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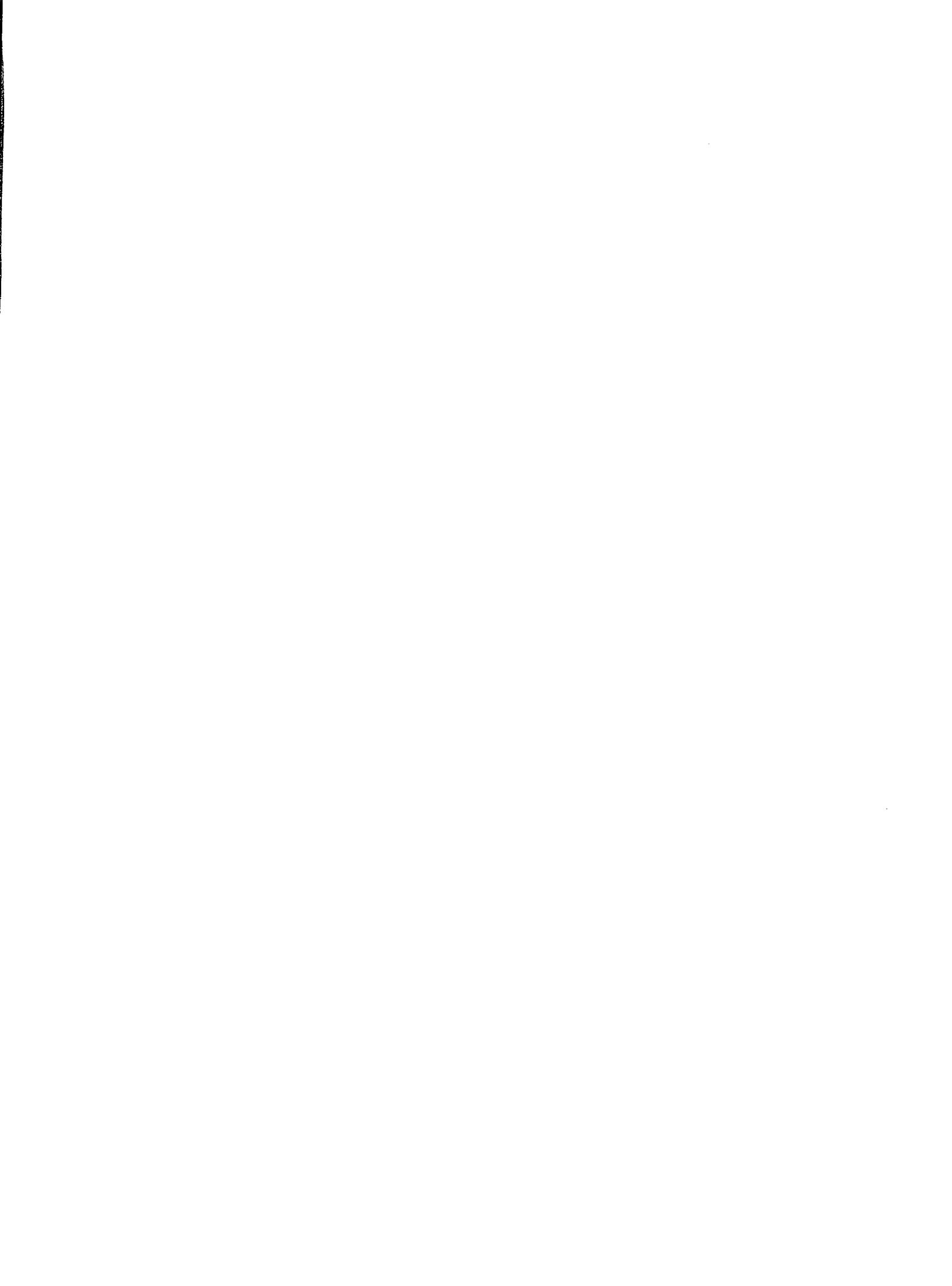
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Toward a New Conceptualization of Perfectionism: Evaluating, Adjusting,
and Expanding Past and Current Conceptualizations of Perfectionism

by

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We accept this dissertation as conforming to the required standard

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ABSTRACT

Perfectionism, a condition which has been linked with psychopathology, has been conceptualized somewhat disparately. This study was concerned with scrutinizing past and current conceptualizations of perfectionism, with developing and proposing a framework for evaluating conceptualizations of perfectionism, and with contributing to current conceptualizations and measures of perfectionism via qualitative inquiry. This study presented an argument for using a proximal-distal approach to conceptualizing perfectionism and put forward the Framework for Evaluating Conceptualizations of Perfectionism (FECPP) as a tool for doing so. Evidence was found for using this approach by way of conducting tape recorded interviews of six perfectionists and using grounded theory research methodology to analyse the data. The analysis yielded a new theoretical model for perfectionism which has implications for conceptualizing, measuring, and treating perfectionism.

For instance, perfectionism may be best viewed in terms of object, process, and inextricable cognitive responses. The results of interviewing the participants of this study suggest the object of perfectionism is a Cognitive Diathesis for Perfectionism (CDP). The results also suggest that the process of perfectionism is made up of three behavioural imperatives: 1) Forming ideals of perfection, 2) Striving for perfection, and 3) Evaluating for perfection. Finally,

they suggest that evaluating for perfection inevitably leads to cognitive dissonance. Peripheral to perfectionism are its distal consequences and correlates, its antecedents and maintenance, and any effective coping or tempering strategies that may help to manage it.

Only the object, process, and cognitive responses of perfectionism should be incorporated into an overall measure of perfectionism. Antecedents and maintenance, and distal consequences and correlates of perfectionism measures should be administered separately. The management of perfectionism is most effectively aimed at tempering striving for perfection and evaluating for perfection.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

A common, or lay view of perfectionism is that it involves striving for perfection via painstakingly meticulous behaviour, and that it facilitates the achievement of extraordinary work. How often have people been heard to say with envy, "Oh so-and-so is such a perfectionist!". However, it has been shown repeatedly that this characteristic, very much reinforced in today's productivity-oriented society, may be linked to psychopathology.

For example, it has been proposed that many individuals high in perfectionism can suffer from depression and/or anxiety (e.g., Hewitt & Flett, 1991b; Blatt, 1995), have diminished self-esteem (e.g., Flett, Hewitt, Blankstein, & O'Brien, 1991), exhibit irrational thinking (e.g., Flett, Hewitt, Blankstein, & Koledin, 1991) and Type A behaviour (e.g., Flett, Hewitt, Blankstein, & Dynin, 1994), suffer with eating disorders (e.g., Slade & Owens, 1998), and, most tragically, manifest high levels of suicide ideation (e.g., Hewitt, Flett, & Weber, 1994). This certainly suggests that perfectionism is not necessarily an attribute to be envied or reinforced. In fact, as perfectionism is examined more closely, it will probably be exposed as something to be managed very carefully if people are to successfully preserve their mental health.

How is perfectionism kept in check? Effective treatment needs to be

researched and designed for those looking to manage their perfectionism such that it contributes to (rather than destroys) wellness. Before this can be done, however, researchers must be sure they are accurately measuring perfectionism, and therefore accurately defining or conceptualizing perfectionism. So far there have been a number of attempts to do this, and these conceptualizations vary with regard to many issues. Which is the most accurate? Which is most comprehensive? Which is the best for generating approaches to treatment?

In this study, a framework for evaluating current conceptualizations of perfectionism is proposed, and it is used to stimulate inquiry into how current conceptualizations of perfectionism may be clarified, adjusted, amended, or expanded. Implications for the operationalization and measurement of perfectionism are put forward, and insights that may aid in the effective treatment of perfectionists are revealed. Hopefully this will shed some light on when and why the effects of perfectionism are detrimental, and this will allow more effective treatment for perfectionism to be formulated.

In Chapter Two, Review of the Literature, the groundwork is laid for constructing the above framework. This includes descriptions of past and current conceptualizations of perfectionism, and descriptions of all current measures of perfectionism that have been developed. It also contains descriptions of current research findings using these measures, and critiques of

these findings. Following this, in Chapter Three, will be the suggested new Framework for Evaluating Conceptualizations of Perfectionism (FECF) and some of its implications for current measures of perfectionism. It will be argued that there is a logical way to discriminate among current conceptualizations of perfectionism, and that they can be clarified, amended, or expanded based on inquiry using the new framework for evaluating them.

The research paradigm and methodological procedures for this study will be outlined in Chapter Four. The results will be presented in Chapter Five, Content Analysis of Data, in Chapter Six, Participant Profiles, and in Chapter Seven, Relationships and New Theory. Lastly, an integrative discussion of this study that includes its implications will be provided in Chapter Eight.

In summary, individuals should be able to examine the work of today's researchers with an eye to determining how each views perfectionism. The FECF outlined in Chapter Three will be of use to individuals who are attempting this. Also, as has been the case for this study, it may also be of use for sparking further inquiry into how perfectionism may be conceptualized, measured, and treated.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Past Conceptualizations of Perfectionism

Most current researchers in the area of perfectionism seem to have arrived at their conceptualizations of perfectionism by investigating the writings of the same handful of authors. There is a paucity of early writing on the subject. Studies and articles by Hollender (1965), Hamachek (1978), Burns (1980), and Pacht (1984) all seem to be referred to quite regularly in the current literature. Ideas about perfectionism put forward by these authors repeatedly resurface in literature reviews as the basis from which current conceptualizations of perfectionism are taken. It is for this reason that they are examined and critiqued in this section.

Hollender.

One of the earliest to put forward his ideas about perfectionism was Marc Hollender. He was a psychiatrist who practised Freudian psychoanalysis, and in his ground-breaking 1965 article entitled "Perfectionism" he conceptualized perfectionism as a negative personality trait learned in childhood. In the article, he quoted part of a dictionary definition of perfectionism, and asserted that it was the most salient characteristic of

perfectionism. He stated that perfectionism is predominantly “the practice of demanding of oneself or others a higher quality of performance than is required by the situation.”, p. 94. In doing so, he put forward the precursor to a position most current researchers now take when conceptualizing perfectionism, that perfectionism includes striving toward unnecessarily high standards, or perfection.

By conceptualizing perfectionism in this way Hollender made a distinction between the non-perfectionist, e.g., the healthy individual who takes pleasure from striving toward high but reachable standards (i.e., excellence), and the perfectionist, e.g., the unhealthy individual who lacks satisfaction while striving toward impossibly high standards (i.e., perfection). As will be seen later, it is a point of divergence in subsequent research as to whether or not individuals who strive for excellence should be included as perfectionists. What is most important to remember at this point is that Hollender (1965) did not do this, and thus viewed perfectionism as maladaptive. In his words, “The perfectionist is exacting for the sake of being exacting”, and, “His striving is accompanied by the corrosive feeling that ‘I am not good enough. I must do better.’” p. 95.

Although it is not clear in his article if he would go so far as labelling perfectionism a type of pathology, it is clear that he considered it likely to be

associated with pathology if not tempered or otherwise coped with via the use of mediating factors. To illustrate this Hollender (1965) suggested that perfectionists may experience depression if they are unable to generate renewed feelings of hope in the face of always failing to achieve perfection. In summary, it seems that Hollender saw perfectionism as both a negative personality trait which produces maladaptive behaviours that centre around striving for no less than perfection, and as a risk factor that must be tempered if one is to avoid developing some type of pathology.

Hamachek.

There is another oft quoted article, this time by Don Hamachek (1978) called "Psychodynamics of Normal and Neurotic Perfectionism". In it, Hamachek made a psychodynamic, normal versus neurotic argument for a conceptualization of perfectionism that in part differs from Hollender's (Hollender, 1965), and in part overlaps it. He differed from Hollender by including those who strive for excellence, i.e., healthy individuals, in his conceptualization of perfectionism. For instance, he linked perfectionism to healthy functioning in that he described those who gain enjoyment from thorough and painstaking effort, but who also know how to ease off as the situation permits as adaptive, or in his words, "normal" perfectionists.

These “normal perfectionists” supposedly use perfectionism to enhance self-esteem in that they appreciate high self-efficacy, and the excellence they achieve via its manifestation (Hamachek, 1978). As already mentioned, this differs from Hollender (1965) in that Hollender did not include the above behaviours in his conceptualization of perfectionism. Rather, Hollender saw them as striving for excellence, or something qualitatively different from perfectionism. Hamachek did not make this distinction, and included the above behaviours in “normal perfectionism”, or a positive form of perfectionism.

Where Hamachek (1978) demonstrated a partial overlap with Hollender (1965) is in his description of what he calls “neurotic perfectionism”. He described “neurotic perfectionism” as maladaptive behaviour that may become linked to psychological disturbance. For instance, he said that “neurotic perfectionists” do not have the ability to feel self-satisfaction when striving for high standards. They tend to evaluate themselves in such a way that disallows any effort or result to be evaluated as “good enough”. This, in turn, tends to set them up for worrying about their deficiencies, and for displaying excessive avoidance of making mistakes.

What does not overlap is that Hollender (1965) would not have limited this description to “neurotic perfectionism”. He would have instead put this

forward as a complete description of perfectionism, i.e., one that is sufficient within itself. In other words, and to reiterate, he would not have added the attributes of “normal perfectionism” to his conceptualization of perfectionism.

To further demonstrate the degree to which Hamachek’s (1978) conceptualization does not overlap with Hollender’s (1965), it is important to note that Hamachek said “neurotic perfectionists” display the same observable behaviours as “normal perfectionists” and only differ in how they evaluate themselves. As seen earlier, he said “neurotic perfectionists” evaluate themselves harshly, i.e., as never being “good enough”.

What Hamachek (1978) failed to take into account is that this means “neurotic perfectionists” probably do not display the same observable behaviours as their “normal” counterparts. It can be argued that, if “neurotic perfectionists” evaluate themselves such that their efforts are never good enough, and “normal perfectionists” tend to evaluate the same efforts as good enough, it may mean that “neurotic perfectionists” have higher standards than “normal perfectionists”. This would reflect a difference in standard-setting behaviour, and would therefore be inconsistent with Hamachek’s point about similar observable behaviours. Also, because “normal perfectionists” strive for excellence rather than for the unreachable standard of perfection, they probably do not exhibit such precise and exacting behaviours as “neurotic

perfectionists". At the very least, they probably do not exhibit them with the same frequency as those striving for perfection.

In summary, if we do not include "normal perfectionism", i.e., the practice of striving for excellence, in Hamachek's (1978) conceptualization of perfectionism, and we examine only "neurotic perfectionism", we find that he both agrees with, and expands Hollender's (1965) conceptualization of perfectionism. With one notable exception, it is this "neurotic", or maladaptive perfectionist upon which most current researchers tend to focus.

Burns.

Another set of ideas continually resurfacing in the literature is that put forth by David Burns (1980) in his article "The Perfectionist's Script for Self-Defeat". His ideas tend to fit with Hollender's (1965) view that engaging in perfectionism is exclusively maladaptive, and possibly, but not necessarily related to pathology. He too postulated that perfectionism involves setting excessively high standards for oneself rather than striving for excellence, standards that are mostly unattainable.

In keeping with this, Burns' (1980) ideas do not tend to fit Hamachek's (1978) view that perfectionism can be either adaptive or maladaptive with some kind of catalytic factor involved in making it maladaptive, that factor

being how one evaluates oneself. Also, his ideas do not reflect either Hollender's (1965) or Hamachek's psychodynamic view of perfectionism. Rather, he saw perfectionistic behaviour as the outcome of having a certain "mental habit", or cognitive style (p. 34).

Because Burns (1980) saw perfectionism as a cognitive style (i.e., a set of behaviours inextricably embedded in cognition), he also put forward what he believed to be its components. He theorized that most perfectionists engage in all-or-none thinking (also called black-or-white thinking), in overgeneralization, and in using "should" statements.

All-or-nothing thinking involves a dichotomous way of dealing with incoming feedback. For instance, if a perfectionist straight-A student were to receive a B grade on his exam he would evaluate this as failure rather than something in between failure and success. Burns (1980) said that this dichotomous way of thinking predisposes the perfectionist to fear mistakes, and overreact to them.

Overgeneralization for perfectionists refers to an inflexible tendency to assume that once a negative event occurs, it will be repeated incessantly. For example, if a perfectionist student were to make a mistake while writing a paper, she might tell herself, "I'm always making mistakes, I'll never get this finished". Burns (1980) contended that this type of thinking causes

perfectionists “to perceive themselves as having a very narrow margin of safety” (p. 38). This means they perceive it as necessary to be hyper-vigilant against making mistakes should this cause an irreversible trend.

According to Burns (1980), “should” statements, statements like “I should be better at this”, “I shouldn’t be late”, “I should have done it differently”, “I should eat better”, etc. are also characteristic of perfectionists. They use these statements in a negative, self-evaluative way. Burns described those perfectionists who engage in this tyranny of the “shoulds” as vulnerable to feelings of frustration and guilt, and prone to engaging in non-productive, self-critical rumination that may lead to unrealistically negative self-images.

In addition to listing the above components of perfectionistic cognitive style, Burns (1980) listed some consequences of having this “mental habit”. A first consequence is that perfectionists tend to have self-defeating strategies for self-management. One example Burns gave is of dieting. Because of their tendencies toward dichotomous thinking, he said perfectionists will see themselves as either “on” or “off” their diets. A perfectionist dieter committing any small transgression would consider the diet a failure, and would probably give it up entirely. Obviously this is not an effective approach to dieting.

As for the second consequence, Burns (1980) stated that perfectionists eventually end up experiencing more punishment than reward for their efforts

as they continually strive for unreachable goals. However, he was not clear on why perfectionists might continue to exhibit this striving behaviour in the face of minimal positive reinforcement. He proposed Skinner's notion that an intermittent schedule of reinforcement can be just as effective as a continuous one. At any rate, it seems paradoxical that perfectionists would continue behaving in such a way as to ensure failure, especially since this is what perfectionists seem to fear most.

In summary, Burns (1980), like Hollender (1965), saw perfectionism as maladaptive and possibly related to pathology. However, unlike both Hollender and Hamachek (1978), he did not see perfectionism in psychodynamic terms. Instead, he saw it as a cognitive style for which he has outlined different behaviours and consequences.

Pacht.

Yet another oft quoted article in current research is "Reflections on Perfection" by Asher Pacht (1984). In it, Pacht seems to be aligned with both Hollender (1965) and Burns (1980) in that he said his conceptualization of perfectionism does not include Hamachek's (1978) idea of "normal perfectionism". He cited Hamachek's "neurotic perfectionism" as being more in line with his views, and also described Burns' cognitive style factors as being

important to his understanding of what is problematic for perfectionists.

In addition to aligning himself with much of the thinking associated with those who went before him, Pacht (1984) demonstrated divergent thinking. In his article he disclosed a belief that perfectionism is more than merely associated with pathology. In fact, he saw it as a pathology unto itself in that he labelled it “a kind of psychopathology” p. 387. In other words, he felt perfectionism is not to be associated with healthy functioning at all, and that it is always maladaptive. In summary, Pacht described perfectionism as having an “insidious nature”, and, rather than viewing its behaviours as somewhat functional, he viewed them as exclusively psychopathological.

Summary.

