et al., 1990), self-oriented perfectionism, and socially prescribed perfectionism (Hewitt et al., 1991).

Against this background, the scope of the present study was to explore the reciprocal longitudinal relations inside the parent-adolescent dyad between the perceived relationship quality of both adolescents and their parents and their perfectionism. To this aim, we used an actor-partner longitudinal design with three-time points spaced six months apart, as often used in research investigating perfectionism development (e.g., Damian et al., 2021).

Based on the PSDM model, both dimensions of perfectionism may be affected by and may also affect the parent-adolescent relationship (Hewitt et al., 2017). However, previous findings found most support for associations between interpersonal relationship factors and the perfectionistic concerns dimension and its facets (e.g., Stoeber et al., 2017). Thus, our general expectations were led by theory (Hewitt et al., 2017), while still exploring if different facets of perfectionism may have different pathways associated with the parent-adolescent relationship quality. We expected that adolescents' high levels of perceived relationship quality will be associated with a longitudinal relative decrease in all facets of adolescent perfectionism within the dyad. Also, parents' high levels of perceived relationship quality will be associated with a longitudinal relative decrease in all facets of parent perfectionism within the dyad. Furthermore, we expected high levels of all facets of adolescent perfectionism, as well as parent perfectionism, will be associated with longitudinal relative decreases in perceived relationship quality in both adolescents and their parents.

### **3.3.2. Method**

#### **3.3.2.1. Participants and procedure**

A sample ( $N = 443$ ) of adolescents aged 10-18 years ( $M_{age} = 15.6$  years;  $SD = 1.9$ , at Time 1) and their parents aged 31-76 years ( $M_{age} = 43.8$  years;  $SD = 5.7$ , at Time 1), were recruited for a three-wave longitudinal study.

The study procedure was conducted in line with the Declaration of Helsinki recommendations. The research project was approved by the Ethical Committee of the authors' institution and received a written authorization from the principals of the participating schools. Participants were informed about the research and signed an informed consent. Participation was voluntary for both students and their parents, and they could opt out of the study at any time.

### 3.3.2.2. Measures

**Perfectionism.** Perfectionism was conceptualized and analyzed using the two-factor model (Stoeber & Otto, 2006), separating the **perfectionistic strivings** dimension from the **perfectionistic concerns** dimension, as well as using each perfectionism subdimension. Both adolescents' and parents' perfectionism were measured using the Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (FMPS; Frost et al., 1990) and the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale-short form (MPS-short form; Hewitt et al., 2008).

**Relationship quality.** Relationship quality was measured using the mother and father attachment subscales of The Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment Revised Version (IPPA-R; Gullone & Robinson, 2005). The scale measures adolescents' perceptions of relationships with parents in terms of trust and quality of communication, and extent of anger and alienation. Despite the name of the scale, The Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA) is not considered a measure of attachment, because it does not consider emotional autonomy or attachment anxiety, nor distinguish between attachment patterns (Crowell et al., 2008). In fact, The IPPA only includes perceptions of trust, communication, and anger/alienation, which better fit measuring perceived quality of relationship or, in other words, perceived security within the dyad (van der Vorst et al., 2006). The IPPA items were adapted for use in children and younger adolescents, resulting in the IPPA-Revised (IPPA-R; Gullone & Robinson, 2005), which we used in our study. Adolescents completed the versions

for mother and father, while parents completed a modified version assessing their perceptions as parents of their relationship with their child in terms of trust, quality of communication, and extent of anger and alienation (e.g., *I respect my child's feelings*).

### 3.3.2.3. Data Analysis

First, we assessed whether missing data followed a Missing Completely at Random (MCAR) pattern using Little's (1988) test. The nonsignificant result ( $\chi^2/df = 0.90$ ) suggested no attrition-related bias. Next, we evaluated the internal consistency of the scale scores with all values exceeding the recommended threshold of .70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), confirming reliability. Next, we conducted **confirmatory factor analyses** and **measurement invariance testing**. The results supported configural, metric, and full scalar invariance, as well as partial scalar invariance (for perfectionism parent report).

To examine the longitudinal actor-partner relations between perceived relationship quality and perfectionism in both adolescents and parents, we conducted a longitudinal actor-partner model with structural equation modeling in Mplus 8.1, using the maximum likelihood robust (MLR) estimator (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2018) and full-information maximum likelihood (FIML) estimation, on account of missing data within the dyads.

### 3.3.3. Main results and discussion

#### 3.3.3.1. The role of perceived relationship quality in the development of perfectionistic strivings and perfectionistic concerns

The current results support the Perfectionism Social Disconnection Model (PSDM; Hewitt et al., 2017) regarding the development and maintenance of perfectionism. More specifically, they suggest that perceptions of relationship quality in the parent-adolescent relationship may contribute to perfectionism over time. Particularly, we found adolescents' perceived relationship quality with their mother, an indicator of perceived security in the parent-adolescent relationship, to predict relative **decreases in adolescents' perfectionistic**

**concerns** over time (actor effect;  $\beta = -.17$ ,  $p = .036$ , from T1 to T2;  $\beta = -.21$ ,  $p = .033$ , from T2 to T3). Breaking down the analysis to explore different associations for intrapersonal versus interpersonal facets of perfectionism (i.e., socially prescribed perfectionism), the results indicated adolescents' perceived relationship quality with mother predicted subsequent significant decreases in their **socially prescribed perfectionism** (actor effect;  $\beta = -.23$ ,  $p = .064$ , from T1 to T2;  $\beta = -.24$ ,  $p = .040$ , from T2 to T3), but not for concerns over mistakes. Consequently, adolescents' perceived quality with their mother may especially contribute to decreases in adolescent's feelings of social pressures for perfection. This pathway comes in support of the hypothesized connection between parent-adolescent relationship security and adolescents' perfectionism (Hewitt et al., 2017). Thus, perceptions of trust, open communication, and belonging, inside the mother-adolescent relationship might ease beliefs of conditional security of the relationship based on being „perfect” for the other. Vice versa, when the adolescent perceives low trust, difficult communication, and alienation in the mother-child relationship, we can expect perfectionism to rise

Surprisingly, we found no evidence that adolescents' perceived relationship quality contributing to their **perfectionistic strivings**. It is possible that perfectionistic strivings rely more heavily on the modeling of parental perfectionism (Flett et al., 2002; Smith et al., 2022) rather than relationship quality. Furthermore, both theory (Hewitt et al., 2017) and research (Damian et al., 2016; Endleman et al., 2022) suggest that advanced competence in a domain, such as school, can foster perfectionism.

