Perfectionism, Family Climate and Emotion Regulation in Childhood

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Article

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Highlights

What are the main findings?

- Children's perceptions of perfectionism are significantly linked to family climate, with higher achievement orientation, parental control and emphasis to moral behaviours predicting greater perfectionistic tendencies.
- Expressive suppression, a maladaptive emotion regulation strategy, is a significant predictor of perfectionism in childhood.

What is the implication of the main findings?

- Findings highlight the importance of considering family dynamics and emotion regulation strategies in programs aimed at supporting children's well-being and mental health.
- Interventions that promote supportive family environments and adaptive emotion regulation skills may contribute to the reduction of maladaptive perfectionism in children.

Abstract

Perfectionism, a personality construct marked by the pursuit of highly demanding expectations for achievement, can encompass both adaptive and maladaptive facets, affecting individuals' well-being. Studies with adults have shown that the family climate (i.e., family cohesion, parental control, parenting style) and the strategies used to regulate emotions (i.e., cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression) can influence their tendency to perfectionism. However, research focusing on children's tendency to perfectionism is quite limited. The present study examines associations among children's perceptions of the family climate, emotion regulation and perfectionism. The participants were 191 children (94 boys, M_{age}=11.27 years, sd = .97) who completed the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale, the Family Environment Scale and the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire for Children and Adolescence. Results showed that children's perceptions of the family climate and emotion regulation were significant factors in predicting tendency to perfectionism. Specifically, parental control, achievement family orientation, emphasis to morality and expressive suppression could moderately predict children's tendency to perfectionism. These findings are important as they enrich our understanding on childhood perfectionism and can be used in programs focusing on family and children support or counselling.

Keywords: perfectionism; family climate; emotion regulation; childhood

1. Introduction

Perfectionism is a personality construct which involves the pursuit of highly demanding expectations for achievement and excellence, the rigid adherence to high standards, and the critical scrutiny of every endeavor [1]. Perfectionism rates have increased over the past 30 years, with at least one in four adolescents experiencing the abiding need to be perfect [2]. Meanwhile, loneliness and

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body image disturbances, along with several mental illnesses such as depression, anxiety disorders, eating disorders, and suicidal ideation also affect an increasing number of young people [3–8]. The simultaneous rise of perfectionism and psychopathology may be related, since perfectionism is an aggravating factor for a set of disorders [9].

Although perfectionism was initially described as a unidimensional conception accumulating mainly negative characteristics closely associated with psychopathology,[10] introduced two distinguished forms of perfectionism, a positive labeled "normal perfectionism" and a negative labeled "neurotic perfectionism". Since then, perfectionism was recognized as either a two-dimensional (i.e., adaptive and maladaptive, positive and negative, functional and dysfunctional) [11,12], or as a multidimensional construct consisting of both intra- and inter-personal components [13,14]. Interpersonal dimensions include other-oriented perfectionism (i.e., perfectionism directed towards others) and socially-prescribed perfectionism (i.e., others, such as parents, enforce high standards, expectations, and demands or criticism on oneself), while intrapersonal dimension involves self-oriented perfectionism (i.e., perfectionistic behaviors directed towards the self) [15,16]. In addition, adaptive perfectionism has been linked to positive attributes, such as conscientiousness, achievement striving, order, self-discipline, organization, life satisfaction, positive affect, and academic success [13,17]; maladaptive perfectionism or maladaptive evaluation concerns has been associated to overconcern about making mistakes, extremely high personal standards, high parental expectations and criticism, doubts about one's abilities, and overemphasis on order [18]. [19] also suggested that certain cognitive assumptions, such as an imperfect performance equaling complete failure, are more likely to contribute to perfectionists' distress. Thus, there are many researchers who argue that perfectionism is rarely positive, adaptive, or functional [15,20,21], and that although perfectionists need the approval of others, they often feel socially isolated, which leaves them exposed in intense psychological difficulties [3,4]. According to the Perfectionism Social Disconnection Model [4] and the Social Reaction Model of Perfectionism [22], perfectionism often develops in the family [1] as response to parenting behaviors that lead children to experience feelings of despair, shame, powerlessness, and a lack of felt security [23].

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of family climate and emotion regulation in the development of the tendency to perfectionism in childhood. Despite the importance of this topic, after reviewing the relevant literature it was found that research related to the associations between perfectionism in childhood and the general emotional climate of the family is quite limited [23,24].

Family Characteristics and Perfectionism

There is a solid theoretical framework for understanding and explaining how perfectionism is endemic within the family. For example, the family system theory proposes that each family is a single system made up of individual independent but mutually influencing subsystems, such as the parent-child or the spouse system [25]. The interconnection of subsystems implies that thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of one member of the system have an influence on the rest of its members [26]. For this reason, but also following the Aristotelian view that the family as a whole is more important than its parts (its members) [27], this study will focus on the family context as a whole and not only the parent-child relationship, to search for the factors that might influence the development of perfectionism [24].

