

## **Influence of Perfectionism on Resistance to Change, Ambiguity Intolerance and Social Desirability among Young Adults**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Perfectionism in young adults as a phenomenon manifests into various areas of their lives from academic pursuit to social interactions to interpersonal relationships. It is characterized by persistent pursuit of flawlessness, thereby setting exceedingly high standards for themselves along with the tendencies of overly self-critical evaluations which has a significant influence across various facets of the individual's life. The present study aimed to explore the influence of perfectionism on resistance to change, ambiguity intolerance and social desirability among young adults. The sample of 212 participants of age 18-25 years was selected. Tools administered included Big Three Perfectionism Scale- Short Form (Feher et al, 2019), Resistance to Change Scale (Oreg, 2013), Short Ambiguity Intolerance Scale (Pedovic et al, 2022) and Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (Crowne and Marlowe, 1982). Regression analysis was used to analyze the data collected. Findings showed a significance relationship between all three forms of perfectionism with resistance to change and ambiguity intolerance. Social desirability only showed significant relationship with narcissistic perfectionism.

**Keywords:** *Perfectionism, Resistance to Change, Ambiguity Intolerance, Social Desirability*

In this rapidly changing world, young adults are faced with numerous challenges and opportunities. And the way they take on those challenges shapes their personal, professional and social life. Adjusting to new environment, circumstances or challenges shows the adaptability of the individuals and how flexible they are when faced with new ideas and notions. Sometimes, these individuals set high expectations for themselves under internal or societal pressures which affects the way they respond to new experiences. The interplay between perfectionism, resistance to change, ambiguity intolerance and social desirability heavily influences their personal, professional, academic and social lives.

### **Perfectionism**

Perfectionism is a multifaceted construct that is deeply rooted within the field of psychology and human behavior. It is characterized by persistent pursuit of flawlessness, thereby setting exceedingly high standards along with the tendencies of overly critical evaluations which has a significant influence across various facets of the individual's life (Stoeber, 2011).

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Perfectionism as a personality trait includes unreasonably high personal standards, strong self-criticism, and an especially high sensitivity to negative evaluations. (Frost et al., 1990).

Young adulthood is an age characterized by radical changes and significant milestones. They experience multitude of transitions across various spheres of life such as education, work, interpersonal relationships and identity formation. Perfectionism in young adults as a phenomenon manifests into various areas of their lives from academic pursuit to social interactions to interpersonal relationships.

While it promotes flawlessness and high standards to achieve success within their young minds; these tendencies can also aggravate stress and anxiety, more so during their transition from adolescent to adulthood. The high expectations from the society and the increasing emphasis on achievement further contributes to the prevalence of these perfectionistic tendencies among young adults.

### ***Resistance to Change***

Resistance to change is characterised by the tendency to hesitate or be reluctant towards embracing new life events, ideas or transitions. This reluctance manifests across various areas in an individual's life, affecting their growth and success in both personal and professional lives. Resistance to change might be driven by the fear of unknown, uncertainties about the future or attachment to familiar routines. Societal norms, cultural expectations and peer pressure can shape an individual's approach towards change. This behavior may later manifest into procrastination, denial or avoidance behavior.

Emotionally, resistance to change may also stem from feelings of anxiety, insecurity, or discomfort with uncertainty. Young adults may fear failure or rejection when faced with new challenges or opportunities, leading them to resist change as a means of self-protection. Moreover, the prospect of leaving behind familiar environments or relationships can evoke feelings of loss or sadness, further reinforcing resistance to change.

In young adults, where they enter the age of exploring and embracing new experiences, resistance to change can lead to stagnation and limited growth as it prevents them trying new opportunities, learning new skills or taking an different path that could enhance their life. They might struggle to keep up with the evolving academic and professional aspects which will hinder any potential growth and their ability to achieve success. This behavior may later manifest into procrastination, denial or avoidance behavior.

Dunican and Gearin (2018) explored the resistance to change and ambiguity intolerance in higher education institutions. The sample size of 38 participants was taken which included faculty, staff, and administrators. Findings revealed that there is a significant relationship between intolerance to ambiguity and resistance to change.

### ***Ambiguity Intolerance***

Ambiguity intolerance refers to the fear of situations involving uncertainties primarily stemming from the set of negative beliefs about the unknown and its implications (Budner, 1962). It involves an individual's aversion or discomfort towards the situation that involves any kind of ambiguity. It is a psychological phenomenon marked by the need for clear, unambiguous information and a predisposition to experience distress when confronted with ambiguity.