Importantly, adolescents' perceived relationship quality with their mother and with their father also predicted a subsequent decrease in their **parents' perfectionistic strivings** (mother:  $\beta = -.27$ ,  $p = .045$ , from T1 to T2;  $\beta = -.33$ ,  $p = .014$ , from T2 to T3; father: ( $\beta = -.30$ ,  $p = .030$ , from T1 to T2;  $\beta = -.33$ ,  $p = .039$ , from T2 to T3), but not on parental perfectionistic concerns (partner effect). This suggests that parents may reduce their

perfectionistic strivings in relation to their child feeling safer due to perceived trust, open communication, and belonging. Considering that most of our sample was comprised of mothers, this may be particularly true for mothers' perfectionistic strivings. To our knowledge, this is the first study to observe an association between the adolescent's perceptions of the parent-adolescent relationship and the parents' perfectionism, as reported by the parent.

Lastly, the only significant relation at the within-person/dyad level for **parents' perceived relationship quality** was its prediction of **subsequent significant decreases in parents' concerns over mistakes and doubts about actions** (actor effect;  $\beta = -.28, p = .030$ , from T1 to T2;  $\beta = -.30, p = .007$  from T2 to T3). This is in accordance with the PSDM theory regarding the maintenance of perfectionism, as well as how treatment of perfectionism may require increases in security inside relationships (Hewitt et al., 2017). Furthermore, the nature of concerns over mistakes and doubts about actions is rooted in an anxious attitude toward not doing things perfectly (Frost et al., 1990). Hence, one can argue that increases in perceptions of relationship security with the child can contribute to a reduction in the parents' anxiety, and consequently, in their concerns over mistakes and doubts about actions. To our knowledge, this is the first study that observed how parent-child relationship quality can not only improve perfectionism in the children of the dyad, but it may affect their parents' perfectionism as well.

### 3.3.3.2. The role of parent and adolescent perfectionism in changing perceptions of relationship quality within the dyad

At the within-person/dyad level, the results indicated that only **parents' perfectionistic strivings** predict significant relative decreases in **perceived relationship quality with their father** (partner effect;  $\beta = -.27, p = .009$ , from T1 to T2;  $\beta = -.28, p = .020$ , from T2 to T3) in adolescents, across all time points (partner effect). This can suggest

that parents' striving for perfection may be leading to higher dissatisfaction with the perceived relationship quality with the father. Considering the majority of the sample being mothers, this may be particularly true for them. Consequently, a mothers' perfectionistic strivings within the family may contribute to how their adolescent views and evaluates the quality of their relationship with the father. Thus, an individual's perfectionism may negatively contribute to the relationship within the family, as suggested by the PSDM (Hewitt et al., 2017). Due to the sample consisting of mostly mothers and their daughters the results should be interpreted with caution.

### **3.3.6.3. Between dyad individual differences and associations**

As expected, at the between-dyad level, our analyses revealed significant negative associations between adolescents' perceived relationship quality and both adolescents' and parents' perfectionistic concerns. This indicates that dyads with higher perfectionistic concerns for both adolescents or parents generally report lower relationship quality. Similarly, parents' perceived relationship quality was negatively correlated with both adolescents' and parents' perfectionistic concerns, suggesting that dyads with higher perfectionistic concerns, whether from parents or adolescents, tend to experience poorer relationship quality. These results are following previous theory and research, indicating that perfectionism may be found more in poorer quality parent-child relationships (Boone, 2013; Taylor et al., 2017) who may struggle, in turn, in relationships (Hewitt et al., 2017; Sherry et al., 2013; Smith et al., 2018).

### **3.3.3.4. Limitations and Future Research**

The present study has several limitations. First, it relied on self-reports rather than incorporating observations or other methods of assessment. Future research should include both perceived and actual behaviors within the dyad to better determine whether perceived behaviors, observed behaviors, or discrepancies between these assessments are most

predictive of relative changes in perfectionism. However, it was a specific aim of this study to focus on adolescents' and parents' perceptions of relationship quality and potential differences in how they relate to perfectionism, as well as examining the dyadic dynamics between parents and adolescents. Lastly, our sample primarily comprised mothers and their children, with fewer father participants. Therefore, our results reflect more of the mother-adolescent relationship dynamic. Previous studies have found different pathways and interactions (Ge et al., 2023), which may also manifest in the interplay between relationship quality and perfectionism. Future research should include more fathers to differentiate between mother-adolescent and father-adolescent dyadic dynamics. In this study, consistent with the PSDM theory (Hewitt et al., 2017), we used the terms „actor effect” and „partner effect” when discussing the actor-partner associations. However, it is important to note that our data and analyses do not permit causal claims regarding the observed associations. Our approach only enables us to infer the directionality of the associations and account for interdependence within the dyad, not causality.

### **3.3.4. *Conclusions***

Despite these limitations, the current findings significantly advance our understanding of perfectionism development and bring support to the PSDM model (Hewitt et al., 2017), demonstrating that the perceptions of the quality of the caregiver-child relationship significantly affect the development and maintenance of perfectionistic concerns in adolescents. Specifically, high relationship quality predicted decreases in both adolescents' perfectionistic concerns and parents' perfectionistic strivings over time, suggesting that perceived security within the parent-child relationship acts as a protective factor against perfectionism. Our findings also highlight distinct roles for different facets of perfectionism. While relationship quality significantly impacted perfectionistic concerns and socially prescribed perfectionism, it did not affect perfectionistic strivings. Our study is the first to



indicate a bidirectional contribution within the dyad, where we found both contributions to parental perfectionism as well as contributions of parental perfectionism, pertaining to adolescents' perceptions of relationship quality. Improved perceived relationship quality in adolescents was associated with reduced perfectionistic strivings in parents, and parental perfectionistic strivings contributed to adolescents' perceptions of relationship quality with the father. The bidirectional results, thus, highlight a mutual relation between parent and child. Finally, this is the first study, to our knowledge, to attempt a longitudinal exploration of the dynamic relation between perfectionism and relationship quality/security using a longitudinal actor-partner design, which took both the adolescents' and the parents' perspectives into account for different pathways of perfectionism development. In sum, fostering perceptions of security and high-quality relationships between parents and adolescents may be important in mitigating perfectionistic concerns, promoting healthier family dynamics and individual well-being.

### **3.4. Study 4. Capturing Perfectionism in the Daily Life of School-Aged Children: An Exploration of Risk and Protective Factors**

Perfectionism poses significant risks for children and adolescents, contributing to academic burnout (Seong et al., 2021), strained relationships (Magson et al., 2019), and lower well-being (Mitchell et al., 2013; Nobel et al., 2012). Despite this, few studies have examined perfectionism before adolescence (Hong et al., 2017; Vecchione & Marsicano, 2024), even though perfectionistic tendencies are already present in younger children (Rice et al., 2016), and recent generations show rising levels (Curran & Hill, 2019).

