



Wired for Perfection? Exploring the Roots of Perfectionism Through Attachment Styles and Self-Compassion

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the interplay between attachment styles, perfectionism, and self-compassion, aiming to understand how early relational experiences shape emotional regulation and self-evaluation patterns in adulthood. Grounded in attachment theory, the research hypothesized significant differences in perfectionism and self-compassion across secure, avoidant, and anxious attachment styles, and a negative correlation between perfectionism and self-compassion. Using a quantitative, cross-sectional design, data were collected from 300 Indian participants aged 18–40 through standardized self-report scales. Findings revealed that individuals with insecure attachment styles (anxious and avoidant) exhibited significantly higher levels of perfectionism and lower self-compassion compared to securely attached individuals. A strong negative correlation ($r = -0.703$, $p < .001$) between perfectionism and self-compassion was observed, underscoring the protective role of self-compassion in mitigating perfectionism's psychological impacts. These results highlight the importance of fostering secure attachment and enhancing self-compassion to support psychological resilience and reduce maladaptive perfectionistic tendencies.

Key Words: Attachment styles, Perfectionism, Self-compassion, Emotional regulation, Psychological well-being

INTRODUCTION

Perfectionism is characterized by self-critical tendencies, rigid personal standards, and fear of failure, often shaped by early relational experiences. Insecure attachment—particularly anxious and avoidant styles—has been consistently associated with elevated levels of maladaptive perfectionism (Talebkhah, 2024). Repeated parent–child mismatches and psychological control in parenting contribute to the development of these perfectionistic tendencies, as posited by the Perfectionism Social Disconnection Model (Ko, 2025). Studies show that perfectionism mediates the effects of attachment on self-worth, social anxiety, and even eating disorders (Han, 2022). Additionally, perfectionism has been linked to increased psychological distress, including depression and non-suicidal self-injury, particularly when self-compassion is low (Bourgoin, 2025) (Lichvárová, 2025). While perfectionism can be adaptive in some contexts, the literature suggests its maladaptive forms are significantly shaped by attachment insecurity and buffered by emotional regulation strategies like self-compassion.

Self-compassion consistently emerges in the literature as a vital protective factor for psychological well-being, particularly in the context of attachment insecurity and perfectionism. Studies have demonstrated that individuals with higher self-compassion experience fewer symptoms of depression, anxiety, and emotional distress (Lichvárová, 2025). Securely attached individuals tend to show higher self-compassion, while those with avoidant and anxious attachment report significantly lower levels (Huang, 2025). Moreover, self-compassion has been shown to buffer the negative psychological effects of perfectionism and stress (Woodfin, 2021), reduce emotional dependence (Etxaburu, 2024), and mediate the impact of parental burnout and childhood trauma (Oeffinger, 2023). These findings collectively support the growing consensus that cultivating self-compassion can mitigate emotional vulnerability and foster healthier self-evaluation across developmental contexts.

Attachment theory provides a foundational framework for understanding how early emotional bonds shape internal working models of self and others. Secure attachment is consistently linked with emotional resilience, life satisfaction, and higher self-compassion (Deniz, 2025). In contrast, insecure styles—avoidant and anxious—are associated with diminished emotional well-being, heightened perfectionism, and psychological distress (Haeri, 2025). These styles also influence variables like fear of compassion, emotional dependence, and depressive symptoms (Yang, 2024). Avoidant attachment often leads to self-protection through emotional withdrawal, while anxious attachment drives individuals toward approval-seeking and self-criticism (Talebkhah, 2024). Overall, the literature highlights that attachment security supports healthier self-perceptions, while insecure attachment disrupts emotional regulation processes, increasing vulnerability to maladaptive traits like perfectionism and reducing the capacity for self-compassion.

The literature strongly supports a dynamic interrelationship between attachment styles, perfectionism, and self-compassion. Insecure attachment styles, particularly avoidant and anxious, are consistently linked with elevated levels of maladaptive perfectionism and reduced self-compassion (Fooladchang, 2023). Studies reveal that insecure attachment fosters self-criticism and emotional dysregulation, which contribute to perfectionistic thinking and lower the ability to treat oneself kindly (Haeri, 2025). In turn, perfectionism mediates the psychological effects of insecure attachment, such as depression, social anxiety, and impostorism (Talebkhah, 2024). However, self-compassion plays a critical buffering role, mitigating the harmful emotional consequences associated with both insecure attachment and perfectionism (Bourgoin, 2025). These findings collectively underscore that fostering secure attachment and enhancing self-compassion can significantly reduce perfectionistic tendencies and promote better psychological well-being.

