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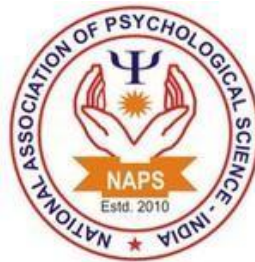
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Exploring the Intersection of Gender and Perfectionism Types among College Students

Roshan Lal*, Monty**, Nupur Gosain***

Abstract

This study examined self-handicapping, Rigid Perfectionism (RP), Self-criticism perfectionism (SCP), and Narcissistic Perfectionism (NP) among students in Chandigarh. Standardized scales were used to measure the levels of each variable. Gender differences were evaluated on students aged 17-21 (Mean 19.4, SD 1.12) on these variables. Significant gender differences were found across all constructs. Self-handicapping was notably higher among males than females. Conversely, females scored higher on RP and self-criticism perfectionism, with males exhibiting higher levels of Narcissistic Perfectionism. The correlation disclosed no significant relation of self-handicapping with RP, but significant correlations were found between the other variables, suggesting a complex interplay of perfectionism facets. Specifically, RP was strongly positively correlated with self-criticism perfectionism and Narcissistic Perfectionism, indicating that these forms of perfectionism often co-occur. The study implies that gender has a crucial role in the manifestation of perfectionism and self-handicapping behaviours among youth. These results have implications for educational strategies and psychological interventions to address perfectionism and promote healthier coping mechanisms among college students.

Keywords: Narcistic, Rigid perfectionism, Self-criticism, Self-handicapping, Students.

About Authors: *Professor, Department of Psychology, Delhi University, **Research Scholar, Department of Psychology, Panjab University Chandigarh, ***Assistant professor of psychology SOL. University of Delhi(corresponding author)

Introduction

Self-handicapping is used to justify likelihood of poor performance; it generally involves affirmations or behaviors before performing a task (Torisu & Boruchovitch, 2023). It allows individuals to take responsibility for failure, blaming it on the created handicap instead of their inabilities, which can contribute to preserving self-esteem. On the other hand, when people succeed despite the previously mentioned excuse, it boosts their perception of self-competence (Schwinger et al., 2021). Perfectionism is a trait that encompasses high standards and critical self-evaluation (Liu et al., 2025). It is like a double-edged sword, as it drives people towards brilliance yet can include unhealthy ways of handling situations, leading to negative results (Jiang et al., 2025). Perfectionism is an umbrella term incorporating different dimensions,

such as self-critical perfectionism (SCP), rigid perfectionism (RP), and narcissistic perfectionism (NP). Individuals high on SCP indulge in rigorous self-evaluation; they are occupied with finding mistakes in their work and have self-doubt. Fixed expectations and a significant need for order characterize RP (Smith et al., 2016). Finally, NP includes high expectations from others and a sense of superiority over others (Agarwal & Joy, 2023).

These variables offer important context while examining college students in India. This includes youth typically aged 17-21 in graduation. At this age, youngsters actively work on identity development while focusing on education, while the demand to meet social expectations from society and family is also high (Subrasreebala & Sreedevi, 2022). India offers a specific

combination of demands to analyze self-handicapping and perfectionism due to the unique context of culture, which requires respect for authority, collective society, family dependence, and high academic expectations from the youth (Menon et al., 2024). The drive to meet parental and societal expectations, coupled with a highly competitive academic environment, could exacerbate tendencies towards both self-protective strategies like self-handicapping and the pursuit of often unattainable perfection (Wang et al., 2012).

Literature Review

Perfectionism has consistently shown to predict self-handicapping behaviors. Kearns et al. (2008) proposed a cognitive-behavioral model linking perfectionistic beliefs to behaviors like procrastination and overcommitment, highlighting their self-protective yet performance-impairing effects. Similarly, Stewart and De George-Walker (2014) found that maladaptive perfectionism, along with external locus of control, significantly predicted self-handicapping. Karner-Huțuleac (2014) also observed a positive correlation between perfectionism, self-handicapping, and lower academic performance.

