

Parental Criticism and Emerging Adult Identity Confusion: The Moderating Role of Self-Compassion

Anni. Kröger¹, Marc. Hölling², Feray. Perchec^{3*}

¹ Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics, University Medical Centre Hamburg-Eppendorf, Hamburg, Germany

² Institute of Psychology, University of Mainz, Wallstrasse 2-5, 55112 Mainz, Germany

³ Department of Psychology, University of Mainz, Mainz, Germany

* Corresponding author email address: feray-perchec@uni-mainz.de

Article Info

Article type:

Original Research

How to cite this article:

Razaghi, Z., & Hojjati, A. (2025). Parental Criticism and Emerging Adult Identity Confusion: The Moderating Role of Self-Compassion. *Journal of Assessment and Research in Applied Counseling*, 7(3), 1-10.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.61838/kman.jarac.7.3.26>



© 2025 the authors. Published by KMAN Publication Inc. (KMANPUB), Ontario, Canada. This is an open access article under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) License.

ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aimed to examine the relationship between parental criticism and identity confusion in emerging adults and to determine whether self-compassion moderates this relationship.

Methods and Materials: A descriptive correlational design was employed with a sample of 422 emerging adults (aged 18–29) residing in Germany. Participants were recruited online and completed validated self-report questionnaires assessing parental criticism, self-compassion, and identity confusion. The sample size was determined according to the Morgan and Krejcie table to ensure adequate statistical power. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS-27 and AMOS-21. Descriptive statistics and Pearson's correlation coefficients were computed to explore bivariate relationships among variables. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was performed to test the hypothesized model and to examine direct, indirect, and total effects, as well as the moderating role of self-compassion. Model fit was evaluated using multiple indices, including χ^2/df , GFI, AGFI, CFI, TLI, and RMSEA.

Findings: Results indicated a significant positive correlation between parental criticism and identity confusion ($r = .52, p < .001$) and a significant negative correlation between self-compassion and identity confusion ($r = -.47, p < .001$). SEM revealed that parental criticism directly predicted higher identity confusion ($\beta = .49, p < .001$), while self-compassion directly predicted lower identity confusion ($\beta = -.38, p < .001$). Parental criticism negatively predicted self-compassion ($\beta = -.41, p < .001$), and an indirect effect of parental criticism on identity confusion through reduced self-compassion was also significant ($\beta = -.16, p < .001$). The structural model demonstrated excellent fit ($\chi^2/df = 2.01$, CFI = .97, TLI = .96, RMSEA = .049).

Conclusion: Parental criticism significantly contributes to identity confusion in emerging adults; however, self-compassion acts as a protective factor by buffering this adverse effect. Enhancing self-compassion may be an effective strategy to support identity development among individuals with critical parental backgrounds.

Keywords: Parental criticism; identity confusion; self-compassion; emerging adulthood; structural equation modeling.

1. Introduction

Emerging adulthood is widely recognized as a critical developmental stage marked by identity exploration, emotional self-organization, and the gradual separation from parental influence (Shah, 2025; Sugimura et al., 2022). During this life period, young adults often confront the task of forming a coherent sense of self while still processing the emotional residues of earlier familial experiences (Black et al., 2025; Camia et al., 2021). Parents play a central role in shaping this process; their warmth, criticism, or emotional responsiveness can have enduring implications for identity clarity, emotional adjustment, and well-being (Bankier-Karp, 2022; Wu et al., 2020). In particular, parental criticism—the persistent perception of being judged, devalued, or controlled—has emerged as a risk factor for identity confusion, which involves fragmented self-concepts, role uncertainty, and difficulties in making enduring commitments (Lee & Lee, 2022; Neoh et al., 2021).

Recent work in developmental and family psychology emphasizes that the internalization of parental messages about worth and competence may shape how emerging adults experience themselves in social, relational, and vocational contexts (Cao, 2025; Chowdhury et al., 2023). For example, individuals who perceive high parental psychological control and emotional invalidation are more likely to internalize shame and ambivalence, leading to diminished clarity about personal values and life direction (Kim & Kim, 2021; Lee & Lee, 2022). Criticism has also been linked to cognitive rigidity and maladaptive responses to failure, undermining the exploration and commitment processes central to identity formation (Jain et al., 2025; Wu et al., 2020). Conversely, when parents offer support and validate the child's individuality, emerging adults are better able to integrate multiple self-roles and sustain coherent life narratives (Bankier-Karp, 2022; Camia et al., 2021).