To summarize the above conceptualizations of perfectionism put forward by past thinkers on this topic, it can be said that they viewed perfectionism as either a personality trait (Hollender, 1965; Hamachek, 1978), or a cognitive style (Burns, 1980; Pacht, 1984). Regardless of view, and with the exception of Hamachek’s (1978) inclusion of “normal perfectionism” in his conceptualization of perfectionism, all of the above researchers seemed to agree that perfectionism manifests itself via maladaptive or self-defeating behaviours. Pacht (1984) even goes as far as labelling perfectionism a psychopathology.

These behaviours include setting and striving for overly high standards, negative self-evaluation, fear of making mistakes, black-and-white thinking, overgeneralization, and using “should” statements. Most current authors use elements of the above summary as a point of entry when conceptualizing perfectionism. Of course past conceptualizations are incomplete and, as will be seen later, unidimensional in the face of the following current conceptualizations of perfectionism.

Current Conceptualizations of Perfectionism

There are four sets of investigators currently conducting research involving the conceptualization of perfectionism, and they are: 1) Randy Frost and associates, 2) Paul Hewitt, Gordon Flett and associates, 3) Robert Slaney and associates, and 4) Peter Slade, Glynn Owens, and associates. The first two sets of investigators have each developed instruments called the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS) (Frost, Marten, Lahart, & Rosenblate, 1990; Hewitt & Flett, 1991a). Slaney et al. have developed an instrument called the Almost Perfect Scale (APS) (Slaney, Ashby, & Trippi, 1995), and Slade and Owens, along with two others, L. A. Terry-Short and M. E. Dewey, have formulated an instrument called the Positive and Negative Perfectionism Scale (PANPS) (Terry-Short, Owens, Slade, & Dewey, 1995). It

follows that if these researchers are measuring perfectionism, they have developed or adopted their own conceptualizations of perfectionism. These are outlined below.

Hewitt and Flett.

Paul Hewitt and Gordon Flett (1991a) have differentiated three dimensions of perfectionism: Self-Oriented Perfectionism, Other-Oriented Perfectionism, and Socially Prescribed Perfectionism. Each dimension is described below.

Self-Oriented Perfectionism - This is an intrapersonal dimension characterized by the motivation to be perfect, the setting and holding of unrealistically high standards, compulsive striving, all-or-none thinking (with only success and failure as possible outcomes), the tendency to focus on flaws and past failures, and generalization of self-standards across behavioural domains. With regard to perfectionism, self-oriented perfectionists can be said to have internal loci of control. These individuals answer only to themselves when evaluations of their performances are made.

Other-Oriented Perfectionism - This can be described as an interpersonal

dimension of perfectionism in that it involves beliefs and expectations about the capabilities of others. It also involves setting unrealistic standards for others, and acknowledging them only if these standards are met. Whereas self-oriented perfectionism generates self-directed feelings and cognitions, other-oriented perfectionism generates externally directed feelings and cognitions. This results in hostility toward others, authoritarianism, and controlling behaviour.

Socially Prescribed Perfectionism - This is also an interpersonal dimension of perfectionism, and it entails perceptions of one's ability to measure up to significant others' standards and expectations. Socially prescribed perfectionists believe that others have unrealistic standards and perfectionistic expectations for their behaviour, and that others will be satisfied only when these standards and expectations are attained. They are motivated to be perfect in others' eyes. With regard to perfectionism, socially prescribed perfectionists can be said to have external loci of control. They fear negative social evaluation, believe that reinforcement is controlled externally, and need approval from others in order to validate themselves.

When examining Hewitt and Flett's multidimensional conceptualization

of perfectionism (e.g., Hewitt & Flett, 1991a), one can recognize parts of past conceptualizations embedded within it. For example, Hollender's assertion that perfectionism is mainly the setting of unrealistic standards (Hollender, 1965), and Burns' proposal that perfectionism is a cognitive style containing all-or-none thinking (Burns, 1980) are readily apparent. What Hewitt and Flett (1991a) have done to expand on past conceptualizations is to take into account that perfectionism may be internally focussed (directed at self), externally focussed (directed at others), and/or socially reactive. The older conceptualizations were unidimensional in that they focussed exclusively on self-oriented cognitions (i.e., as in Self-Oriented Perfectionism). Obviously Hewitt and Flett have expanded this notion in that they contend that a conceptualization of perfectionism should include other-directed dimensions (i.e., Other-Oriented and Socially Prescribed dimensions).

Frost, Marten, Lahart, and Rosenblate.

The next set of researchers to put forward a conceptualization of perfectionism, Frost et al., acknowledge Hewitt and Flett's (1991a) interpersonal aspects but do not focus on them to the same degree (Frost, Marten, Lahart, & Rosenblate, 1990). In Frost et al.'s conceptualization of perfectionism, in which they also view perfectionism as multidimensional, they

seem to focus mainly on three intrapersonal factors and two possible antecedents of perfectionism that they put forward as dimensions of perfectionism. These are, "Concern over mistakes" (CM), "Personal standards" (PS), "Doubts about actions" (DA), "Parental expectations" (PE), and "Parental criticism" (PC) respectively. They have also noted a sixth dimension, "Organization" (O), that they have found to be separate but somewhat related to some of the other dimensions.

Concern over mistakes (CM) - The dimension CM is mostly concerned with perfectionists' negative reactions to making mistakes. The more severe the reaction, the more one is thought to be a perfectionist. CM is the most central dimension in the Frost et al. (1990) conceptualization of perfectionism because it underlines a belief they share with Hamachek (1978) that perfectionists can be largely distinguished by their tendency to be overly critical in their self-evaluations, and because it emphasizes the difference between perfectionists and those who set high standards simply because they want to achieve excellence. Note that this dimension represents both agreement and disagreement with Hamachek in that his idea that perfectionism should include both "normal" and "neurotic" perfectionism is rejected.

Personal standards (PS) - PS has to do with the setting of unreachable standards of performance, an idea already expounded upon repeatedly in this writing, and an idea which is included in all other conceptualizations of perfectionism. Unlike most other conceptualizations of perfectionism which name this factor as central, this is only a secondary feature of Frost et al.'s (1990) conceptualization.

Parental concerns (PC), and Parental Expectations (PE) - The third (PC) and fourth (PE) dimensions are both connected with antecedents for perfectionism via parental attitudes toward children, i.e., potential perfectionists. Inclusion of these two dimensions implies that Frost et al. (1990) support the notion contained in most past conceptualizations that perfectionism is to some extent learned, i.e., it has a developmental component (see Hollender, 1965; Hamachek, 1978). If parents are perceived to have high expectations (PE), and are perceived as being overly critical (PC), children can internalize and develop these tendencies, and direct them toward themselves. As will be reiterated later, these dimensions have some relation to the Hewitt and Flett (1991a) dimension of socially prescribed perfectionism.

Doubts about actions (DA) - The fifth dimension, DA, concerns the propensity

to doubt one's own actions or performances. This doubting behaviour is usually obsessive, and leads to excessive rumination. This dimension is somewhat similar to the dimension CM, i.e., Frost et al.'s (1990) contention that perfectionists should be distinguished by their tendency to be overly critical in their self-evaluations, and it affords the possibility of looking at perfectionist behaviour as the product of cognitive style.

Organization (O) - The separate but somewhat related dimension mentioned earlier is O, and it highlights a need for order or orderliness as a characteristic of perfectionists. Frost et al. (1990) have not placed great emphasis on this as aptly conceptualizing perfectionism because it does not seem to have sufficient construct validity or reliability in identifying perfectionism as they have measured it so far, and because it does not overlap the other dimensions with much significance. However, Hollender (1965), has described this characteristic as a tendency to be "fussy and exacting", (p. 96), something most laypersons would include in any conceptualization of perfectionism.

Again, as with the work done by Hewitt and Flett (e.g., 1991a), many aspects of past conceptualizations of perfectionism can be seen in the work of Frost and his associates (1990). Frost et al. especially seem to agree with any

past researchers who emphasize negative self-evaluation as suggestive of perfectionism (e.g., Hamachek, 1978). Their main point of departure from historical conceptualizations seems to be their added emphasis on perfectionists' exaggerated propensities to doubt themselves and their behaviours and their belief that this is a main indicator of perfectionism. In other words, Frost et al. expand on what should be included when distinguishing a perfectionist's cognitive style from others.

Slaney, Ashby, and Trippi.

The third set of current researchers to conceptualize perfectionism, headed by Slaney, have not yet settled on a firm conceptualization but are getting closer (e.g., Slaney, Ashby, & Trippi, 1995). So far they are studying three basic elements or factors: high standards, orderliness, and discrepancy. They define and measure high standards and orderliness in much the same way as those who have gone before them. However, they deviate from the others by the addition of their discrepancy factor. Although this factor has components reminiscent of components present in both Hamachek's (1978) and Frost et al.'s (1990) conceptualization (i.e., the negative self-evaluation components), it is still somewhat different.

Slaney et al. (1995) define the discrepancy factor as the association

between people's standards, and the degree to which they think they have achieved them. For example, if people experience strong congruence between what they achieve and what their standards are, then they are said to be low in discrepancy. The flip-side of course is that people who do not experience this congruence are high in discrepancy. A concrete illustration of people who will be susceptible to being high in discrepancy are those individuals who continually set goals which are unobtainable. Slaney et al. (1995) say these individuals, as they continually feel they are not meeting their standards, endure high levels of distress and unhappiness, and low levels of productivity. It is for this reason that Slaney et al. put forward the discrepancy factor as being important. It has the potential for providing the theoretical underpinnings needed for an accurate measure of the degree to which perfectionists negatively evaluate themselves. This is the unique contribution that Slaney et al. make toward further conceptualizing perfectionism.

Slade and Owens.

The last set of researchers to propose a conceptualization of perfectionism is Slade and Owens via their "Dual Process Model of Perfectionism" (Slade & Owens, 1998). They seem to agree with Hamachek (1978) that there are adaptive and maladaptive aspects of perfectionism.

However, unlike Hamachek they use Skinnerian reinforcement theory to make a distinction between “positive” (“normal”) and “negative” (“neurotic”) perfectionism. They have proposed that those who embody the two types of perfectionism can be discriminated not on the basis of behaviour, which may appear similar for both types (i.e., they demonstrate the same behaviours past researchers have generally associated with perfectionism), but on the basis of what motivates or drives these behaviours.

For instance, positive perfectionists are supposedly motivated by the desire to achieve their ideal selves through the pursuit of success, perfection, excellence, and/or approval, and they generally experience satisfaction, pleasure and/or euphoria as a result (Slade & Owens, 1998). On the other hand, negative perfectionists are supposedly driven by the desire to dodge their feared selves in order to avoid failure, imperfection, mediocrity, and/or disapproval, and they experience dissatisfaction, displeasure and/or dysphoria as a result.

Of note here is the distinction between the positive perfectionists' tendency to be proactive or pursuant in their behaviours (i.e., they seek reward), and the negative perfectionists' tendency to be reactive or avoidant (i.e., they avoid punishment). As they probably believe that there is always another chance to succeed, the positive perfectionists' proactive approach

enables them to pursue high standards and celebrate any achievements without being affected too much by the possibility of failure. However, as they fear failure can happen at any time, negative perfectionists' reactive approach has them continually striving to meet high standards in order to avoid failure. This leaves them with little or no opportunity to enjoy their accomplishments (Slade & Owens, 1998).

This parsimonious reinforcement model of perfectionism (Slade & Owens, 1998) has a better chance than others for legitimizing Hamachek's (1978) normal/neurotic view of perfectionism. However, there is still much disagreement surrounding the question of whether or not there are both adaptive and maladaptive aspects to perfectionism. This is because there seem to be differing ideas about what should be termed striving for excellence, and what should be termed perfectionism. At any rate, if there are indeed two types of perfectionism, something originally posited by Terry-Short, Owens, Slade, and Dewey (1995), Slade and Owens' (1998) reinforcement model tries to account for what motivates or drives the behaviour characterizing each type, and adds another view toward conceptualizing perfectionism.

Summary.

Past conceptualizations of perfectionism are expanded when taking into

account Hewitt and Flett's (1991a) addition of an interpersonal approach to investigating perfectionism, Frost et al.'s (1990) addition of an extra intrapersonal consideration (excessively doubting one's actions), Slaney et al.'s (1995) assertion that it is perfectionists' perceived goal-performance discrepancies that make perfectionism problematic for them, and Slade and Owens' (1998) contention that reinforcement theory can discriminate between two types of perfectionism (positive and negative). Though they differ as to how perfectionism should be conceptualized, the above approaches have been useful and it has proven very fruitful to conduct research using each of them. This usefulness and prolificacy is in part due to the fact that all of these conceptualizations have been operationalized into measures of perfectionism.

Operationalizing Perfectionism

In order to operationalize a construct like perfectionism such that it can be measured in an individual, it should be stated in observable, behavioural terms rather than in unobservable, abstract terms (see Borg & Gall, 1989 for a discussion on operationally defining constructs). For example, when perfectionism is operationalized it may be described behaviourally as "the setting of unreachably high standards" rather than abstractly as "a cognitive style". An individual can be observed setting unreachably high standards, but

an individual's cognitive style cannot be directly observed.

Also, terms used in operationalizing perfectionism should reflect or stay true to the conceptualization of perfectionism they are operationalizing. For instance, if a conceptualization of perfectionism states that perfectionism is a cognitive style, any measure of it should include behaviours supposedly resulting from this cognitive style rather than from some other source such as personality. All current measures of perfectionism are the result of attempts to operationalize perfectionism in observable, behavioural terms which stay true to their conceptualizations of perfectionism. They are described below.

Current perfectionism measures: Brief descriptions.

There are four measures currently being used in today's research on perfectionism, and each was produced by one of the four sets of researchers (and corresponding associates) whose conceptualizations of perfectionism are described above. It is important to note that these measures were not necessarily the first to be developed. It should be acknowledged that precursors to these measures do exist, i.e., The Perfectionism Scale (PS) formulated by Burns (1980), and that they have been used in past research, (e.g., Flett, Hewitt, & Dyck, 1989; Ferguson & Rodway, 1994). They are no longer used because they do not take into account any expansion of past

conceptualizations of perfectionism, or any current trends toward defining and measuring perfectionism in multidimensional terms. The four measures of perfectionism about to be described do a much better job of taking into account any expansion of past conceptualizations of perfectionism and measuring perfectionism in multidimensional terms.

The instruments most commonly used today include two that have been given the same name, the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS), the first formulated by Frost, Marten, Lahart, and Rosenblate (1990), and the second by Hewitt and Flett (1991a). Two additional instruments in the process of being finalized are the Almost Perfect Scale-Revised (APS-R) by Slaney, Mobley, Trippi, Ashby, and Johnson (1998), and the Positive and Negative Perfectionism Scale (PANPS) by Terry-Short, Owens, Slade, and Dewey (1995). Each measure takes into account the conceptualization of perfectionism of its creators, and each is briefly described below. More elaborate descriptions of each instrument will follow in later sections.

Frost et al.'s Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS).

Frost et al.'s MPS (1990) purportedly measures the six dimensions in Frost et al.'s conceptualization of perfectionism (CM, PS, PC, PE, DA, and O). It contains six subscales, each corresponding to one of the six dimensions. Its

main usefulness is that it seems to measure both intrapersonal aspects and antecedents of perfectionism. Although the instrument appears to have some amount of face/construct validity, and it has been shown to be reliable (see Frost, Marten, Lahart, & Rosenblate, 1990; Parker & Adkins, 1995), it does not appear to have been used as extensively as Hewitt and Flett's MPS.

Hewitt and Flett's Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS).

Hewitt Flett's MPS (1991a) purportedly measures the three dimensions inherent in their conceptualization of perfectionism (Self-Oriented, Other-Oriented, and Socially Prescribed Perfectionism), and these dimensions make up its subscales. This instrument also appears to have face/construct validity, and has also been shown to be reliable (see Hewitt, Flett, Turnbull-Donovan, & Mikail, 1991; Hewitt & Flett, 1991a). Hewitt and Flett's MPS has been used extensively, especially within their own work. Though it seems to be useful for measuring intrapersonal aspects of perfectionism, its greatest contribution is that it also seems to measure interpersonal aspects, and that individuals vary significantly with regard to where they perceive expectations are directed.

Almost Perfect Scale-Revised (APS-R).

When it was first formulated as the Almost Perfect Scale (Slaney, Ashby, & Trippi, 1995), the measure assessed four factors (standards and order, relationships, anxiety, and procrastination). However, after much testing and revising, the current version, the Almost Perfect Scale-Revised (APS-R), assesses three factors (high standards, orderliness, and discrepancy), and therefore has three subscales (Slaney, Mobley, Trippi, Ashby, & Johnson, 1998). So far, not much has been published using this instrument (although there is research currently awaiting publication), but it has the potential to be useful, especially with regard to the discrepancy factor and its potential for predicting the degree to which perfectionists negatively evaluate themselves.

Positive and Negative Perfectionism Scale (PANPS).

The Terry-Short et al. (1995) instrument, the PANPS, has two subscales, one supposedly measuring positive perfectionism, and the other measuring negative perfectionism. It was formulated drawing heavily on Hewitt and Flett's MPS using Self-Oriented Perfectionism items for positive perfectionism, and Socially Prescribed Perfectionism items for negative perfectionism. Again, this instrument has not been utilized much but has potential, especially with regard to discriminating between adaptive and

maladaptive perfectionism (if there is such a thing as adaptive perfectionism).

As mentioned above, the MPSs, APS-R and PANPS reflect the conceptualizations, hence operational definitions of perfectionism associated with their creators (Frost, Marten, Lahart, & Rosenblate, 1990; Hewitt & Flett, 1989; Slaney, Mobley, Trippi, Ashby, & Johnson, 1998; Terry-Short, Owens, Slade, & Dewey, 1995). They have been used repeatedly in research concerning perfectionism. Below is a review of this research.

Research Findings Using Current Measures of Perfectionism

Of note is that most research findings using current measures of perfectionism deal with uncovering the effects of perfectionism and they do not examine the accuracy of the conceptualizations of perfectionism they are based on. In other words, in the research cited below, the researchers most likely assume their conceptualizations of perfectionism are accurate, and therefore assume the measures which operationalize these conceptualizations are accurate measures of perfectionism. The following are samples of research findings for each of their instruments.

Multidimensional Perfection Scale (MPS) (Hewitt and Flett)

Hewitt and Flett's (1991a) measure of perfectionism, the

Multidimensional Perfection Scale (MPS) has been used mainly to establish links among different types of psychopathology and perfectionism. For example, they have used their MPS to test for relationships between perfectionism and many conditions such as depression (more on this later), anxiety (Flett, Hewitt, Endler, & Tassone, 1994), suicide ideation (Hewitt, Flett, & Weber, 1994), diminished self-esteem (Flett, Hewitt, Blankstein, & O'Brien, 1991), Type A behaviour (Flett, Hewitt, Blankstein, & Dynin, 1994), irrational thinking (Flett, Hewitt, Blankstein, & Koledin, 1991), and personality disorders (Hewitt, Flett, & Turnbull, 1992). Also, the MPS has been used for research in other areas such as constructive thinking (Flett, Russo, & Hewitt, 1994), and goal commitment (Flett, Sawatsky, & Hewitt, 1995), and, although these areas appear more positive, they are included only to further illuminate the association between perfectionism and psychopathology.

Although there is a host of potential relationships that Hewitt and Flett have investigated, by far the most common one is that between perfectionism and depression. One the main ideas behind investigation of this relationship seems to have been that, because they supposedly set unobtainable standards for themselves, and therefore set themselves up to continuously fail, perfectionists are more prone to stressful reactions and feelings of helplessness

or hopelessness, which, in turn, lead to depression.