Stoeber and Stoeber (2009) differentiated between perfectionism dimensions, showing that self-oriented perfectionism was more domain-specific, while socially prescribed perfectionism related negatively to life satisfaction. Firoozi et al. (2016) and Akar et al. (2018) reinforced the distinction between adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism, with the latter contributing to test anxiety and academic underperformance through self-doubt and defensive behaviors.

Several studies examined mediators and moderators that explain the perfectionism–self-handicapping link. Workye et al. (2023) found that anxiety sensitivity and SCP intensified emotional responses to failure. Pereira et al. (2022) showed that self-compassion buffered burnout in perfectionistic students, while Awad et al.

(2022) identified self-esteem as a mediator between perfectionism and mindfulness.

Perfectionism is manifested by gender and social expectations. Macinga and Dobrița (2010) reported that men exhibited higher perfectionism, while women scored higher on irrational beliefs. Hirt and McCrea (2009) and Hirt et al. (2003) found that women engaged less in self-handicapping, valued effort more, and judged such behaviors more harshly. Kaya et al. (2017) and Sand et al. (2021) further supported the influence of societal approval and socioeconomic status on perfectionistic tendencies, particularly among women.

The intersection of perfectionism with narcissistic and dark personality traits has also been explored. Sherry et al. (2014) linked perfectionistic self-promotion with narcissism. Čopková (2023) demonstrated that individuals high in Dark Triad traits and perceived SES employed assertive strategies like perfectionism over defensive ones like self-handicapping, indicating a strategic use of perfectionism for self-image management.

Studies among gifted, medical, and athlete populations emphasized heightened perfectionistic pressures. Alodat et al. (2020) and Tadik et al. (2017) found gifted students vulnerable to self-handicapping due to cultural and emotional pressures. McKay et al. (2024) highlighted academic disengagement and distress among perfectionistic physiotherapy students. Török et al. (2022) and Curtis and Hutchinson (2022) found that maladaptive perfectionism predicted self-handicapping among athletes and runners, often through self-blame and external expectations.

Objectives:

To assess the differences in self-handicapping, rigid perfectionism, self-criticism perfectionism, and narcissistic perfectionism between male and female college students in Chandigarh using

standardized scales. To find the relationship among these variables.

Hypotheses:

H1: Self-handicapping will be positively correlated with Rigid Perfectionism, Social Comparison Perfectionism (SCP), and Narcissistic Perfectionism (NP)

H2: There are significant differences in levels of Self- Handicapping, Rigid Perfectionism, Social Comparison Perfectionism (SCP), and Narcissistic Perfectionism (NP) between male and female students.

Methodology

The study's participants comprised 100 individuals, with an equal gender

distribution. An age range of 18 to 22 years was observed among participants, with a mean of 19.8 years (SD = 1.20). Participants were recruited randomly from three Government colleges located in Chandigarh. Before their involvement, all participants were provided with comprehensive information regarding the research procedures. To ensure ethical research conduct, the confidentiality of each respondent was guaranteed before distributing the questionnaires. Following data collection, questionnaire scoring and coding were conducted using Microsoft Excel. ⁴ The subsequent data analysis was performed utilizing SPSS version 26.

Group Descriptives

Variable	Group	N	Mean	Median	SD	SE
Self-handicapping	F	50	61.3	60.0	9.05	1.28
	M	50	31.7	27.5	13.94	1.97
RP	F	50	28.6	30.0	7.29	1.03
	M	50	32.4	31.0	5.81	0.82
SCP	F	50	50.5	52.0	10.74	1.52
	M	50	58.1	56.0	10.93	1.54
NP	F	50	45.7	47.0	10.66	1.51
	M	50	53.5	51.5	9.10	1.29

t-Test Results

Variable	Levene's Test F	Levene's Test Sig.	t-value	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
SH	2.176	0.143	12.582	98	0.000	29.58	2.35091	24.9147	34.2453
RP	2.557	0.113	-2.867	98	0.005	-3.78	1.31859	-6.39834	1.16163
SCP	0.394	0.532	-3.499	98	0.001	-7.58	2.16644	-11.87923	-3.28077
NP	1.704	0.195	-3.955	98	0.000	-7.84	1.98247		