An important aspect of the family climate is cohesion, which is the emotional bonding of family members to each other [26]. Cohesive families openly discuss their concerns, share their thoughts and feelings, and solve problems together, while their members enjoy spending time together [28]. It has been found that children in cohesive families are able to regulate their emotions and behaviors without adopting perfectionistic behaviors [26]. Conversely, high or low levels of family cohesion are two sides of the same coin, as they both have been positively associated with maladaptive perfectionism [1,28]. Thus, it can be assumed that the strong emotional bond fostered by family cohesion may enhance children's independence and personal development and inhibit the feelings and thoughts that promote maladaptive perfectionism [29]. Adaptive perfectionists tend to have

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more balanced and cohesive family environments, and feel that they receive more parental support and care than children with maladaptive perfectionism or no perfectionism [28].

Parental typology also seems to influence the development of perfectionism, since it affects the climate in which the child develops and is socialized [30] or involves parental control, harshness, neglect, or conditional approval [31–33]. [34] distinguished three types of parents: (a) the authoritarian, who exert high control and show low acceptance to their children; (b) the authoritative, who are supportive, showing high acceptance and involvement; and (c) the permissive, who are accepting but raise their children with low control. Greek studies identified a fourth parental type, the strict, which shares attitudes and behaviors of the authoritarian and the permissive type [35,36]. The authoritarian type has been associated mainly with socially prescribed perfectionism [22], as these parents make demands, show little affection, exert greater psychological control, are reluctant to grant them autonomy, and use more forceful and punitive measures to control their children, and especially their male offsprings [1,37]. Thus, their children experience concerns about their mistakes and doubts about their actions, as manifestations of the development of maladaptive perfectionism [22,29,31]. In particular, parents who exercise psychological control push their children to pursue high goals using conditional love and frustration as a lever of pressure [29]. Psychological control inhibits children's autonomy, leading them to adopt harmful and maladaptive behaviors in their attempt to meet their parents' expectations, while it has been found to be a predictive factor of perfectionism [24,32] and a mediator in the intergenerational transmission of perfectionism [37]. Parental characteristics are related to the use of psychological control in their children's upbringing, which in turn predict the maladaptive perfectionism of their children [37,38].

Since parents act as role models, some of their behaviors or their own characteristics, such as their maladaptive perfectionism or neuroticism, can be adopted by their children [39–41]. For instance, children following their parents' steps tend to seek perfection, to be overly careful, and to check their every action until they are completely satisfied, in order to minimize the possibility of insufficient performance or failure [37,42,43]. In addition, parents' psychopathology may influence, as an intermediary factor, the manifestation of perfectionistic behavior in their child. Parents suffering from depression, anxiety, and OCD may adopt attitudes and behaviors that contribute to the development of maladaptive perfectionism in their children [42].

Research on family climate and perfectionism in childhood is limited and mainly retrospective. [1] examined the relations among family climate characteristics, such as psychological control, parental typology, cohesion, and family environment, and adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism and found that high levels of parents' psychological control, the authoritarian parental type, and the excessive family cohesion were significant predictors of children's maladaptive perfectionism. In addition, adaptive perfectionism could be predicted when the psychological control was excluded from the family climate, leading to the suggestion that psychological control may be a worse than authoritarianism [1]. Moreover, marital conflict, contributes significantly to the development of perfectionism through psychological control and low autonomy and support, as parents' manipulative strategies to regulate their children's behavior and emotions expose children to perfectionism concern (concern about mistakes, doubt about actions), as they set high standards for themselves and become hypersensitive to their mistakes [24]. Conversely, parental affection and acceptance can foster a supportive family climate, where children can experience different things without the fear of failure and can develop their own standards of what constitutes success [31].

The difference between the expectations of the family and the actual child's performance plays an important role in the manifestation of perfectionism [44]. Families with high expectations pass them on to their children, who initially adopt them, as they place great importance on their parents' wishes. However, when their performance does not meet the achievement of the intended goals, they question and criticize their abilities, experience negative emotions such as depression or anxiety, and have low self-esteem for disappointing their parents [45,46]. The mismatch of personal and family goals may be a source of emotional difficulties or the development of maladaptive perfectionism [26,44].

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Finally, as human beings are social creatures living in a complex environment with moral values, perfectionism has been linked to the social, moral, and cultural context [47]. Thus, perfectionists can either be influenced by the perceived expectations of others or their own judgments which are affected by the culture they reside in [48,49], while their behaviors are positively linked with the moral values and virtues of their society, the concern over moral mistakes and condemnation of wrong behaviors [50].

Concluding, it could be suggested that adaptive and maladaptive perfectionists may be differentiated by the degree of discrepancy they perceive between their standards and their actual performance and that certain parental behaviors or characteristics, such as the psychological control [37], the lack of nurturance and affection, and low provision of care [29] combined with the demand for high performance [33] and authoritarianism [31] could contribute to the manifestation of perfectionism in children.