Even before they formulated their MPS, Hewitt and Flett (1991a) found significant relationships between these variables. For instance, Hewitt and Dyck (1986) found significant correlations between stressful life events and depression only when study participants scored above the median on Burns' Perfectionism Scale. Also, Hewitt and Flett (1990) demonstrated a positive relationship between levels of perfectionism (as measured by precursor versions of the MPS), and depression severity.

After successfully developing the MPS, Hewitt and Flett (1991a) have shown that depression is related differentially to their three dimensions of perfectionism (Hewitt & Flett, 1991b). Testing revealed that depressives tended to score higher than other psychiatric patients and normal control subjects on the Self-Oriented Perfectionism subscale, and, along with anxious patients, tended to score higher on the Socially Prescribed Perfectionism subscale.

In a 1993 study, Hewitt and Flett examined vulnerability to depression, and looked at which specific stressors are most associated with depression. They found that, for those high on Self-Oriented Perfectionism, achievement stressors were most related to depression, and for Socially Prescribed Perfectionism, interpersonal stressors were most related. Hewitt, Flett, and

Ediger (1995) have since looked at this relationship longitudinally, and have confirmed that, over time, the association between Self-Oriented Perfectionism, achievement stressors, and depression still holds.

Recently, Flett, Hewitt, Blankstein, and Mosher (1995) have thoroughly tested a diathesis-stress model using perfectionism, life events, and depression as variables. In a clever two phase study, they found that: 1) Self-Oriented and Other-Oriented Perfectionism were related to higher desire for control, and to greater perceived personal control, and, 2) Self-Oriented perfectionism and life stress interacted significantly over time to produce higher levels of depression, especially if major life events were experienced.

One work examining the perfectionism/depression relationship not done by Hewitt and Flett, but done using their MPS, is one done by Joiner and Schmidt (1995). They discovered that males high in Self-Oriented Perfectionism were prone to depression increases under high but not low levels of interpersonal, but not achievement related stress. They also found that males high in Socially Prescribed Perfectionism experienced more depression under high but not low life stress, regardless of stressor type. This work seems to reveal that the relationship between perfectionism and depression is not only explained by interactions among specific stressors, types of perfectionism, and depression, but by severity of stressors as well.

Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS) (Frost et al.).

Although most of the work linking perfectionism to psychopathology has been done by Hewitt and Flett in the form of investigating the perfectionism/depression relationship, some findings can be attributed to work done using Frost et al.'s (1990) MPS. For example, Minarik and Ahrens (1996) have used it to test the relationship among perfectionism, eating behaviour and depression variables. In two studies they uncovered: 1) depression was related to Concern over mistakes, Doubts about actions, and Parental expectations, 2) those higher in depression tended to set lower personal standards, 3) eating disturbance was related to Concern over mistakes and Doubts about actions, and, 4) the dimensions of perfectionism were more specific to depression than to anxiety.

More recently, Frost and Steketee (1997) examined the relationship between perfectionism and obsessive-compulsive disorder, and found this psychopathology to be significantly related to overall perfectionism, and especially related to Concern over mistakes and Doubts about actions. Most other research using Frost et al.'s (1990) MPS has been done by Frost et al. on other topics beside perfectionism and psychopathology (albeit these topics may indirectly linked to psychopathology). For instance they have looked at perfectionism as it relates to evaluative threat (Frost & Marten, 1990),

parental behaviour (Frost, Lahart, & Rosenblate, 1991, as cited in Blatt, 1995), reactions to athletic competition (Frost & Henderson, 1991), reactions to mistakes (Frost et al., 1995), daily hassles (Frost & Roberts, 1997), and self-monitoring of mistakes (Frost, et al., 1997). As there does not seem to be much research conducted using Frost et al.'s (1990) MPS to test the relationship between perfectionism and psychopathology, it is hoped there will be more in the future.

Almost Perfect Scale-Revised (APS-R).

Slaney et al.'s research has mostly been directed at conceptualizing and creating a measure of perfectionism. So far they have tested the validity of the original APS (Douglas & Slaney, 1996), studied a criterion group to more specifically determine the nature of perfectionism (Slaney & Ashby, 1996; Slaney, Chadha, Mobley, & Kennedy, in press), and reformulated the APS (it is now called the Almost Perfect Scale-Revised, or APS-R) (Slaney, Mobley, Trippi, Ashby, & Johnson, 1998).

Also, the APS and the APS-R have been used to investigate perfectionism as associated with adult children of alcoholics (ACOAs) (Ashby, Mangine, & Slaney, 1995), parental relationships (Rice, Ashby, & Preusser, 1996), self-esteem and depression (Rice, Ashby, & Slaney, in press), worrying

(Slaney, Suddarth, Rice, Ashby, & Mobley, 1998), Adlerian inferiority (Ashby & Kottman, 1996), religiosity (Ashby & Huffman, 1997), eating disorders (Ashby, Kottman, & Schoen, 1997), social interest (Kottman & Ashby, 1997), and finally, career decision making self-efficacy (Ashby, Bieschke, & Slaney, 1997). All areas were found to have some sort of association with perfectionism as measured using either the APS or the APS-R, and support for Hamachek's (1978) "normal" versus "neurotic" perfectionism was believed to be found. It will be interesting to watch as the APS-R is used to determine whether or not its discrepancy factor is related to psychopathology.

Positive and Negative Perfectionism Scale (PANPS).

The first distinction made by Slade, Owens, and associates is an interesting one for the study of perfectionism as it contributed to the formulation of the PANPS. The distinction was between "satisfied" (generally satisfied with their lives) and "dissatisfied" (generally dissatisfied with their lives) perfectionists. They found that eating disordered females were more likely to be dissatisfied perfectionists (Slade & Dewey, 1986; Slade, Kiemle, & Newton, 1990 as cited in Slade & Owens, 1998).

Much of their work is associated with eating disorders, and thus Slade and Owens have mostly looked at perfectionism as it relates to the eating

disorders (e.g., Slade, 1982). As perfectionism is a significant concern when treating eating disorders, it has become important for researchers to become more acquainted with the nature of perfectionism, and therefore become more involved in its conceptualization.

In support of their contention that perfectionism can be positively or negatively typed, Slade and Owens helped to create the PANPS (Terry-Short, Owens, Slade, & Dewey, 1995). They found a distinction between items they generated measuring positive and negative perfectionism that overrode the distinction between items measuring Hewitt and Flett's (1991a) Self-Oriented Perfectionism (assumed related to positive perfectionism by Slade et al.) and items measuring Socially Prescribed Perfectionism (assumed related to negative perfectionism) (Slade & Owens, 1998).

They also found when they compared depressed women to controls, that the depressed women scored higher on negative perfectionism, a result that supports other findings (especially those of Hewitt and Flett). As with the APS-R, it will be interesting to see what will be done in the future using the newly formulated PANPS.

Summary.

As one can see, there has been a considerable amount of research done

using newly developing conceptualizations of perfectionism and their corresponding measures. However, and as noted before, the research deals mainly with uncovering the effects of perfectionism rather than examining whether or not conceptualizations of it are accurate. This provides the basis for any criticism aimed at the above studies.

Critiquing Current Research on Perfectionism

As most current research deals with uncovering the effects of perfectionism rather than with validating any conceptualizations of perfectionism the studies are based on, there are several concerns about the base upon which much of this research rests. These concerns are especially warranted if these conceptualizations are to be used to provide a basis for operationalizing perfectionism, and consequently for measuring perfectionism. To begin with, it is probably remiss to consider current conceptualizations of perfectionism as wholly accurate because they are based on the writings of those who did not necessarily formally test their conceptualizations.

For instance, Hollender (1965) based his conceptualization of perfectionism mainly on clinical observations he made in his practice of psychiatry which were not formally recorded and analysed using an acceptable investigative methodology. In fact, Hamachek's ((1978), Burns' (1980), and

Pacht's (1984) conceptualizations of perfectionism are all the result of similar processes in that their theories or models are based on interpretations made by them rather than on data gathered using acceptable investigative methodologies. As all current researchers have quoted bits and pieces of these researchers' work to support their conceptualizations of perfectionism, it is questionable whether any of these conceptualizations are based on legitimate research findings that have generated solid theoretical frameworks with clearly stated underlying assumptions.

Another criticism of current research is that it requires reading between the lines in order to decide whether or not researchers have adopted the theoretical leanings of the researchers they quote. Although Slade and Owens (1998) actually do use traditional reinforcement theory to explain the maintenance of perfectionism, the others do not really reveal such obvious leanings. They do not clearly state whether they see perfectionism as an issue of personality, cognitive style, cognitive diathesis, etc.

Yet another criticism is that current researchers do not make it clear if they view perfectionism in terms of its antecedents, in terms of its core, in terms of the behaviours that represent its expression, in terms of its consequences, or in terms of some combination of the above. In other words, it is difficult to ascertain just what they actually consider to be perfectionism,

and what they consider to be causal, consequential, or incidental with regard to perfectionism.

One last criticism is that it is also difficult to determine whether the researchers of today view perfectionism as an object, a process, or both. This distinction is very blurred in the literature, and should really be clarified as it is an important element of any conceptualization of perfection. As one can see, it would be better if current researchers would make their underlying assumptions clearer as this greatly affects how perfectionism is to be operationally defined and/or measured. It would also be easier to see where their conceptualizations could be expanded or adjusted.

The Purpose of this Study

Even though it is not always clear where today's researchers stand on the above issues, it is clear that their conceptualizations of perfectionism both overlap and diverge and that further research should be focussed on where they diverge. For the most part, their conceptualizations seem to diverge with regard to whether or not perfectionism is adaptive, i.e., "normal" or "positive", and with regard to how perfectionism should be differentiated from its antecedents and/or consequences. As these splits have important implications for how we conceptualize, operationalize, and measure perfectionism, it is a

goal of this study to shed some light on how we might bring them closer together. In order to further this end, a proximal/distal framework for evaluating conceptualizations of perfectionism will be suggested in Chapter Three. This framework will be used to stimulate inquiry leading to the clarification, possible adjustment, and/or further expansion of current conceptualizations of perfectionism and their corresponding measures.

Research Goal One

The first research goal to be addressed by this study was the following:

- Create a framework for evaluating past and current conceptualizations of perfectionism.

This first research goal is addressed in the next chapter (Chapter Three: Synthesizing the Literature: A New Framework). A framework for evaluating past and current conceptualizations of perfectionism was created by looking for commonalities, points of divergence, and possible patterns among past and current conceptualizations of perfectionism in the literature. The framework can be utilized for critiquing existing theory pertaining to perfectionism, and for creating new theory.

CHAPTER THREE:

SYNTHESIZING THE LITERATURE: A NEW FRAMEWORK

Introduction

So far the study of perfectionism resembles the proverbial story of the blind men and the elephant. For those who do not know it, it goes something like this: Three blind men are presented with an object, in this case an elephant, and each are asked to identify it. The first man feels the elephant's trunk and declares the object a snake. The second feels its leg and guesses it is a tree trunk. Finally, the third blind man feels the elephant's tail and is sure he is holding a rope. None of the men successfully identify the elephant because they cannot see or feel the entire elephant. The point of the story is that if people examine only one part of something, they will not guess the nature of the whole. A logical progression from this is that when a part is studied without taking into account the whole, its function or its relation to the whole may not be understood.

Not unlike the blind men, it seems most researchers who are studying perfectionism have chosen different parts or aspects of perfectionism to highlight within their conceptualizations of perfectionism. In doing this, they have not always provided an overview of perfectionism that reveals its full

nature, and which explains how its parts are related to the whole. This is probably the case because their studies have mostly been conducted in the absence of a common approach to studying perfectionism, one that allows each aspect of perfectionism to be viewed through a lens that organizes these aspects.

What is needed is a framework for studying perfectionism that will allow both its parts, and the relationship of these parts to the whole to be examined. It would also be helpful to have a framework that would allow the antecedents, consequences, and correlates of perfectionism to be distinguished from perfectionism itself. As these aspects are all quite blurry within the existing literature, such a framework is needed to aid in evaluating and/or adjusting current conceptualizations of perfectionism.

For instance, if such a framework existed for examining conceptualizations of perfectionism, it could be used to aid researchers in answering the following questions. What does this conceptualization consider the core of perfectionism? Does this conceptualization view perfectionism as object, process, or both? What behaviours does this conceptualization consider necessary to perfectionism? Does this conceptualization include antecedents for perfectionism? Does this conceptualization discriminate between perfectionism and its consequences or correlates?

Below is a proposal for a framework that can be used to properly evaluate current conceptualizations of perfectionism in terms of the above questions. Incorporated into this framework, the Framework for Evaluating Conceptualizations of Perfectionism (FECP), will be examples taken from the current conceptualizations of perfectionism presented in Chapter Two: Review of the Literature, and examples of the view of perfectionism to be taken in this study by the researcher (see Figure 1 for a diagrammatic overview of the FECP).

Framework for Evaluating Conceptualizations of Perfectionism (FECP)

Before outlining the Framework for Evaluating Conceptualizations of Perfectionism (FECP), it is best to first define some of the terms contained within it. To begin with, the term “proximal” will be used to refer to what is closest to the core of perfectionism, and the term “distal” will refer to what is furthest away. Also, it is important to make a distinction between what will be considered object, and what will be considered process with regard to perfectionism. Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary (1974) defines the suffix “ism” as any one of “act”, “practice” or “process”, and “doctrine” or “cause”, p. 613. This means that perfectionism can be considered both object and process. Most researchers do not make a distinction between the two when

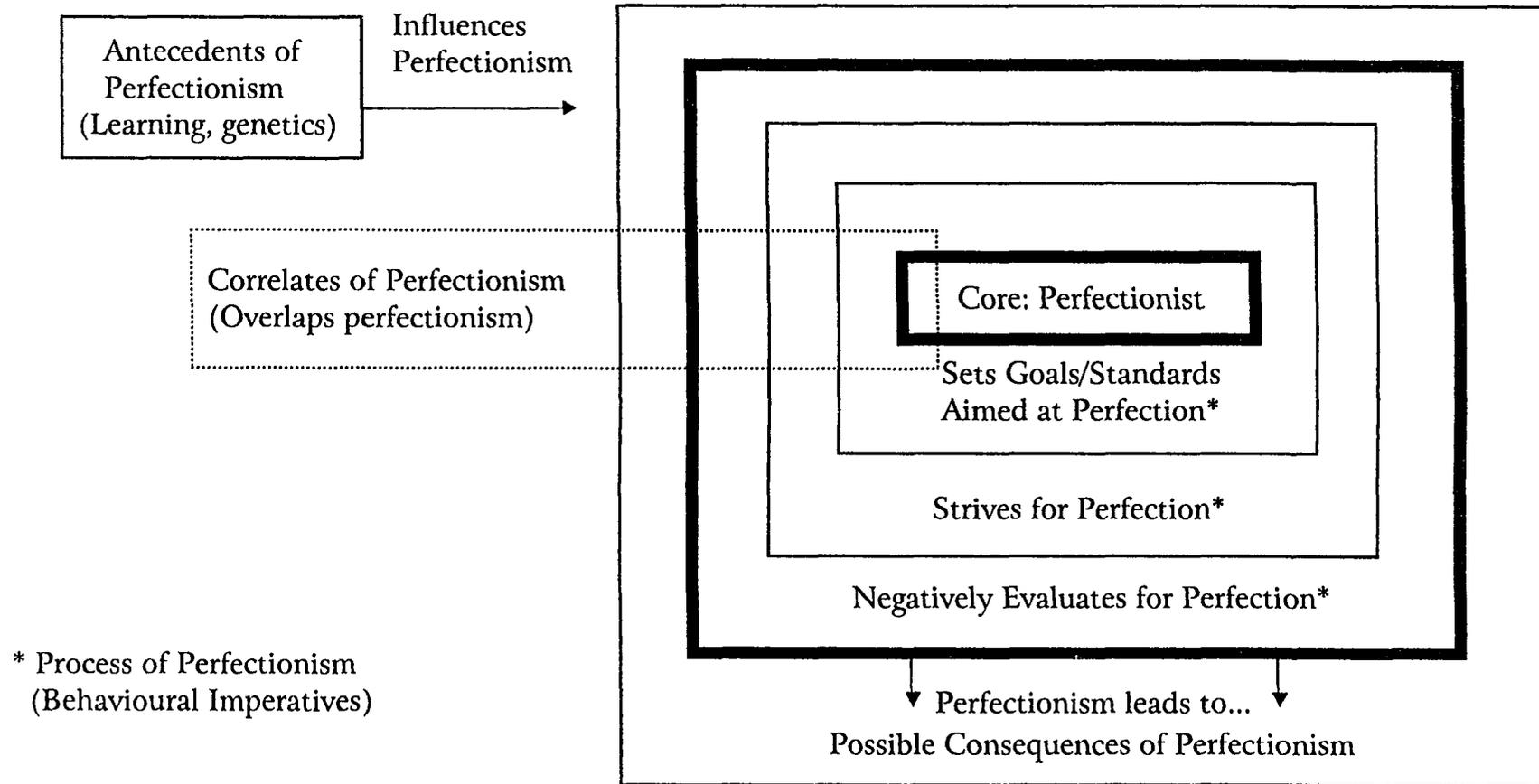


Figure 1: Proximal-Distal Overview of the Framework for Evaluating Conceptualizations of Perfectionism (FECp)

referring to perfectionism. Instead they leave this to those who read about their conceptualizations of perfectionism. However, this ambiguity gets confusing, and it would probably be more useful if two different words were used when referring to these two qualitatively different meanings of the word “perfectionism”.

In this framework, the FECP, the word “perfectionism” will always refer to perfectionism as process (i.e., act, practice, etc.), and not to perfectionism as object (i.e., cause, doctrine, etc.). The word “perfectionist” will be used when referring to perfectionism as object. Assuming the above definition of terms it can be said that perfectionists engage in perfectionism, and that a perfectionist must exist before the process of perfectionism can behaviourally manifest itself. The perfectionist is therefore most proximal to the core of perfectionism. In the following, the outline of the FECP, the perfectionist, and everything more distal to the core of perfectionism, will be described in order of proximity to the core of perfectionism.

The perfectionist.

When evaluating different conceptualizations of perfectionism using the FECP, one should determine what researchers consider as object with regard to perfectionism, i.e., determine how they describe perfectionists apart from their

behaviour. In other words, which conditions do researchers say must be present before the process of perfectionism can behaviourally manifest? These conditions are necessary to perfectionism in that if they are absent individuals cannot be labelled as perfectionists.

For instance, some researchers to date such as Hollender (1965) and Hamachek (1978) have described perfectionists as having personality traits for perfectionism, and some such as Burns (1980) and Frost et al. (1990) have described them as having perfectionist cognitive styles. It has also been described in terms of being a product of learning (e.g., Hollender, 1965).

Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary (1974) defines perfectionism as, "a disposition to regard anything short of perfection as unacceptable", p. 851. Note that "disposition" is the operative word here as it represents the object rather than the process of perfectionism. This dictionary defines "disposition" as a, "prevailing tendency, mood, or inclination", p. 330. If this definition is to be adopted as accurate, what it suggests is that the perfectionist has a stable condition that can be described as a precursor to perfectionism. This fits with the conceptualizations of most current researchers (e.g., Hewitt & Flett, 1991a; Slaney, Mobley, Trippi, Ashby, & Johnson, 1998) in that they generally believe that perfectionists are somewhat hardwired for perfectionism. They only differ with regard to how they label this hardwiring.