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Ambiguity-intolerant young adults experience high anxiety or stress when confronted with choices that have uncertain results or lack of clear information. This discomfort may lead them to avoid making decisions altogether or procrastinate, fearing the potential consequences of making the wrong choice. Therefore, they may miss out on opportunities for personal growth or progression in academic or professional areas. In social settings, ambiguity intolerance can affect young adults' ability to navigate ambiguous social cues or interpret others' intentions accurately. They may struggle to communicate effectively or express themselves accurately, fearing misunderstandings or rejection. This can strain their relationships with peers, romantic partners, or colleagues, as others may perceive them as indecisive or overly cautious.

Dunican and Gearin (2018) explored the resistance to change and ambiguity intolerance in higher education institutions. The sample size of 38 participants was taken which included faculty, staff, and administrators. Findings revealed that there is a significant relationship between intolerance to ambiguity and resistance to change.

Agajani et. al. in 2015 conducted a study to explore the relationship between perfectionism and ambiguity intolerance among gifted (N=71) and non- gifted (N= 77) girls and it was concluded that the relationship and levels of perfectionism and ambiguity tolerance was higher in gifted girls than non- gifted girls and negative perfectionism was higher in non-gifted girls.

### ***Social Desirability***

Social Desirability is a psychological trait wherein individuals modify their behaviour, thoughts and responses to present them in a socially acceptable way (Holden, 2009). They align their presentation or actions with the perceived societal expectations or norms, often times at the cost of their own feelings, thoughts and judgments. Adolescents and young adults are more susceptible to being influenced by these societal norms, peer pressure or familial expectations to gain approval and expectations to those around them. They conform to society's perceived idea of success or relationships or body image which affects their own self-perception and worth.

Fear of judgment, rejection, or negative evaluation by peers, family members, or authority figures can compel young adults to adjust their behavior or responses in order to appear more socially desirable or acceptable. They may engage in impression management strategies to create a favourable impression or avoid disapproval. They internalise the media representations and cultural norms of what is 'ideal' and 'attractive' in order to appease society, suppressing their own identity and or individuality in the process.

Karakaya and Unal (2023) studied the effects of the social environment on individuals' beliefs about themselves and perceptions of their abilities. The sample size of 121 university students were taken and their self-handicapping and self-efficacy relationship was significant only when they received positive feedback and social approval.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### ***Aim***

To study the influence of perfectionism on resistance to change, ambiguity intolerance and social desirability among young adults.

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### **Objectives**

1. To assess the relationship between Perfectionism and Resistance to Change amongst young adults.
2. To assess the relationship between Perfectionism and Ambiguity Intolerance amongst young adults.
3. To assess the relationship between Perfectionism and Social Desirability amongst young adults.
4. To assess the relationship between Perfectionism and resistance to change, Ambiguity Intolerance, and Social Desirability amongst young adults.

### **Hypotheses**

1. There will be no statistically significant relationship between perfectionism and resistance to change among young adults.
2. There will be no statistically significant relationship between perfectionism and ambiguity intolerance among young adults.
3. There will be no statistically significant relationship between perfectionism and social desirability among young adults.

### **Sample**

The sample size of 212 participants was taken using both online survey and paper pen method. Convenience sampling was used to collect the data. Targeted population of young adults of age group 18-25 years was selected.

### **Instruments**

Four measures were used in this study,

1. **Big Three Perfectionism Scale- Short Form:** BTPS- SF is a 16-item scale which was given by Anita Feher et. al. in 2019. It is a short version of Big Three Perfectionism Scale which works on 5 point likert scale with 5 being the Strongly Agree option to 1 being the Strongly Disagree option. The scale consists of 3 domains of perfectionism i.e. Rigid Perfectionism (items 1-4), Self- Critical Perfectionism (items 5-10) and Narcissistic Perfectionism (items 11-16).
2. **Resistance to Change Scale:** RTC is a 17-item self-administered questionnaire developed by Oreg in 2003. It uses 6-point likert scale with 1 being strongly disagree and 6 being the strongly agree. The RTC was designed to assess individuals' tendencies "to resist or avoid making changes, to devalue change generally, and to find change aversive across diverse contexts and types of change."
3. **Short Ambiguity Intolerance Scale:** SAIS-7 is a 7-item self-administered questionnaire given by Pedovic, I. et al in 2022. The short version of ambiguity intolerance scale is measured on 5-point likert scale. It measures the discomfort caused due to ambiguous situations.
4. **Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale- Short Form:** The Marlowe Crowne Social Desirability Scale (MCSDS) is a 13-item questionnaire that measures social desirability, which was defined as the "need for subjects to respond in culturally sanctioned ways" (Crowne and Marlowe 1960, p. 354) and "need for social approval" (Crowne and Marlowe 1964). The responses are either marked 'True' or 'False'.

