

# Literature Review: The Effects of Attachment Styles and Perfectionism on Life Satisfaction

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**Abstract.** Attachment and perfectionism are two important psychological factors that can significantly influence individual satisfaction in various aspects of life, including relationships, work, and personal achievement. This essay reviews four studies that explore the connection between perfectionism—whether it's positive or negative—and attachment type and their impact on life satisfaction or marital satisfaction. Results indicate that securely attached individuals tend to exhibit higher positive perfectionism and lower negative perfectionism, leading to greater life satisfaction. In contrast, people with insecure attachment tend to exhibit higher levels of negative perfectionism, thereby reducing their life satisfaction. Maladaptive forms of perfectionism are linked to insecure attachment styles, leading to lower levels of marital satisfaction. These findings have practical implications for counselling and interventions aimed at promoting positive mental health and improving relationship satisfaction. However, these studies have limitations that need to be considered, including the use of self-reports, limited generalizability of results, and lack of evidence of a causal relationship between attachment, perfectionism, and satisfaction. Future research could address these limitations and advance our understanding of the complex interactions between the three concepts.

**Keywords:** Attachment styles, perfectionism, life satisfaction, marital satisfaction, mental health.

## 1. Introduction

The phenomenon of attachment is universal and exists in all cultures and can significantly influence an individual's ability to explore, learn about the world, and become independent. There are many different attachment styles, including secure, anxious-ambivalent, and avoidant. Additionally, positive and negative perfectionism, which are characterized by high personal standards and a preoccupation with making mistakes, are important personality traits that can influence an individual's life satisfaction. This essay explores how positive and negative perfectionism and attachment styles interact and influence life satisfaction in different contexts, such as college students, young adults and married people. The studies reviewed in this essay highlight the importance of considering attachment style, perfectionism traits, and conflict resolution strategies to promote life and marital satisfaction and offer suggestions for valuable implications for counselling and therapeutic interventions.

## 2. Literature Review

Different definitions of attachment can be found in the existing literature. It is commonly defined as a sufficient, long-term, and deep emotional connection involving two individuals or members of the same species, which forces them to make an effort to maintain close contact with each other, or as a circumstance where the subject demonstrates a strong intuitive predisposition to seek closeness or security with another in danger or distress [1]. Attachment styles can significantly influence a child's capacity to discover the world, learn about it, and develop independence [2]. All civilizations experience attachment, which is a universal phenomenon. Furthermore, in all cultures, affection and security in the relationship a caregiver provides to their child are equally important [3].

According to Bowlby and Ainsworth, a child can develop one of three kinds of attachment styles:

A secure attachment style emerges when the caregiver is involved, receptive and caring, responsive to and ready to respond to the child's reported needs [4]. The child's confidence in an attachment

figure is indicative of a secure style. The need for intimacy and connection with the mother (the attachment figure) in a securely attached youngster does not hinder them from exploring their surroundings [4]. The mother (or the person assuming her place) is mentally and physically available, loving, and attuned to the needs of the kid [3]. The kid grows up believing they are deserving of affection and being taken care of [3]. The feeling of competence in social communication arises. Relationships with others generate happiness and fulfilment since they are viewed as being loving and supportive.

In a relationship marked by anxiety and ambivalence, the carer is emotionally erratic, inconsistent, and unpredictable, which deprives the child of a sense of security [4]. An anxious-ambivalent style develops when a child experiences uncertainty about the caregiver's availability, creating heightened awareness, a distorted sense of security, and separation anxiety [3]. Children usually stay close to the caregiver but do not contact or participate in their environment [3]. During development, these kids have low self-esteem and self-belief, and they view relationships with other people as unreliable and unsatisfying needs.

In an avoidant relationship, the child's carer is uncaring and disinterested in the needs of the child [4]. When carers are uncaring and inattentive, an avoidant behaviour emerges. The youngster thinks he is unlovable, that other people are unreachable, and that interacting with them can only result in failure and frustration [3].