Emotional Climate in the Family and Children's Emotion Regulation

Throughout childhood, parents play an important role in scaffolding their children's emotional experiences and guiding them to use sophisticated and intentional regulatory strategies, especially in situations evoking strong emotions [51]. Emotion regulation (ER) is affected by the emotional climate of the family, as reflected in the quality of the attachment relationships, parenting styles, family expressiveness, and the emotional quality of the marital relationship.

The family environment is the context where children spend most of their childhood. During daily socializing and interaction, family members consciously or unconsciously express thoughts and feelings that are transformed into attitudes and behaviors, which shape the family climate. The emotional climate of the family is reflected in the quality of relationships and emotions, positive and negative, expressed among family members [52]. Depending on the climate of the family and the emotional conditions that prevail within it, regulating children's emotions can be an easier or more difficult process.

Research data demonstrate that parenting typology and practices are related to the development of children's emotional regulation [53]. Parents who are supportive and responsive to their children's emotional needs, accept them and have reasonable demands from them, but also set limits and promote their autonomy and independence [34,36], have children who can better regulate their emotions [53]. Conversely, parents who are critical, repress their children, express negative emotions, avoid effective communication, prefer punishment and psychological control as methods of education and discipline, undermine their children's ability to regulate their emotions and are the source of their psychological problems [53,54]. Thus, when children receive intense negative emotions, originated by other family members, they consider themselves to be under a constant threat, they experience the same negative emotions, which inhibits their emotion regulation [55].

In addition, another factor that seems to influence the development of a child's emotional regulation within the family context is marital (intrafamily) conflict [53,56]. Frequent arguments at home between parents, lead children to take action to restore calm and emotional security. However, with their interference, they become recipients of negative emotions, which "overwhelm" them and as they are unable to manage them effectively, they internalize them [55]. Consequently, children who grow up in such environments experience worry, anxiety, fear, and insecurity about family cohesion and generally avoid confrontations [56,57].

The emotional expressiveness of parents, especially mothers, is another important factor that affects the family climate. The way parents express their emotions at home, whether positive or negative, affects children's emotional regulation. While some researchers suggest that the expression of negative emotions by mothers is related to the child's difficulties in emotional regulation [58], others support the opposite [59]. However, a family climate characterized by the free expression of emotions contributes to the development of children's emotion regulation, perhaps because different emotional states become manageable within the family context and children interact with parents who are capable of regulating their own emotions, acting as role models for them [55].

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Furthermore, parents' beliefs about their own and their children's acknowledgement and expression of emotions, influence the emotional climate of the family. In particular, parents who are aware of their own and others' emotions, and encourage their children to express instead of suppressing them, altering the personal meaning of an emotional event to enhance attention to emotional responses [60,61], contribute to the effective regulation (cognitive reappraisal) of children's emotions. Conversely, parents who are unaware of their emotions or believe that especially the negative emotions are potentially harmful, they do not deal constructively with them, and teach their children to suppress (expressive suppression) or to ignore them [60,62]. Longitudinal studies have shown that parents' negative reactions to their children's emotions are related to difficulties in children's emotion regulation [53].

Emotion Regulation and Perfectionism

Although the family environment significantly influences emotion regulation, research examining the relationship between emotion regulation and perfectionism in children is limited [63]. Relevant research on undergraduate students [64] showed that adaptive perfectionists tend to use more cognitive reappraisal and less expressive suppression as a strategy to regulate their emotions and are less critical of themselves, comparing to maladaptive perfectionists or non-perfectionists. In maladaptive perfectionists, the combination of high expectations and the inability to meet them, resulted in their dysfunctional emotion regulation, neuroticism, and higher levels of chronic stress [64]. In addition, in a longitudinal study with adolescents [63], self-directed perfectionism predicted greater use of cognitive reappraisal, which is considered an adaptive emotion regulation strategy, while socially-prescribed perfectionism predicted a relative increase of emotion regulation difficulties. Thus, adolescents who have high expectations of themselves and strive to be perfect tend to frequently re-evaluate any situation they are involved in, with the aim of changing their emotional response to that particular situation. With this reaction, in fact, they regulate their emotions better, have fewer emotional difficulties, and manage their negative emotions more effectively [63]. As perfectionism pre-exists or precedes the experience of an event and its possible appreciation, it may activate different emotion regulation strategies through different mechanisms each time [65], predisposing individuals to learn and apply specific emotion regulation strategies, with the aim of meeting the needs of their environment [66].

Aim of the Present Study

As every behavior develops within a social context, children's family environment plays a significant role to their adjustment and well-being [67]. Family climate has been found to be directly dependent on the environment, culture, and social norms [52,68], affecting parents' attitudes about their children's (mainly) academic success or failures. Thus, parents quite often oppress their children to set high standards and to achieve their goals, instilling in them that perfection is only way to reach success [3].

This research addresses a gap in the literature by exploring the links between family climate, emotion regulation, and perfectionism in school-aged children. Existing studies have primarily relied on the retrospective accounts of adults. Focusing on Greek families, this study will investigate how aspects of the family environment, including family relations, personal growth and family organization, and different emotion regulation strategies relate to and may predict children's perfectionism, which often appears in academic settings [69,70].