Middle to late childhood is a key developmental window for perfectionistic strivings, self-critical thinking, and sensitivity to others' evaluations (Pfeifer & Pyke, 2012; van Drunen et al., 2021). During this period, global self-esteem often declines (Chung et al., 2017), making children vulnerable to linking self-worth to performance, especially in performance-oriented environments. Hong et al. (2017) and Vecchione & Marsicano (2024) found that perfectionism emerges and follows specific developmental trajectories during this stage.

There is general consensus that perfectionism includes two core dimensions: perfectionistic strivings and concerns (Stoeber, 2018). These tendencies arise early and develop through interactions with caregivers, teachers, and peers (Hewitt et al., 2017). Yet, little is known about how perfectionism unfolds in children's everyday lives. Capturing children's daily experiences at home and school can provide a more ecological and nuanced view of perfectionism development.

Most longitudinal studies have focused on parental perfectionism, expectations, and overcontrol, without integrating mechanisms or adaptive factors (Soenens et al., 2005). While psychological control has been studied as a mediator, the buffering role of autonomy support remains understudied. This research addresses that gap by examining parents' autonomy support and accounting for within-child variability and dyadic interdependence.

Furthermore, the school context has been largely overlooked, especially in middle childhood. We investigated how school experiences relate to everyday perfectionism.

Although previous work has explored gifted children and adolescents (Speirs Neumeister et al., 2004, 2006, 2008; Molnar et al., 2023), no studies have examined how younger children perceive and express perfectionism in daily life.

This study fills that gap using a longitudinal, multi-method design that combines daily diary data with self- and parent-reports, and qualitative analysis. It explores both the subjective experience and developmental dynamics of perfectionism, including its stability, variability, and context-dependent fluctuations across time.

- a. A model testing autonomy support as a mediator between parent and child perfectionism;
- b. A two-level random intercept model examining the link between general autonomy support and daily perfectionistic strivings;
- c. A thematic analysis of open-ended responses from children and parents.

### **3.4.2. Method**

#### **3.4.2.1. Participants and procedure**

A sample of 68 parent-child dyads from five schools in north-western Romania, grades 2 to 4, completed baseline measurements, 45 dyads completed both baseline and follow-up, and 58 children completed the diary data. 24 dyads completed diary and qualitative data. The missing data was handled at the level of the dyad to account for the interdependence of the data.

#### **3.4.2.2. Procedure for the diary data**

The daily diary used an **interval contingent design** (Bolger et al., 2003; Larson & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). Each parent was contacted via email at 17:00 o'clock every day as a reminder for the child to complete the diary, and at the same hour at the end of the week for

the completion of their part of the diary, to ensure sufficient time for completion and to align with the parents and the children's schedules.

### 3.4.2.3. Measures

#### *Baseline measures.*

**Parent perfectionism.** Parents' perfectionism was measured with the Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (FMPS; Frost et al., 1990), and the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale-short form (MPS-short form; Hewitt et al., 2008).

**Child perfectionism.** Children's perfectionism was measured using the Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (FMPS; Frost et al., 1990), the Child-Adolescent Perfectionism Scale (CAPS; Flett et al., 2016), and the scale of negative reactions to imperfection of Stoeber and Rambow (2007).

**Parental autonomy support.** For parental autonomy support, we used The Autonomy Support Scale, both as a self-report and parent report (Soenens et al., 2006; 2007), and a general score was computed using their mean.

#### *Daily diary measures.*

**Daily perfectionism in children.** A checklist of perfectionistic behaviors and self-evaluation, where children had to check what they experienced during the day, was constructed specifically for this study to facilitate the collection of daily perfectionistic behaviors in a daily diary format, forming: *daily perfectionistic strivings*, *daily perfectionistic concerns*, and *negative reactions after results*. To reduce burden on the participants, we opted for a multiform planned item missingness design (Losardo, 2024; Little & Rhemtulla et al., 2013; Remthulla et al., 2012), where we included only one randomised item for each subscale.

The daily diary also included: reported tests, contests or other grades/points received that day, and Open questions (What did you do today? Did anything special happen today?

Who did you spend time with? Who did you play with? Who did you talk to? Who did you do your homework with?).

*Weekly parental diary measures.*

For the weekly parental diary, we used the following open questions: How was the past week for your family from your point of view? Were there any special events during the week? Was there anything relevant you think we should know about that influenced the well-being of the family? How much time did you manage to spend with your child during the past week? Did you receive any form of feedback or evaluation of your child from the school? If so, what feedback did you receive? How was your child the past week from your point of view? We also measured parental autonomy support at the end of each week. Additionally, parents reported a version of the children's perfectionism (Self-oriented perfectionism, Socially prescribed perfectionism, Personal standards, Concern over mistakes and doubts about actions, Negative reactions to results), from their point of view. This scale was piloted prior to the study.

#### **3.4.2.4. Data analysis approach**

To explore variations in perfectionistic strivings and perfectionistic concerns and their relation to parenting and school context, we employed a multi-method analytical approach:

(a) A longitudinal analysis investigating autonomy as a mediator between parent perfectionism and child perfectionism;

(b) Multilevel modeling examining daily dynamics of perfectionism in relation to autonomy support;

(c) A mixed-qualitative design to strengthen quantitative observations and explore the subjective experiences of children.

#### **3.4.2.5. Qualitative data analysis process**

We used the recommendations of Braun and Clarke (2006). Cohen's kappa was computed to evaluate agreement to assess interrater reliability, yielding a value of  $\kappa = .93$ , indicating strong agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977).

#### **3.4.3. Results and discussion**

##### **3.4.3.1. An investigation of autonomy support as a mediator between parent and child perfectionism**

The main analyses were conducted using structural equation modelling (SEM) in Mplus version 8.1 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2018) to build a mediation model with maximum likelihood (ML) and Full Information Maximum Likelihood (FIML) estimation, examining the longitudinal relationships between parents' perfectionistic strivings and concerns, their autonomy-supportive behaviors, and children's perfectionistic strivings and concerns. The model included stability paths for children's perfectionism over time (Geiser, 2013) and paths to test mediation effects via autonomy support. To assess indirect effects, we used bias-corrected bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples, and reported 95% confidence intervals for the indirect effects. Next, we evaluated the model fit through multiple indices (Byrne, 2012). The model demonstrated overall a good fit.

##### **A. Perfectionistic strivings**

Exploratory findings suggest that children's perfectionistic strivings may present more stability over time ( $\beta = 0.37, p = .011$ ). Specifically, children's perfectionistic strivings in baseline significantly predicted children's perfectionistic strivings in follow-up. This is in line, with the hypothesis that perfectionistic strivings may involve more of a genetic component (Curran et al., 2020). Perfectionistic strivings might be anchored in the way children evaluate themselves in terms of positive and negative academic traits. In accordance,

academic self-concept and self-evaluations seem to be show a higher heritability (van Drunen et al., 2021).