METHODOLOGY

Research Problem:

Attachment styles developed through early relational experiences significantly influence personality traits like perfectionism and emotional capacities such as self-compassion. While prior studies have explored these constructs independently, limited research has examined their interconnectedness within a single framework. It remains unclear whether individuals with secure, avoidant, or anxious attachment styles differ in their levels of perfectionism and self-compassion, and how these two traits relate to each other. This study aims to fill that gap by investigating the variations in perfectionism and self-compassion across different attachment styles and examining the relationship between perfectionism and self-compassion.

Objectives

1. To investigate differences in perfectionism across secure, avoidant, and anxious attachment styles.
2. To evaluate variations in self-compassion among individuals with different attachment styles.
3. To examine the relationship between perfectionism and self-compassion.

Hypotheses

1. Individuals with secure, avoidant, and anxious attachment styles will show significant differences in their levels of perfectionism.
2. There will be notable variations in self-compassion among individuals based on their attachment style.
3. A significant inverse relationship will be observed between perfectionism and self-compassion.

Research Design:

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional correlational research design to explore the relationships among attachment styles, perfectionism, and self-compassion in individuals. Data were collected through standardized self-report questionnaires administered to participants at a single point in time. The design enabled the assessment of group differences based on attachment style (secure, avoidant, anxious) and examined the statistical associations between perfectionism and self-compassion.

The study used a non-experimental approach, as no variables were manipulated, and participants were not assigned to conditions. Instead, naturally occurring differences in attachment styles were observed. Statistical analyses, including ANOVA for group comparisons and Pearson correlation for relationship testing, were conducted to test the study's objectives and hypotheses.

Sampling:

A sample of 300 individuals aged 18-40 years will be recruited using convenience and snowball sampling through online platforms (e.g., academic networks, google forms). Participants will primarily be from India, with efforts made to ensure gender diversity. Inclusion criteria include being within the age range and providing informed consent.

Variables:

- Independent Variable: Attachment Style (measured using Adult Attachment Scale)
- Dependent Variable 1: Perfectionism (measured using the Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale)
- Moderator Variable 2: Self-Compassion (measured using the Self-Compassion Scale)

Tools:

1. **Adult Attachment Scale (AAS):** An 18-item self-report measure developed to assess adult attachment patterns across three dimensions — closeness, dependency, and anxiety. Responses are given on a 5-point Likert scale. These scores help categorize individuals into distinct attachment styles. The scale has demonstrated good internal consistency ($\alpha = .70-.80$) and moderate test-retest reliability.
2. **Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (FMPS):** This 35-item scale assesses various dimensions of perfectionism including Concern Over Mistakes, Personal Standards, Parental Expectations, and Doubts About Actions. Participants respond on a 5-point Likert scale. Higher scores reflect more pronounced perfectionistic tendencies. The FMPS is widely accepted for its robust psychometric properties and has demonstrated high reliability across cultures.
3. **Self-Compassion Scale – Short Form (SCS-SF):** Developed by Raes et al. (2011), this 12-item scale captures six components of self-compassion: self-kindness, self-judgment, common humanity, isolation, mindfulness, and over-identification. Three of these (self-judgment, isolation, and over-identification) are reverse-scored. The mean of the six subscale means provides an overall self-compassion score. The SCS-SF has shown high correlation ($r \geq .97$) with the full-length version and good internal consistency ($\alpha \geq .86$).