One of the most important character traits and mental states that separate people from one another and bring about life changes is perfectionism, both positive and negative. Positive perfectionism entails having high standards for oneself and working hard [5]. Negative perfectionism, on the other hand, is characterised by people's obsession with errors, dread of criticism from others, and worry over a contradiction between performance and standards [5]. Positive and negative perfectionism hold people to high personal standards in their work or behaviour, yet they have a range of responses to failure [5]. Positive perfectionists, for instance, may experience moderate levels of anxiety when they fall short of their goals, whereas negative perfectionists may feel high amounts of anxiety in the same situation. Positive perfectionism, also known as normal, healthy, or adaptive perfectionism, has been linked favourably to indicators of desired outcomes like positive affect and constructive attitudes and behaviours in the workplace [5]. On the other hand, they countered that negative perfectionism was referred to as neurotic, pathological, or maladaptive perfectionism and was linked to unpleasant emotions including stress, anxiety, and sadness [5].

### **3. Positive or Negative Perfectionism of Different Attachment Types in Different Relationships**

A study by Pishva and Besharat examined the connection between positive and negative perfectionism. Examining the connection between attachment patterns and perfectionism is the goal of this study, precisely to determine the level of relationship a comparison of attachment patterns, constructive and destructive perfectionism. The study included 461 participants who studied at the University of Tehran (204 male and 257 female). All participants completed standardized questionnaires, including the Attachment Styles Questionnaire (ASQ), the Positive and Negative Perfectionism Scale (PANPS), and a demographic questionnaire.

The data collected from the questionnaires were analysed using Pearson's Correlation and Linear Regression Analysis (PCLRA) to Investigate the connection between attachment type and both positive and negative perfectionism. The study's findings revealed a negative association between negative perfectionism and a secure attachment style as well as a positive correlation between positive perfectionism. People with secure attachment were found to have increased positive perfectionism, while those with insecure attachment had negative perfectionism [6]. Also, individuals with avoidant attachment were shown to have a significant negative correlation with both positive and negative perfectionism, in contrast to their anxious counterparts, who had a strong positive correlation with negative perfectionism [6].

The research results were interpreted to mean that perfectionism is associated with attachment style and has different aspects, positives and negatives. Secure attachment was linked to positive perfectionism, and attachment rejection was linked to negative perfectionism [6]. In contrast, avoidant attachment was related to the negative aspect of both positive and negative perfectionism [6]. An anxious attachment style was positively correlated with negative perfectionism.

These results indicate that our attachment style is a critical factor influencing how people perceive themselves and our relationships with others in various domains of life, such as perfectionism. Thus, attachment theory can be a valuable framework for understanding the development of perfectionism.

Research findings have significant implications for future research on perfectionism, relationship commitment, and clinical applications. The results provide insight into the influence of different attachment styles on positive and negative perfectionism, which professionals can use in counselling people with perfectionistic tendencies. This study is a helpful resource for future research on perfectionism and attachment and clinical practice. Professionals should consider their clients' attachment styles when evaluating and implementing interventions related to perfectionism.

In addition, the study also highlights the need for further investigation of the complex interplay between attachment dimensions and perfectionism. The potential connection between attachment types and the emergence of perfectionism could be examined in future studies and discover how attachment can influence the development of perfectionism in different contexts. This study provides a foundation for future research that explores more deeply how attachment styles, perfectionism, and other personality traits interact in different cultural settings.

While Ainsworth suggested three types of attachment styles (secure, anxious, and avoidant) developed since infancy, Bowlby suggested that in adulthood, people could be categorized into four different attachment styles: secure, dismissing, fearful, and preoccupied. A four-category model was proposed: Secure (positive view of self and others), Rejecting (positive view of self and negative view of others), Anxious (negative view of self and positive view of others), and Fearful (both negative views of self and others).

Lowell and Limke's study intended to study linkage between adult romantic attachment and types of perfectionism. They hypothesized that those who exhibit a high level of perfectionism, particularly those with maladaptive forms, would have might display less secure attachment and more unsecured attachment behaviours (i.e., anxious and avoidant).

The study involved 97 participants (78.35% females and 21.65% males), with an age average of 35.38. Participants completed a series of questionnaires, including the Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised (ECR-R) to evaluate attachment styles, the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS) to assess types of perfectionism (i.e., adaptive, maladaptive), and the Demographic Questionnaire.

The results showed that those with greater levels of self-oriented (adaptive) perfectionism had greater levels of secure connection and less anxiety-provoking attachment patterns. [7]. Conversely, those with higher levels of other-oriented (maladaptive) perfectionism show signs of greater avoidant attachment [7]. Socially prescribed perfectionism was not related to any of the attachment styles.