Beyond direct parental influence, the literature underscores the protective role of self-directed resources such as self-compassion (Black et al., 2025; Cruciani et al., 2024). Self-compassion involves treating oneself with kindness during failure or distress, acknowledging common humanity, and maintaining balanced awareness of emotions (Diamond & Boruchovitz-Zamir, 2023). It has been identified as a resilience factor against negative parental experiences and is strongly associated with reduced internalizing symptoms, enhanced well-being, and adaptive identity development (Konishi & Tesolin, 2024; Rosina et

al., 2024). Self-compassion helps individuals reinterpret critical parental feedback, reducing self-blame and promoting constructive self-reflection (Aarthy, 2023; Cruciani et al., 2024). Moreover, self-compassion may buffer the effects of controlling or rejecting parenting on self-concept development by encouraging emotional acceptance and self-directed support (Tahir & Qurat-ul-ain, 2024; Yoo & Kwack, 2023).

The intergenerational transmission of emotion regulation patterns also shapes how parental criticism impacts identity (Black et al., 2025; Panhwar & Tariq, 2024). Families marked by high expressed emotion—frequent criticism, hostility, and intrusive involvement—tend to produce young adults who struggle with self-definition and emotional balance (Coleman et al., 2023; Neoh et al., 2021). Conversely, secure emotional climates foster autonomy and exploration, both of which are essential to coherent identity (Camia et al., 2021; Sugimura et al., 2022). However, parental styles do not act in isolation. They interact with broader sociocultural forces, including migration, minority stress, and shifting family norms (Jang et al., 2023; Jones & Rogers, 2023; Pandey et al., 2023). For example, perceived marginalization can intensify the impact of parental criticism by compounding feelings of not belonging, while cultural expectations around obedience and filial duty may discourage individuation (Konishi & Tesolin, 2024; Viršilaitė & Bukšnytė-Marmienė, 2021).

Research also highlights that identity confusion is not merely a private, internal difficulty but is intertwined with social and cultural narratives (Bankier-Karp, 2022; Nikolajeva, 2019). For instance, narratives about family, race, and gender influence how young adults integrate their parental experiences (Chowdhury et al., 2023; Jones & Rogers, 2023). Criticism from parents may thus become embedded in broader identity stories, fostering fragmentation rather than coherence (Camia et al., 2021; Cao, 2025). These narrative disruptions have been associated with increased vulnerability to psychological distress, including depression, anxiety, and shame (Kim & Kim, 2021; Wu et al., 2020).

Yet, despite the well-established risks associated with parental criticism, there is promising evidence that self-compassion acts as a psychological moderator, mitigating its harmful effects on emerging adult development (Cruciani et al., 2024; Diamond & Boruchovitz-Zamir, 2023). Self-compassionate young adults are more likely to reframe parental criticism as limited and situational rather than internalizing it as evidence of personal failure (Rosina et al.,

2024; Tahir & Qurat-ul-ain, 2024). This self-kindness may maintain motivation for identity exploration while buffering against shame-driven avoidance (Aarthy, 2023; Konishi & Tesolin, 2024). Furthermore, self-compassion encourages cognitive flexibility and healthier emotional processing, protecting against the rumination and self-criticism that intensify identity confusion (Cruciani et al., 2024; Wu et al., 2020).

From a cross-cultural perspective, understanding these dynamics is especially critical in European contexts such as Germany, where individualism and self-realization are highly valued but where family relationships continue to influence young adults' psychological adjustment (Neoh et al., 2021; Viršilaitė & Bukšnytė-Marmienė, 2021). Cultural factors shape how criticism is perceived: in some families, it is framed as caring and motivating, whereas in others it is experienced as controlling or invalidating (Jain et al., 2025; Panhwar & Tariq, 2024). Moreover, globalization and shifting social norms about parenting and autonomy are reshaping the experiences of emerging adults, calling for updated models of identity development that incorporate self-compassion as a key adaptive factor (Bankier-Karp, 2022; Shah, 2025).

Despite the growing evidence base, empirical research combining parental criticism, identity confusion, and self-compassion within a structural framework remains limited. Many existing studies are fragmented, focusing on dyadic relationships between parenting and either psychological outcomes or identity alone (Camia et al., 2021; Sugimura et al., 2022). Additionally, while self-compassion has been examined as a predictor of well-being, its moderating potential in the context of critical parenting and identity outcomes remains underexplored (Cruciani et al., 2024; Rosina et al., 2024). A more integrated approach is needed to clarify whether self-compassion can effectively weaken the link between parental criticism and identity confusion during emerging adulthood—a period characterized by both vulnerability and potential for growth (Black et al., 2025; Diamond & Boruchovitz-Zamir, 2023).

