Perfectionism: What’s So Bad About Being So Good

The Kortschak Center for Learning and Creativity
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Stats about Perfectionism

• 66% of college students in one study said they were perfectionists (Merrell, et al., 2008)

• 21% of men and 26% of women seeking counseling at a college counseling center reported that perfectionism was “quite distressing” or “extremely distressing” to them (Ashby, et al., 2012)

• 92% of people consider themselves a perfectionist in at least one domain of life (Stoeber, et al., 2013)
Perfectionism Defined

• Perfectionism is a personality characteristic defined by striving for flawlessness and setting exceedingly high standards for performance accompanied by tendencies for overly critical self-evaluation and concerns about negative evaluations by others (Stoeber, Hoyle, Last, 2013, p. 178).
Maladaptive vs. Adaptive Perfectionism

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<tr>
<th>Maladaptive Perfectionist</th>
<th>Adaptive Perfectionist</th>
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<td>Higher levels of depression; poor coping skills</td>
<td>Positive affect; good coping skills</td>
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<td>Higher levels of self-criticism; low self-esteem</td>
<td>Higher levels of assertiveness and life direction</td>
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<td>Excessively worried about making mistakes; fear of evaluation by someone else</td>
<td>Higher levels of self-efficacy in career decision-making</td>
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<td>A chronic sense of inadequacy when it comes to achieving goals</td>
<td>Able to enjoy a “job well done”; able to recognize and rejoice in their skill</td>
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(Ashby, Noble, and Gnilka 2012)  (Merrell, Hannah, Van Arsdale, Buman, and Rice, 2008)
Recommendations

• Engage in “Vitality Producing Activities” (i.e., activities that will add meaning to your life, whatever they may be).

• Practice Time Management Strategies:
  a) Set clear timelines and behavioral limits when working
  b) Breaking tasks up into smaller components helps people stay focused on the task as opposed to the outcome

• Set Realistic and “Kinder” Goals

• Engage in Behavior Experiments; at the heart of perfectionism is a fear of the possible consequences of being imperfect.

• Increase Exercise
Some Recommendations

• Challenge Negative Thoughts

“Doing well isn’t good enough, I have to do better!”
“If I don’t get an A, I don’t deserve to be here”
“If I get it wrong – they will think badly of me”
“If I don’t do the best I will let them (parents, teachers, others) down and they wont approve of me”
“I have to do an excellent essay or else they’ll know I’m a fraud”
References