The findings supported the researchers' hypothesis that maladaptive forms of perfectionism were related to insecure attachment styles. Specifically, maladaptive perfectionism was related to avoidant attachment, which could be explained by individuals prioritizing their high expectations over their partner's needs and desires, leading to feelings of isolation and avoidance [7]. Conversely, adaptive perfectionism was related to secure attachment, which could be explained by individuals having high standards for themselves while being sensitive to their partner's needs, resulting in higher levels of trust and intimacy in the relationship [7].

The study's implications suggest that individuals with maladaptive forms of perfectionism may benefit from learning healthy ways to balance their high expectations with their partner's needs. Additionally, understanding these relationships can aid relationship therapists in identifying perfectionism-related issues in their clients that may hinder their ability to form and maintain secure attachments.

However, the cross-sectional design of the study prevents the establishment of causation, which is one of the study's drawbacks. It is unclear if perfectionism causes insecure attachment or if insecure attachment leads to maladaptive forms of perfectionism. Additionally, the study's sample consisted of mostly young adults from a Christian university setting, limiting generalizability to older or non-religious or non-college populations.

Future research could utilize longitudinal designs to examine the causal relationships between perfectionism and attachment over time and diversify the sample to increase external validity. Furthermore, exploring the potential mediating and moderating factors (for example, gender and social norms) could enhance our understanding of the complex relationship between perfectionism and adult romantic attachment.

#### **4. The Differences of Attachment Styles and Positive or Negative Perfectionism on Life Satisfaction**

Life satisfaction is an individualised concept that each person has, which is an integral part of subjective well-being [8]. It usually appertains to a person's general and cognitive assessment of his life. People with high life satisfaction demonstrate exclusive behaviour following major traumatic life events are less likely to do so [8]. Increased stress and behavioural difficulties, despair, anxiety, and depression are all negative outcomes of life dissatisfaction of life dissatisfaction, such as reduced social cooperation, help, and social trust [8]. Various factors influence young people's life satisfaction. Personal characteristics (temporality), the nature of familial ties and attachment style, peer groups, academic and social standing, and perfectionism are a few examples. The strength of family ties appears to be more significant than other factors, though. People are influenced by their affections because they are enduring relationship patterns that influence behaviour and play a very important role in our sense of security. The following studies reveal how attachment and perfectionism coexist and simultaneously affect life prosperousness.

Sharifi et al. sought to investigate the association between perfectionism, life happiness, and attachment types in university students. The study employed a correlational design where data was gathered from 300 undergraduates from the Islamic Azad University of Roodehen using self-administered questionnaires. Participants were selected through random sampling and the Cohen's table for sample size. The researchers used various instruments to gather data, including the Revised Adult Attachment Scale (RAAS) to measure attachment, the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SLS) to measure satisfaction of life, and the PANPS to measure perfectionism. Only 271 out of 300 questionnaires were put forward for analysis in the next step due to the incompleteness of 29 questionnaires.

Data was collected over several weeks and analysed using Path and Regression Analysis and SPSS 21 software to investigate the connection between perfectionism, life satisfaction, and attachment types. The relative and interval scale of the model's variables, linear relationship between predicting variables and dependent variable, normality of data, and absence of multicollinearity are taken into account in this study while making Path Analysis assumptions.

The study found that attachment styles were significantly related to life satisfaction and perfectionism level in the chosen undergraduates. A negative relationship was discovered between insecure attachment styles and adaptive perfectionism [8]. In fact, in particular, between avoidant attachment and life satisfaction, adaptive perfectionism acts as a mediator [8]. Avoidant and anxious attachment are negatively correlated with life satisfaction significantly, while secure attachment correlated positively with the same variable [8]. Additionally, the findings indicate a positive association between positive perfectionism and life satisfaction as well as a negative correlation between negative perfectionism and life satisfaction [8]. Therefore, it can be inferred that securely attached beings are more satisfied with their lives due to the exhibition of high positive perfectionism. In contrast, insecurely attached beings do not experience high life satisfaction due to exhibiting high negative perfectionism.

The study findings have important implications for both theoretical and practical perspectives. The study highlights the importance of secure attachment in promoting life satisfaction and reducing negative perfectionism in university students. As such, interventions that aim to improve the attachment styles of students could help prevent or manage problems associated with life dissatisfaction and negative perfectionism.