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### Variables

#### Independent Variable:

- 1. Perfectionism-** It is characterized by persistent pursuit of flawlessness, thereby setting exceedingly high standards along with the tendencies of overly critical evaluations which has a significant influence across various facets of the individual's life.

#### Dependent Variable:

- 1. Resistance to change-** It refers to the individuals' tendencies "to resist or avoid making changes, and to devalue change generally".
- 2. Ambiguity Intolerance-** The tendency to perceive ambiguity (absence of relevant information that could be used by the decision maker) as stressful or discomforting.
- 3. Social Desirability-** psychological trait wherein individuals modify their behavior, thoughts and responses to present them in a socially acceptable way (Holden, 2009)

### Procedure

The participants within the age range 18-25 years old were selected and asked to fill the questionnaire. They were told their rights and asked for consent before the participation. They were assured that the responses would be kept confidential and be only used for this research purpose. The responses were then analyzed through SPSS and the result was discussed through tables and analysis.

## RESULTS

*Table No. 1 Correlations Matrix*

	Mean	Std. Dev.	Rigid	Self-Critical	Narcissistic	RTC	AI	SD
<b>Rigid</b>	13.50	3.52	1					
<b>Self-Critical</b>	18.09	5.15	.444**	1				
<b>Narcissistic</b>	14.25	4.67	.336**	.336**	1			
<b>RTC</b>	56.21	12.05	.347**	.498**	.348**	1		
<b>AI</b>	20.33	4.48	.333**	.309**	.315**	.458**	1	
<b>SD</b>	07.83	2.08	.52	.117	.141*	.140*	.121	1

The correlation matrix depicts the relationship between the variables, highlighting which set of variables have the highest correlation value. Table 1 shows the correlation between independent variable (rigid perfectionism, self-critical perfectionism, and narcissistic perfectionism) and dependent variables (resistance to change (RTC), ambiguity intolerance (AI) and social desirability (SD)). It also describes the inter-correlation between the dependent variables and also inter-correlation within the domains of independent variable (perfectionism).

Resistance to change is positively correlated with all three domains of perfectionism (rigid, self-critical, and narcissistic) at 0.01 level ( $r = .347$ ,  $r = .498$ ,  $r = .348$  respectively). This shows increase in perfectionism tends to increase resistance to change in young adults.

Ambiguity intolerance is also positively correlated to all three domains (rigid, self-critical, and narcissistic) of perfectionism at 0.01 level ( $r = .347$ ,  $r = .498$ ,  $r = .348$  respectively). This depicts that increase in perfectionism score will bring an increase in resistance to change scores in young adults.

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Social desirability is showing positive correlation with only one domain of perfectionism, narcissistic perfectionism ( $r = .141$ ) at 0.05 level which means only increase in narcissistic perfectionism scores can bring an increase in social desirability scores. It has no significant correlation with rigid perfectionism and self-critical perfectionism.

**Table 2: Regression Statistics**

Regression Statistics	
<b>Multiple R</b>	0.545
<b>R Square</b>	0.297
<b>Adjusted R Square</b>	0.287
<b>Standard Error</b>	10.169
<b>Observations</b>	212

*Dependent variable: RTC (Resistance to Change)*

Table 2 values show the correlation coefficient between dependent variable (resistance to change) and predictor values in the regression values. For resistance to change,  $R = .545$ , which indicates that a moderate positive correlation exists between resistance to change and all three domains of perfectionism (rigid, self-critical, and narcissistic). The R square value is .297 which means 29.7% of the variance in the resistance to change is accounted for by the independent variables.