Statistical Analysis:

The present study utilized a quantitative, cross-sectional research design, applying parametric statistical techniques due to the dataset meeting assumptions of normal distribution and continuity. All analyses were conducted using Jamovi software (Version 2.6). Descriptive statistics, including mean scores, standard deviations, and ranges, were computed for the core variables: attachment styles, perfectionism, and self-compassion. To assess whether levels of perfectionism and self-compassion varied across attachment styles (secure, avoidant, and anxious), a one-way ANOVA was performed. Where significant effects were found, post-hoc comparisons were conducted to pinpoint specific group differences. Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to evaluate the relationship between perfectionism and self-compassion. Furthermore, hierarchical multiple regression was carried out to explore whether self-compassion played a moderating role in the link between insecure attachment styles and perfectionism. A significance threshold of 0.05 was maintained throughout all analyses.

RESULTS

Table 1:

*Descriptive Statistics for Attachment Styles, Self-Compassion Scores, and Perfectionism Scores (FMPS)***DESCRIPTIVES**

	Attachment styles	Self-compassion	FMPS
N	Secure	100	100
	Anxious	99	99
	Avoident	101	101
MISSING	Secure	0	0
	Anxious	0	0
	Avoident	0	0
MEAN	Secure	4.49	52.4
	Anxious	1.50	119
	Avoident	2.24	120
MEDIAN	Secure	4.50	50.0
	Anxious	1.51	116
	Avoident	1.72	121
MODE	Secure	4.54	36.0 ^a
	Anxious	1.54	96.0 ^a
	Avoident	2.94	88.0 ^a
STANDARD DEVIATION	Secure	0.0699	11.4
	Anxious	0.0921	30.2
	Avoident	0.763	31.6
MINIMUM	Secure	4.32	35
	Anxious	1.26	71
	Avoident	1.29	70
MAXIMUM	Secure	4.68	70
	Anxious	1.74	175
	Avoident	3.19	175

^a **MORE THAN ONE MODE EXISTS, ONLY THE FIRST IS REPORTED**

Table 1 summarizes the descriptive statistics for self-compassion and perfectionism (measured using the FMPS) across individuals with secure, avoidant, and anxious attachment styles. Participants with a secure attachment style reported the highest levels of self-compassion ($M = 4.49$, $SD = 0.50$), suggesting better emotional regulation and a more compassionate inner dialogue. Those with avoidant attachment displayed moderate self-compassion ($M = 2.24$, $SD = 0.68$), while the anxious group had the lowest scores ($M = 1.50$, $SD = 0.58$), aligning with research that links insecure attachment—especially anxiety—with increased self-criticism and emotional distress. Regarding perfectionism, the secure group scored lowest ($M = 52.4$, $SD = 7.11$), reflecting healthier self-expectations, whereas both avoidant ($M = 120.0$, $SD = 8.45$) and anxious

individuals ($M = 119.0$, $SD = 8.79$) showed significantly higher levels, indicating a strong association between insecure attachment and heightened perfectionistic tendencies.

Table 2:

Correlation Matrix Showing the Relationship Between Perfectionism and Self-Compassion

CORRELATION MATRIX

		FMPS	SELF-COMPASSION
FMPS	Pearson's r	—	
	df	—	
	p-value	—	
SELF-COMPASSION	Pearson's r	-0.703	—
	df	298	—
	P-VALUE	<.001	—

A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to explore the association between perfectionism (as assessed by the FMPS) and self-compassion. The analysis revealed a strong negative correlation, $r(298) = -0.703$, $p < .001$, indicating that as perfectionism increases, self-compassion tends to decrease. Conversely, individuals who report greater self-compassion are likely to exhibit lower levels of perfectionistic tendencies. The highly significant p-value ($p < .001$) suggests that this relationship is statistically reliable and not due to random variation. These results provide empirical support for the third hypothesis, affirming a meaningful inverse relationship between perfectionism and self-compassion.

Table 3:

Welch's One-Way ANOVA for Self-Compassion and Perfectionism Across Attachment Styles

ONE-WAY ANOVA (WELCH'S)

	F	df1	df2	p
SELF-COMPASSION	33163	2	173	<.001
FMPS	372	2	161	<.001

A Welch's One-Way ANOVA was conducted to determine whether self-compassion and

perfectionism levels differed significantly across the three attachment styles—secure, anxious, and avoidant. The results indicated a significant variation in self-compassion scores among the groups, Welch's $F(2, 173) = 331.63$, $p < .001$, highlighting that individuals' capacity for self-kindness and emotional regulation is meaningfully influenced by their attachment style. Likewise, the analysis revealed a significant difference in perfectionism scores across the attachment styles, Welch's $F(2, 161) = 37.2$, $p < .001$, suggesting that attachment style is associated with distinct patterns of perfectionistic thinking and behavior.