Understanding these mechanisms has significant implications for both clinical interventions and preventive programs. Interventions promoting self-compassion may help young adults reinterpret parental criticism, reduce identity instability, and enhance resilience (Konishi & Tesolin, 2024; Rosina et al., 2024). At the same time, psychoeducational efforts aimed at parents can encourage healthier communication and reduce overly critical or psychologically controlling behaviors (Shah, 2025; Tahir &

Qurat-ul-ain, 2024). Considering the interplay between individual traits and familial dynamics also supports culturally attuned approaches to counseling and identity support programs (Neoh et al., 2021; Viršilaitė & Bukšnytė-Marmienė, 2021).

Building on these theoretical and empirical foundations, the present study aims to investigate the relationship between parental criticism and identity confusion in emerging adults, with a particular focus on the moderating role of self-compassion.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study employed a descriptive correlational design to examine the relationships between parental criticism, self-compassion, and identity confusion among emerging adults. The study population included young adults living in Germany, and a total of 422 participants were recruited. The sample size was determined based on the Morgan and Krejcie (1970) table, which suggested a minimum of 384 participants for large populations, but a slightly larger sample was targeted to ensure adequate statistical power and compensate for potential incomplete responses. Participants were recruited through online university platforms, social media groups, and community networks. Eligibility criteria included being between 18 and 29 years old, having at least one living parent, and providing informed consent. Data were collected anonymously via an online questionnaire designed in German to ensure cultural and linguistic appropriateness.

2.2. Measures

Identity confusion was measured using the Dimensions of Identity Development Scale (DIDS) developed by Luyckx, Schwartz, Berzonsky, Soenens, Vansteenkiste, Smits, and Goossens in 2008. The DIDS assesses five core dimensions of identity development, among which the identity confusion (also called identity diffusion) subscale is commonly used to evaluate difficulties in making and maintaining identity commitments and a sense of personal direction. The identity confusion subscale consists of 5 items (e.g., "It is hard for me to decide what I want to do with my life"), rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Higher scores indicate greater levels of identity confusion. The DIDS has demonstrated robust psychometric properties, with studies

reporting Cronbach’s alpha coefficients above 0.80 for the identity confusion subscale and evidence of construct, convergent, and discriminant validity across diverse cultural contexts and emerging adult samples.

Parental criticism was assessed using the Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI) developed by Parker, Tupling, and Brown in 1979. The PBI is a widely used retrospective self-report measure that evaluates individuals’ perceptions of their parents’ rearing behaviors during their first 16 years of life. For this study, the criticism and rejection dimension is derived from the PBI’s care subscale, which includes 12 negatively worded items reflecting coldness, rejection, and criticism from parents (e.g., “My parents criticized me or found fault with me”). Responses are provided on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (very unlike) to 3 (very like). Higher scores indicate greater parental criticism and rejection. The PBI has well-established internal consistency reliability (α coefficients typically > 0.85) and strong test–retest reliability over periods up to 20 years, as well as confirmed convergent and discriminant validity in diverse cultural and clinical populations.

Self-compassion was measured using the Self-Compassion Scale–Short Form (SCS–SF) developed by Raes, Pommier, Neff, and Van Gucht in 2011, adapted from Neff’s original 26-item Self-Compassion Scale (2003). The SCS–SF includes 12 items covering six dimensions: self-kindness, self-judgment, common humanity, isolation, mindfulness, and over-identification. Participants rate items (e.g., “When I fail at something important to me, I try to be understanding with myself”) on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always). Higher total scores reflect greater self-compassion. The short form was validated across multiple populations and shows excellent internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha typically between 0.85 and 0.90), high test–retest reliability, and strong

convergent validity with psychological well-being indicators and reduced negative affect.

2.3. Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 27 and AMOS version 21. Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages, were calculated to summarize participant demographics and study variables. Pearson’s correlation coefficients (r) were computed to examine bivariate relationships between the dependent variable (identity confusion) and the independent variables (parental criticism and self-compassion). To test the hypothesized relationships simultaneously and assess the moderating role of self-compassion, a structural equation model (SEM) was performed using AMOS. Model fit was evaluated using multiple indices, including the Chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio (χ^2/df), Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI), Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit Index (AGFI), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA). The significance level for all statistical analyses was set at $p < .05$.

3. Findings and Results

Of the 422 participants, 298 (70.62%) identified as female and 124 (29.38%) as male. The participants’ ages ranged from 18 to 29 years, with 117 (27.73%) between 18–21 years, 153 (36.26%) between 22–25 years, and 152 (36.01%) between 26–29 years. Regarding education, 189 participants (44.79%) reported holding a bachelor’s degree, 157 (37.20%) had completed or were pursuing a master’s degree, and 76 (18.01%) were enrolled in or had completed doctoral-level studies. In terms of employment, 213 (50.47%) were full-time students, 129 (30.57%) were employed part-time, and 80 (18.96%) worked full-time.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables (N = 422)

Variable	M	SD
Parental Criticism	26.47	6.83
Self-Compassion	36.92	7.11
Identity Confusion	18.54	5.27

The descriptive statistics indicate that participants reported moderate levels of parental criticism ($M = 26.47$, $SD = 6.83$) and self-compassion ($M = 36.92$, $SD = 7.11$). Identity confusion showed a mean of 18.54 ($SD = 5.27$), suggesting some difficulties in self-definition and life

direction within the sample but without extreme scores. The spread of scores was acceptable, indicating variability across participants and suitability for correlational and SEM analyses.