**Table 3: ANOVA Analysis**

	<b>df</b>	<b>Sum of Sq.</b>	<b>Mean sq.</b>	<b>f</b>
<b>Regression</b>	3	9103.519	3034.506	29.347
<b>Residual</b>	208	21507.349	103.401	
<b>Total</b>	211	30610.868		

*Dependent variable: RTC (Resistance to Change)*

*Independent variable: rigid, self-critical, and narcissistic*

Table 3 provides a summary of ANOVA for the regression model which is used to assess the overall significance of regression model. The f-value points toward the significance of regression model as a whole. Higher the f-value, the higher significance of the regression model. In this case,  $f = 29.347$  which shows the high significance of the regression model.

**Table 4: Regression coefficient**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>b</b>	<b>Standard Error</b>	<b>Beta</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>r</b>	<b>Coefficient of Determination</b>
<b>Rigid</b>	0.436	0.225	0.127	1.937	0.347**	0.044
<b>Self-critical</b>	0.888	0.156	0.380	5.674	0.498**	0.189
<b>narcissistic</b>	0.476	0.161	0.185	2.955	0.348**	0.064
<b>constant</b>	27.462	3.316		8.280		

*Dependent variable: RTC (Resistance to Change)*

Table 4 shows the regression analysis with Resistance to change as the dependent variable and rigid, self-critical, and narcissistic perfectionism as the independent variables. The regression coefficient (b) represents the change in the dependent variable for a 1-unit change in independent variables. It depicts how 1 unit change in independent variable brings about the change in dependent variable (resistance to change). For every 1 unit increase in Rigid

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perfectionism score, the resistance to change score increases by .436 units (4.4% variation). Same goes for Self-critical perfectionism where one unit increase brings .888 units increase in resistance to change and accounts for 1.8% variation. And resistance to change also increases with .476 units with 1 unit increase in narcissistic perfectionism and accounts for 6.4% variation. All the independent variables have positive contribution towards determining resistance to change.

**Table 5: Regression Statistics**

<b>Regression Statistics</b>	
<b>Multiple R</b>	0.425
<b>R Square</b>	0.180
<b>Adjusted R Square</b>	0.168
<b>Standard Error</b>	4.085
<b>Observations</b>	212

*Dependent variable: AI (Ambiguity intolerance)*

In table 5, multiple R value is .425 signifying a positive correlation between independent variables and Ambiguity intolerance scores. Approximately, 18% of variance in ambiguity intolerance is accounted for by the independent variables in the model.

**Table 6: ANOVA Analysis**

	<b>df</b>	<b>Sum of Sq.</b>	<b>Mean sq.</b>	<b>f</b>
<b>Regression</b>	3	763.520	254.507	15.248
<b>Residual</b>	208	3471.702	16.691	
<b>Total</b>	211	4235.222		

*Dependent variable: AI (Ambiguity intolerance)*

*Independent variable: rigid, self-critical, and narcissistic*

Table 6 shows the f value in ANOVA model which is  $f= 15.248$  which shows that the regression model is statistically significant as a whole because higher the f-value, the higher is the significance of the regression model.

**Table 7: Regression coefficient**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>b</b>	<b>Standard Error</b>	<b>Beta</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>r</b>	<b>Coefficient of Determination</b>
<b>Rigid</b>	0.267	0.090	0.210	2.958	0.333**	0.069
<b>Self-critical</b>	0.128	0.063	0.147	2.029	0.309**	0.045
<b>narcissistic</b>	0.199	0.065	0.207	3.067	0.315**	0.065
<b>constant</b>	11.584	1.332		8.693		

*Dependent variable: RTC (Resistance to Change)*

Table 7 shows the regression analysis with Ambiguity Intolerance as the dependent variable and rigid, self-critical, and narcissistic perfectionism as the independent variables. The regression coefficient (b) represents the change in the dependent variable for a 1 unit change in independent variables. Increase in 1 unit of rigid perfectionism brings about the increase of .267 units in Ambiguity intolerance scores and accounts for 6.9% variance in AI. Increase in 1 unit of self-critical perfectionism brings about the increase of .128 units in Ambiguity intolerance scores and accounts for 4.5% variance in AI. Increase in 1 unit of narcissistic perfectionism brings about the increase of .199 units in Ambiguity intolerance scores. All

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the independent variables have positive contribution towards defining ambiguity intolerance and accounts for 6.5% variance in AI.