As for this study, the chosen label for this hardwiring is “Cognitive Diathesis for Perfectionism” (CDP). This is partly because the dictionary definition can be strongly aligned with the notion that perfectionism is the behavioural result of having a cognitive diathesis for perfectionism. The above dictionary, Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary (1974), defines diathesis as, “a constitutional predisposition toward an abnormality or disease”, or “a disposition toward or aptitude for a particular mental development”, p. 315. It is simple to see an overlap between “the disposition to regard anything short of perfection as unacceptable” and “the disposition toward or aptitude for a particular mental development” in that the former type of disposition is just a specific form of the latter, more general type.

In addition to this, “CDP” will be the chosen label because most current conceptualizations of perfectionism tend to label it similarly. For instance, Hewitt and Flett have included diathesis-stress studies in their many studies on perfectionism (e.g., Flett, Hewitt, Blankstein, & Mosher, 1995). In the literature on cognitive diathesis-stress theories of depression, cognitive diathesis has been described as a cognitive predisposition, or a predetermined set of cognitive variables with which one processes information (e.g., Abramson, Alloy, & Metalsky, 1988). This description of a cognitive diathesis is in alignment with the above dictionary definition of perfectionism, and

seems to be a plausible way of describing the stable condition present in perfectionists. And so, “Cognitive Diathesis for Perfectionism” (CDP) will be the label given in this study to the hardwiring, or object of perfectionism manifested by the perfectionist.

If the above is accurate, perfectionism as the result of a CDP, i.e., a predisposition or prevailing tendency to reject anything short of perfection, dooms one to live out a disastrous chain of events, i.e., afflicts one with “a constitutional predisposition toward an abnormality or disease” (Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary, 1974, p. 315). This is of course a maladaptive view of perfectionism, and whether or not perfectionism should be seen as exclusively negative or maladaptive will depend in some part upon its consequences. For reasons that will be obvious later, the aforementioned maladaptive view will be taken by this study.

In summary, when evaluating conceptualizations of perfectionism with this Framework for Evaluating Conceptualizations of Perfectionism (FECP), it must be determined what researchers consider object with regard to perfectionism. In other words, it should be ascertained what, if anything, predisposes the behavioural aspects of perfectionism. It is proposed in this study that the CDP is the object of perfectionism, and that it is maladaptive.

Next, it follows that if perfectionists engage in the process of

perfectionism, they will probably engage in certain behaviours resulting from their predispositions (i.e., their CDPs). In the FECP, and as will be seen below, these behaviours are described in terms of being imperative or necessary to the process of perfectionism.

Three behavioural imperatives of perfectionism.

If individuals are perfectionists, i.e., have dispositions to regard anything short of perfection as unacceptable, or, as in this study, have CDPs, they will not fail to manifest the following three behaviours, behaviours that constitute the process of perfectionism:

- 1) They will set goals/standards aimed at perfection
- 2) They will strive toward goals/standards aimed at perfection
- 3) They will evaluate negatively the results of striving to achieve goals/standards aimed at perfection (This is a type of all-or-nothing thinking, i.e., perfection = success, everything else = failure)

Note the assumption in the third behavioural imperative that perfectionists will always evaluate their achievements in terms of failure. In

order to assume this it must also be assumed that perfection is impossible or unattainable. This is of course a debatable point. Some may think that perfection is relative to the perfectionist, i.e., in the eye of the beholder, and that there are as many ideas of perfection as there are individuals. It follows that some might believe that many individuals view perfection in terms of what is attainable for them, and because of this these individuals may not negatively evaluate their achievements.

The obvious point here is that if perfectionists are left to decide what perfection is, being an adaptive or "normal" perfectionist *a la* Hamachek (1978) becomes possible. Perfectionists that see perfection in terms of what is actually attainable for them will set standards they can achieve, and this might lead to high satisfaction levels that could facilitate a positive view of perfectionism.

Conversely, others may see perfection in absolute terms, i.e., not in the eye of the beholder. There are two ways to do this. First, perfection can be viewed in absolute abstract terms, i.e., as an abstract ideal that cannot exist in physical reality, or second, it can be viewed in absolute concrete terms, i.e., as the highest conceivable standard possible in physical reality. Both represent that which is practically unattainable. If perfectionists see perfection as unattainable and they strive for it even though there is no possibility of

success, their low satisfaction levels could facilitate a negative view of perfectionism.

This leads back to the excellence versus perfection, “normal” versus “neurotic” debate outlined earlier in Chapter Two: Review of the Literature, and is a point of significant divergence among past and current conceptualizers of perfectionism. Obviously when evaluating conceptualizations of perfectionism it must be ascertained how researchers view perfection as this will determine how they think perfectionists view perfection. This will in turn help to determine whether or not perfectionism is viewed as adaptive or maladaptive. This is a point that should be investigated further in the future.

As evidenced by the third behavioural imperative of perfectionism advanced above, the FECP contains the view that perfection should be considered in either absolute abstract or absolute concrete terms, and that perfectionists will thus evaluate their achievements in terms of failure. This third behavioural imperative, along with the first and second behavioural imperatives, will be the only behaviours accepted by this study as the behavioural manifestation of the process of perfectionism.

Whether or not perfection is viewed absolutely (as opposed to relatively) perfectionists will at minimum set high standards aimed at perfection, strive for these standards, and evaluate their achievements for perfection. When

conceptualizations of perfectionism are evaluated using the FECP, they must be screened for the presence of these three behaviours, and the degree of emphasis researchers place on them should be noted. Obviously these behaviours should always be included and given a central role in any description of the process of perfectionism. Probably none of these three behaviours should be considered more important than the other as all are necessary for engaging in perfectionism, i.e., setting standards aimed at perfection, striving for them, and evaluating the results should probably all be given equal weight in any conceptualization of perfectionism. According to the FECP, there are many possible consequences of engaging in the process of perfectionism, and they are as listed below.

Probable consequences of perfectionism.

It is proposed in this Framework for Evaluating Conceptualizations of Perfectionism (FECP) that there are consequences of perfectionism that should not be confounded with perfectionism itself. For instance, when evaluating conceptualizations of perfectionism with the FECP one should look for what researchers designate as separate from, or the outcome of, the process of perfectionism. If the researchers do not make this separation they may be confounding perfectionism with its effects. Below is a proposed list of possible

examples for the consequences of perfectionism, and they are listed in accordance with each behavioural imperative of perfectionism. Most likely these examples, which are taken from the writings of those listed in Chapter Two (e.g., Hollender, 1965; Burns, 1980), are highly probable but not inevitable like the three behavioural imperatives of perfectionism. They are as follows:

- 1) Setting goals/standards aimed at perfection leads to:
 - a. Setting unrealistic goals/standards
 - b. Black and white thinking

- 2) Striving toward goals/standards aimed at perfection leads to:
 - a. Exacting behaviour
 - b. Controlling behaviour
 - c. Excessive* striving and/or drivenness
 - d. Excessive* orderliness and/or organizational behaviour

* Use of the word “excessive” to describe these behavioural consequences refers to a frequency or intensity of behaviour that goes beyond what a situation requires, and that which may become obsessive.

- 3) Evaluating for perfection leads to:
- a. Excessive focus on flaws/mistakes
 - b. Negative evaluations of self or others
 - c. Lack of awareness regarding diminishing returns for striving
 - d. Overgeneralizing
 - e. Making “should” statements
 - f. Concern over mistakes/Self-doubt
 - g. Black and white thinking

Of course this list is not exhaustive. When evaluating conceptualizations of perfectionism using the FECP, consequences such as the above should be identified and inspected for signs of being confounded with aspects more proximal to the core of perfectionism. These consequences should probably instead be considered either indicators of perfectionism, or a “symptom” list for perfectionism. To elaborate this further, the items on the list could be more descriptive of what might be labelled a “perfectionism syndrome”, or a syndrome associated with perfectionism. Of note here is that this syndrome may be something distinct from perfectionism itself, and that an implication of this framework is that any conceptualizations of perfectionism

that include items from this list in their definitions of perfectionism are really describing “perfectionism syndrome” rather than perfectionism itself.

In other words, these conceptualizations may be describing something that should be considered more distal to the core of perfectionism than its imperative behaviours, and something out of range from the actual process of perfectionism. This study contains the proposal that only the three behavioural imperatives of the process of perfectionism should be included as perfectionism itself, and that these behaviours are most proximal to the Cognitive Diathesis for Perfectionism (CDP). Also not to be confounded with perfectionism are the possible correlates of perfectionism listed below.

Possible correlates of perfectionism.

As demonstrated previously in the Introduction (e.g., Hewitt & Flett, 1991b; Blatt, 1995), there are many conditions (e.g., depression, eating disorders, etc.) that may be associated with perfectionism. When evaluating conceptualizations of perfectionism using the FECP it should be noted that correlates of perfectionism may or may not be included in these conceptualizations. It is proposed that correlates should never be confounded with perfectionism as they are probably even more distal to perfectionism than perfectionism syndrome. Rather, they should be presented as separate, but

possibly related to perfectionism. Below is a non-exhaustive list of possible correlates taken from those researchers examined so far (e.g., Slade & Owens, 1998; Hewitt, Flett, & Weber, 1994):

- 1) Excessive procrastination
- 2) Depression
- 3) Anxiety
- 4) Eating disorders
- 5) Suicide ideation
- 6) Obsessive-compulsive disorder
- 7) Writer's block
- 8) Penile erectile disorder
- 9) Type A behaviour
- 10) Irrational thinking
- 11) Diminished self-esteem
- 12) Fear of failure
- 13) Paranoia

This is quite a lengthy list of possible correlates of perfectionism. Again, it was proposed earlier in this framework that they not be confounded with

perfectionism, and that they should be considered very distal to the core of perfectionism. Also distal to the core of perfectionism are its antecedents.

Possible antecedents for perfectionism.

When evaluating conceptualizations of perfectionism with this Framework for Evaluating Conceptualizations of Perfectionism (FECP) it should be determined whether or not researchers suggest any antecedents for perfectionism. It is proposed that these antecedents should explain what helps to produce, develop, or maintain a perfectionist, or, if we accept the view presented in this study, it should explain what yields a Cognitive Diathesis for Perfectionism (CDP). Although it is not clear at this point what exactly is involved in the development and/or maintenance of a perfectionist, a couple of possible antecedents may be as follows:

1) Learning - Perfectionism may be to some extent learned via positive reinforcement (reward) for the presence of perfectionism behaviours, or negative reinforcement (punishment) for non-perfectionism behaviours (see Hollender, 1965). In other words, perfectionism is seen by some perfectionists as necessary or expected in order to gain praise, approval, love, acknowledgement, rewards, etc., or in order to avoid criticism, disapproval,

hate, mediocrity, punishment, etc. from self or significant others. In this case, traditional Skinnerian learning theory may be used to explain any drive or compulsion toward achieving perfection either for ulterior reasons or for its own sake.

2) Genetics - Perfectionism may be to some extent biological and the product of various biological factors (e.g., genetics) that are unknown at this time.

So far the only one of these two antecedents that has been given any support in the literature is that of learning (see Hollender, 1965; Slade & Owens, 1998). Although there has not been any talk of a genetic predisposition for perfectionism, this could be a component of the cognitive diathesis approach. This may provide direction for further study.

Whatever these antecedents may be, they are also to be considered within the FECP as distal to perfectionism, and should not be confounded with it. As these antecedents seem to contribute to perfectionism, and, according to this study, produce individuals with predispositions or diatheses for perfectionism that may be maladaptive, it may be helpful to investigate them further in future studies so that perfectionism may be better treated.

Summary of the Framework for Evaluating Conceptualizations of Perfectionism (FECP).

It is useful at this point to go back to the blind men and elephant analogy for perfectionism research. According to the FECP, the essence of perfectionism, or the “whole” elephant, is a Cognitive Diathesis for Perfectionism (CDP) that leads those affected to manifest a certain set of behavioural imperatives, i.e., to set standards aimed at perfection, strive toward standards aimed at perfection, and evaluate negatively whether or not these standards have been achieved. This predisposition for perfectionism is the core of perfectionism, or the perfectionist, and, although they are somewhat distal to this core, its imperative behaviours are inextricably bound to this core. As the suffix “ism” implies, perfectionism is the process of being a perfectionist, and will be present only if a perfectionist first exists.

To go back to the elephant analogy, as sure as elephants will behave like elephants by means of unique ways of eating, sleeping, moving, breathing, etc., they are elephants engaged in the process of being elephants. However elephants must first exist if they are to behave like elephants. Likewise, as sure as individuals with CDPs will display the three behavioural imperatives, they are perfectionists engaged in the process of perfectionism. However, these predispositions for perfectionism must first exist before individuals can behave

like perfectionists, i.e., engage in perfectionism.

Although it is theoretically possible to view the CDP as separate from its imperative behaviours, these two aspects of perfectionism are in reality inseparable just as a live elephant is inseparable from its behaviours. However, since this predisposition leads to the behaviours, it can be placed in the centre of most conceptualizations of perfectionism, i.e., it is most proximal, and it is at the core of perfectionism (see Figure 1 for a proximal-distal overview).

Anything more distal from the core of perfectionism is considered by this framework to be something associated with, but not necessary to, perfectionism. This can be illustrated by the elephant analogy in that there are probable behaviours strongly associated with elephants that are not necessary to their existence. For example, they might scratch their backs on trees but that does not necessarily indicate that they are elephants, nor is it necessary to their survival. However, it would not be a surprise to see an elephant do this as it cannot scratch its own back.

In the case of perfectionism, what seems to be most strongly associated with perfectionism is a “perfectionism syndrome”, or the probable consequences of perfectionism listed earlier. This syndrome is difficult to see as separate from perfectionism, and sometimes gets confounded with it. To give an example, perfectionists may doubt their actions because they are always

negatively evaluating themselves, and this may appear to be part of perfectionism. However, doubting oneself does not necessarily follow from negatively evaluating one's achievements, and does not have to be present in order to say one is a perfectionist. These two examples demonstrate the distinction between perfectionism and its probable consequences, and aid in explaining why these consequences are more distal to the core of perfectionism than the three behavioural imperatives.

Also distal to, or separate from the core of perfectionism are both its antecedents, (e.g., genetic or learning influences) and its correlates (e.g., depression). Even though the antecedents of perfectionism help to develop and maintain perfectionism, and even though correlates of perfectionism may be strongly related to perfectionism, these aspects are not necessary to perfectionism once it is present, and, like its probable consequences, they are also disqualified from being called perfectionism.

As already suggested, all of the above points should be considered when evaluating conceptualizations of perfectionism using the FECP. As already mentioned, a summary diagram of the FECP is shown in Figure 1. It depicts the perfectionist (the object of perfectionism) with accompanying imperative behaviours (the process of perfectionism), and it depicts some of its associated but distal aspects ("Perfectionism Syndrome" or consequences of

perfectionism, antecedents, correlates, etc.). The FECP has implications for operationally defining and measuring perfectionism. However, before addressing these implications it is appropriate to first use this new framework to evaluate the past and current conceptualizations of perfectionism described thus far.

Evaluating Past and Current Conceptualizations of Perfectionism using the Framework for Evaluating Conceptualizations of Perfectionism (FECP)

When using the FECP to view conceptualizations of perfectionism adopted for use in past and current studies, it is apparent that they differ from one another. Table 1¹ clarifies how they both overlap and differ from one another when viewed via each key aspect of the framework. For instance, it can be seen where each of the researchers listed in Chapter Two (i.e., Burns, Frost et al., Hamachek, Hewitt and Flett, Hollender, Pacht, Slade and Owens, and Slaney et al.) stand on the issue of what a perfectionist is. Note that some researchers see the object of perfectionism as a matter of personality (i.e., Hollender, 1965), some as a matter of cognitive style (i.e., Burns, 1980), and some as a matter of cognitive diathesis (i.e., Hewitt and Flett, 1991a).

¹ Examples are not exhaustive. Also, when there are no examples shown in Table 1 for a certain researcher with regard to a key aspect of the FECP, it is because it is unclear where the researcher stands on this key aspect.

Table 1: Past and Current Conceptualizations of Perfectionism as Evaluated Using the Framework for Evaluating Conceptualizations of Perfectionism (FECF)

	Burns	Frost	Hamachek ¹	Hewitt/Flett	Hollender	Pacht	Slade/Owens ²	Slaney et al.
Core Perfectionism	Cognitive style	Maladaptive thinking style	Personality trait	Cognitive diathesis	Personality trait	Psychopathology	Behavioural trait	Cognitive style
Standards, Goals aimed at perfection	Excessively high, relentless standards	Excessively high standards	Higher levels than possible to attain	Excessively high standards	Higher quality than required by situation	Unrealistically high, rigid goals	High-level goals	Excessive and extreme standards
Striving for perfection	Unremitting, compulsive striving	Order, neatness, organization	Striving to avoid failure	Striving to meet standards	Being exacting for its own sake	Behaving in order to win approval	Striving to avoid failure	Orderliness, neatness, etc.
Evaluating for perfection	All-or-nothing evaluating	Overly critical evaluations,	Nothing is good enough	Focus on flaws and past failures	Locating defects and flaws	“God/scum” phenomena	Check for avoidance of failure	Discrepancy between standards and results
Consequences of perfectionism	Over-generalizing, black/white thinking	Self-doubt, concern over mistakes	“I should” feeling, face-saving behaviour	Over-generalizing, black/white thinking	Shame, hopelessness	Feeling like a failure, like “scum”	Reactive orientation	No example

Table 1: Past and Current Conceptualizations of Perfectionism as Evaluated Using the Framework for Evaluating Conceptualizations of Perfectionism (FECPC) (Continued)

	Burns	Frost	Hamachek	Hewitt/Flett	Hollender	Pacht	Slade/Owens	Slaney et al.
Correlates of perfectionism	Loneliness, school drop-out rates, low earnings, etc.	Depression, Type A Behaviour, OCD	Depression, shame, guilt, anxiety,	Depression, suicide, procrastination psychopathology, etc.	Depression, suicide	Alcoholism, erectile dysfunction, anorexia, etc.	Eating disorders, depression	Career problems
Antecedents of perfectionism	Parental interaction, self-reinforcing	Parental expectations, parental criticism	Non-approval, conditional positive approval	No example	Learned in childhood, family influences	Learned in childhood, parental expectations	Positive and negative reinforcement	No example
Perfectionism positive or negative?	Negative	Negative	Positive and Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Positive and Negative	Negative

1 & 2: Examples are for neurotic and positive perfectionism only

It can also be seen in Table 1 where each of these researchers stands on the process of perfectionism (i.e., which behaviours they think constitute perfectionism), on the issue of whether or not perfectionism is adaptive (as already argued, an adaptive view of perfectionism depends on researchers like Hamachek adopting the assumption that perfection is in the eye of the beholder), and on the issue of which behaviours, if any, should be designated as probable consequences of perfectionism (i.e., as "Perfectionism Syndrome") rather than as perfectionism itself. For example, Slaney et al. (1998) consider orderliness to be part of perfectionism and Burns (1980) thinks that overgeneralization is part of perfectionism. Both of these supposed aspects of perfectionism should probably be considered probable consequences of perfectionism.