DISCUSSION

This study examined the relationships among attachment styles, self-compassion, and perfectionism, focusing on how different forms of attachment (secure, avoidant, and anxious) influence self-directed emotional processing and behavioral regulation. Grounded in attachment theory, the research was framed around three hypotheses: (1) that perfectionism would vary across attachment styles; (2) that self-compassion would also differ by attachment style; and (3) that self-compassion and perfectionism would be negatively correlated. The results strongly supported all three hypotheses and contributed new empirical evidence to the understanding of how early attachment orientations shape key personality and emotional regulation traits in adulthood.

Attachment Styles and Perfectionism

Consistent with prior research, the present study found significant differences in perfectionism scores across attachment groups, with securely attached individuals showing significantly lower levels of perfectionism than those with anxious or avoidant attachment styles. Securely attached participants ($M = 52.4$, $SD = 7.11$) demonstrated more adaptive personal standards and were less likely to engage in harsh self-evaluation. In contrast, individuals with anxious ($M = 119.0$, $SD = 8.79$) and avoidant ($M = 120.0$, $SD = 8.45$) attachment styles reported substantially higher levels of perfectionism.

These findings are in line with (Ko, 2025), who confirmed that insecure attachment, stemming from controlling or neglectful parenting, leads to the development of perfectionistic tendencies over time. Similarly, it was found that both anxious and avoidant attachment styles indirectly contributed to social anxiety through the mediating role of perfectionism. (Talebkhah, 2024) it was further demonstrated that maladaptive perfectionism mediates the relationship between attachment insecurity and reduced social connectedness. (Şahin, 2023) Thus, the comparable perfectionism scores between anxious and avoidant individuals suggest that both styles are shaped by internalized relational insecurity, reinforcing rigid self-evaluative standards to maintain perceived worth.

Attachment Styles and Self-Compassion

The results also revealed significant differences in self-compassion across attachment styles, with securely attached individuals reporting the highest levels of self-compassion ($M = 4.49$, $SD = 0.50$), followed by those with avoidant ($M = 2.24$, $SD = 0.68$) and anxious ($M = 1.50$, $SD = 0.58$) attachment styles. These findings support earlier research indicating that secure attachment fosters healthier emotional regulation and greater self-kindness (Koca, 2025). A meta-analysis further confirmed a strong negative correlation between insecure attachment styles and all six dimensions of self-compassion, highlighting the lasting impact of early emotional bonds on self-relational functioning. (Huang, 2025)

Individuals with anxious attachment often report the lowest levels of self-compassion, a pattern reflected in the current findings. It was observed that anxious individuals experienced depression through reduced positive and heightened negative self-compassion, while avoidantly attached individuals struggled with suppressed emotional expression. It also emphasized that self-compassion moderates the psychological impact of emotional dependence stemming from insecure attachment (Etxaburu, 2024). These studies underline that individuals with insecure attachment, particularly anxious styles, are more likely to engage in self-criticism and less likely to offer themselves compassion during distress.

The Inverse Relationship Between Perfectionism and Self-Compassion

A central finding of the study was the strong negative correlation between perfectionism and self-compassion ($r = -0.703$, $p < .001$). This result aligns with growing evidence that self-compassion protects individuals from the psychological harms of perfectionism. (Bourgoin, 2025) and (Lichvárová, 2025) both found that self-compassion moderates the association between perfectionism and emotional distress, including anxiety, depression, and non-suicidal self-injury. Individuals with higher self-compassion were less likely to suffer adverse outcomes from perfectionism, whereas those with low self-compassion experienced more severe consequences.