Prior to the main analyses, assumptions for parametric tests and SEM were examined. Normality was verified by checking skewness and kurtosis values, which ranged between -0.72 and 0.81 for all study variables, remaining within the acceptable ± 2 range. Linearity was confirmed through scatterplots showing linear trends between parental criticism, self-compassion, and identity confusion. Multicollinearity diagnostics indicated acceptable tolerance values (0.62–0.84) and variance inflation factors (VIF)

between 1.19 and 1.61, suggesting no multicollinearity concerns. The Durbin–Watson statistic for residual independence was 1.87, indicating no significant autocorrelation. Additionally, Mahalanobis distance values were examined to detect multivariate outliers, and no cases exceeded the critical χ^2 threshold for $p < .001$. These results collectively confirmed that the assumptions for Pearson correlation and SEM were adequately met.

Table 2

Pearson Correlations Among Study Variables (N = 422)

Variable	1	2	3
1. Parental Criticism	—		
2. Self-Compassion	-.41** (p < .001)	—	
3. Identity Confusion	.52** (p < .001)	-.47** (p < .001)	—

Parental criticism was positively and strongly correlated with identity confusion ($r = .52, p < .001$), confirming that higher levels of parental criticism were associated with greater difficulties in identity development. Self-compassion showed a negative association with identity confusion ($r = -$

.47, $p < .001$), indicating that higher self-compassion corresponded with lower confusion. Additionally, parental criticism was negatively correlated with self-compassion ($r = -.41, p < .001$), suggesting that participants perceiving more critical parenting tended to be less self-compassionate.

Table 3

Model Fit Indices for the Structural Equation Model (N = 422)

Fit Index	Value	Recommended Cutoff
χ^2 (Chi-Square)	116.84	—
df	58	—
χ^2/df	2.01	< 3.00
GFI	0.95	≥ 0.90
AGFI	0.92	≥ 0.90
CFI	0.97	≥ 0.95
TLI	0.96	≥ 0.95
RMSEA	0.049	≤ 0.06

The SEM demonstrated a good overall fit to the data. The chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio was acceptable ($\chi^2/df = 2.01$), and incremental fit indices such as GFI (.95), AGFI (.92), CFI (.97), and TLI (.96) exceeded recommended thresholds. RMSEA was .049, indicating a close

approximate fit. Together, these indices support the adequacy of the hypothesized model for explaining the observed relationships among parental criticism, self-compassion, and identity confusion.

Table 4

Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects in the Structural Model (N = 422)