In addition to this, it can be noted that the researchers differ with regard to which mechanisms are prominent in the development of the perfectionist, i.e., they put forward different antecedents for perfectionism or emphasize the same ones differently. For instance, Frost et al.'s (1990) parental influences are greatly emphasized in their conceptualization of perfectionism whereas in other conceptualizations they are not.

Lastly, the researchers differ with regard to the correlates of perfectionism. Almost all of the above researchers seem to believe that there

are correlates of perfectionism, but not all have indicated what these correlates are. Those who have made suggestions as to which conditions or attributes may be correlated with perfectionism are shown in Table 1. Needless to say, the researchers would probably all agree that these associated conditions are not part of perfectionism, i.e., they might agree that these are separate but possibly covarying variables. As will be seen, this distinction between that which is perfectionism, and that which is considered peripheral to perfectionism is a very important consideration when operationalizing perfectionism.

Framework for Evaluating Conceptualizations of Perfectionism (FECF)

Implications for Operationalizing/Measuring Perfectionism

An issue that comes up when examining and measuring perfectionism is that of how it should be operationally defined. To operationally define perfectionism is different from conceptualizing it in that an operational definition should describe how it will be made observable to researchers or anyone else who would like to measure it. Conceptualizations mainly speak of perfectionism in abstract, intangible terms. In contrast to this, operationalizations of perfectionism should speak only in concrete, tangible terms, terms that can easily be translated into observable measures. The most

salient implication the FECP has for operationalizing perfectionism, and therefore for measuring it, concerns the proximal-distal distinctions it makes among the object, process, probable consequences, and possible antecedents of perfectionism. Which of these should be measured in order to determine if individuals are perfectionists?

In order to begin shedding some light on this issue the following epiphenomenal question may be asked, "What provides more evidence of the existence of a steam engine train, 1) the train itself, 2) an observation of it chugging along on its tracks, 3) the clouds of steam it leaves behind, or 4) the conditions leading to its production?". If the train represents a perfectionist, its chugging represents perfectionism, its steam clouds represent the probable consequences of perfectionism, and the conditions leading to its production represent the possible antecedents of perfectionism, most would surely pick the first option as the best evidence of perfectionism.

However, unlike steam engine trains, perfectionists (who may have predispositions for perfectionism like the Cognitive Diathesis for Perfectionism, i.e., CDP, outlined earlier) are immeasurable intangibles, and so other evidence must be measured in order to determine if individuals are perfectionists. Although steam clouds (probable consequences of perfectionism) and the conditions leading to the production of trains (possible

antecedents of perfectionism) provide pretty strong evidence that the steam engine train (perfectionist) exists, they do not necessarily prove its existence.

For instance, there is the possibility that the steam clouds could have been produced by something other than the train thereby rendering them limited in their capacity to predict the presence of a train. The same is true for utilizing probable consequences of perfectionism as reliable indicators of perfectionism. Also, there is the possibility that the conditions leading to the production of the train could have produced something else. The same is true for utilizing possible antecedents of perfectionism as a measure of perfectionism. They should not be used to determine whether or not an individual is a perfectionist. Just because individuals are exposed to influences that can encourage the development of a perfectionist does not mean that those individuals will become perfectionists. To believe this is to believe that a rock, like a seed, will grow a plant if given the right soil conditions. The best a measure of the antecedents of perfectionism can provide is an idea of whether or not individuals were exposed to influences that can encourage the development of a perfectionist. It cannot measure whether or not individuals actually become perfectionists.

Surely equivocal evidence akin to that presented above is second best to observing the actual chugging of the train or, in other words, observing

perfectionism itself? If a perfectionist (i.e., CDP) cannot be directly observed would it not be best to observe the behavioural process that actualizes it rather than the consequences or antecedents of this behavioural process? The three behavioural imperatives of perfectionism represent this process, and thus represent the best potential operational definition of perfectionism. To formulate test items that reflect this process would probably be the best way to measure whether or not individuals are perfectionists.

In short, the FECP has implications for the measurement of perfectionism mostly because it helps to clarify just what core perfectionism is and how it can be operationalized into test items that measure concrete, observable behaviours. It can also aid in demonstrating how current measures of perfectionism may or may not be measuring what it is hoped they will measure. If they are not congruent with their creators' conceptualizations of perfection, this brings into question their usefulness for operationalizing and testing these conceptualizations. Also, if they are measuring antecedents of perfectionism and probable consequences of perfectionism (perfectionism syndrome), they may not be useful for measuring perfectionism or testing any associations between perfectionism and its correlates or other variables (like psychopathology). It is useful at this point to take an in-depth look at current measures of perfectionism to examine this issue.

Current Measures of Perfectionism: What do They Really Measure?

It makes methodological sense that the operationalization of perfectionism should be congruent with conceptualizations of perfectionism being developed or adopted by researchers. It also makes practical sense that if the Framework for Evaluating Conceptualizations of Perfectionism (FECF) can be used to more effectively evaluate these conceptualizations, it can also be used to evaluate the measures spawned by them. Depending upon the results of these evaluations, there may or may not be ramifications for how each of the four current measures of perfectionism briefly described in Chapter Two: Review of the Literature should be utilized in research studies. Before considering these ramifications for the four instruments, it is best to first look at what each purportedly measures, what each probably does measure, and any criticisms regarding operationalization/conceptualization congruence. In short, what follows is a critique regarding construct validity for each of the four instruments listed below.

Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (Hewitt & Flett).

Fundamentally speaking, Hewitt and Flett's (1991a) Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale has been formulated with the implication that perfectionism is a cognitive diathesis. As they rarely use overall scores when

establishing relationships between their measure of perfectionism and other variables, Hewitt and Flett's MPS is best addressed in terms of its three subscales. Following this its overall significance for the study of perfectionism will also be addressed.

Self-Oriented Perfectionism subscale - As the MPS seems to have been mostly established to distinguish among types of perfectionism, this subscale attempts to measure to what extent respondents direct expectations of perfection at themselves. As all of the items in this subscale ask respondents to decide whether they agree or disagree with "I" statements about perfectionism, it probably does measure whether or not a respondent's perfectionism is self-oriented.

However, the subscale is on dubious ground regarding whether or not it actually measures perfectionism as they have conceptualized it. As Hewitt and Flett (1991a) appear to view perfectionism as a maladaptive cognitive diathesis, this subscale is probably to some extent also meant to measure it as such. As laid out in the Framework for Evaluating Conceptualizations of Perfectionism (FECF), perfectionist predispositions probably require individuals to display three types of behaviour (setting standards aimed at perfection and striving for them, and evaluating negatively whether or not

these standards are met). However, as the larger proportion of items determine whether or not respondents strive to be perfect or set goals aimed at perfection, this subscale makes less consequential the degree to which respondents evaluate whether or not these standards are met, and thereby weakly measures what is probably the most maladaptive part of the process of perfectionism.

One other questionable aspect of the subscale involves semantics. As we discovered earlier, all goals or standards must be aimed at nothing less than perfection. It follows then that items such as “I set very high standards for myself.” do not measure this as the words “very high standards” do not equate with the word “perfection”. Instead, it is probably more equated with, in Gordon Flett’s words, “a strong achievement orientation” (personal communication, 1999), i.e., striving for excellence. Behaviour such as this cannot necessarily be placed on a maladaptive behavioural continuum because it is not sufficient in itself for causing problems. Instead, it must be the consequence of a maladaptive cognitive diathesis, and “setting very high standards” may or may not be such a consequence. If Hewitt and Flett view perfectionism as a maladaptive cognitive diathesis, and are purporting to measure (and therefore operationalize) it as such, they are probably failing to do so via items such as these.

One last criticism of this subscale is that it for the most part leaves it up to the respondents to define the words “perfect”, “perfection”, and “perfectionistic”. They are required to rate themselves on items like “I am perfectionistic in setting my goals”, “I demand nothing less than perfection of myself.”, and “I strive to be as perfect as I can be”. As perfection may also be defined using words like “flawlessness”, it is probably not a good idea to leave it totally up to respondents to generate their own definitions of perfection. It might be a good idea to substitute words like “flawlessness”, and phrases like “unsurpassable degree of accuracy or excellence” for the words “perfect”, “perfection”, and “perfectionistic” in some items. In short, although most of the items in the self-oriented subscale are appropriate, there is room for improvement in some.

Socially-Prescribed Perfectionism - This subscale is meant to measure what respondents think others expect of them regarding perfectionism. As all of the items are couched in this way, i.e., use words and phrases like, “My family expects me...”, “The people around me expect...”, “Others think...”, etc., it undoubtedly measures this distinction. However, as this subscale really measures the perceived expectations of others, it cannot be said to measure respondents’ perfectionism, and therefore cannot be combined with the other

subscales to yield an overall measure of perfectionism.

Other-Oriented Perfectionism - This subscale is supposed to measure respondents' expectations regarding the perfectionism of others. Again, the language used in the items, i.e., "I seldom expect others to excel...", "I have high expectations for the people who are important to me.", "Everything that others do...", etc., makes it likely that they are indeed testing for this. However, the above criticism levelled at the socially-prescribed subscale is again relevant here.

Research ramifications for the Hewitt and Flett MPS.

Although it has been used to investigate relationships between itself and many other psychopathology variables, the most useful contribution the MPS can make to the study of perfectionism is to determine whether or not respondents expect themselves or others to have and strive toward high standards, or to determine whether they think others expect the same from them.

In other words, it does well at making intrapersonal/interpersonal distinctions among behaviours and expectations surrounding perfectionism but does not do as well at measuring the Cognitive Diathesis for Perfectionism

(CDP), i.e., what is considered in this study to be the essence of perfectionism. However, it should be noted that despite its limitations it is probably one of the most useful measures of perfectionism developed to date.

Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (Frost et al.).

In general, the Frost et al. (1990) MPS has been formulated with the assumption that perfectionism is, in Frost's words, a "maladaptive thinking style" (personal communication, 1999). As Frost et al. also do not use overall scores much when establishing relationships between their measure of perfectionism and other variables, their MPS is also best addressed in terms of its subscales. Following this its overall significance for the study of perfectionism will be addressed.

Concern Over Mistakes (CM) - This subscale allegedly measures negative reactions to mistakes, a tendency to interpret mistakes as being equivalent to failure, and a tendency to believe that one will lose the respect of others following failure (Frost et al., 1990). It appears that some items do indeed measure the above, but there are also some that are somewhat dubious in this respect.

For instance the item, "The fewer mistakes I make, the more people will

like me”, which one would assume is supposed to be associated with “a tendency to believe that one will lose the respect of others following failure”, is more about being liked or accepted by others than it is about being respected. It is also more an interpersonal measure of approval than it is a measure of perfectionism, something the MPS supposedly measures.

Also, the item, “If someone does a task at work/school better than me, then I feel like I failed the whole task.”, an item which is hard to clearly associate with any one of the three parts of the subscale measurement description (an observation that in itself does not bode well for the item), seems more concerned with reactions to competition than with reactions to mistakes or their equivalency to failure. It is reasonable to say that one can do worse than another without making a mistake, and so the association here is somewhat questionable. One thing this item does reflect is that if someone does better than another on a task, it means that person could not have reached perfection. To the degree that this reflects self-evaluation, it might be a good item for measuring perfectionism.

Although it appears that some of the items could be improved, the subscale is probably doing a fair job of really measuring what Frost et al. (1990) claim it measures. It also seems to be congruent with their belief that perfectionism is a maladaptive thinking style. This is because it does not just

measure behaviour, but makes an attempt to measure the cognitive processes behind behaviour. In this case it attempts to measure the perfectionist's cognitive-behavioural tendency to negatively interpret and react to mistakes. As for how it should be evaluated according to the FECP, its items would probably be most useful when measuring probable consequences of perfectionism (i.e., perfectionism syndrome) rather than perfectionism itself.

Personal Standards (PS) - Unlike Hewitt and Flett's (1991a) self-oriented perfectionism subscale, which is not blatantly purported to measure whether respondents set and strive toward high standards but ends up doing so anyway, this subscale really does purport to do so hence its name. For the most part, it lives up to this purpose in much the same way as Hewitt and Flett's self-oriented perfectionism subscale, that is, it measures striving for perfection and standard/goalsetting behaviour. However, it is also supposed to take into account "the tendency to evaluate oneself based on performance" (Frost et al., 1990, p. 454), and this is where it falls short.

For instance, agreeing or disagreeing with items like, "I have extremely high goals." says nothing of how respondents evaluate themselves with regard to achieving their goals. Also, the item, "I am very good at focusing my efforts on attaining a goal." really misses the mark in that, more than anything else, it

probably measures evaluative perceptions regarding focusing abilities. In short, there are no items which seemingly measure “the tendency to evaluate oneself based on performance” (Frost et al., 1990, p. 454).

In addition to the above criticism, there is also a glaring omission in all items of the word “perfection”, and any words related to it. The same criticism of semantics aimed at Hewitt and Flett’s (1991a) self oriented subscale is relevant here. If all goals or standards must be aimed at nothing less than perfection in order to be evidence of perfectionism, this subscale is more likely to measure setting standards aimed at excellence. This is because it does not specify that goals or standards be aimed at perfection, or at other things having similar meaning to perfection (i.e., flawlessness). Given the above criticisms, and given that it only includes seven items, it appears that this subscale needs serious alterations before it can be said to measure what it is purported to measure.

Parental Expectations (PE) - This subscale supposedly measures the tendency of perfectionists to “place considerable value on their parents’ expectations” (Frost et al., 1990, p. 451), and it probably does do this. There are no items that clash with this claim, and this makes it difficult to question the subscale’s validity. As for any incongruence between this subscale and Frost et al.’s belief

that perfectionism is a maladaptive thinking style, it is not really an applicable concern in this case, or in the case of the next subscale (Parental Criticism).

This is because, although the subscales do not directly measure cognitive style, parental influences are probably important in its formation. As for the relevance of this scale for measuring perfectionism, it probably does not do this. At best, it measures antecedents of perfectionism, and, as mentioned earlier, these may or may not cultivate perfectionism.

Parental Criticism (PC) - This subscale is somewhat similar to Parental Expectations (PE) in that it is also concerned with parental influence. It is believed to measure “the perception that one’s parents are (or were) overly critical” (Frost et al., 1990, p. 451), and it indeed appears to do this. Again, there are no items that clash with this belief, and this lends itself to confirming the subscale’s validity. However, the same criticism regarding antecedents levelled at PE can also be directed at PC.

Doubts About Actions (DA) - This subscale consists of items from the Maudsley Obsessive-Compulsive Inventory doubting subscale (Rachman & Hodgson, 1980) and reflects the extent to which people doubt their ability to accomplish tasks (Frost et al., 1990). This subscale appears to meet validity

concerns in that the Maudsley Obsessive-Compulsive Inventory doubting subscale has already been tested for this.

However, it is debatable if having doubts about one's actions can be considered part of perfectionism. Nowhere has this been mentioned by any of the early conceptualizers of perfectionism, nor has it been acknowledged by any of the present researchers. It seems that at best it might be a measure of probable consequences of perfectionism (perfectionism syndrome). However, as it is too early to rule out doubting one's actions for possible inclusion in the process of perfectionism, it is inappropriate to severely criticize it at this time.

Organization - This subscale, not included when calculating the overall perfectionism score of the MPS, is supposed to measure the perfectionists' "over-emphasis on precision, order, and organization" (Frost et al., 1990, p. 451), something that has traditionally been associated with perfectionism. With items like, "I try to be an organized person.", and, "I am a neat person.", it is really just measuring one specific type of striving for perfection which may or may not be demonstrated by all perfectionists. The FECF would see organization as part of perfectionism syndrome rather than as perfectionism itself. This might explain why it does not usually correlate with the other subscales.

Research ramifications for the Frost MPS.

According to the FECF it appears that one subscale of this instrument has some utility for measuring perfectionism (i.e., PS). However, it also appears that the other subscales are more suited for measuring perfectionism syndrome (i.e., CM, DA, and O), or antecedents of perfectionism (i.e., PE and PC). However, because most scales do not measure what the FECF would confirm is perfectionism, and as this MPS mixes its focus, its overall scores should probably not be used as an overall measure of perfectionism, especially when trying to associate perfectionism with other variables like psychopathology.

Almost Perfect Scale-Revised (APS-R).

The Slaney et al. (1998) instrument was formulated to match the assumption that perfectionism is the tendency to set high standards, to need order, and, most importantly, to think that performance never meets goals or expectations (i.e., nothing is ever good enough).

Standards - As with the Self-Oriented Perfectionism (Hewitt & Flett, 1991a) and Personal Standards (Frost et al., 1990) subscales, this subscale is meant to measure standard setting behaviour. As with Personal Standards, there is no

use of the word “perfect” or any of its derivatives or synonyms, and therefore it probably measures standards aimed at excellence rather than standards aimed at perfection. For this reason the subscale seems to fall short of measuring what it is supposed to measure, and probably does not accurately measure perfectionism.

Orderliness - Similar to Frost et al.’s (1990) Organization subscale, this subscale is believed to measure the degree to which individuals perceive themselves as orderly. The subscale only consists of four items, and probably measures what it is supposed to. However, as with Frost et al.’s subscale, it is probably only measuring perfectionism syndrome rather than perfectionism itself.

Discrepancy - In comparison to the other instruments, this subscale is the only one that is unique to Slaney et al.’s (1998) instrument. It is supposed to measure whether or not individuals think they are adequately meeting their high standards, and this is an issue of self-evaluation. If individuals do think they are meeting their standards, the subscale yields low discrepancy scores, if they do not, it yields high scores.

The items in this subscale, items like, “I am never satisfied with my accomplishments.”, and, “I hardly ever feel that what I’ve done is good enough.”, appear to have high congruence with the intent of the subscale. This subscale is also congruent with the FECP in that, to a large degree, it can measure self-evaluation of whether or not goals/standards aimed at perfection are met. This subscale is potentially an effective measure of the third behavioural imperative of perfectionism, that of negatively evaluating for perfection.

Research ramifications for the APS-R.

The main research contribution that the APS-R makes is through the inclusion of the discrepancy factor subscale. It seems that if this subscale were to be combined with Hewitt and Flett’s (1991a) Self-Oriented Perfectionism subscale, the result would be a fairly complete measure of perfectionism as laid out in the FECP. Also, the APS-R, as do the MPSs, has the potential to further illuminate how perfectionism might some day be consensually conceptualized.

Positive And Negative Perfectionism Scale (PANPS).

This measure, based on the behavioural reinforcement model conceived

by Slade and Owens (1998), was mostly created to distinguish between what Slade and Owens call positive and negative perfectionism. They posit that the two types of perfectionism can be discriminated not on the basis of behaviour, which may appear similar for both types, but on the basis of what motivates or drives these behaviours. It is this motivation which discriminates between the PANPS's two subscales, and it is addressed below.

Positive perfectionism - This subscale consists of twenty items, ten which seem to be directed at how perfectionists experience their positive perfectionism, i.e., "I get fulfilment from totally dedicating myself to a task.", and ten directed at how perfectionists perceive others may experience their positive perfectionism, i.e., "I like to please other people by being successful.". This subscale should measure perfectionists' tendencies to feel satisfaction, pleasure and/or euphoria while pursuing their ideal selves through the achievement of success, perfection, excellence, and/or approval (Terry-Short, Owens, Slade, & Dewey, 1995), and for the most part it does measure these tendencies. However, as with the Frost et al. (1990) and Slaney et al. (1998) instruments, it mostly omits the word "perfect" and its derivatives and/or synonyms, and so again appears to be a better measure of striving for excellence than of perfectionism. In other words, although the subscale may be successfully measuring what

drives certain behaviour, the behaviours themselves may not be representative of perfectionism.