Additionally, parental perfectionistic strivings were linked to children's perfectionistic strivings at follow-up ( $\beta = -0.42, p = .048$ ), but no significant direct ( $\beta = -0.44, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.99, 0.12]$ ), or indirect effect through autonomy support, were observed ( $\beta = 0.25, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.58, 1.07]$ ). Parental perfectionistic strivings in baseline positively predicted autonomy support ( $\beta = 0.61, p < .001$ ), and directly contributed to changes in children's perfectionistic strivings at follow-up ( $\beta = -0.43, p = .048$ ). This result is surprising in light of theory of social learning (Flett et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2022a). However, this finding may reflect a resistance in response to parents' preoccupation with perfection and excessive standards. Theory on the development of perfectionism addresses that children might have different reactions to imposed standards: internalization or rejection (Flett et al., 2002), however, so far, research focused on children internalizing parents' standards. This result aligns with reactance theory (Rains, 2013) in that children may be opposed to parents' perfectionistic standards and act in dissention to them (Quick & Stephenson, 2008; van Pettergem et al., 2015).

### **B. Perfectionistic concerns**

Exploratory findings suggest that children's perfectionistic concerns may be less stable over time ( $\beta = 0.23, p = .140$ ). Specifically, children's perfectionistic concerns at baseline did not predict children's perfectionistic concerns at follow-up significantly.

Parental perfectionistic concerns at baseline negatively predicted children's perfectionistic concerns at follow-up ( $\beta = -0.54, p < .001$ ). This counterintuitive finding may reflect children's resistance in response to parents' preoccupation with perfection and socially prescribed standards. As accounted previously, children might have different reactions to imposed standards: internalization or rejection (Flett et al., 2002). Reactance theory (Rains,

2013) and previous research also point to some children responding to parental pressuring requests through reactivity and rebellion (Brauer, 2017; Quick & Stephenson, 2008; van Pettergem et al., 2015). Alternatively, this result might reflect a particularity of the sample. The mean for perfectionistic concerns in this sample of children was  $m_{T1} = 2.6$  and  $m_{T2} = 2.1$ , which is at the lower end of the spectrum. Thus, this sample is generally representative for children with lower levels of perfectionism. Future studies should explore in more detail individual differences in children's response to parent's perfectionism. Also, acknowledging the sample limitations of the study, replication with adequate power is critical to inform definitive claims.

As expected, autonomy support negatively predicted children's perfectionistic concerns at follow-up ( $\beta = -0.70$ ,  $p = .010$ ). The present result suggests that parental autonomy support contributes to relative decreases in **children's perfectionistic concerns**. In accordance with previous theory (Flett et al., 2002) and research on adolescents (Damian et al., 2022), this result highlights the importance of parental autonomy support as a protective factor in the development of perfectionistic concerns.

Additionally, a tentative indirect effect of parental perfectionistic concerns on children's perfectionistic concerns through autonomy support emerged ( $\beta = 0.38$ , 95% CI [0.03, 0.67]) indicating a mediation effect of autonomy support between parents' and children's perfectionistic concerns, but replication with adequate power is critical. There is a significant indirect positive link between parent's perfectionistic concerns and children's perfectionistic concerns via autonomy support ( $\beta = 0.380$ ,  $p = 0.034$ , 95% CI [0.03, 0.67]), concurrently with a direct negative link between parent's perfectionistic concerns and children's perfectionistic concerns ( $\beta = -0.544$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , 99% CI [-0.93, -0.16]), with a nonsignificant total effect ( $\beta = -0.164$ ,  $p = 0.535$ , 95% CI [-0.68, 0.27]). This points to a **suppression effect**. The suppression effect indicates that **parents' perfectionistic concerns**



have two opposing contributions to children's perfectionistic concerns: a surface-level **direct** contribution to **relative decreases in perfectionistic concerns** and a hidden indirect contribution to **relative increases in children's perfectionistic concerns by reducing autonomy support**. This masking effect underscores the importance of analyzing mediation mechanisms—without it, we might overlook the significant role of parental autonomy support. Extrapolating from the results of Soenens et al. (2005), which found maladaptive parental perfectionism intervene on adolescents' perfectionism via psychological control, our results suggest that parents with high perfectionistic concerns may have a hard time allowing the autonomous functioning of their children. In turn they may knowingly or without awareness exert more control and pressure over children's decision making and agency. When children are faced with **low autonomy support**, they may feel more pressured to be perfect, adopt perfectionistic behaviors and get more preoccupied over avoiding mistakes. Parents may especially struggle when their children act in ways that conflict with their perfectionistic attitudes and expectations, and manifest conditional regard in return (Curran et al., 2020). Alternatively, parents who are not struggling with perfectionistic concerns themselves, may worry less about socially prescribed pressures and have more ease in promoting their children's agency, welcoming their opinions and choices whenever possible. In turn, children with autonomy supportive parents may feel less need to concern themselves over prescribed perfection. This result is emphasizing the role of parental rearing as an intervening variable between parental perfectionism and children's perfectionism. This is consistent with the results of Damian et al. (2022) linking adolescents' higher levels of perceived parental autonomy support with lower socially prescribed perfectionism trajectories across time.

However, the present study points to a longitudinal relative association between these variables from baseline to follow-up. Next, we will explore in more depth if autonomy supportive parenting contributes to less perfectionistic concerns in children's everyday life.

### 3.4.3.2. A multilevel model examining daily dynamics of perfectionism in relation to autonomy support

We analyzed 184 daily reports from 24 parent-child dyads using multilevel modeling in Mplus 8.1. (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2018). Two random intercept models with fixed slopes were employed using Maximum likelihood (ML) estimation to investigate contributions of autonomy support for daily perfectionistic strivings and daily perfectionistic concerns separately, due to the limited number of dyads.

As expected, **dyad-reported parental autonomy support** was associated with **fewer daily perfectionistic concerns for the child** ( $\beta = -0.173$ ,  $SE = 0.075$ ,  $p = .021$ , 95% CI  $[-0.320, -0.026]$ ). More specifically, for dyads where parents are more autonomy supportive, children report less daily perfectionistic concerns versus dyads where parents are less autonomy supportive. In families where parents foster autonomy, children may perceive mistakes as learning opportunities rather than threats to self-worth, thereby dampening their perfectionistic concerns. Due to the small sample size, a random slope model would have been inappropriate, thus future studies should further investigate if increases in autonomy supportive parenting within the dyad lead to significant decreases in the child's perfectionism over time.

Additionally, perfectionistic concerns showed high daily variability (95.5% within-dyad variance), suggesting that daily perfectionism in children operates as a dynamic state, sensitive to daily contexts, with autonomy-supportive parenting mitigating daily concerns. The high within-dyad variability in concerns mirrors findings by Hong et al. (2017), who linked decreasing trajectories of socially prescribed perfectionism to child surgency (i.e., sociability and reactivity). Presumably, children with temperamental sensitivity to social cues may be more vulnerable to daily environmental pressures, making autonomy support critical

to buffer against perfectionistic concerns. This resonates with Hewitt et al. (2017)'s emphasis on the role of parenting in amplifying or mitigating socially driven perfectionism. However, we did not measure temperament, thus future research should explore this possible explanation further.