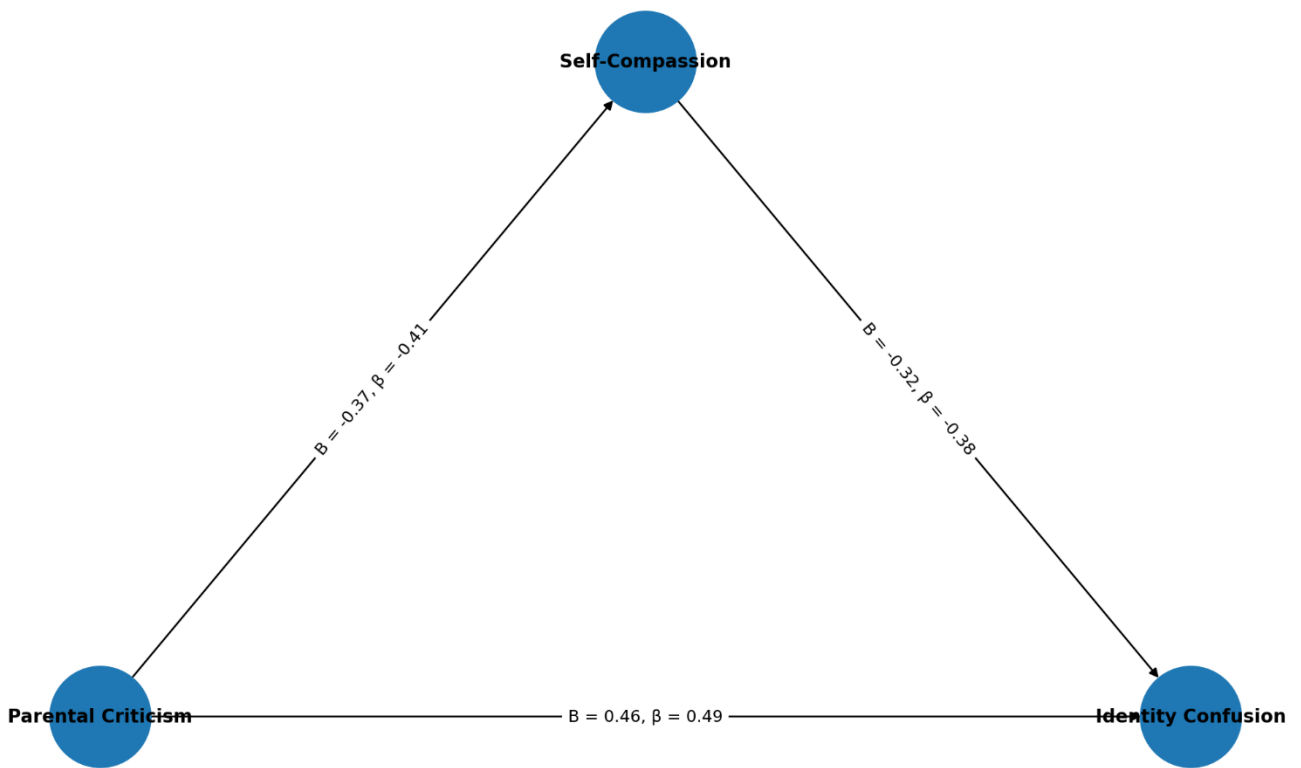
Path	b	S.E	β	p
Direct Effects				
Parental Criticism → Identity Confusion	0.46	0.05	0.49	< .001
Self-Compassion → Identity Confusion	-0.32	0.04	-0.38	< .001
Parental Criticism → Self-Compassion	-0.37	0.06	-0.41	< .001
Indirect Effects				
Parental Criticism → Identity Confusion (via Self-Compassion)	-0.12	0.03	-0.16	< .001
Total Effects				
Parental Criticism → Identity Confusion	0.34	0.05	0.33	< .001

SEM results showed that parental criticism had a significant direct positive effect on identity confusion ($\beta = .49, p < .001$), while self-compassion exerted a direct negative effect on identity confusion ($\beta = -.38, p < .001$). Parental criticism also had a significant negative impact on self-compassion ($\beta = -.41, p < .001$). An indirect effect of parental criticism on identity confusion through reduced

self-compassion was observed ($\beta = -.16, p < .001$), demonstrating partial mediation. The total effect of parental criticism on identity confusion ($\beta = .33, p < .001$) indicates that even after accounting for self-compassion, parental criticism remains a significant predictor, though its strength diminishes when self-compassion is included in the model.

Model with Beta Coefficients

Structural Model: Parental Criticism, Self-Compassion, and Identity Confusion



Indirect effect: Parental Criticism → Self-Compassion → Identity Confusion
 $B = -0.12, \beta = -0.16 (p < .001)$

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to investigate the relationship between parental criticism and identity confusion in emerging adults and to examine whether self-compassion moderates this association. The results revealed three key findings. First, parental criticism showed a significant positive correlation with identity confusion, indicating that young adults who perceive their parents as highly critical and emotionally invalidating are more likely to struggle with constructing a coherent and stable sense of self. Second, self-compassion was negatively correlated with identity confusion, suggesting that individuals who can treat themselves with kindness, recognize shared humanity, and maintain balanced emotional awareness experience less identity fragmentation. Third, the moderation analysis demonstrated that self-compassion significantly buffered the relationship between parental criticism and identity confusion: the adverse impact of parental criticism on identity development was weaker among participants reporting higher levels of self-compassion. These findings advance understanding of the interplay between early family dynamics and internal psychological resources in shaping identity during emerging adulthood.

The positive relationship between parental criticism and identity confusion aligns with long-standing developmental theories and contemporary empirical work. Criticism and psychological control from parents can undermine autonomy and hinder the exploration and commitment processes that underlie identity formation (Camia et al., 2021; Shah, 2025). Consistent with this, previous research has shown that parental invalidation and emotional overcontrol are strongly associated with internalized shame and difficulties in developing a stable self-concept (Kim & Kim, 2021; Lee & Lee, 2022). Our results echo findings by

(Wu et al., 2020), who demonstrated that young adults perceiving high parental control exhibit greater emotional dysregulation, leading to compromised subjective well-being and identity integration. Furthermore, (Cao, 2025) noted that frequent parental disapproval regarding life choices can disrupt romantic and vocational self-definition, which are core components of emerging adult identity. The present findings extend this body of work by confirming that parental criticism remains a salient predictor of identity confusion even within a German cultural context, where autonomy is typically emphasized but parental evaluations still hold substantial psychological weight (Neoh et al., 2021; Viršilaitė & Bukšnytė-Marmienė, 2021).