Negative perfectionism - This subscale also consists of twenty items, ten which supposedly measure how perfectionists experience their negative perfectionism, i.e., "I would rather not start something than risk doing it less than perfectly.", and ten that measure how perfectionists perceive others may experience their negative perfectionism, i.e., "If I fail people, I fear they will cease to respect or care for me."

The negative subscale purportedly measures perfectionists' tendencies to experience dissatisfaction, displeasure and/or dysphoria resulting from their drive to avoid their feared selves, i.e., selves that experience failure, imperfection, mediocrity, and/or disapproval (Terry-Short et al., 1995). The subscale probably does measure avoidance behaviour, but does not necessarily measure it in relation to perfectionism for the same reasons outlined above for the positive perfectionism subscale. However, it is probably closer to measuring drive in relation to perfectionism than the positive subscale because it most likely measures perfectionism syndrome. The items that use "perfect" or its derivatives and/or synonyms probably measure avoidance in relation to

perfectionism, and all others probably measure it in relation to perfectionism syndrome.

Research ramifications for the PANPS.

It seems that the PANPS is a useful instrument for measuring drive in relation to behaviour, but not necessarily in relation to perfectionism, although the negative subscale has potential for this. As outlined earlier, research needs to be done on defining the word “perfection” so that a distinction may be made between perfectionism and striving for excellence. This would help resolve the debate around positive versus negative perfectionism, and help with adjustments to this measure. Until this is done, this instrument may not be that useful for future research studies. It will be interesting to see what criticisms are directed at the PANPS by others who do not see perfectionism as being adaptive.

Concluding comments.

It is obvious that for all of these instruments there is some degree of incongruence between what the instruments measure and how perfectionism is conceptualized by their creators. There is also a lack of harmony between each instrument and how the Framework for Evaluating Conceptualizations of

Perfectionism (FECF) would recommend perfectionism be operationalized and measured. For instance, it is suggested in the FECF that the three behavioural imperatives for the process of perfectionism (i.e., setting goals or standards aimed at perfection, striving for perfection, and evaluating for perfection) should probably all be given equal weight in any conceptualization of perfectionism. This means that the behavioural imperatives should also be given equal weight in any measure of perfectionism. This is not the case for all of the current measures of perfectionism critiqued above, and this may call into question the validity of these instruments. However, further research confirming the equal importance of each of the behavioural imperatives is necessary before this claim may be made legitimate.

Relationships Among the Four Instruments

One final observation that may be made with regard to the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS) (Hewitt & Flett, 1991a), the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS) (Frost et al., 1990), the Almost Perfect Scale-Revised (APS-R) (Slaney et al., 1998), and the Positive and Negative Perfectionism Scale (PANPS) (Terry-Short et al., 1995) concerns the limited overlap among these instruments. One test of the validity of an instrument is how well it can be correlated with other instruments purporting

to measure similar variables. Low correlations among instruments suggest that they are not necessarily measuring the same thing, and may confirm that they are measuring different constructs (or in this case differing conceptualizations of perfectionism). Although the PANPS has not yet been associated with any other perfectionism measures, relationships between the two MPSs and the APS-R have been explored. Although there were significant relationships found, the correlations were weaker than they should have been if these instruments purportedly measure the same phenomenon.

Comparisons between the MPS (Frost et al., 1990) and the MPS (Hewitt & Flett, 1991a).

Frost et al., (1993) formally examined the relationships between the two MPSs, and found that the Frost et al. (1990) MPS's total score correlated significantly but weakly with Hewitt and Flett's (1991a) subscales measuring Self-Oriented and Socially Prescribed Perfectionism, but not Other-Oriented perfectionism. The fact that Frost et al.'s total score did not correlate with Other-Oriented Perfectionism makes intuitive sense because the Frost et al. MPS does not include any questions that refer to what respondents expect of others regarding perfectionism. What is salient here is that the total score only correlated weakly with the other two subscales, and because these measures

were to measure similar variables the correlations should have been much stronger.

In addition to this, Frost et al. (1993) also found that their Personal Standards subscale was somewhat related to the Hewitt and Flett (1991a) Self-Oriented Perfectionism subscale (in which most of the items ask about striving toward or setting goals/standards aimed at perfection), and the cluster of subscales Concern over Mistakes, Parental Criticism, and Parental Expectations was to some degree associated with the Socially Prescribed Perfectionism scale. This last result was not surprising in that concern over making mistakes can probably be associated with fear of negative social evaluation, and parental influence has definitely been associated with the expectations of others (the main thrust of the Socially Prescribed subscale). However, again the main point to be made here is that any relationships found among the subscales should have been much stronger if they were measuring similar variables.

There is an interesting finding not related to the above issue regarding weak overlap among the subscales of the two MPSs. Something else Frost et al. (1993) reported after comparing the two MPSs was the product of a factor analysis conducted on the items from both of them. It produced two main factors: 1) maladaptive evaluative concerns, and, 2) positive achievement striving. This supports Frost's contention that perfectionism is best measured

in terms of self-evaluative concerns, but does not necessarily acknowledge Hewitt and Flett's (1991a) contention that perfectionism has interpersonal aspects. The two factors do contribute to the idea that there may be two types of perfectionism with maladaptive evaluative concerns representing negative perfectionism, and positive achievement striving representing positive perfectionism. Of note here is that these two factors may overlap with two of the behavioural imperatives listed in the FECP, i.e., evaluating for perfection and setting standards/goals aimed at perfection. However, as mentioned before, it is questionable whether positive achievement striving is perfectionism at all, and the relationship between this and setting standards/goals aimed at perfection would probably not be strong.

What do the relationships between the MPSs mean for researchers that might use these instruments? One thing is certain. Researchers should not use these instruments interchangeably. This is because there does not appear to be a large enough statistical overlap between them to warrant such practice. More importantly, there is a relatively low practical overlap among the instruments in that their face/construct validities are based on conceptually differing assumptions.

Comparisons among the MPS (Frost et al., 1990), the MPS (Hewitt & Flett, 1991a), and the APS-R (Slaney et al., 1998).

Another comparison among perfectionism measures conducted by Suddarth (as cited in Slaney, Rice, & Ashby, 2000) includes the two MPSs, and the APS-R, and was done to test the hypothesis that there is both “healthy perfectionism” and “unhealthy perfectionism”. Subscales from the three measures were found to load onto three orthogonal factors: 1) Unhealthy Perfectionism, which consists of Frost et al.’s (1990) CM, PE, PC, and DA subscales, Hewitt and Flett’s (1991a) Socially prescribed subscale, and Slaney et al.’s (1998) Discrepancy subscale, 2) Healthy perfectionism, which consists of Frost et al.’s PS, Hewitt and Flett’s Self-oriented and Other-oriented subscales, and Slaney et al.’s Standards subscale, and, 3) Orderliness, which includes Frost et al.’s O subscale, and Slaney et al.’s Order subscale.

The fact that these instruments overlap at all provides evidence that there may be some degree of agreement among the researchers’ conceptualizations of perfectionism. However, as argued earlier, there is room for improvement here. In addition to this, there are validity problems yet to be addressed for many of the items used in these three instruments, and it is dubious as to whether these findings are really evidence for healthy and unhealthy types of perfectionism. Further research is needed to clarify these

points, and to bring researchers closer to a common understanding of perfectionism.

Summary of the View of Perfectionism for this Study

In light of the arguments put forward in Chapters Two and Three, especially with regard to the Framework for Evaluating Conceptualizations of Perfectionism (FECP) and the criticisms directed toward current measures of perfectionism, it is intended that a new conceptualization and operationalization of perfectionism be adopted for this study. The proximal/distal view taken in the FECP will be adopted, and so the Cognitive Diathesis for Perfectionism (CDP) will be seen as the core of perfectionism. The CDP represents a type of cognitive “hardwiring”, and predisposes the minimally distal three behavioural imperatives (i.e., setting standards/goals aimed at perfection, striving for perfection, and evaluating negatively for perfection), or process of perfectionism.

The meaning of “perfection” will be stated in absolute terms, and, as this means that this study will view perfection as unattainable, it will be assumed that perfectionism is maladaptive. “Perfectionism syndrome” will not be viewed as part of perfectionism itself, but as distal, highly probable consequences of perfectionism that should not be confounded with it.

Antecedents and correlates of perfectionism will also be seen as largely distal to perfectionism. Lastly, it will be assumed that perfectionism should be operationalized taking into account the proximal-distal distinctions made in the FECP, and that only its behavioural imperatives should be operationalized when measuring it. It is hoped that eventually there might be a consensus as to how perfectionism should be conceptualized, and that a new measure of perfectionism can be formulated to operationalize this homogenous new conceptualization of perfectionism.

Research Goal Two

The second research goal to be addressed by this study is the following:

- Application of the Framework for Evaluating Conceptualizations of Perfectionism (FECF) to stimulate inquiry leading to the clarification, possible adjustment, and/or further expansion of current conceptualizations and measures of perfectionism.

The second research goal, which essentially involves creating new theory with regard to perfectionism, will be addressed in Chapter Four: Research Paradigm and Methodology. The FECF will be used as a starting point for inquiring into the lives of perfectionists such that they will reveal new theoretical information and insights regarding perfectionism.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH PARADIGM AND METHODOLOGY

Choosing a Research Method

The first research goal to be investigated by this study involved formulating the Framework for Evaluating Conceptualizations of Perfectionism (FECF). This was addressed in Chapter Three, Synthesis of the Literature: A New Framework. The next goal, using the FECF to stimulate further inquiry leading to the clarification, possible adjustment, and/or further expansion of current conceptualizations of perfectionism and their measures, is first addressed in this chapter on methodology.

Since a goal of this study was to generate theory by adding to or adjusting present theory, and since this was a rather open-ended goal, it was clear that a qualitative methodology would yield the most appropriate data for this investigation. Descriptive, insightful, and otherwise non-quantifiable observational data was needed for making interpretations that could lead toward developing an expanded view of perfectionism based on the FECF. This was also the best way to build on or challenge the variables already extracted from the literature.

The best way to generate the observational data needed for this study was to go back to actual perfectionists themselves and have them describe their

experiences with perfectionism (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994). They would need to be interviewed in a way that would encourage them to provide new information and insights regarding perfectionism (Kvale, 1983). This new information could then be analysed and/or examined in such a way that it could be added to current conceptualizations of perfectionism, or it could contribute toward new thinking regarding perfectionism, i.e., new thinking that may or may not include the conceptualizations of perfectionism already explored in this study. One type of qualitative methodology capable of accomplishing the above was a methodology called grounded theory.

Grounded theory, originally outlined by Glaser and Strauss (1967) in their book *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* as a series of steps or procedures for the analysis of qualitative data, is a methodology that is often used for deriving theory from observational data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As already outlined, new theory regarding the conceptualization of perfectionism was the desired result of this investigation, and so grounded theory methodology was the most obvious choice for achieving this end. Grounded theory is a method for systematically alternating the gathering of interview data with its analysis into categories and subcategories which finally become saturated, and which, in the final analysis, eventually yield new theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). A more thorough description of grounded theory procedures is as follows.

Any researcher utilizing grounded theory generally adheres to a certain sequence of grounded theory steps or procedures. The following list of 13 steps is similar to that used by most researchers using grounded theory (see Strauss & Corbin, 1998), and represents the procedural approach taken during the data collection and analysis for this study:

The researcher...

- 1) develops a general area of inquiry
- 2) reviews relevant literature
- 3) identifies possible research questions
- 4) identifies his or her own biases
- 5) formulates an initial list of questions
- 6) conducts an initial tape recorded interview
- 7) listens to the recording, writes notes and/or memos, and transcribes the recording into text
- 8) analyses the text into categories and subcategories using a microscopic examination technique called open coding
- 9) uses a macroscopic examination technique called axial coding to relate categories with their subcategories

- 10) uses another macroscopic technique called selective coding to integrate and refine any emerging theory
- 11) uses the results of her analysis to generate new interview questions that, when answered, will either add to existing categories/subcategories, or generate new ones
- 12) repeats the above steps until the categories and subcategories become theoretically saturated (i.e., additional interviews yield no new category development via the addition of new properties, dimensions, or proposed relationships)
- 13) uses the results of her final analyses to either create new theory about the variable in question, or refine old theory

As grounded theory became the methodology of choice for this study the above sequence of 13 steps were selected for use while conducting it. More details of grounded theory methodology and how it was incorporated into this study will be further explicated in the section on procedure. First, it will be described how potential participants were solicited, screened, and then chosen for this study.

Participants

Screening Questionnaire: Rationale.

In order to determine which respondents would be best suited for participation in this study a short eight item questionnaire was generated for screening potential participants (see Appendix A). As perfectionism in this study was to be defined according to the Framework for Evaluating Conceptualizations of Perfectionism (FECF) presented in the previous chapter (Synthesizing the Literature: A New Framework), it was necessary to determine whether or not respondents were perfectionists as conceptualized in this way. For instance, it was necessary to determine if respondents engaged in the three behavioural imperatives of the process of perfectionism (i.e., if they set standards aimed at perfection, strive for perfection, or evaluate for perfection) before allowing them to participate in this study.

To this end, very basic questions were generated for inclusion in the screening questionnaire by referring to both the Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary (1974), points from which were included in the formulation of the FECF, and by referring to the FECF itself. The content of these questions is more thoroughly addressed in the following description of the questionnaire.

Screening questionnaire: Description.

There were two parts to the questionnaire. The first part consisted of three questions to which respondents could answer either yes or no. The second part consisted of five “I” statements with which respondents could either agree or disagree. Part one determined via self-report whether or not respondents perceived themselves as perfectionists (i.e., “perfectionist” as defined in a definition placed at the top of the questionnaire), and whether or not respondents thought others perceived them as perfectionists. Part two determined whether or not respondents agreed that they engage in behaviours related to perfectionism as outlined in the screening questionnaire definition of perfectionism and the Framework for Evaluating Conceptualizations of Perfectionism (FECF). The definition of perfectionism placed at the top of the questionnaire, and the questionnaire items and their rationales are described below.

Screening questionnaire: Definition of perfectionism.

There was an elaboration of a dictionary definition placed at the top of the screening questionnaire such that respondents would read it before responding to the items in Part One and Part Two of the questionnaire. It was a definition of “perfectionist”, and it read, “Someone with ‘a disposition to

regard anything short of perfection as unacceptable', perfection can be defined as 'flawlessness, or an unsurpassable degree of accuracy or excellence', and disposition as a 'prevailing tendency, mood, or inclination'." (Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, 1974, p. 851). Since the goal of this study was to aid in further conceptualizing perfectionism, a good starting point for defining it both for the study and its participants was simply to adopt a dictionary definition, or in other words, to go from a lay point of view. Although it has not been exhaustively conceptualized in the current literature, perfectionism seems to be acknowledged by most as something that does indeed exist, and the dictionary definition chosen for this questionnaire represents in everyday terms what we commonly understand it to be.

Screening questionnaire: Part One.

Question One - This questionnaire item was worded, "Given the above definition, would you consider yourself a perfectionist? (Yes or No)". It refers to and incorporates the definition of "perfectionist" referred to above, and simply asks respondents to decide whether or not they fit the definition of perfectionist given at the top of the screening questionnaire. The obvious rationale for this question is that the respondents needed to view themselves as perfectionists as defined by this study in order to be included as participants.

Question Two - "Would others consider you a perfectionist? (Yes or No)", simply asks respondents if they think someone other than themselves would verify them as perfectionists.

Question Three - This item was worded, "Have you ever been told by a counsellor, psychologist or psychiatrist (i.e., therapist) that you are a perfectionist? (Yes or No)". This question is an extension of Question Two in that it also asks if someone other than the respondents would verify them as perfectionists. However, it focuses on a specific "someone other" in that it taps into whether or not respondents have been perceived as perfectionists by people who should have the skills and knowledge to recognize them as such.

The rationale for including both Question Two and Question Three in the screening questionnaire was that a "yes" response to either of them would reflect more than just a respondent's opinion of himself or herself. It would reflect others' perceptions of the respondents and was therefore seen as a more objective indicator of perfectionism than could be provided via a "Yes" response to Question One. These questions were also included to make the respondents more objectively question whether or not they are perfectionists, i.e., by asking them to step back and view themselves through the eyes of

another.

Screening questionnaire: Part Two.

Statement One and Statement Two - “Anything short of perfection is unacceptable (Agree or Disagree)” and, “I require flawlessness in all performances or things (Agree or Disagree)” reflected examples of thinking related to perfectionism that would be consistent with the dictionary definition of perfectionism found at the top of the screening questionnaire. Respondents were to indicate whether or not they think this way. The rationale for including these statements was to test for whether or not respondents engaged in behaviour consistent with the dictionary definition given at the top of the screening questionnaire.

Statement Three - “I set goals and standards aimed at no less than perfection (Agree or Disagree)” required respondents to indicate whether or not they engage in setting goals or standards aimed at perfectionism. This is the first imperative behaviour of perfectionism outlined in the FECP, and all conceptualizers of perfectionism referred to in Chapter Two, Review of the Literature listed this behaviour as central to their understanding of the process or behavioural manifestation of perfectionism. Because of this it was necessary

to ask respondents if they engage in this type of goalsetting behaviour.

Statement Four - "I strive toward reaching goals/standards aimed at perfection (Agree or Disagree)" asked respondents if they actually take action toward reaching their goals or standards aimed at perfection. This is an indicator of whether or not they manifest their perfectionism via observable behaviours. As outlined in the FECP, striving for perfection is the second behavioural imperative of perfectionism, and for this reason it was necessary to ask respondents if they engage in this type of striving behaviour.

Statement Five - "I evaluate whether or not I accomplish goals/standards aimed at perfection (Agree or Disagree)" asked respondents if they in some way decide whether or not they have reached their goals or standards aimed at perfection. As this partially represents the third behavioural imperative given in the FECP it was necessary to ask respondents if they engage in this type of evaluative behaviour. This only partially represents the third behavioural imperative because it excludes the word "negatively" before the word "evaluate". As it is a controversial point in the literature whether or not perfectionists always negatively evaluate themselves, respondents were asked only if they evaluate themselves. The issue of negative evaluation was left for

exploration in the interviews.

Of note for all of the above screening questionnaire items is that their response options were dichotomous rather than on a continuum. Either respondents were asked to answer “yes” or “no” to a question, or they were asked to “agree” or “disagree” with a statement. The reason for this is that only definite perfectionists, and not those somewhere else along the continuum of being perfectionists were required for participation in this study. Those respondents that would answer “yes” or “agree” to the above items were considered more likely to be on the extreme end of the perfectionist continuum. For this reason they were considered to be more desirable interviewees.

Criteria for selection to the study.

In order to attract perfectionists for participation in this study, flyers asking for participation in the study were put up on notice boards around the University of Victoria (see Appendix B). Most potential participants responded by either leaving a telephone answering machine message, or sending an e-mail message that communicated a willingness to participate. Two respondents did this by word of mouth. Nine respondents were contacted

and screened using the eight item screening questionnaire described above (see Appendix A) to determine whether or not they were appropriate candidates.