2. Materials and Methods

Participants

One hundred and ninety-one (n=191) Year 5, Year 6 and Year 7 students (50.8% girls, M_{age}=11.27 years, SD=.97) from public primary and secondary schools of the broader area of Athens and the

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Peloponnese in Greece took part in the present study. Most participants (87.4%) reported having at least one sibling, lived in urban areas (80.1%), and their mothers (61.3%) and fathers (55.5%) had a university degree.

Measures

a) The Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale-FMPS [13] was administered to the participants. FMPS is a widely used multidimensional self-report tool that assesses perfectionism and includes 35 items subsumed to six subscales: i) Concern over Mistakes, with 9 items (9, 10, 13, 14, 18, 21, 23, 25, 34) reflecting a person's negative response to making an error, their tendency to view a mistake as a complete failure, and as a result, their fear of losing respect from others; ii) Personal Standards, with 7 items (4, 6, 12, 16, 19, 24, 30), are about setting unrealistically high expectations and then using those expectations as the primary measure of one's self-worth; iii) Parental Expectations, with 5 items (1, 11, 15, 20, 26) describing a person's tendency to perceive their parents as both setting very demanding goals and being excessively critical; iv) Parental Criticism, with 4 items (3, 5, 22, 35) elucidating individuals' perceptions of their parents' excessively critical behaviors; v) Doubts about actions, with 4 items (17, 28, 32, 33) assessing individuals' tendency to doubt their own abilities, feel that tasks are never completed to a satisfactory degree and experience a constant sense of unease and a need to repeatedly check one's work, as a complete sense of closure is elusive and vi) Organization, with 6 items (2, 7, 8, 27, 29, 31) is characterized by an individual's powerful preference for order and organization, highlighting their drive to have everything in a neat and systematic arrangement.. The scale has an overall perfectionism score as well as six subscale scores. Items from the Organization scale are not used in calculating the overall perfectionism score [13]. Answers are given on a five-point Likert-type scale (1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neither Disagree nor Agree, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree) and the potential range of FMPS total scores (when the Organization subscale is omitted) is between 29-145, with higher scores indicating higher level of dysfunctional perfectionism. The internal consistency reliability coefficients, Cronbach's alpha (a), for the FMPS subscales range between .77 and .93 while for the entire questionnaire is .90. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of the questionnaire for the present study is .87.

b) The Family Environmental Scale-FES [71], a self-report instrument, was used to assess perceptions of the climate of the family, as it measures the interpersonal relationships among family members on the directions of personal growth and on the basic organizational structure of the family. The FES and its Greek version [72] consist of 90 items in ten subscales, each of which consists of 9 sentences, exploring three dimensions of the family climate: a) Family Relationships, b) Personal Growth and c) System Maintenance and Change of the family system. The total score for each subscale is the sum of participants' answers and ranges from 0 to 9. The Family Relations dimension includes three subscales: 1) cohesion, 2) expressiveness, and 3) conflict in which the level of commitment and support between family members, the expression of emotions, and the level of conflict within the family are examined. The Personal Growth dimension is composed of five subscales: 1) independence, 2) achievement orientation, 3) intellectual-cultural orientation, 4) active-recreational orientation, and 5) moral-religious emphasis. Independence is about how much family members can be self-sufficient and make their own choices. Achievement Orientation reflects the family's focus on competition and success. Intellectual-Cultural Orientation measures the family's engagement with art, and cultural activities. Active-Recreational Orientation is about how much they participate in social and recreational activities. Finally, Moral-Religious Emphasis describes how much the family focuses on moral values and religion. The Family System Maintenance and Change dimension, in two subscales: 1) organization and 2) control, examines the organization and structure of the family system (i.e., rules and procedures imposed or followed by family members). Possible answers are given in the form of True (1) – False (0). Cronbach's alpha (a) reliability coefficients of the FES subscales range from .64 to .79, while in the present study was .62.

c) The Emotion Regulation Questionnaire for Children and Adolescence-ERQ-CA [73], adapted also in Greek [74] was used to assess participants' emotion regulation strategies. It consists of 10 items

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with answers on a five-point Likert scale (1=Never, 2=Rarely, 3=Sometimes, 4=Often, 5=Always). Six items (1, 3, 5, 7, 8, 10) examine the strategy of cognitive reappraisal of emotions (6-30 score range) and the remaining 4 items (2, 4, 6, 9) the strategy of expressive suppression of emotions (4-20 score range). The Cronbach's alpha (a) internal consistency reliability coefficient of the ERQ-CA ranged from .82 to .86 for the cognitive reappraisal, and from. 69 to .79 for expressive suppression for children aged between 10 and 18 years [68]. In the present study Cronbach's alpha reliability indices were found to be .70 for cognitive reappraisal and .57 for expressive suppression.