We did not find a significant contribution of autonomy support to children's **perfectionistic strivings**. Additionally, the variance pattern of perfectionistic strivings suggests variability both within- and between- dyads, but presents significantly more stability than perfectionistic concerns. The differences in variability for the two distinct dimensions echo the previous result, where perfectionistic strivings were more stable over the year of collection, while perfectionistic concerns were significantly less stable.

This study advances the understanding of perfectionism as a multidimensional and dynamic construct. Perfectionistic concerns seem to operate as fluid, context-sensitive states moderated by autonomy support, while strivings resemble more stable tendencies, less tied to daily parenting. Considering the significant variability within subjects present in both perfectionistic concerns and perfectionistic strivings, it is important to explore relevant daily contexts that might play a role in this variability.

#### **3.4.3.3. A mixed-qualitative investigation of perfectionism in middle childhood**

An important aim of this study was to explore how perfectionism manifests in everyday life by analyzing children's experiences using a longitudinal mixed daily diary design, as well as exploring potential daily contextual factors that may be linked to variability in perfectionistic strivings and concerns. For the qualitative section, children were asked to describe their day and any special events during the day over two weeks. They were also prompted to talk about any special events, how and who they spent their time with at school and at home. The main objective of the qualitative part of the study was to complement the quantitative data and investigate perfectionism in children within the school and home

everyday context, by identifying themes related to perfectionism development and manifestations in the children's and parents' discourses when discussing their day.

The thematic analysis of the children's daily diaries and parents's summary of the week revealed a complex interplay of perfectionism with daily school experiences, manifesting across multiple dimensions. Overall, children described their day more factually, discussing school activities as well as special events, with less detail. Still, considering the dynamics of this developmental period, children differed among themselves in their self-reflective abilities (e.g., *"I had a headache all day, I don't know why."* versus *"Today at school, I was FURIOUS, I don't know why, but this week we had a lot of homework and I got angry"*). However, abstract self-descriptions and reflections were often present in discussing the valences of their experiences. This is in line with studies observing that between 9 to 11 years, children begin to focus on psychological self-knowledge and increase in the complexity and integration of their life experiences into their self-concept (Ross et al., 2025).

Even though the open question refers to their whole day, all children focused on their school activities when discussing it, with very few accounts of home activities. This emphasizes the impact school experiences have over children.

### ***Performance-focused versus Learning-focused evaluations***

The thematic analysis highlighted two contrasting yet coexisting narratives: children's focus on performance versus children's focus on learning.

Performance-focused evaluations dominated children's accounts, with frequent references to grades, rankings, and social comparison with peers in terms of performance (e.g., *"Today I got three 10s, I helped two classmates and another classmate got a 5 for nothing."*). Children frequently described performance outcomes (e.g., grades, test scores, competition results) as central to their school experiences. Their narratives often included social comparisons (e.g., *"I was the only one in class with no mistakes on the math test"*),

reflecting a competitive and performance-focused self-concept. This emphasis on ranking and evaluation suggests a self-development highly attuned to external validation, reinforcing the role of achievement in shaping self-worth. Additionally, children's focus on grades and competition indicates a reliance on broad generalizations about their abilities based on repeated experiences, potentially fostered by „all or nothing thinking”, which may be typical in this developmental period (Vecchione & Marescano, 2023). This can contribute to a rigid self-concept where mistakes and imperfections are seen as threats rather than learning opportunities. Quantitative analyses parallel these assertions: we observed that children's performance talk was also positively associated with high personal standards, suggesting that children who might talk about their performance more, may also set high standards of performance for themselves. Additionally, there were consistent associations of perfectionism with evaluative contexts within the school day. More specifically, tests, contests, receiving good grades, and performance-focused feedback influenced children's daily perfectionistic tendencies. These findings suggest that the external structure of schooling may act as a reinforcement mechanism for social comparison and rigid standards turning into perfectionistic behaviors, particularly in systems that emphasize evaluation over personal growth. However, these findings should be interpreted cautiously, given the small sample size.

Contrastingly, learning-focused evaluations, though less common, were still a recurring pattern in children's discourse. Notably, these children still reported high standards during the day. However, it is unclear to what extent their discourse reflects, in fact, their school engagement and intrinsic motivation for learning or the high standards really refer to perfectionistic, excessive strivings. The descriptions were typically positive and enthusiastic, demonstrating intrinsic motivation for learning and enjoyment. This aspect may demonstrate a healthy cognitive flexibility between striving for excellence (Gaudreau et al., 2019) and

enjoying learning. Alternatively, it may indicate that children can internalize excessively high standards even in the context of intrinsic motivations for learning and positive attitudes toward schoolwork. Studies on giftedness and perfectionism can give us an insight into this. More specifically, a number of qualitative studies indicate that gifted children notice others' expectations increasing as they demonstrate high achievement, which, along with early experiences of success, reinforce the belief that it is necessary to keep a high performance and interest for validation and self-worth (Speirs Neumeister et al., 2004; 2008; 2009). Thus, in alignment with experiences of gifted children, highly motivated and engaged students manifesting enjoyment in learning, may experience performance rewarding reactions in others and heightened external expectations. In time, they may develop perfectionistic strivings and a performance-based self-concept (Stornelli et al., 2009).

### ***Reactivity to mistakes and school stress***

Some children were preoccupied with monitoring mistakes and expressed distress over mistakes or poor grades. Parents also noted children's worry and preoccupation, even in situations where children expressed unexplained somatic complaints. This aligns with research on self-conscious emotions in middle to late childhood (Harter et al., 2012; Crone et al., 2022; 2024), where shame and guilt become more salient as children develop metacognitive awareness of their own shortcomings. Additionally, the observed monitoring could be explained by advancements in metacognition for some of the children (Mazancieux et al., 2020) that determine them to be more aware of their shortcomings. Overall, children's descriptions may represent an expression of how normative advances in cognitive and socio-emotional abilities prepare a fertile ground for pressuring contexts to foster perfectionistic concerns in children.

Additionally, there seems to be a connection between perfectionism, high academic expectations regarding evaluative school work (e.g. tests, homework), and children

experiencing heightened stress. Parents also expressed concern about their children's stress levels, suggesting that school-related fatigue is experienced at a family level, with both children and caregivers sharing the burden of high academic expectations.