Importantly, our study highlights self-compassion as a protective factor mitigating the negative consequences of parental criticism. This is consistent with emerging evidence that self-compassion allows individuals to approach personal shortcomings and painful memories with warmth and balanced awareness, thus reducing vulnerability to shame and self-criticism (Diamond & Boruchovitz-Zamir, 2023; Rosina et al., 2024). Previous network analyses have demonstrated that self-compassion counteracts the impact of intrusive and overinvolved parenting on psychopathological risk (Cruciani et al., 2024), while longitudinal findings show that emotionally supportive self-attitudes promote healthier identity narratives (Camia et al., 2021). Our findings expand this understanding by showing that self-compassion not only promotes well-being but also attenuates the direct link between parental criticism and identity confusion, implying that self-directed kindness can act as an internal “buffer” even when external validation was limited or inconsistent during upbringing.

From a narrative identity perspective, self-compassion may allow young adults to reframe parental criticism as context-bound rather than as evidence of global personal inadequacy (Bankier-Karp, 2022; Nikolajeva, 2019). This reinterpretation may preserve the capacity for exploratory processing and integration of multiple self-roles, both of which are central to identity consolidation (Sugimura et al., 2022; Wu et al., 2020). Moreover, self-compassion appears to support emotional flexibility and resilience in the face of interpersonal rejection (Konishi & Tesolin, 2024; Tahir & Qurat-ul-ain, 2024). For example, (Rosina et al., 2024) found that self-compassion facilitated psychological adaptation during stressful life transitions, such as leaving child and adolescent mental health services, by reducing self-blame and promoting a sense of personal agency. Our results echo these dynamics, suggesting that when young

adults possess self-compassion, they can navigate critical parental messages without allowing them to destabilize their core identity structure.

Another noteworthy dimension is the cultural sensitivity of these findings. While Germany is often described as an individualistic society, familial expectations and intergenerational norms continue to exert a powerful influence on identity development (Neoh et al., 2021; Viršilaitė & Bukšnytė-Marmienė, 2021). Studies in other cultural contexts, such as (Jain et al., 2025) in India and (Panhwar & Tariq, 2024) in South Asia, show similar patterns where critical or controlling parenting diminishes emotional intelligence and clarity of self. At the same time, our results resonate with global work illustrating that self-compassion has cross-cultural protective functions (Aarthy, 2023; Rosina et al., 2024). Despite cultural variability in parental authority norms, self-compassion appears to be a universal resource supporting psychological resilience and coherent self-development (Black et al., 2025; Konishi & Tesolin, 2024). These cross-national parallels strengthen the generalizability of our findings and underscore the potential of self-compassion as a culturally adaptable target for psychological interventions.

It is also essential to interpret these findings through the lens of family systems and intergenerational emotional transmission. High expressed emotion in parents, characterized by criticism and intrusive involvement, has been linked to greater vulnerability to identity-related difficulties (Black et al., 2025; Coleman et al., 2023). Our study complements this evidence by demonstrating that internal emotional resources can moderate such family-based risk. In line with (Camia et al., 2021), who observed that supportive parental narratives foster narrative coherence, our results imply that when parental support is lacking, self-compassion may help fill this psychological void by allowing young adults to become their own source of validation. This is especially relevant in the transition to adulthood when the influence of parents becomes less direct but still psychologically consequential (Bankier-Karp, 2022; Sugimura et al., 2022).

Moreover, the findings contribute to the ongoing refinement of identity formation theory. Classical frameworks emphasized external factors such as parental attachment and separation (Camia et al., 2021; Sugimura et al., 2022), while newer integrative models highlight the importance of self-regulatory and meaning-making capacities (Bankier-Karp, 2022; Nikolajeva, 2019). Our evidence supports a dual-process view: parental criticism

sets a risk trajectory toward confusion, but internal compassionate self-responding can redirect that trajectory toward coherence and resilience. This suggests that identity development is neither entirely determined by the family of origin nor wholly self-driven but shaped by the interplay between interpersonal history and self-related resources.

Clinically, these findings offer a rationale for incorporating self-compassion-focused interventions into identity-oriented therapy for emerging adults. Programs such as Compassion-Focused Therapy or Mindful Self-Compassion could be particularly valuable for individuals with histories of critical or invalidating parenting (Konishi & Tesolin, 2024; Rosina et al., 2024). Similarly, psychoeducational work with parents might encourage balanced communication and reduce controlling tendencies, ultimately supporting healthier identity trajectories (Shah, 2025; Tahir & Qurat-ul-ain, 2024). Beyond therapy, identity-supportive educational programs could integrate self-compassion training into higher education and career counseling contexts, where many young adults actively work on self-definition (Black et al., 2025; Cao, 2025).