Procedure

The purpose of the study were communicated to the principals and the teachers' associations of randomly selected schools. Parents of all students in each school received a letter presenting the purpose and the value of the research, along with a consent form to sign. Only students whose parents provided written informed consent participated in the study. Of the 357 parents approached via letters, 201 (56.3%) allowed their children to participate in the survey. Ten of these students did not complete the questionnaires, so the total number of the participants was 191. Students were informed of the voluntary and confidential nature of the research and given detailed instruction of how to complete each questionnaire. Extra clarifications were given to the students when required. The whole process lasted approximately 45 minutes.

3. Results

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics, including the mean (M), standard deviation (SD), minimum (min), and maximum (max) scores for all psychological measures examined in this study.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics (N=191).

	M	SD	min	max
Family Environmental Scale				
Family Relations - total	15.10	2.48	7	21
cohesion	7.31	1.74	1	9
expressiveness	5.14	1.45	2	9
conflict	2.65	1.79	0	8
Personal Growth - total	25.13	4.58	13	37
independence	5.14	1.23	2	8
achievement	4.87	1.55	1	9
intellect-culture	5.28	1.90	1	9
recreation	5.94	2.01	0	9
morality-religion	3.88	1.98	0	9
Management/maintenance - total	10.74	2.67	2	19
organization	5.95	1.73	0	9
control	4.78	1.84	1	9
Emotion Regulation Questionnaire for Children/Adolescence				
cognitive reappraisal	20.14	4.35	8	30
expressive suppression	10.06	3.36	4	20
Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale				
Concern over Mistakes	18.45	5.56	9	39
Personal Standards	23.60	4.69	9	35
Parental Expectations	14.54	4.08	5	25
Parental Criticism	8.08	2.87	4	17
Doubts about actions	10.95	2.79	5	19
Organization	22.67	4.57	6	30
Total Perfectionism score	75.62	14.13	29	131

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The results indicate that, on average, the participating children tend to perceive their families as having a relatively low level of conflict, high level of cohesion and an average level of expressiveness. For Personal Growth, mean scores indicate that children perceived their families as placing emphasis on recreational activities, intellectual and cultural experiences, independence fostering and achievement and less emphasis on morality or religion. Additionally, children tend to perceive their families as imposing average levels of control and higher levels of rules and organization. The results, also, suggest that children in this study are more likely to use cognitive strategies to deal with emotions rather than hiding their emotional expressions. Finally, children in the sample tend to set high personal standards and value organization more than they are concerned about making mistakes, whereas, on average, they do not perceive high levels of criticism from their parents.

Table 2 presents the correlations between children's perceptions of perfectionism and various aspects of their family environment and emotion regulation. The results indicate several significant relationships, both positive and negative, across the different subscales.

Table 2. Correlations among children's perceptions about perfectionism, family climate and emotion regulation.

	Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale						
Family Environmental Scale	**CM**	**PS**	**PE**	**PC**	**D**	**O**	**Total**
Family Relations - total	-.103	.095	.003	-.193**	-.058	.092	-.059
cohesion	-.283**	.141	-.088	-.353**	-.129	.213**	-.187**
expressiveness	-.133	-.024	-.084	-.200**	-.026	.029	-.131
conflict	.239**	.015	.157*	.237**	.066	-.102	.206**
Personal Growth - total	-.015	.247**	.097	-.136	-.041	.099	.068
independence	-.116	.123	-.040	-.148*	-.076	.087	-.061
achievement	.275**	.356**	.443**	.125	.092	.171*	.398**
intellect-culture	-.108	.003	-.178*	-.244**	-.071	-.032	-.156*
recreation	-.246**	-.046	-.202**	-.256**	-.146*	-.085	-.251**
morality-religion	.181*	.260**	.278**	.173*	.100	.160*	.292**
Management/maintenance - total	.193**	.320**	.227**	.073	.126	.271**	.287**
organization	.013	.247**	.087	-.085	.029	.278**	.101
control	.287**	.267**	.270**	.194**	.169*	.161*	.352**
Emotion Regulation Questionnaire for Children/Adolescence							
cognitive reappraisal	-.074	.144*	.167*	-.013	.005	.052	.065
expressive suppression	.237**	.187**	.220**	.352**	.372**	.193**	.364**

Note: CM= Concern over Mistakes, PS= Personal Standards, PE= Parental Expectations, PC= Parental Criticism, D =Doubts about actions, O= Organization, **p<.01, *p<.05.

The results revealed a significant negative correlation between family cohesion and most perfectionism subscales, particularly Concern over Mistakes (CM) and Parental Criticism (PC). This suggests that in families with a lower sense of togetherness or closeness, children tend to report higher levels of concern over mistakes and perceive more parental criticism. Conversely, there is a positive relationship between cohesion and the Organization (O) subscale, meaning that in more cohesive families, children are more likely to value order and organization. Similarly, a positive correlation was found between family conflict and most perfectionism subscales, including Concern over Mistakes (CM), Parental Expectations (PE), and Parental Criticism (PC). This indicates that higher levels of family conflict are associated with children who are more concerned about making mistakes and who perceive their parents as setting high expectations and being overly critical.