However, the study has several limitations that should be noted. Firstly, the study used a correlational design, which does not establish causality; hence, the directionality of the relationships observed cannot be determined. Secondly, the study's participants were only from a particular university, which limits the generalizability of the findings to larger and more diverse populations. Furthermore, the study's self-report measures may have introduced social desirability bias, reducing the accuracy of responses. Finally, the study only focused on the relation between attachment styles, life satisfaction, and perfectionism, excluding other possible factors that may contribute to these variables, for example, family background and cultural differences.

Overall, Sharifi et al.'s study suggests that attachment styles are important determinants of life satisfaction and perfectionism, with secure attachment promoting life satisfaction and reducing negative perfectionism, while insecure attachment styles do the opposite. The study's implications are particularly relevant to educational, clinical, and counselling fields, where the findings can help design interventions that promote better mental health among university students.

Marriage satisfaction is considered an important predictor of life satisfaction [9].

Nadiri and Khalatbari conducted a study to investigate the psychological components that affect marital satisfaction in students. The study utilized a correlational design to explore the interrelation between attachment style, perfectionism, and conflict resolution with spousal satisfaction. A random sample of 252 married students from the University of Tehran was selected for the study. Participants completed three questionnaires, including Anrich's Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire, the Hazen and Shew Adult Attachment Styles Questionnaire, and the Ahwaz Perfectionism Scale to acquire information on participants' marital status and satisfaction, attachment styles and perfectionism spectrum.

The collected data was processed through descriptive statistics (mean and standard description) and inferential statistics (Pearson Correlation Coefficient and Multivariate Regression) and then analysed using the SPSS statistical software version 22.

According to the findings, marriage satisfaction and attachment styles have a substantial positive link [10]. A matrix coefficient correlation of 0.95% and an error less than 0.5 indicate that those deemed securely bonded report stronger marriage satisfaction compared to those who are not [10]. In addition, comparing the variables of perfectionism and marriage satisfaction, a person with more adaptive perfectionism will experience higher marriage satisfaction and vice versa [10]. In particular, individuals with avoidant attachment styles are more likely to develop a negative perfectionism and use dominating conflict resolution tactics, which will negatively impact their marital life [10]. On the other hand, securely attached individuals are able to use collaborative resolution tactics to impact their marital life positively [10].

Note that the study specifically mentioned that perfectionism, when controlled for attachment style and conflict resolution styles, does not have a significant impact in predicting marital satisfaction. This suggests perfectionism can only play a role in influencing marital satisfaction when it is analysed with attachment and conflict resolution.

This study emphasizes the importance of understanding attachment style and conflict resolution in promoting student marital satisfaction. This research has essential implications for couples counselling and emphasizes the need for interventions that address attachment style and approaches to resolving disputes in couples' therapy.

Despite the fact that the study yields valuable insights into the psychological components of marital satisfaction in students, it does have limitations. The sample consisted of only Iranian students, and thus, the study's results may not be generalizable to other populations. Additionally, considering that the questionnaires are self-reported, participants may not want to reveal the bad side of their

marriage, thus giving researchers false information, resulting in reporting bias. Lastly, a stratified sampling method is recommended. Participants can be separated into different groups according to their length of marriage and then be randomly selected for the study. This can yield more information on whether third-party variables, for instance, the length of marriage, can have an influence on marital satisfaction. Future research on the psychological components of marital satisfaction should also explore cross-cultural differences and utilize experimental designs to establish causal relationships between the variables.

## 5. Conclusion

In short, the global phenomenon of attachment is visible in all individuals, and the quality of it significantly affects a child's capacity to venture out and develop individuality. Different types of attachment discussed above can influence an individual's positive or negative perfectionism, which can have a significant impact on life and marital satisfaction. Secure attachment promotes positive perfectionism and increased life satisfaction, while insecure attachment style promotes negative perfectionism and reduced life satisfaction. Interventions to improve attachment styles may help prevent or manage problems related to life dissatisfaction and negative perfectionism. Future research should explore the complex interactions among dimensions of attachment, perfectionism, and other traits and characteristic adaptations in different cultural contexts and use experimental designs to establish cause-and-effect relationships between variables. Understanding attachment styles and their impact on different life domains could significantly benefit the educational, clinical, and counselling fields, leading to better mental health outcomes for individuals.

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