Correlation Table

Variables	Self-handicapping	RP	SCP	NP
Self-handicapping	1			
RP	-0.02	1		
SCP	-2.89**	0.77***	1	
NP	-0.26**	0.77***	0.79***	1

Discussion

This study examined the relationship between self-handicapping and three dimensions of perfectionism—RP, SCP, and NP—among students. Additionally, it examined whether there were significant differences in the levels of these constructs between both gender. Understanding these relationships is vital for gaining deeper insights into the factors influencing student motivation, academic behaviors, and overall psychological well-being within educational settings. The focus on gender differences acknowledges the potential impact of social and cultural factors on these psychological constructs.

Our initial hypothesis was that self-handicapping and RP were positively correlated. Self-handicapping and RP had no significant connection ($r = -0.017$, $p > 0.05$). This shows that in this group, the tendency to engage in actions that hamper achievement to protect one's self-image in expectation of failure is not linearly associated with students' adherence to rigid and inflexible perfection standards. RP, which is more rule-bound and internally regulated, may not easily lead to externalized failure-avoidant behaviours (Manav & Temel, 2024). Our findings contradicted earlier research that linked self-handicapping to RP (Arazzini & De George-Walker, 2014).

We saw negative correlations between self-handicapping and both SCP ($r = -0.289$, $p < 0.01$) and NP ($r = -0.257$, $p < 0.01$). These negative correlations indicate that higher levels of SCP and NP were associated with lower levels of self-handicapping among the students in this study. This finding is contrary to the initial expectation of a negative correlation across all three types of perfectionism. Lotar and Kamenov (2005) noted that individuals with higher levels of negative perfectionism are significantly more likely to engage in self-handicapping behavior. Mohammadi and Saeedian (2008) reported significant correlation between self-handicapping behaviors and narcissistic personality.

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Individuals high on SCP may intentionally avoid engage in self-handicapping as an acknowledgement of potential imperfection, which they strive to avoid (Moroz & Dunkley, 2019). A narcissistic perfectionist demands perfection from himself and others, and might avoid self-handicapping cause such behavior could expose imperfection which in turn threatens their self-concept. For them maintaining an image of infallibility is their top priority, and self-handicapping could undermine this façade (Nealis et al., 2015).

The second hypothesis of the study said that there would be significant differences between male and female students in self-handicapping, RP, social comparison perfectionism, and narcissistic perfectionism. The independent samples t-tests showed that there were statistically significant gender differences across all four variables. For example, female students reported significantly higher levels of self-handicapping ($M = 61.3$) than their male counterparts ($M = 31.7$). On the other hand, male students had significantly higher mean scores in RP ($M = 32.4$), social comparison perfectionism ($M = 58.1$), and narcissistic perfectionism ($M = 53.5$) compared to female students (RP: $M = 28.6$; Social Comparison Perfectionism: $M = 50.5$; Narcissistic Perfectionism: $M = 45.7$).

These findings regarding gender differences present a complex picture compared to existing literature. For self-handicapping, a meta-analysis indicated that men tend to exhibit a more substantial likelihood of self-handicapping compared to women. Other studies have also supported this trend, suggesting that males might use self-handicapping to protect their self-esteem. However, our finding of higher self-handicapping in females contradicts this prevailing trend supporting findings of Sultan and Kanwal (2021). This discrepancy could be attributed to differences in help-seeking behaviors, with females being more willing to acknowledge and report behaviors perceived as self-

sabotaging than males who underreport such behaviors to maintain an image of competence and self-reliance (Güney et al., 2024).