As regard personal growth and perfectionism, the results indicated a strong, positive correlation between achievement orientation in the family climate and several perfectionism subscales, most

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notably Personal Standards (PS) and Parental Expectations (PE). This suggests that when families place a high value on achievement, children are more likely to set high personal standards and perceive their parents as having high expectations. Both recreation and intellect-culture show significant negative correlations with several perfectionism subscales, especially Concern over Mistakes (CM) and Parental Criticism (PC). This suggests that in families that prioritize leisure activities and intellectual or cultural pursuits, children are less likely to be concerned about mistakes or perceive their parents as being critical. Moreover, the Morality-Religion subscale shows a positive correlation with multiple perfectionism subscales, including Personal Standards (PS) and Parental Expectations (PE), indicating that in families that emphasize morality and religion, children are more likely to set high standards for themselves and perceive high parental expectations.

As regards emotion regulation and tendency to perfectionism, it was found that the strategy of expressive suppression shows a significant positive correlation with every single perfectionism subscale. This is the most consistent and widespread finding in the table. It indicates that children who tend to hide or suppress their emotions are also more likely to be perfectionists, showing greater concern over mistakes, setting higher personal standards, and perceiving higher levels of parental expectations and criticism. Cognitive reappraisal, on the other hand, shows some weaker positive correlations, specifically with Personal Standards (PS) and Parental Expectations (PE). This suggests that children who use cognitive reappraisal (reinterpreting a situation to change its emotional impact) are slightly more likely to set high standards for themselves and perceive high parental expectations.

This study used a hierarchical regression analysis to determine if perfectionism traits in children are related to their family environment and emotion regulation strategies. The analysis was run separately for total perfectionism scores. Family environment factors including family relations (cohesion, expressiveness and conflict), personal growth (independence, achievement, intellect/culture, recreation and morality/religion), and management-maintenance (organization and control) were entered in Step 1 of the regression, followed by emotion regulation strategies (cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression) in Step 2) (Table 3).

Table 3. Regression analysis to predict children's perceptions of perfectionism from a) family climate and b) emotion regulation.

Variable	β	t	F	R^2	ΔR^2	ΔF
Total Perfectionism score						
Step 1			8.48	.32	.32	8.48**
Family Relations - cohesion	-.09	-1.21				
Family Relations - expressiveness	-.03	-.44				
Family Relations - conflict	.09	1.29				
Personal Growth - independence	.01	.02				
Personal Growth - achievement	.33	4.88**				
Personal Growth – intellect/culture	-.11	-1.30				
Personal Growth - recreation	-.07	-.86				
Personal Growth – morality/religion	.21	3.10**				
Management/maintenance - organization	.05	.64				
Management/maintenance - control	.14	1.87*				
Step 2			8.44	.36	.04	5.89**
Family Relations - cohesion	-.07	-.84				
Family Relations - expressiveness	-.02	-.36				
Family Relations - conflict	.09	1.14				
Personal Growth - independence	-.01	-.16				
Personal Growth - achievement	.29	4.38**				
Personal Growth – intellect/culture	-.11	-1.44				
Personal Growth - recreation	-.03	-.32				
Personal Growth – morality/religion	.19	2.81**				

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Management/maintenance - organization	.03	.44
Management/maintenance - control	.14	1.99*
Emotion Regulation - cognitive reappraisal	.04	.67
Emotion Regulation - expressive suppression	.21	3.33**

*p<0.05, **p<0.01.

Based on the hierarchical regression analysis, certain family environment factors were found to be predictive of perfectionism in children. In the first step of the analysis, three specific aspects of the family environment—achievement orientation, moral/religious emphasis, and control—accounted for 28.3% of the variance in children's perfectionism. This suggests that children are more likely to develop perfectionistic tendencies when their families place a high value on achievement, competition, success, and moral or religious values, and when they have a greater number of rules and procedures. In the second step, the addition of expressive suppression as an emotion regulation strategy contributed an additional 4% to the prediction, bringing the total explained variance to 32%. This indicates that the more a child tends to suppress their emotions, the more likely they are to exhibit perfectionistic behaviors.

4. Discussion

The present study sought to examine the intricate relationships between children's perceptions of perfectionism and aspects of their family climate and their emotion regulation strategies, but also to determine the extent to which family climate and emotion regulation could predict these perceptions. The findings reveal a complex network of associations, elucidating the multifaceted nature of perfectionism in childhood and highlighting the crucial roles of family dynamics and emotional regulation processes in its development.

Correlations revealed several key findings. First, the statistically significant negative correlation between children's overall perfectionism scores and family cohesion indicates that a stronger sense of family cohesion is associated with lower levels of perfectionism. This finding aligns with previous research indicating the protective role of family cohesion in children's psychological well-being [26,28]. In cohesive families, members experience a sense of belonging, support, and emotional connectedness, which may buffer children against the pressure to strive for unrealistic standards and to seek validation through flawless performance [29]. These children may feel worthy, independent, and secure, limiting the need to engage in perfectionistic behaviors as a means of gaining approval and avoiding rejection [1]. This finding is further supported by work stating that adaptive perfectionists tend to have more balanced and cohesive family environments [28].