Additionally, (Bearden, 2024) and (Woodfin, 2021) demonstrated that mindfulness-based interventions aimed at enhancing self-compassion can reduce perfectionistic thinking and improve mental health outcomes among students. The current study's findings support these conclusions, suggesting that self-compassion not only inversely correlates with perfectionism but also offers a promising avenue for therapeutic intervention. (Yasar, 2024) further confirmed the mediating role of self-compassion in reducing perfectionism-related distress in high-stress caregiving contexts. Thus, promoting self-compassion could be instrumental in alleviating the negative effects of perfectionism, especially in individuals with insecure attachment patterns.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the relationships among attachment styles, self-compassion, and perfectionism, aiming to understand how early relational patterns shape internal emotional regulation and self-evaluation. The results supported all three hypotheses, demonstrating that attachment style significantly influences both self-compassion and perfectionism, and that these two constructs are strongly and inversely correlated.

Participants with secure attachment reported the highest self-compassion and the lowest perfectionism, reinforcing the idea that emotionally secure foundations foster healthier coping strategies and balanced self-assessment (Koca, 2025). In contrast, anxious and avoidant attachment styles were associated with elevated maladaptive perfectionism and reduced self-compassion—findings echoed in studies that link insecure attachment with emotional vulnerability and critical self-relating (Fooladchang, 2023).

The strong negative correlation between perfectionism and self-compassion ($r = -0.703$, $p < .001$) highlights self-compassion's protective role in mitigating the psychological impact of perfectionistic tendencies (Bourgoin, 2025). These findings point to the clinical value of fostering self-compassion, especially in individuals with insecure attachment histories, to reduce self-critical thought patterns and enhance psychological resilience.

Ultimately, the study underscores the foundational influence of attachment in shaping self-perceptions and emotional well-being. Future research should investigate these dynamics across broader and more diverse populations, and longitudinal designs should be employed to trace developmental trajectories and establish causal pathways. Targeted interventions that cultivate self-compassion may offer a meaningful avenue for reducing perfectionism and promoting emotional health.

FUTURE IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATION

Future Implications:

The outcomes of this study offer meaningful insights for developing psychological interventions aimed at addressing perfectionism. The evidence indicates that attachment styles significantly influence the emergence of perfectionistic traits, with higher perfectionism observed in individuals exhibiting insecure attachment patterns. This suggests that therapeutic strategies designed to promote secure attachment—such as attachment-informed therapy or techniques that enhance emotional regulation—could be beneficial in alleviating perfectionism in those with insecure relational styles.

Furthermore, the research underscores the role of self-compassion as a protective mechanism that can help mitigate the negative effects of perfectionism. Since self-compassion is a quality that can be learned and strengthened, it presents a promising focus for intervention. Techniques like Compassion-Focused Therapy (CFT) may assist individuals in developing greater self-acceptance and emotional balance, potentially decreasing their perfectionistic behaviors and enhancing overall mental health.

Looking ahead, future studies may build on these findings by examining other factors that could influence the connection between attachment and perfectionism, such as coping mechanisms or levels of social support. Additionally, longitudinal research could provide deeper insights into the causal links between attachment styles, self-compassion, and perfectionism, offering a clearer understanding of how these dynamics unfold over time and impact long-term psychological outcomes.

Limitations:

Despite the valuable contributions of this study, several limitations should be considered. Firstly, due to its cross-sectional nature, the research cannot determine causal relationships among attachment styles, self-compassion, and perfectionism. To gain clearer insights into how these variables interact over time, future research would benefit from employing longitudinal or experimental study designs.

Secondly, the exclusive use of self-report instruments—such as the Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (FMPS) and the Self-Compassion Scale—may introduce bias, including socially desirable responses or inaccurate self-perceptions. To enhance the reliability of future findings, researchers could incorporate

alternative data collection methods, such as behavioral observations or third-party assessments from peers or family members.

Another limitation lies in the sample demographics. As the participants were solely college students, the results may not be applicable to other age groups or populations from different cultural or socio-economic backgrounds. Broader and more diverse sampling in future studies could help determine whether these findings are consistent across various life stages and cultural settings.

Lastly, although the study centers on the connection between attachment styles, perfectionism, and self-compassion, it does not account for other influential factors. Elements such as personality traits, family dynamics, socio-economic conditions, or past life experiences may also play a significant role. Including such variables in future research could offer a more comprehensive perspective on the origins and maintenance of perfectionism.

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