In order to qualify for the study, respondents had to circle the answer “yes” for at least two out of three questions in Part One of the screening questionnaire. As it was unreasonable to expect that all respondents would have had contact with a mental health practitioner regarding their perfectionism, it was not necessary to require a “yes” response to Question Three of Part One. In addition to the above requirement, respondents had to circle the answer “agree” for at least four out of five “I” statements in Part Two of the screening questionnaire in order to qualify for the study. Only four “agree” responses were required in order to leave room for the possible misinterpretation of at least one of the statements.

It was thought that if the above criteria were met, it was safe to assume that a respondent was perfectionist according to both the definition of perfectionism at the top of the screening questionnaire and the FECP, and that he or she would probably be able to provide additional information of interest. After screening each potential participant was informed as to what the qualifying criterion were, and told whether or not he or she qualified. Those respondents who did not qualify for the study (two respondents) were thanked for their interest in the study, debriefed, given support, and then released.

Those who did qualify (seven respondents) were asked to keep in touch regarding possible interview times. In the end, only six respondents were actually interviewed (i.e., there were six in the final sample for the study) because saturation of the categories was reached by the end of the sixth interview. The seventh respondent was also thanked for his interest in the study, debriefed, given support, and then released.

Brief profiles of the selected participants.

The following are snapshots of those that were selected for participation in the study and who were actually interviewed. Five out of six participants were female, and four out of six were in their late teens to mid twenties. One female participant and the male participant were in their forties. The participants' names have been changed in order to protect confidentiality but all other details are accurate. Note that more elaborate profiles will be presented in Chapter Six. They are not presented here as the profiles contain many new terms that would not be understood at this point. These new terms will be described and explained in Chapter Five.

Participant 1: June - June was a female graduate student in her mid twenties. She tended to see perfectionism as constant, contextual, and somewhat

negative. She was particularly interested in the perceptual qualities of her perfectionism, and said that she is always looking for patterns, especially those involving text. She said that she is very “details oriented”, and notices everything even if she does not care about what she is observing. She called her perceptual tendencies a “perceptual filter”.

June said that she sets high standards but is not conscious of it when doing so. She says they are “automatic expectations” that come unbidden. She strives toward achieving these standards but is very selective about which standards she directs her striving at. She conducts a “cost-benefit analysis” of her circumstances before engaging in perfectionism.

June saw imperfection in terms of patterns that “look unfinished”, and said that she is driven to complete these patterns. June said that when she cannot complete a pattern she experiences cognitive dissonance. She makes a concerted effort not to focus on flaws but finds this very difficult.

June saw her perfectionism as “just who I am” and did not want to give it up. She said that although it is rigid at times she thinks her perfectionism could be very useful if she could channel it properly. Although she said she has suffered from depression and has engaged in “too much” procrastination as a result of her perfectionism, she thinks she is now a “recovering perfectionist”.

Participant 2: Bonnie - Bonnie was a female undergraduate student in her early twenties. When relating her experiences as a perfectionist she coined the phrase “imperfectionist”, or one who focuses on errors rather than on what is correct. She described one aspect of her perfectionism as an “evaluative sorting device”, and further described it as an “ideals filter”. She said she is now trying out other options from the “binary world view” she once had.

Bonnie was very clear that perfectionism is negative for her, and that it often causes her to judge herself as “not good enough”. She said she feels “discomfort” after negatively evaluating herself and agreed that this could be cognitive dissonance. She also frequently experiences a “fear of being average” and other negative emotions as a result of evaluating herself so harshly.

Bonnie had an interesting name for her standards aimed at perfection. She called them “utopic ideals grounded in fantasy”. She felt that these ideals represent rigid absolutes that cannot be achieved in reality, and that she is not aware of her humanity or “sentience” when she is striving toward them. She strives toward her ideals via imposing structure on her world. She “fears losing control”, and much of her striving is directed at calming this fear.

Bonnie viewed her perfectionism as permanent but somewhat manageable if she can be conscious of it and make choices with regard to it. She does not see it as equal to striving for excellence as she said excellence can

actually be achieved whereas perfection cannot.

Participant 3: Leanne - Leanne was a female undergraduate student in her late teens. She saw perfectionism as a permanent but manageable predisposition. She said that she is extremely sensitive perceptually, i.e., a more “sensitive instrument”, and thought this contributes in a big way to her perfectionism.

Leanne mainly viewed perfectionism in terms of the expectations she places on herself, and she evaluates herself in terms of these expectations. She thought that although the perfectionistic nature of her expectations could not change, the contents of them could change. For instance, she disclosed that she had an eating disorder she saw as linked to perfectionism, and in order to treat the eating disorder she had to change the content of her expectations around her weight. The expectations she now holds are still perfectionistic but more reasonable with regard to her weight.

Leanne said she largely expresses her perfectionism by making lists and schedules, and by trying to impose structure on her day. She says this need for control sometimes leads to addictive behaviour, and that this behaviour is largely avoidant of any cognitive dissonance caused by an intolerance of chaos in her life. However, she hopes to transform her perfectionism such that it is useful to her rather than destructive.

Participant 4: Tina - Tina was a female undergraduate student in her early twenties. She saw her perfectionism as an automatic tendency to check for order and logic. Tina epitomized “black and white thinking” as for her things were either “right” or “wrong”. She was adamant that “everything should be in its place” and considered herself to be very organized. She said she experiences “irritation” or cognitive dissonance when something is wrong or out of place, and, as this is the case most of the time, she experiences this irritation a lot.

Tina said she expresses her perfectionism via excessive planning. She even plans her spontaneity! She is especially particular about how her household should look and finds it difficult to settle for a “messy” household. She said that she strives excessively to meet her ideals, and that she strives beyond any external rewards she may receive. She strives for her own “inner satisfaction”. She finds she addictively plays computer games in order to avoid feelings of dissatisfaction.

Tina spoke a lot about how her perfectionism affects her personal relationships. She admitted that because she believes in absolute truths grounded in science, and because she tends to do things until she gets them “right” she sometimes expects others to do the same. This rigidity causes conflict in her relationships.

Participant 5: Richard - Richard, a male in his forties, was a former graduate student and current piano teacher and artist. He revealed some of his philosophical beliefs around why he is a perfectionist, and said that these beliefs allow him to think that he might be able to transform his perfectionism into something useful and productive. He spoke of transformation because he sees his perfectionism as permanent and unremovable, i.e., “hard-wired in”. He described it as “an all pervasive need to get the thing right”, and said that it is something he has to “consciously override”.

Richard strives for ideals that he has thoroughly researched and finds that he sometimes gets immobilized because as an “idealist” he gets stuck in theorizing and cannot move forward to applying what he has found. He finds that when he does strive for his ideals he has tunnel vision with regard to what he strives for. He said he is driven to generate and complete patterns, and evaluates himself in terms of whether or not he has successfully done this. He experiences cognitive dissonance when he is obstructed from generating or completing patterns.

Richard felt his parents did a lot to reinforce his perfectionism by means of their expectations of him and the behaviour they modelled for him. He said he was severely punished whenever he did not live up to their expectations, and that under their influence he quickly learned to strive for perfection.

Participant 6: Holly - Holly was a former graduate student and public administrator in her early forties. She was a competitive figure skater and thought that her perfectionism was very much expressed in this domain. She said that her perfectionism is a drive to avoid failure, and that it takes over and leads to obsessive rumination. She also saw it in terms of feeling like she would “never be good enough”, and that this feeling would never go away. She saw this reactive orientation to the world as a type of “reverse perfectionism”.

Holly spoke about feeling “twisted” whenever things are not perfect, and said she is “horrified” at making mistakes. She said she thinks striving for perfection helps to ward off this type of cognitive dissonance or pain. For this reason she thinks her perfectionism may be somewhat addictive. She said she strives excessively and feels like she is on a treadmill because of the pace she must keep up in order to reach her ideals.

Holly said she is constantly resetting her ideals so that they are more representative of perfection, and this is partly responsible for her excessive striving. She said she does not expect external rewards for her efforts, and has no need for others’ approval. She also does not expect perfection from others but gets frustrated when others get in the way of her achieving her own ideals.

The above six respondents were interviewed in accordance with the 13

steps and procedures for grounded theory outlined above. These steps and procedures appear in the next section on procedure, and they are described in terms of how they were utilized for this study.

Procedure

Steps one to three.

Before interviewing respondents it was necessary to 1) develop a general area of inquiry; 2) review any relevant literature; and 3) formulate possible research questions. These were all accomplished as part of the groundwork for this research (see Chapters Two and Three). It was also necessary to begin documenting the research process as the above three steps were carried out. This was done by starting an ongoing research journal in which to write down thoughts, interpretations, and actions, and by preparing notebooks for data analysis.

Step four.

This step involves the researcher acknowledging and exploring any personal biases and putting them forward. They have already been partially revealed in this study via the development and adoption of the Framework for Evaluating Conceptualizations of Perfectionism (FECP). Although the FECP

was a product of synthesizing the literature on perfectionism (see Chapter Three), it was also a product of personal experience and bias. This is because I made choices based on my own experiences as a perfectionist among differing opinions or findings found in the literature on perfectionism. For instance, although I could have chosen to view perfectionism as a personality trait like Hollender (1965) or as a cognitive style like Burns (1980), I chose to view it as a cognitive diathesis like Flett et al. (1995). "Cognitive diathesis" more thoroughly describes my experience as a perfectionist because I sense my perfectionism is innate and permanent rather than learned and changeable. I thought I might find that participants would also think of perfectionism as a permanent condition, i.e., as something they cannot change, and that they might view it as maladaptive. As I have experienced much dysfunction because of my perfectionism, I, unlike researchers like Hamachek (1978) or Slade and Owens (1998) view it as maladaptive. I cannot see how the relentless pursuit of perfection can allow me much peace of mind.

In addition to the above views, I choose to view certain behaviours associated with perfectionism as unnecessary to the behavioural process of perfectionism. For instance, Frost et al. (1990) include doubting oneself as a behaviour indicative of perfectionism whereas I do not. I have certainly experienced doubt when behaving like a perfectionist, but sometimes I have

not. This lack of consistency leads me to believe that doubting my actions is not necessary to perfectionism. In my mind only behaviours that are always present may be considered part of the process of perfectionism. I thought I might find that the participants would indicate that they engage in the three behavioural imperatives outlined in the FECF, and that they might see them as the only behaviours that are present in every instance of their perfectionism.

With regard to other aspects of perfectionism, unlike Frost et al. (1990), I do not think the antecedents of perfectionism belong in a measure of perfectionism. I philosophically believe that antecedents may or may not produce a state of being, and should not be used as an indication that anything exists. I think antecedents of perfectionism may be included in a measure of what conditions are present when perfectionism is developed, but only those who have already been designated as perfectionists should complete such a measure. These beliefs have influenced my choice to view the antecedents of perfectionism as distal to perfectionism itself.

Lastly, I choose, as most researchers do (e.g., Hewitt & Flett, 1990), to view the correlates of perfectionism as distal to perfectionism. For instance, I think of depression (something I occasionally suffer as a result of being a perfectionist) as a separate entity from perfectionism but one that may covary with it. Certainly my experience has been that I get more depressed when I

behave more like a perfectionist. However, for me behaving like a depressive is nothing like behaving like a perfectionist and so I do not view them as being related. I see covarying correlates of perfectionism like depression as very distal to perfectionism, and I did not expect that participants would see them as proximal either. Finally, as I find that I have addictive tendencies around my perfectionism I thought that I might find that the participants might also think of their perfectionism in terms of being addictive.

What the above personal biases meant in terms of my conduct as a researcher who would interview participants and analyse their responses was that I would have to acknowledge and explore them as much as possible. This was so I could become more aware of them, and in so doing I could be careful not to let them unduly influence participants during their interviews. I was very conscious that my biases had the potential to become apparent and influential during interviews, and that these biases should either be suppressed or openly acknowledged as such when conducting them. As I knew I could only do so if I was extremely aware of my biases, I made sure that I acknowledged and explored them thoroughly. I also did this after interviewing each participant and analysing his or her data.

I acknowledged and explored my personal biases by having conversations with friends and colleagues, by journaling as I went along during

the interview process, and by reflecting deeply on what I had discovered while creating the FECP or conducting interviews. I found when I did this I was able to be more clear about where my personal biases leave off and others' begin.

Step five.

This step entailed formulating an initial list of questions for use in conducting the first interview. Unfortunately these questions were not piloted on anyone before being used in the initial interview, and it would have been better to do so because they may have been clearer and more efficient. Instead, the untested questions were derived from those in the screening questionnaire, and were asked of the first interviewee. They were basically open-ended questions asking the first respondent to elaborate on her answers to the dichotomous questions in the questionnaire. For instance, "How does that [screening questionnaire] definition of perfectionism fit for you?", "Do you strive for perfection", etc.

Step six.

This next step, conducting an initial tape recorded interview, was carried out as soon as there was a time set for doing so. As with all of the interviews conducted during this study, the first interview took place in a certain

University of Victoria meeting room, and was tape recorded using the author's tape recorder. Note: All interviewees were required to sign a consent form before proceeding with their interviews (see Appendix C). The research journal mentioned above was used to record any notes about the practical details of the interview (such as room suitability), and any thoughts or reflections regarding it. The tape recording and research journal were then stored in a locked filing cabinet until they would be used again.

Step seven.

Step seven involved listening through the whole tape recording of the first interview, writing "listen-through notes" in the research journal, and then transcribing it into text from beginning to end. Figure 2 shows an example of "listen-through notes", or notes written while listening to a tape recording for the first time in order to gather first impressions.

1)	<i>June sees perfectionism (P) as contextualized and selective</i>
2)	<i>P visual tendency?</i>
3)	<i>Experiences P as constantly present: details orientation</i>

Figure 2. Example of Listen-Through Notes

When the listen-through notes were completed, the tape recording was transcribed word for word using a computer word processing programme, saved onto computer disk, and printed triple-spaced onto paper. In much the same manner as was done for all the interviews, the text was stored in a passworded computer file and the paper copies were kept in a locked filing cabinet. After this, the transcript was sent to the first interviewee accompanied by a self-addressed envelope which included prepaid postage. She sent back the transcript with any errors corrected, and with comments about the strangeness of seeing her conversational style in print. Interviewee One, and all of the other five participants did not challenge the accuracy of any content in the transcripts other than spelling or grammatical errors. Most made comments on their lack of perfection regarding conversational style.

Something worth mentioning at this point is that in addition to transcribing the tape recordings and having the interviewees check them for errors, the transcripts were also summarized in question and answer format. This was done in order to distill the interviews into more manageable forms for easy reference. For all six approximately 60 page transcripts transcribed in this study each produced a six or seven page summary. They were referred to whenever individual quotes or references were needed as support for any claims made as a result of this study.

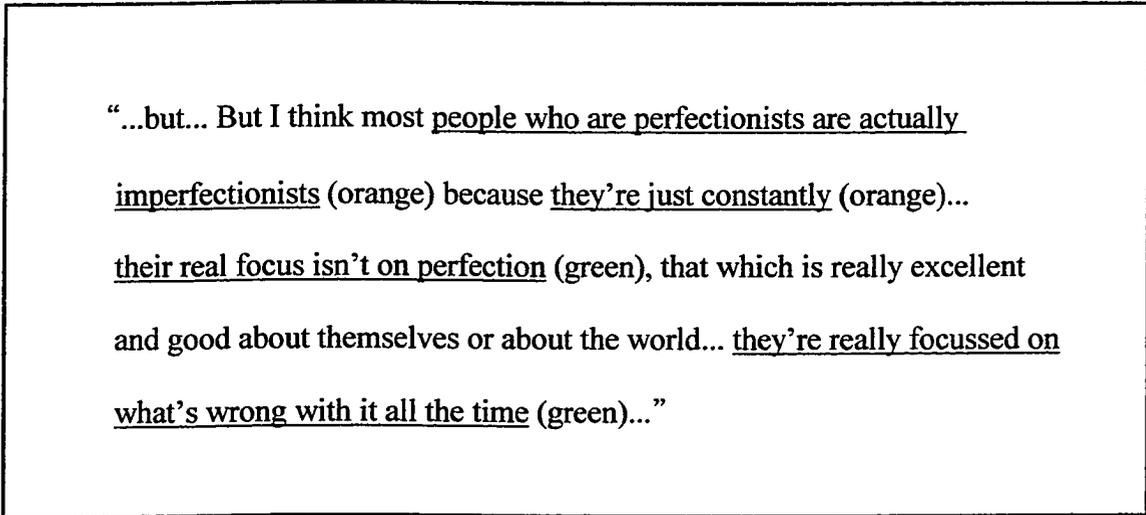
Step eight.

Once the first transcript was returned, more brief notes were made in anticipation of doing Step eight, i.e., an analysis of the text into categories and subcategories using a microscopic examination technique called open coding. In order to do the open coding, a line-by-line analysis of the transcribed interview text was done. This line-by-line analysis involved separating various pieces of information into categories and subcategories using the aforementioned microscopic examination technique called open coding.

Open coding is similar to working on an uncompleted puzzle in that it represents a first attempt to make sense of an undifferentiated mass of text (i.e., it's like trying to sort a pile of puzzle pieces). For interview one, this first attempt involved using coloured highlighter pens to separate pieces of text from one another on the basis of colour. Each colour represented a fledgling category derived from one of the questions asked during the interview, and text items (i.e., any significant statements made by interviewee one) were highlighted with the colour of the category they seemed to fit best.

For example, there were questions regarding a predisposition for perfectionism, and so "Predisposition for perfectionism" became a fledgling category represented by the colour orange. In turn, text items thought to be related to this category were highlighted in orange. The same was true for

other categories represented by pink, yellow, green, blue, and purple. Figure 3 shows an example of how relevant text items were highlighted. Note in the example that underlining followed by a colour in parentheses has been used instead of coloured highlighting.



“...but... But I think most people who are perfectionists are actually imperfectionists (orange) because they’re just constantly (orange)... their real focus isn’t on perfection (green), that which is really excellent and good about themselves or about the world... they’re really focussed on what’s wrong with it all the time (green)...”

Figure 3. Sample of Colour Highlighting in Transcript Text

The colour highlighted text items were recorded in a notebook that had sections which corresponded to the highlighter pen colours. To put all of the above more simply, the colour highlighting was used for open coding purposes such that each of the text items (data entries) were loosely assigned to a category. Following this the scene was set for a switch to axial coding.

Step nine.

This step was done after open coding, and it incorporates a macroscopic examination technique called axial coding to relate categories with their subcategories. After the items were colour highlighted, i.e., assigned to categories, and before they were recorded in the notebook's differently coloured sections, they were scanned for subtle differences and given reference numbers that would eventually correspond with subcategories contained within each category or coloured section of the notebook. Figure 4 shows an example of how the text items became both colour highlighted (as in Step 8) and numerically referenced in the transcript text.

“...but... But I think most ① people who are perfectionists are actually imperfectionists (orange) because ⑥ they're just constantly (orange)... ④ their real focus isn't on perfection (green), that which is really excellent and good about themselves or about the world... ④ they're really focussed on what's wrong with it all the time (green)...”

Figure 4. Sample of Highlighting and Reference Numbering in Transcript Text

The reason for creating numbered subcategories was that although a certain text item seemed to fit a certain category, it was apparent that it was qualitatively different from other items being assigned to the same category. For instance, one text item to be assigned to the fledgling category “Predisposition for perfectionism”, i.e., “I think my perfectionism is sort of like a perceptual filter”, was characteristically different from another item to be assigned to the same category, i.e., “My perfectionism seems permanent”. Because of this difference each of these items were given different reference numbers and recorded in different numbered subcategory sections of the coloured sections of the notebook. Each recorded entry was referenced by transcript page number so that it could easily be traced back to the transcript text. Figure 5 shows an example of this type of recording. Note that the transcript page numbers are shown in parentheses along with the (in this case fake) initials of the participant.