Conversely, the statistically significant positive correlation between children's overall perfectionism scores and family conflict suggests that a more conflictual family environment is associated with higher levels of perfectionism. This finding agrees with previous research emphasizing that the exposure to interparental conflict can contribute to the development of perfectionism in children [24]. Frequent disagreements and tension in the family, may lead children to perceive perfectionism as a way to mediate conflict, gain parental attention, or maintain a sense of control over their environment, as they consider that achieving high standards and avoiding mistakes could minimize conflict and promote stability in their family [31]. Moreover, as previously suggested [42,43], children of perfectionist parents tend to seek flawlessness, to be overly careful, and to check their every action until they are completely satisfied, in order to eliminate the possibility of failure.

The study also revealed a significant positive correlation between children's overall perfectionism scores and parental control, which strongly indicates that higher levels of parental control are associated with higher levels of perfectionism in children. This finding confirms previous research presenting the detrimental effects of controlling parenting styles on children's psychological

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adjustment [22,31–33]. Parents who exert excessive control over their children's lives may foster a sense of inadequacy and dependence, leading them to constantly doubt about their actions and abilities and being preoccupied with the possibility of mistakes [24,32,37]. These children will seek high personal standards and strive for perfection to meet their parents' expectations [29] or to conform to their parents' wishes, suppressing their own desires and interests in an attempt to gain approval [37,38,41,45,46].

The study also offers intriguing insights into the potential influence of moral and cultural values transmitted within the family environment on children's perfectionistic tendencies. The positive correlation between the morality-religion subscale of the FES and children's overall perfectionism underscores the importance of considering the role of moral values in shaping achievement-related behaviors. Thus, in families that place a strong emphasis on adherence to moral principles and religious beliefs, children may internalize these values and strive for perfection as a means of upholding these standards and avoiding moral transgressions [48]. Moreover, positive correlations between morality and concern over mistakes, as well as with parental criticism, imply that children could be exposed in intense psychological difficulties [3,4]. In line with previous research, the current findings also emphasize the degree to which perfectionists can either be influenced by the expectations of others or their own judgments which are affected by their culture [47,49]. Family members may perceive perfection as a way to be an integral part of their society [50]. The moral aspects of family climate cannot be detached from the cultural norms, as moral dimensions can be influenced by the socio-economic status and academic achievement [69]. This perspective highlights the importance of considering the broader cultural context in which perfectionism develops, as societal values and norms can shape individuals' perceptions of success, failure, and the importance of adhering to moral standards. Furthermore, this study revealed significant associations between children's personal growth and parental expectations, as well as achievement, parental expectation, morality, and system maintenance, indicating that the cultural context and the values that are important for the society have a great effect on the development of perfectionism [47–50]. The results suggest that the degree of discrepancy children perceive between their personal standards and their actual performance is greatly dependent on certain parental behaviors or characteristics, such as the psychological control, the lack of nurturance and affection, and low provision of care combined with the demand for high performance and authoritarianism [29,31,33,37].

A significant positive correlation was observed between children's overall perfectionism scores and expressive suppression, suggesting that children who tend to suppress their emotions are more likely to exhibit perfectionistic behaviors. This finding aligns with previous research indicating that expressive suppression is a maladaptive emotion regulation strategy with negative consequences for psychological well-being [53,54,60]. It could be suggested that children suppress their emotions in an attempt to avoid negative evaluation or to maintain a flawless image. However, this strategy can ultimately lead them to increased emotional distress, impaired social functioning, and heightened risk for mental health problems [58,59]. The family environment plays a significant role on children's emotion regulation, especially when family members consciously or unconsciously express thoughts and feelings that are transformed into attitudes and behaviors, which shape the family climate [51,52]. However, the present study failed find a significant relationship between cognitive reappraisal and overall perfectionism. While previous research has suggested that cognitive reappraisal may be associated with lower levels of maladaptive perfectionism [58–60], our results did not support this relationship. This discrepancy may be due to the age of the participants, as cognitive reappraisal requires higher-order cognitive skills that may have not been fully developed in the children consisting our sample, or to the multidimensional nature of perfectionism itself, given that parental expectations and personal standards and growth were the only dimensions significantly related to cognitive reappraisal.