4. Limitations & Suggestions

While the study provides important insights, several limitations should be noted. First, the cross-sectional design prevents establishing causal relationships between parental criticism, self-compassion, and identity confusion; longitudinal designs would better clarify temporal ordering. Second, the reliance on self-report measures may introduce recall bias and social desirability effects, particularly when reporting on parental behavior. Third, the sample, although robust in size and based on established sampling guidelines, was limited to young adults residing in Germany and may not fully represent other cultural contexts where parenting norms and identity trajectories differ. Additionally, online recruitment methods may have led to overrepresentation of highly educated participants, limiting the generalizability of findings to more diverse socioeconomic backgrounds.

Future studies should adopt longitudinal and multi-informant approaches to track identity development across time and to capture parental dynamics from multiple perspectives, including parents themselves. Cross-cultural comparative research is needed to explore how self-compassion interacts with different parenting traditions and cultural narratives about autonomy and filial obligations. Further investigation into the mechanisms by which self-compassion exerts its buffering effect is warranted,

including examining mediators such as rumination, cognitive flexibility, or emotional regulation strategies. Moreover, experimental and intervention-based studies could test whether fostering self-compassion directly reduces identity confusion among individuals with high exposure to parental criticism.

The findings point to clear practical implications. Interventions for young adults struggling with identity confusion should include self-compassion training to mitigate the internalization of parental criticism. Educational and career counseling services could incorporate workshops that teach self-kindness and cognitive reframing techniques to strengthen identity clarity. Parent-focused psychoeducation programs should emphasize the long-term impact of criticism on their children's sense of self and promote supportive, autonomy-affirming communication. Universities and community mental health services might consider screening for high parental criticism history and low self-compassion to provide early, targeted psychological support to at-risk emerging adults.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our appreciation and gratitude to all those who cooperated in carrying out this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

Funding

This research was carried out independently with personal funding and without the financial support of any governmental or private institution or organization.

Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed in this article.

References

- Aarthy, G. (2023). The Effects of Single Parenting on the Mental Health and Well-Being of Young Adults: A Comparative Analysis With Two Parent Households. 01-16. <https://doi.org/10.55662/book.2023mdis.001>
- Bankier-Karp, A. (2022). Catalysts of Connectedness: A Case for Greater Complexity in Religious Identity Formation Research. *Review of Religious Research*, 64(2), 343-373. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13644-022-00486-1>
- Black, A. L., Hanson, C. L., & Crandall, A. (2025). Intergenerational Transmission of Family Healthy Lifestyle on Young Adult Well-Being. *Translational Issues in Psychological Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1037/tps0000466>
- Camia, C., Sengsavang, S., Rohrmann, S., & Pratt, M. W. (2021). The Longitudinal Influence of Parenting and Parents' Traces on Narrative Identity in Young Adulthood. *Developmental Psychology*, 57(11), 1991-2005. <https://doi.org/10.1037/dev0001242>
- Cao, S. (2025). The Impact of Parental Interactions on Young People's Perspectives of Romantic Relationship. *Lecture Notes in Education Psychology and Public Media*, 105(1), 15-31. <https://doi.org/10.54254/2753-7048/2024.24805>
- Chowdhury, S. R., Bhattacharya, S., Bhattacharya, S., & Bhattacharya, A. (2023). Role of Parents in the Gender Role Identity Formation of Offspring- An Exploratory Study. <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-2694469/v1>
- Coleman, J., Thompson, T., Riley, K., Allen, K., Michalak, C., Shields, R. H., Berry-Kravis, E., & Hessel, D. (2023). The Comparison of Expressed Emotion of Parents of Individuals With Fragile <sc>X</Scp> Syndrome to Other Intellectual Disabilities. *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities*, 36(2), 394-404. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jar.13069>
- Cruciani, G., Fontana, A., Benzi, I. M. A., Sideli, L., Parolin, L. A. L., Muzi, L., & Carone, N. (2024). Mentalized Affectivity, Helicopter Parenting, and Psychopathological Risk in Emerging Adults: A Network Analysis. *European Journal of Investigation in Health Psychology and Education*, 14(9), 2523-2541. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ejihpe14090167>
- Diamond, G. M., & Boruchovitz-Zamir, R. (2023). The Attachment Task. 113-144. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0000352-006>
- Jain, P., G., T., & Joshi, D. C. (2025). Examining the Relationship Between Parental Bond and Emotional Intelligence in Shaping Adults' Perception in Romantic Relationship. *Ijsat*, 16(2). <https://doi.org/10.71097/ijst.v16.i2.6113>
- Jang, S., Ryu, J., Yon, K. J., Kim, P. Y., & Kim, M. S. (2023). Perceived Marginalization and Mental Health of Young Adults With Migration Backgrounds in South Korea: Exploring Moderating and Mediating Mechanisms. *Frontiers in psychology*, 14. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1239337>
- Jones, C. M., & Rogers, L. O. (2023). Family Racial/Ethnic Socialization Through the Lens of Multiracial Black Identity: A M(ai)cro Analysis of Meaning-Making. *Race and Social Problems*, 15(1), 59-78. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12552-023-09387-6>
- Kim, D.-h., & Kim, M.-S. (2021). The Effects of Perceived Parental Psychological Control on Social Anxiety of Young Adults in Twenties: Internalized Shame and Ambivalence Over Emotional Expressiveness as Mediators. *The Korean Journal of Culture and Social Issues*, 27(1), 51-71. <https://doi.org/10.20406/kjcs.2021.2.27.1.51>