Both the overwhelming focus and considerable stress children describe in relation to performance and school work may reflect the current Romanian school system, marked by disparities such as immense pressure on children to perform, particularly in schools from the cities and STEM schools (for which this sample is representative), at the same time with a severe deficit in rural and vocational schools. Focusing on the pressuring side of the school system, children are often pushed into competitions like Comper (mentioned by the children in the sample), although these are not mandatory, and also face mandatory national evaluations in grades 2 and 4, which are meant to be formative, but often force children into aiming to obtain high grades rather than focusing on learning. The system is very performance-driven, with grades and constant evaluations being at the center of school work. Additionally, this focus on performance can be felt by teachers and schools as they are also evaluated based on children's performance on national evaluations, competitions, and various academic contests. Moreover, at about 14 years of age, children are faced with a decisive mandatory evaluation by which they are accepted or denied by their preferred schools, based on performance. Considering this school environment, children's focus on performance and preoccupation with mistakes may be an adaptation to academically survive within an unforgiving school context.

### ***The role of peer and teacher relationships***

Children's narratives underscored teachers' and peers' pivotal roles in their daily lives and perfectionism, in line with previous theories (Flett et al., 2002; Stoeber et al., 2016). Both the children's and parents' descriptions underscored the importance of teachers' support versus criticism. In line with Domocus et al. (2018), teacher support seems to help children

see performance contexts as less threatening (e.g., *Today I also participated in a contest and even if I didn't do very well, teacher was pleased that at least I participated.*). Paralleling the themes of performance focus, some teachers seem to be focused on performance and preoccupied with mistakes, as suggested by some of the feedback discussed in parents' descriptions (e.g., *She -the child- was praised by the teacher because she did very well on the Comper test*). Moreover, performance-oriented teacher feedback was positively associated with children's perfectionism. This aligns with Daumiller et al. (2023), suggesting that schools who emphasize performance will promote performance-based teaching, which makes children susceptible to perfectionism.

Beyond the overwhelming mentions of school work, children also frequently discussed about playing with classmates, games during breaks, and spending time with their friends at school (e.g., *"We played volleyball and had fun."*). When they described these activities, they mostly described their enjoyment, having fun, or being happy about certain games. It seems that peer relationships bring mostly a positive note to the school experience. Arguably, they might be a source of resilience when facing challenging academic settings (Luthar et al., 2020; Rueger, 2010; Shin & Ryan, 2014). However, social comparison in this developmental period is increasing, thus peers may also become a source of pressure and burnout (Madigan & Curran, 2021).

Summing up, children's and parents' descriptions about their daily lives, illustrate the presence of performance-focused pressures that contribute to children's perfectionistic preoccupations. This pressure can be seen in multiple levels: children's focus on grades, performance comparisons with classmates, children's monitoring of performance and mistakes, their stress and relief when escaping evaluations, as well as a school environment constantly packed with tests, contests, evaluations, performance-focused teacher feedback, homework, even in primary school.



#### 3.4.4.4. Limitations and future directions

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. The sample size was small, and attrition may have influenced the results, limiting generalizability. Children had a difficult time logging everyday, and both children and parents tended to give up closer to the end of collection, with the last weekend of collection being completed by only three dyads. Weekends proved to be especially difficult for completion. Thus, future studies should consider the possibility of only including weekdays or targeting weekends separately. Lastly, future research might be interested in expanding the intervals of measure and including weekly measures throughout the year in this exploration. Missing data was also substantial, some children having missing days, some parents only completing one collection. Also, we encountered situations where children or parents wrote the wrong ID code of the dyad.

Also, some items proved to be too difficult for children even though they were previously piloted. Specifically, the reverse and double negative items were more difficult, leading to their removal from all analyses.

Another limit pertains to the restrictions of a daily diary design with children, which is very demanding for the participants. Many children understandably did not go into much detail in their open questions, the question about feedback being often ignored. However, their responses were still significant and informative. Parents' reports and diaries were fundamental in completing the information. Thus, future studies should perhaps include daily diaries for parents, too. Next, the daily diary design forced limitations in order to reduce participant burden and adapt to children's ages. Thus, the daily perfectionism checklist marked the presence or absence of each behavior described for children, and the score for daily perfectionistic strivings and concerns represented a sum score, limited by the number of items which were also reduced. We also included the open questions only at the end of each daily diary, which may have caused a prompting effect for children to discuss their school

day, rather than their day at home. Thus, the overwhelming presence of discussions on the school work and time spent at school may be explained by this prompting. Additionally, we were only focused on parent and child perspectives, but future research should also incorporate teacher-reported data to triangulate findings regarding the school context, and expand on the present qualitative exploration. The cultural specificity of the Romanian context should also be considered when interpreting findings, as educational policies and parental expectations may differ across cultures. This result is representative for the Romanian school context, and the specifics of the present sample, which was not selected based on perfectionism levels. Future studies might be interested in exploring children's subjective experiences in their everyday life on a sample with high levels of perfectionism.

#### **3.4.4. Conclusion**

This study advances the understanding of perfectionism as a dynamic and multidimensional construct in middle childhood. It highlights the critical role of autonomy support in buffering perfectionistic concerns, while reinforcing the relative stability of perfectionistic strivings. The school context appears to be a key driver of daily fluctuations in perfectionistic concerns, suggesting that targeted interventions in educational settings may be particularly effective. Future research should continue to refine theoretical models of childhood perfectionism and explore practical interventions to support children's well-being in both home and school environments.

## IV. CHAPTER IV. GENERAL DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

### 4.1. Theoretical Contributions

**Table 1**  
**Summary of original theoretical contributions**

Thesis section	Key findings and theoretical contributions/ advances
<p>Introduction</p> <p>Part of section 1.3.4. reflects: Domocus, I. M., Damian, L. E., &amp; Benga, O. (2020). Teacher's Role in the Development of Children's Perfectionism. <i>Perspectives on Early Childhood Psychology and Education</i>, 4(2), 217-236. PACE UNIVERSITY PRESS, [S.l.]. ISBN: 978-1-935625-44-5.</p>	<p>This thesis explores risk and protective factors within the family and school contexts in relation to perfectionism development, with a focus on middle childhood and adolescence, emphasizing potential protective sources from perfectionism development. More specifically, this thesis investigates the dynamic longitudinal relations between perceived family acceptance, parent-adolescent relationship quality, parental autonomy support, school daily context, and perfectionism in adolescence and middle to late childhood. By integrating theoretical perspectives and empirical evidence, the present thesis contributes to a deeper understanding of perfectionism development within a relational framework of interdependence and reciprocity (Rasmussen &amp; Troilo, 2016), targeting the emergence and development of perfectionism.</p> <p>This section brings new contributions by constructing a critical analysis of normative developmental considerations for perfectionism development; constructing a systematic review and critical analysis of the role of teachers in children's perfectionism development; and building an extended integrative model for perfectionism development.</p>
<p>Study 1</p> <p>Domocus, I. M., Damian, L. E., &amp; Benga, O. (2022). Perfectionism shapes the way adolescents perceive family acceptance over time. <i>Journal of Social and Personal Relationships</i>, 39(5), 1369-1389. DOI: <a href="https://doi.org/10.1177/02654075211056563">https://doi.org/10.1177/02654075211056563</a>.</p>	<p>Our results contribute to advancements in understanding the role of adolescents' perfectionism in their perceptions of acceptance from their family over time. They suggest that adolescents with perfectionism may assume conditional acceptance, bringing support to the Perfectionism Social Disconnection Model (PSDM; Hewitt et al., 2017). More specifically, adolescents seem to perceive higher acceptance from their whole family over time, if they strive for perfection. Contrastingly, our results suggest that adolescents' perfectionistic concerns are linked to lower perceived family acceptance over time, suggesting that adolescents who are preoccupied with imperfection, more worried and doubtful, may feel less accepted. This is supporting the PSDM (Hewitt et al., 2017) highlighting that adolescents who are more concerned over perfection may be hypersensitive to rejection and feel less accepted or</p>