The results, also, revealed that variance in children's perfectionism is partially explained by certain aspects of family climate and emotion regulation strategies, suggesting that the atmosphere at home is a powerful shaper of a child's psychological development [25,26]. Achievement

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orientation, moral/religious emphasis and family control together were found to explain significantly almost 30% of the variance in children's perception about perfectionisms. These findings are consistent with prior studies linking achievement-oriented parenting styles to increased pressure on children to succeed [30,33]. When a family places a strong emphasis on success, competition, and high achievement, children may internalize the belief that their worth is conditional on their performance. This can lead to perfectionistic concerns, where a child feels intense pressure to meet impossibly high standards to gain approval. They may develop a fear of failure and become overly critical of themselves and others [30,33]. Furthermore, in conjunction to the previous research, it was proven that parental expectations have a great impact on children who tend to adopt them, as they place great importance on their parents' wishes [44]. The outcomes further support the notion that ethical behaviors play a significant role in shaping individuals' perceptions of success and in promoting perfectionism by setting high standards [47,48,69]. A family environment with a strong moral or religious emphasis can contribute to perfectionism. This may be linked to a belief system where there's a strong emphasis on being "good," "righteous," or "blameless." Children may feel a need to be morally perfect, leading to a form of perfectionism that is driven by a fear of sin or moral transgression [47,48,69]. The hierarchical regression analysis then revealed that high degree of parental control, characterized by numerous rules and procedures, made a statistically significant contribution to the prediction of children's perfectionism. This aligns with previous research showing that controlling parenting styles are associated with higher levels of maladaptive perfectionism [1,31,32,37,38]. When children have little autonomy and are constantly regulated, they may feel a need to be perfect to avoid punishment or criticism. This creates an environment where mistakes are seen as unacceptable, reinforcing perfectionistic tendencies [1,31,32,37,38]. In essence, these three factors (achievement orientation, moral/religious emphasis, family control) combine to create a high-pressure environment where a child learns that their value is contingent on their flawless performance, strict adherence to rules, and moral uprightness. Finally, the inclusion of expressive suppression in the model significantly increased the amount of variance explained in children's perfectionism, supporting the hypothesis that children who tend to suppress their emotions are more likely to present perfectionistic behaviors and that beyond the family environment, how a child manages their emotions is also a significant factor [63–65]. Children who suppress their emotions may do so out of a fear that showing vulnerability or negative feelings is a sign of weakness or imperfection. This suppression can become a core part of their perfectionistic coping mechanism—they must maintain a perfect, com-posed exterior to avoid judgment. This can create a significant internal burden, as sup-pressed emotions can lead to increased anxiety, stress, and other mental health issues, further reinforcing the need for perfection. In conclusion, these results highlight a two-pronged pathway to perfectionism. First, it is nurtured by specific familial conditions that prioritize achievement, morality, and control. Second, it is exacerbated by a child's learned tendency to suppress their emotions, which likely develops as a way to cope with the high-pressure family environment and maintain an image of flawlessness. This cumulative effect—with the family setting the stage and emotional regulation providing the final push—explains a significant portion of the development of perfectionism in children [25,26].

The findings of this study have several important theoretical and practical implications. From a theoretical perspective, the results contribute to our understanding of the complex interplay between family dynamics, emotion regulation, and the development of perfectionism in children. By highlighting the roles of family climate, parental control, and expressive suppression, this study provides further support for the social-contextual model of perfectionism [4,22], which emphasizes the importance of considering the social and environmental factors that contribute to the development of perfectionistic behaviors. From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that interventions aimed at reducing maladaptive perfectionism should focus on promoting supportive family environments and adaptive emotion regulation skills. As it has been suggested in previous research [41,42], to prevent the development of perfectionism in children, parents should adopt attitudes and behaviors that encourage open communication, mutual support, and emotional

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expressiveness within their families. Additionally, children should be taught effective emotion regulation strategies, such as cognitive reappraisal, which can help them manage their emotions in a healthy and adaptive manner. School-based interventions could also play a role in promoting supportive peer relationships and fostering a more balanced perspective on achievement.

Despite its valuable contributions, the present study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. As previously mentioned, the cross-sectional design of the study limits our ability to draw causal inferences about the relationships between the variables. Longitudinal studies are needed to examine the developmental trajectories of perfectionism and to identify the factors that contribute to its emergence and maintenance over time. Second, the reliance on self-report measures may be subject to biases, such as social desirability bias or recall bias, which could have influenced participants' responses. Future studies could benefit from incorporating multiple methods of data collection, such as observational measures of family interactions and emotion regulation, as well as reports from parents and teachers. Furthermore, the sample was drawn from a relatively homogenous cultural background, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other populations. Future research should explore the role of cultural factors in shaping the relationship between family climate, emotion regulation, and perfectionism. Research should also explore the potential moderating and mediating factors that may influence the relationship between family climate, emotion regulation, and perfectionism. For example, cultural factors, gender, and individual differences in temperament may play a role in shaping the development of perfectionism.

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, the findings of this study provide valuable insights into the complex interplay of family climate, emotion regulation, and perfectionism in children. The results highlight the importance of fostering a cohesive and supportive family environment, as well as promoting adaptive emotion regulation strategies, in reducing the risk of maladaptive perfectionism. These findings have implications for prevention and intervention efforts aimed at promoting children's psychological well-being and fostering healthy development. By creating supportive and accepting family environments, parents can help children develop a more balanced perspective on achievement and reduce the pressure to strive for unrealistic standards. Further research is required to examine the developmental trajectories of perfectionism and to identify the factors responsible for its emergence and maintenance over time.

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

MPS	Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale
FES	Family Environmental Scale
ERQ-CA	Emotion Regulation Questionnaire for Children and Adolescence

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