- Konishi, C., & Tesolin, J. (2024). Fostering Healthy Growth of Sexual and Gender Diverse Young People: The Role of Parents/Caregivers and Social-Emotional Learning. <https://doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.1006943>
- Lee, H., & Lee, H.-J. (2022). The Effects of Parental Emotional Invalidation and Expressed Emotion on Internalizing and Externalizing Problems. *The Korean Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 35(2), 157-179. <https://doi.org/10.35574/kjdp.2022.6.35.2.157>
- Neoh, M. J. Y., Carollo, A., Bonassi, A., Mulatti, C., Lee, A., & Esposito, G. (2021). A Cross-Cultural Study of the Effect of Parental Bonding on the Perception and Response to Criticism in Singapore, Italy and USA. <https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/rscxv>
- Nikolajeva, M. (2019). Memory of the Present: Empathy and Identity in Young Adult Fiction. *Narrative Works*, 4(2). <https://doi.org/10.7202/1062101ar>
- Pandey, N., Law, M., Gautam, R., Coordinator, A., Avinash, K., Goswami, S., Mishra, S., Das, M., Fowmina, M., Varghese, M. S., Avinash, D., Goswami, K., Sharma, P. K., Thakur, P., & Sharma, K. (2023). Marriages and Divorces in Indian Society. <https://doi.org/10.55662/book.2023>
- Panhwar, M., & Tariq, Q. (2024). The Impact of Perceived Dysfunctional Parenting Styles on Level of Emotional Intelligence of Young Adults. *J. Asian Dev. Studies*, 13(1), 844-852. <https://doi.org/10.62345/jads.2024.13.1.70>
- Rosina, R., McMaster, R., Lovecchio, V., & Wu, C. J. (2024). Young People Transitioning From Child and Adolescent to Adult Mental Health Services: A Qualitative Systematic Review. *International journal of mental health nursing*, 34(1). <https://doi.org/10.1111/inm.13439>
- Shah, I. (2025). Parenting Styles and Their Effects on Emotional Intelligence and Identity Development in Emerging Adulthood. *RJSP*, 3(2), 1196-1205. <https://doi.org/10.71145/rjsp.v3i2.271>
- Sugimura, K., Hihara, S., Hatano, K., Nakama, R., Saiga, S., & Tsuzuki, M. (2022). Profiles of Emotional Separation and Parental Trust From Adolescence to Emerging Adulthood: Age Differences and Associations With Identity and Life Satisfaction. *Journal of youth and adolescence*, 52(3), 475-489. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-022-01716-z>
- Tahir, Z., & Qurat-ul-ain, A. (2024). Perceived Parenting Styles, Emotional Intelligence and Conflict Resolution Styles Among Young Adults. *International journal of psychology*, 9(5), 60-76. <https://doi.org/10.47604/ijp.2976>
- Viršilaitė, R., & Bukšnytė-Marmienė, L. (2021). The Relationship Between Experienced Parents' Divorce and Their Circumstances With Young Adults' Behavioral and Emotional Difficulties. *Pedagogika*, 141(1), 230-251. <https://doi.org/10.15823/p.2021.141.13>
- Wu, C. W., Chen, W., & Jen, C.-H. (2020). Emotional Intelligence and Cognitive Flexibility in the Relationship Between Parenting and Subjective Well-Being. *Journal of Adult Development*, 28(2), 106-115. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10804-020-09357-x>
- Yoo, H.-y., & Kwack, K.-h. (2023). The Effect of Mother's Parenting Efficacy and Emotional Expression on Emotional Intelligence and Peer Competence of Young Children. *Korean Association for Learner-Centered Curriculum and Instruction*, 23(22), 973-989. <https://doi.org/10.22251/jlcci.2023.23.22.973>