**Table 8: Regression Statistics**

Regression Statistics	
Multiple R	0.160
R Square	0.026
Adjusted R Square	0.011
Standard Error	2.069
Observations	212

*Dependent variable: SD (Social Desirability)*

Table 8 shows the weak positive relationship between independent variables and social desirability scores because  $R = .160$ . Approximately, 2.6% of variance in social desirability is accounted for by the independent variables in the model.

**Table 9: ANOVA Analysis**

	df	Sum of Sq.	Mean sq.	f
Regression	3	23.329	7.776	1.816
Residual	208	890.558	4.282	
Total	211	913.887		

*Dependent variable: SD (Social Desirability)*

*Independent variable: rigid, self-critical, and narcissistic*

In Table 9, ANOVA is used to calculate the statistical significance of the regression model. The  $f$  scores,  $f = 1.816$ , which signifies that the regression model is not statistically significant which suggests that independent variables in the model may not be reliably predicting the dependent variable i.e. social desirability.

## DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to study the influence of perfectionism on resistance to change, ambiguity intolerance and social desirability among young adults i.e. individuals between the ages 18 to 25 years. All statistical analyses was done through SPSS software.

The results obtained on the variables: Perfectionism, Resistance to change, Ambiguity intolerance and Social desirability was through multiple regression analysis.

The findings of the analysis revealed that:

1. All three domains of perfectionism (rigid, self-critical, and narcissistic) had positive significant relationship with the variables resistance to change and ambiguity intolerance at 0.01 level.
2. Only narcissistic perfectionism has significant positive relationship with social desirability scores at 0.05 level.
3. Resistance to change scores and ambiguity intolerance scores has positive significant relationship at 0.01 level.

Resistance to change variable showed positive correlation with all the domains of perfectionism (rigid,  $r = .347$ ; self-critical,  $r = .498$ ; narcissistic,  $r = .348$ ) at  $p < .01$ . This



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means increase in the scores of these independent variable will show the significant increase in the scores of resistance to change. This means that as the perfectionism (pursuit of flawlessness and setting high expectations) in an individual increases, the tendency to resist to changes and adapt to new circumstances will also significantly increase, affecting all facets of that individual's life. This rejects the hypothesis, H1 which stated that there will be no statistically significant relationship between perfectionism and resistance to change among young adults. Zhou and Zhang in 2023 observed during the CBT intervention of students with maladaptive perfectionism that the students with high maladaptive perfectionism show less tendencies towards flexibility and adaptability and high inclination towards resistance to change.

Ambiguity intolerance is the inability to feel anxious or stressed in uncertain situations. This variable showed positive correlation with all the domains of perfectionism (rigid,  $r = .333$ ; self-critical,  $r = .309$ ; narcissistic,  $r = .315$ ) at 0.01 levels. This signifies that the increase in the scores of perfectionism will show a significant increase in the scores of the ambiguity intolerance. The higher the tendency of perfectionism in the individual, the higher will be the stress and anxiety caused by the uncertain or ambiguous situations. In 2019, Leung et. al. studied the combination of traits associated with perfectionism and intolerance towards ambiguity and found that the low tolerance towards ambiguity was associated with both adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism. This rejects the hypothesis H2 which stated that there will be no statistically significant relationship between perfectionism and resistance to change among young adults.

Social desirability is the inclination towards presenting your actions, thoughts and emotions in a more socially acceptable manner in order to gain validation or to fit in. Pearson correlation showed no significant relationship between rigid and self-critical perfectionism at any levels. Narcissistic correlation did have a weak positive relationship with social desirability ( $r = .141$ ) at  $p < 0.5$ . This meant that perfectionism tendencies and the predisposition to present yourself in a more acceptable manner does not have any correlation between them.

Regression analysis and ANOVA model further confirmed the significance of the correlation and significance of the regression model between independent variables (rigid, self-critical, and narcissistic) and dependent variables (resistance to change and ambiguity intolerance). Regression and ANOVA for social desirability showed no significance of correlation and regression model with the independent variables (resistance to change and ambiguity intolerance).

### **CONCLUSION**

The aim of the study was to study the influence of perfectionism on resistance to change, ambiguity intolerance and social desirability among young adults. Out of the three hypotheses, hypothesis 1 and hypothesis 2 was rejected which meant there was a significant relationship established between the independent and dependent variables. Hypothesis 3 was however retained which meant there was no significant relationship between perfectionism and social desirability.

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### Conflict of Interest

The author affirmed no conflict of interests.

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