	<p>even sabotage their acceptance via behaviors hindering their parents' ability to express their acceptance – thus, potentially furthering social disconnection within the family.</p> <p>Additionally, the study supports the distinction between perfectionistic strivings and concerns, suggesting that perfectionistic strivings may respond positively to conditional acceptance and perfectionistic concerns may hinder the relationship with adolescents' family by perceiving less acceptance from them.</p>
<p>Study 2</p> <p>Bunea, I. M., Damian, L. E., &amp; Benga, O. (accepted, 2025). Perfectionism's role in shaping adolescents' perception of support from friends. <i>Studia Universitatis Babes-Bolyai-Psychologia-Paedagogia (accepted for publication - June edition)</i>.</p>	<p>This research furthers the previous findings in Study 1, by observing the role of perfectionism in their perceptions of support from friends over time. Our results noting that adolescents' perfectionistic concerns were linked to decreases in perceived friend support over time, highlighting the furthering of social disconnection outside family relationships, to friendships.</p> <p>This result advances research on the Social Disconnection Model for Perfectionism (Hewitt et al., 2017) pointing out the impact it may have on hindering perceptions of being supported and cared for in adolescents' friendships. Additionally, the study supports the distinction between perfectionistic strivings and concerns over impacting friendships.</p>
<p>Study 3</p> <p>Bunea, I. M., Damian, L. E., &amp; Benga, O. (under revision for invited resubmission). Perfectionism and relationship quality in parent-adolescent dyads. <i>European Journal of Personality</i>.</p>	<p><b>Perceived relationship quality contribution to perfectionism:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Our results suggest that adolescents' perceived relationship quality with their mothers contribute to decreases in their perfectionistic concerns but not in adolescents' perfectionistic strivings, highlighting both the importance of the mother-adolescent relationship for perfectionism development, as well as the importance of investigating separate pathways of development for perfectionistic strivings versus perfectionistic concerns. This result contributes to theoretical advances in theories discussing perfectionism development (Hewitt et al., 2017). Across dyads there was an association between higher perceived relationship quality and families with lower perfectionism.</li> <li>• When splitting perfectionistic concerns into its more granular components, adolescents' perceived relationship quality contributed to adolescents' socially prescribed perfectionism, emphasizing the unique significance of socially prescribed perfectionism in relationships, as theorized in Flett et al. (2022).</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Also, a major contribution to theory and research on perfectionism is reflected in the result that adolescents' perceived relationship quality with their mother and father contributed to subsequent decreases in parental perfectionistic strivings, suggesting that when adolescents feel safer in relationship with their mother and father, their parents may reduce their need for perfection. This represents the first study investigating and discovering that children may also impact parents' perfectionism. Also, a significant new result represents the role of parents' perceived relationship quality predicting subsequent significant decreases in parents' concerns over mistakes and doubts about actions, suggesting that a better relationship quality with their adolescent relieves parents from concerning over mistakes and imperfection.</li> </ul> <p><b>Perfectionism contributions to perceived relationship quality:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Results also indicated that parental perfectionistic strivings contributed to adolescents' perceptions of relationship quality with the father. Considering the majority of the sample being mothers, a mothers' perfectionistic strivings within the family may contribute to how their adolescent views and evaluates the quality of their relationship with the father. Thus, an individual's perfectionism may negatively contribute to the relationship within the family, as suggested by the PSDM (Hewitt et al., 2017).</li> <li>To our knowledge, this represents the first study to attempt a longitudinal exploration of the dynamic relation between perfectionism and relationship quality/security using a longitudinal actor-partner design, which took both the adolescents' and the parents' perspectives into account for different pathways of perfectionism development.</li> </ul>
<p>Study 4</p> <p>Capturing perfectionism in the daily life of school-aged children: An exploration of risk and protective factors (manuscript in preparation)</p>	<p><b>Parental Autonomy Support and Perfectionism:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Parents' perfectionistic strivings</b> were directly associated with lower <b>perfectionistic strivings in</b> children, supporting an oppositional reactance hypothesis (van Petegem et al., 2015). Parents' <b>perfectionistic concerns</b> were also directly associated with lower <b>perfectionistic concerns</b> in children. However, they <b>indirectly contributed to increases in these concerns by reducing autonomy support</b>. This suggests that while parents' perfectionistic concerns may sometimes ignite reactivity in children (Brauer, 2017; Quick &amp; Stephenson, 2008), the detrimental impact of low autonomy support from</li> </ul>

	<p>perfectionistic parents outweighs any potential benefits, ultimately contributing to <b>increases in perfectionistic concerns in children</b>. Contrastingly, perfectionistic strivings did not present significant effects, suggesting different pathways for the development of perfectionistic dimensions consistent with literature (Flett et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2022).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Additionally, <b>parental autonomy support was negatively associated with daily perfectionistic concerns</b>, suggesting that children with more autonomy-supportive parents exhibited fewer daily perfectionistic concerns compared to those with less autonomy-supportive parents, in line with previous results.</li></ul> <p><b>Variability of Perfectionism in Middle Childhood</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The study identified significant within-subject variability in both daily perfectionistic concerns and strivings, hinting toward the importance of exploring relevant daily contexts that contribute to these fluctuations.</li><li>• The mixed-methods approach employed in this study allowed for a deeper investigation into the lived experiences of children and how perfectionism manifests in their daily lives. Specifically, children's narratives highlighted a school context often fostering performance-driven motivations, focused on grades, tests, competitions, related to children's perfectionistic strivings, and perfectionistic concerns.</li></ul>
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## 4.2. Methodological Contributions

An important methodological contribution to the field is the use of longitudinal models in all studies. There are few studies investigating perfectionism in children and adolescents using longitudinal designs, and even less doing so in middle childhood (e.g. Hong et al., 2017). Additionally, studies 3 and 4 included multiple time points and a novel intensive longitudinal diary design (Study 4), allowing for a more detailed exploration of children and adolescents' perfectionism changes over time.