The literature presents mixed findings regarding RP. Some studies have shown no significant gender differences (Skreli & Bodinaku, 2022; Tsai, 2023) or even slightly higher levels in females for certain aspects of perfectionism (Thakur et al., 2024). However, our finding of higher RP in males aligns with research that has found males to be higher on perfectionism generally (Kállay & MihocN., 2021).

Our result of higher social comparison perfectionism in males supports findings of Franzoi and Shields (1984) and Flett et al. (2024). The competitive academic environment experienced by the students in our study may foster a greater tendency for males to compare themselves to others and strive for perfection concerning their peers (Valls, 2022).

The finding of higher narcissistic perfectionism in males is consistent with a substantial body of literature indicating more narcissism tendencies among males than females (Weidmann et al., 2023). Societal gender roles that might encourage assertiveness, competitiveness, and a sense of entitlement in males could contribute to these higher levels of narcissistic traits, including the tendency to hold unrealistic expectations for others and demand perfection from them (Sherry et al., 2014).

A complex interplay of gender roles and societal expectations might influence the observed gender differences in self-handicapping and the dimensions of perfectionism. For instance, traditional masculine norms might discourage males from admitting to self-handicapping behaviors. At the same time, societal pressures on females regarding achievement and the fear of negative evaluation could contribute to higher reported levels of self-handicapping as a pre-emptive strategy. The higher levels of specific perfectionism dimensions in males

could reflect societal expectations around male achievement and competitiveness. The specific academic culture and the participant's field of study might also significantly shape these gendered patterns.

Implications of the study

The evidence from this research has implications for understanding student behaviour and well-being in academic settings. The higher levels of self-handicapping reported by female students in this sample suggest that interventions aimed at reducing this maladaptive strategy might need to be mainly focused on addressing the underlying reasons for this tendency in females within this specific context. Conversely, the higher levels of rigid social comparison and narcissistic perfectionism in male students indicate a potential need for interventions that promote more adaptive forms of perfectionism and healthier coping mechanisms to manage the pressures and expectations associated with these traits.

The unexpected relation between self-handicapping and SCP and NP challenges some of the traditional assumptions about the relationship between perfectionism and self-protective behaviors. These findings underscore the importance of examining the specific dimensions of perfectionism and their nuanced relationships with self-handicapping rather than treating perfectionism as a monolithic construct. Future theoretical models need to incorporate these complexities to provide a more comprehensive understanding of these psychological phenomena.

Limitations of the Study

The correlational methodology prevents researchers from demonstrating that self-handicapping leads to various perfectionistic attitudes. The study's results may have limited applicability because only one academic institution contributed its data population. Utilizing only self-report tools in the study introduces response biases as a main limitation. The study failed to differentiate between discrete self-

handicapping behaviors and reported self-handicapping, which would help scientists better understand these strategies, particularly regarding gender differences.

Longitudinal research designs should be used in following studies to study how perfectionism interacts with self-handicapping across multiple timepoints. The research results would gain broader applicability when researchers use a wider sample that includes different students across multiple educational institutions and culturally diverse groups. The application of qualitative research techniques would lead to better understanding of how students experience and motivate themselves when they engage in self-handicapping and perfectionistic behavior. Future studies should focus on identifying intermediate factors which explain how perfectionism connects with self-handicapping.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that self-handicapping exists in diverse relationships with different forms of perfectionism within student populations. Self-handicapping behaviors showed negative relationships with both self-critical perfectionism and narcissistic perfectionism, with no significant connection to rigid perfectionism. Female participants reported higher levels of self-handicapping than males, whereas male students scored higher on rigid perfectionism, social comparison, and narcissistic perfectionism. These findings support examining perfectionism as a multidimensional construct and highlight the influence of gender on these patterns. The evidence reflects complex associations among psychological traits, suggesting the need for refined theoretical frameworks and gender-responsive intervention strategies.

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