Another contribution is brought by investigating reciprocal relations within models (Studies 1,2,3), allowing for a more comprehensive investigation of the dynamics between perceived relationship factors and adolescents' perfectionism. Importantly, the third study is, to our knowledge, the first to explore perfectionism development in relation to parent-adolescent relationship quality in a dyadic longitudinal actor-partner interdependence model (L-APIM). This analysis allowed us to account for dyadic interdependence and explore actor and partner effects, discovering potential contributions of children to parental perfectionism uncharted before, as well as bringing support to the theoretical claims of the role of relationship quality for perfectionism development (Hewitt et al., 2017) and the reciprocity inside the parent-child/adolescent relationship (Rasmussen & Troilo, 2016). Additionally, the last study also explored dyadic data.

As a secondary objective, for a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of perfectionism and children's everyday subjective experience in the context of middle childhood, in study 4, we took a closer look at analyzing the variability of perfectionism both from baseline to follow-up, as well as the variability in children's daily reports of perfectionism, capturing a novel perspective on the construct of perfectionism within children's everyday life.

Adding to this, the mixed-methods approach incorporating qualitative analyses allowed for a deeper dive into the lived experiences of children in their daily lives that may potentially explain this daily variability. Also, this exploration highlighted numerous potential ways in which everyday contexts may contribute to more perfectionistic concerns in children, that warrant future investigations.

Notably, methodological contributions also emerged from investigating the psychometric properties, factor loadings, and measurement invariance for Perfectionism, Perceived family acceptance, and Perceived Relationship quality in Studies 1 and 3. The bifactorial model of perfectionism (perfectionistic strivings vs. perfectionistic concerns) was confirmed on two independent samples in high-school adolescents (14-19 years old) as well as on a sample including younger adolescents (10-18 years old). All used scales for perfectionism presented good internal consistency (Cronbach Alphas over .70) and measurement invariance, reinforcing the validity of F-MPS (Frost et al., 1990), CAPS (Flett et al., 2016), and MPS-short form (Hewitt et al., 2008). Also, the measurement invariance for the bifactorial measure of perfectionism was excellent in adolescents, as well as their parents, suggesting psychometric equivalence of constructs across time. Additionally, we performed these analyses to determine perceived family acceptance and perceived relationship quality, obtaining good psychometric consistency and equivalence across waves. For both measures, a model separating mother and father acceptance/relationship quality was a better fit for the data, marking the importance of distinctly addressing parental factors between mother and father.

### **4.3. Recommendations and Practical Implications**

Concerning the practical implications of our study, the present thesis draws attention to several important aspects to take into account for perfectionism development, its early



assessment, prevention and intervention. These implications are particularly relevant in the context of perfectionism development through middle childhood and adolescence.

First, assessment, prevention, and intervention research efforts regarding perfectionism should be tailored to the cognitive and socio-emotional advances children and adolescents experience as they go through normative developmental stages. Screening practices should be developed to identify children who exhibit early perfectionistic traits, especially in families where parents also exhibit perfectionism, high achievement is emphasized, or relationship quality and autonomy support are low.

Second, our studies suggest that effective interventions should include components that address family interaction patterns, teacher-child dynamics, and peer influences. Facilitating open communication, trust, a sense of belonging, autonomy, and realistic expectations within these relationships can help buffer against perfectionistic pressures. Family-based prevention programs could provide support to caregivers who may unintentionally reinforce rigid standards or conditional regard and struggle with supporting their children's autonomy or providing a safe and qualitative parent-child relationship. Also, interventions might be extended to include parenting workshops, teacher training, and school-wide practices that promote realistic goal-setting, collaborative learning, and process focus rather than performance focus. Such multi-level approaches are more likely to reduce pressures that contribute to the development of perfectionism in these vulnerable periods of middle childhood to adolescence. Children's perfectionistic expressions seem to fluctuate with situational demands, which means that interventions would benefit from incorporating strategies to help children recognize and regulate their responses in various contexts. Interventions should help reduce external pressures but also equip children to resist internalizing unrealistic standards and promote more flexibility to enhance children's resilience to external pressures.

#### **4.4. Limitations and Future Research**

Nevertheless, the current thesis has several limitations, beyond those extensively discussed for each study, that need to be taken into account.

Our studies focused on self-reports capturing perceptions of adolescents, parents, and children. While these provide valuable subjective insights into the lived experiences of perfectionism, parent-child/adolescent relationships, parental practices, and daily functioning, self-reports are inherently biased, and future studies may be interested in further exploring observable behaviors in interactions within parent-child relationships. Thus, future research may benefit from using multiple data sources, from teacher reports and peer reports to physiological and observed behavioral indicators, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of perfectionism and the relational and school contexts within which it develops.

Furthermore, our studies focused on naturally occurring developmental phenomena and explored emerging patterns within longitudinal correlational designs, limiting any assertions of causality. Future studies should further explore these relations within experimental or longitudinal interventions to identify mechanisms of reduction of perfectionistic tendencies in children.

Another noteworthy limitation is the gender imbalance in parental participation: all studies involving parent-reported data had an overwhelming majority of mother respondents, with fathers being significantly underrepresented. This skew limits the generalizability of findings and may obscure potential differences in parental perspectives or contributions to children's perfectionistic tendencies. Future research should strive to include a more balanced representation of fathers and other caregivers, thereby capturing a broader spectrum of family dynamics and socialization practices relevant to the development of perfectionism.

#### 4.5. Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, the present thesis contributes to significant theoretical, empirical and methodological advances, which help us to better understand how the relational context shapes perfectionism development in middle childhood and adolescence, and how children/adolescents' perfectionism subsequently shapes perceptions of relationships.

On the one hand, the thesis results emphasize perfectionism as contributing to biases in adolescents' interpretations of their family's acceptance and social support from friends, suggesting potential biases of perfectionism hindering relationships, in accordance with the perfectionism social disconnection model (Hewitt et al., 2017) and consolidating perfectionism as a potential risk factor for interpersonal relationships.

On the other hand, our results suggest that perceptions of the quality of the caregiver-child relationship within the parent-adolescent relationship may represent a protective factor against perfectionistic concerns development and maintenance in adolescents. Additionally, the thesis highlights a mutual relationship between parent and child, where parents may also be impacted by their children. This thesis contributes to the understanding of perfectionism as a dynamic and multidimensional construct in middle childhood and adolescence, first pointing to its sensitivity to relational contexts. High-quality relationships, as well as autonomy-supportive parenting, may be important in mitigating perfectionistic concerns and promoting healthier family dynamics and individual well-being. Completing this image, school context appears to be a potential driver of daily fluctuations in perfectionistic concerns.

Finally, our findings highlight the multidimensional nature of perfectionism even in childhood and adolescence, bringing support to current conceptualizations of perfectionism and theoretical models for perfectionism development.

## V. CHAPTER V. REFERENCES

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