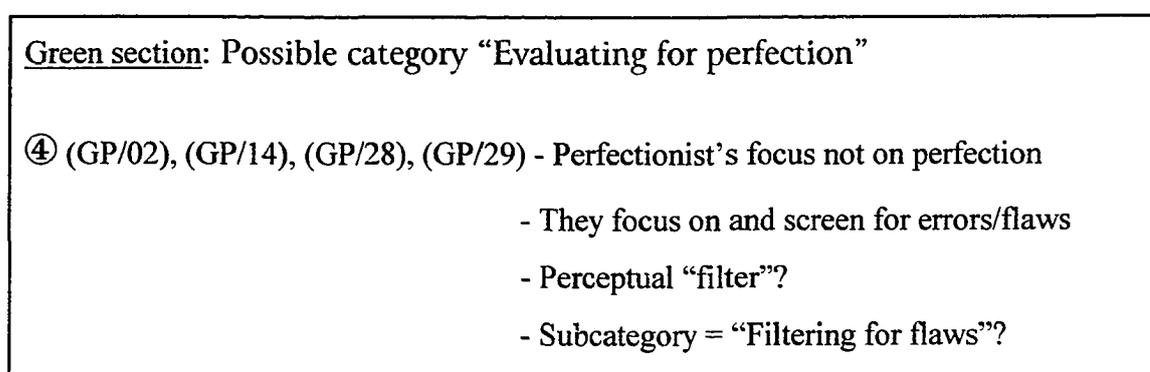


Figure 5. Sample of Subcategory Recording in Coloured Section of Notebook

This procedure is an example of axial coding in that subcategories were being assigned within categories. Because these assignments were still rather crude it meant that the categories were still incomplete and the subcategories were still unrefined. However, it was still time for selective coding to begin.

Step 10.

In addition to using the above techniques for generating and fleshing out categories and subcategories, Step 10, using a macroscopic technique called selective coding to integrate and refine any emerging theory, was used to investigate relationships among the emerging categories. In order to do this, a poster board chart (Chart 1) was started to visually display any emerging categories and accompanying subcategories. The text items were listed in point form on coloured post-it notes that corresponded to the category colours, and they were posted under category headings. Another chart (Chart 2) was also started that displayed any emerging relationships among the categories. This was done by using coloured cutouts representing the categories and moving them around on the chart in order to explore how they might relate to one another. After making any additions warranted by the analysis of the first transcript these charts were set aside for use in selective coding for all of the remaining interviews.

Step 11.

After transcribing and summarizing the tape recording of the first interview, and after open, axial, and selective coding were finished, Step 11 was performed. This step involves using the results of any analysis to generate new interview questions that, when answered, will either add to existing categories/subcategories or generate new questions for the next interview. They were formulated by determining where on the charts created in Step 10. (i.e., Charts 1 and 2) information was still needed. For instance, the next interview was also to proceed using open-ended questions, and some of these were developed from text items taken from the last interview that were in need of clarification. For example, in the first interview the participant indicated that she thought perfectionism was a type of “perceptual sorting device or filter” and so one of the questions to be asked of the second participant was, “The last person I interviewed described her perfectionism as a perceptual filter. How does this fit for you?”.

Other open-ended questions were developed by looking at some of the emerging relationships among the categories and subcategories generated by the first interview. For instance, on Chart 2 it appeared that there was a relationship between a feeling of discomfort and not striving for perfection and so one of the questions to be asked of the second interviewee was, “What’s the

discomfort you feel when not striving for perfection like, and when do you experience it?”. In summary, all of the questions to be asked in the next interview were developed to add to the categories or subcategories formed as a result of analysing the first interview, and they were developed to help generate new categories/subcategories and interview questions.

Step 12.

As subsequent interviews were basically to be a confirmation and/or continuation of the first in that questions arising from the first would allow new categories and subcategories to emerge and existing ones to fill out, more interviews were then conducted. This was in accordance with Step 12, i.e., repeating the above steps until the categories and subcategories become theoretically saturated (i.e., additional interviews yield no new category development via the addition of new properties, dimensions, or proposed relationships). In fact, second, third, fourth, fifth, and sixth interviews were conducted and Steps 5 to 11 were repeated for each of them.

As each interview was analysed, more notes, subcategories, and categories were added to Chart 1, more relational adjustments were made to Chart 2, and, with the exception of interview six, more interview questions were generated. Interviews were conducted until it became apparent that no

new categories or subcategories were forming on Chart 1, and no more information was needed to flesh out the existing ones. Interviews were also conducted until there were no more relational adjustments to be made among the existing categories on Chart 2. In other words, the categories were theoretically saturated (i.e., additional interviews would yield no new category development via the addition of new properties, dimensions, or proposed relationships).

Step 13.

This step, using the results of the final analyses to either create new theory about the variable in question, or refine old theory, was done once the preliminary microanalyses and macroanalyses were finished for all six transcripts. First, the transcripts were each given a final microanalysis to make sure no individual articulations were omitted or assigned to the wrong category. Charts 1 and 2 were then redone in order to reorganize and simplify them for final display. (The original charts had been corrected and added to so many times that they were eventually very disorganized and readable only by the author.) The final versions of these charts represented a final macroanalysis of the data, and summarized the results of this study.

In its final form Chart 1 included headings which represented all of the

final categories, and subheadings that represented all of the subcategories. Under each of the subcategory headings were listed the many details and particulars of the subcategories. Chart 1 depicted a hierarchical approach to gathering, summarizing, and presenting the data. In contrast to this, Chart 2 depicted a non-hierarchical approach to gathering, summarizing, and presenting the data in that it was entirely geared toward demonstrating the relationships among the categories and subcategories. The results of the data analysis summarized on Chart 1 are presented in Chapter Five, and the relationships among the core concept, main categories, and subcategories shown on Chart 2 are revealed in Chapter Seven.

Evaluating Grounded Theory Studies

Most researchers conducting scientific studies allow their methodologies to be scrutinized for both reliability and validity. Reliability traditionally deals with whether or not a study can be replicated under the same conditions at a later time. Validity traditionally deals with whether or not a study addresses what it is conducted to address (Altheide & Johnson, 1994; Borg & Gall, 1989; Eichelberger, 1989). A grounded theory study, or one that stimulates legitimate or valid inquiry into modifying or augmenting theory, is also subject to scrutiny, and those who use grounded theory methodology are no different

from most researchers in that they are also concerned with reliability and validity. However, the traditional canons of reliability and validity may or may not apply to grounded theory research.

The authors who developed this methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) have put forward many suggestions as to how these canons may or may not apply to grounded theory research. The first suggestions regard reliability, or as these authors have named it, reproducibility, and they are outlined below along with an explanation of how they have been incorporated into this study. Following this are suggestions aimed at the issues of external and internal validity. These issues are: generalizability, researcher bias, consistency, theory-observation compatibility, and quality of the research process. They are also outlined below along with explanations of how they have been incorporated into this study.

Reproducibility.

As mentioned earlier, reproducibility concerns the potential for studies to be replicated. In the case of most grounded theory research, the interpretive interaction between researchers and their data necessitates that different outcomes will result from each of their studies (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In other words, it is never possible to accurately replicate grounded theory studies.

However, it is possible to achieve reliability when attempting to measure certain phenomenon within grounded theory studies, and these help to make them somewhat reproducible. Strauss and Corbin (1998) have stated the following:

Given the same theoretical perspective of the original researcher, following the same general rules for data gathering and analysis, and assuming a similar set of conditions, other researchers should be able to come with either the same or very similar theoretical explanation about the phenomenon under investigation. (p. 266-67)

The measures taken to achieve reproducibility within this study were as follows. First, the theoretical perspective to be taken in this study was well laid out. Second, the interviews were always conducted in the same setting, with the same seating arrangements, and using the same equipment. Third, the interviewer was the same person for all six interviews, and the same interview style was used for all participants (see Kvale, 1983 for an in-depth description of interviewing procedures). Finally, the same procedures for analysis and interpretation were carried out for all six interviews. Although these measures are somewhat minimal, they do provide some direction for those who might

like to attempt replicating this study.

Predictability.

Predictability is an issue of external or population validity (Borg and Gall, 1989). When doing quantitative studies, researchers usually try to randomly sample their target populations so that their results might be generalizable to these populations (Eichelberger, 1989). The degree to which findings can be generalized to the population from which study participants are drawn is a concern in this research, especially as there were only six participants, they were not randomly chosen from the target population (i.e., from all perfectionists), and there was a chance that there may have been bias due to the unique characteristics of each participant. It is important to acknowledge that any results gleaned from this study are not necessarily generalizable to all perfectionists, and may be unique to the sample of participants used in this study.

Given that the above concerns have been acknowledged, it is of note that Strauss and Corbin (1998) have pointed out that predictive ability or explanatory power is a more desired outcome of grounded theory studies than generalizability. It is not as important that the results of this study are generalizable to all perfectionists as it is that they speak specifically for the

participants of this study and can be applied back to them. To this end the results of this study satisfy the requirement of predictability.

Researcher bias.

When conducting research using human participants there is always the danger that researchers' biases or expectations will influence either their data or their participants (Borg & Gall, 1989). Although researchers conducting grounded theory studies may influence their participants, they are especially prone to allowing their biases and expectations to distort the data. As Strauss and Corbin (1998) have stated emphatically, "...it is not possible to be completely free of bias" (p. 97), measures had to taken to minimize bias in this study.

As the potential for bias was greatest when analysing or interpreting the data, great care was taken to recognize when personal assumptions, beliefs, and values were intruding into the analysis. Whenever possible they were "bracketed" or pushed aside, and a journal was kept in order to bring biases to a more conscious awareness. Attempting to become more aware of biases, and to suspend them wherever possible were the only ways to reduce researcher bias with regard to analysing the data.

With regard to reducing researcher bias or influence for the participants,

several other measures were taken in addition to those above. When conducting quantitative studies researchers design their data collection methods such that they minimally influence their participants. They do this by minimizing contact with them, by using blind and double-blind collection methods, by using self-report measures that have been thoroughly tested for reliability and validity, etc. (Eichelberger, 1989). They can do all this because most of the time their aim is to test the effects of one variable against another, and not to theorize about the nature of any of these variables.

What is different about grounded theory studies is that the variable being studied is not compared against any other variables, and that creating theory with regard to it is the main focus of the study (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In the case of this study, the aim was a better more complete conceptualization of perfectionism, especially with regard to its construct validity for current perfectionism measures. Because the nature of this study was to do the above by interacting with participants via asking them questions about certain aspects of perfectionism theory already present in the literature or the Framework for Evaluating Conceptualizations of Perfectionism (FECF), and by asking them how the views of other participants fit with them, it was impossible to use collection methods such as those outlined above.

The only way to reduce any influence of researcher expectations or bias

on the participants was to make sure that any questions asked of them were open-ended, i.e., they did not require a yes or no answer, or lead the participants to certain answers, that the questions contained only information included in the reviewed conceptualizations of perfectionism, in the conceptualization adopted for this study or in past interviews, and that the questions were asked in a neutral tone of voice. It was also important not to show much visible reaction to interviewees responses lest they be influenced by this. For the most part this was achieved, and to the extent it was, the results of analysing the interviews, i.e., the resulting new theory, meet validity concerns.

Consistency.

In quantitative research, consistency, an issue of internal validity, refers to whether or not studies can demonstrate causality. In qualitative research consistency refers to whether or not studies demonstrate that certain conditions can be consistently related to other conditions (Sweet, 2000). In grounded theory the procedures of theoretical sampling and constant comparison are used to make consistency more probable.

In this study theoretical sampling was carried out by selecting pieces of transcript text for analysis that were thought to be reflective of the concepts,

properties, dimensions, and variations of perfectionism. Constant comparison, which refers to the process of comparing one piece of theoretical sampling to another in order to refine these concepts, properties, dimensions, and variations (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was carried out in this study by comparing the text items from one interview to those from the other five interviews. To the extent that concepts, subcategories, categories, and the proposed relationships among them were consistently supported by incoming data they were not eliminated from the study. In order to make accurate decisions about what was to be eliminated the researcher was constantly searching for evidence that would either verify or refute the existing data. To the extent that the procedures of theoretical sampling and constant comparison were successfully carried out, consistency was achieved in this study.

Theory-observation compatibility.

Theory-observation compatibility is akin to the requirement of face validity in quantitative research studies. Any theory generated by a grounded theory study should emerge from all collected data and in so doing reflect the everyday reality of the phenomenon in question. It should also make sense to those studying the theory or those experiencing the phenomenon being theorized about (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The extent to which this study has

successfully done this for anyone other than the researcher remains to be seen.

Criteria for evaluating research process quality.

Strauss and Corbin (1998) have suggested that it is difficult for readers to accurately evaluate the research processes of grounded theory studies. For instance, they may wonder if a certain study was carried out with methodological accuracy. In order to aid readers in doing this Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggested the following criteria for evaluating the quality of grounded theory research processes. Note that they are in the form of questions the reader might ask.

Criterion 1: How was the original sample selected? On what grounds?

Criterion 2: What major categories emerged?

Criterion 3: What were some of the events, incidents, or actions (indicators) that pointed to some of these major categories?

Criterion 4: On the basis of what categories did theoretical sampling proceed? That is, how did theoretical formulations guide some of the data collection? After the theoretical sampling was done, how representative of the data did the categories prove to be?

Criterion 5: What were some of the hypotheses pertaining to conceptual relations (i.e., among categories), and on what grounds were they formulated and validated?

Criterion 6: Were there instances in which hypotheses did not explain what was happening in the data? How were these discrepancies accounted for? Were hypotheses modified?

Criterion 7: How and why was the core category selected? Was this collection sudden or gradual, and was it difficult or easy? On what grounds were the final analytic decisions made? (p. 269)

The above criteria are offered for evaluating grounded theory studies in general and for evaluating this study where it seems appropriate (especially with regard to this chapter and the following chapters containing the results of the analysis).

Quality and Usefulness of New Theory.

Regardless of whether or not the above reliability and validity concerns were addressed, the results of this grounded theory study should be evaluated with regard to the quality and usefulness of any theory generated as a result of its analyses. For instance, any new theory of perfectionism generated by this study should be functional in that it has scope, it accurately and conceptually explains perfectionism, and it has predictive ability. The theory should also be flexible in that the possibility for modification via further inquiry is present.

In addition to this, any new theory regarding perfectionism should be logical and have internal consistency (Altheide & Johnson, 1994; Strauss &

Corbin, 1998). More specifically, the concepts or categories generated in the analyses should be clear but detailed such that they put forward a number of properties that describe each concept. In turn, the concepts should be systematically linked together, and related to the core topic of perfectionism.

Further to having internal consistency, the new theory should have relevance for researchers or mental health practitioners dealing with perfectionism in that it should have implications for expanding past and current conceptualizations of perfectionism, and implications for operationalizing and measuring perfectionism. At the very least, the new theory generated in this study should provide new direction for further inquiry. The following three chapters contain the results of the analyses for this study, and the theory it has generated. Hopefully this new theory regarding perfectionism complies with the above guidelines for evaluating the quality and usefulness of theory.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONTENT ANALYSIS OF DATA

This chapter contains the results of the first stage of analysis, that of classifying the interview data or content into both a core concept, and main categories and subcategories. In Chapter Six the study participants are profiled in terms of this core concept and these main categories and subcategories. In Chapter Seven relationships that exist among the core concept, main categories, and subcategories are proposed and synthesized into new theory about perfectionism. Before proceeding with results of the first stage of analysis, it is best to first explain how the Framework for Evaluating Conceptualizations of Perfectionism (FECp) was utilized during the data analysis.

Analysing the Data Using the Framework for Evaluating Conceptualizations of Perfectionism (FECp)

Because the second research goal for this study was to use the Framework for Evaluating Conceptualizations of Perfectionism (FECp) to stimulate inquiry leading to the clarification, possible adjustment, and/or further expansion of current conceptualizations and measures of perfectionism, the FECp was used during the first stage of analysis as a theoretical “skeleton”

on which to begin “fleshing out” new theory. To this end the FECP was used to help name any emerging core concept, main categories, and subcategories, and to help classify interview data into the core concept, main categories, and subcategories. As the questions for the first interview were couched in terms taken from the FECP, it was logical to assume that the first core concept, main categories, and subcategories to emerge would be in alignment with some these terms. In other words, the core concept and some of the main categories were to a large extent predetermined.

For example, one of the emergent main categories described below is “Striving for Perfection” and it is almost identical in assumption to the second behavioural imperative described in the FECP, i.e., “striving toward goals/standards aimed at perfection”. However, although “Striving for Perfection” includes the second behavioural imperative as its starting point, it was in no way limited by or bound to it during analysis. The participants provided additional information about striving for perfection from that already present in the literature and the FECP, and this information was further refined by way of organizing it into subcategories. In other words, the second behavioural imperative of the FECP was part of the “skeleton” that was “fleshed out” by way of gathering new data from participants.

In short, the FECP is a product of synthesizing the literature, and it

provided the researcher of this study with a loose set of predetermined main categories (including the core concept) that could be used to inform the analysis of any collected data. New information and potential main categories or themes from those contained in the FECP were also solicited and accepted for inclusion in the results.

Content Analyses of Data

Overview.

During the course of analysis, one core concept, and seven main categories or themes emerged along with several subcategories for each of the main categories. The core concept was designated the “Cognitive Diathesis for Perfectionism” (CDP). The seven main categories were designated the “Ideals of Perfectionism”, “Striving for Perfection”, “Evaluating for Perfection”, “Cognitive Responses to Perfectionism”, “Distal Consequences and Correlates of Perfectionism”, “Antecedents and Maintenance of Perfectionism”, and “Managing Perfectionism” categories.

At this point the distinction made in Chapter Three between the terms “perfectionist” and the “process of perfectionism” should be reiterated. The core concept “CDP” refers exclusively to “perfectionist” as the object of perfectionism, and all the main categories derive from it or are related to it.

The “Ideals of Perfection”, “Striving for Perfection”, and “Evaluating for Perfection” categories account for the specifics behind engaging in the “process of perfectionism”. The “Cognitive Responses to Perfectionism” category includes any cognitive responses present while engaging in the process of perfectionism, and it is separate from the object and process of perfectionism. Also separate are the last three main categories. The “Distal Consequences and Correlates of Perfectionism” category includes any consequences or effects the participants of this study experienced as a result of their perfectionism. The “Antecedents and Maintenance of Perfectionism” category accounts for how participants viewed the prebirth factors, development, and maintenance of their perfectionism. And, the “Managing Perfectionism” category encompasses all the participants said they did to effectively handle their perfectionism.

There are undoubtedly many overlaps (intercorrelations) among the core concept, main categories, and subcategories in that they cannot be totally separated from one another (i.e., they cannot be orthogonal to one another). For instance, obviously “perfectionists” cannot be entirely separated from the development and maintenance of their perfectionism, from engaging in the “process of perfectionism”, from suffering its effects, or from their attempts to cope with perfectionism.

However, for the purpose of creating new theory about perfectionism

and its surrounding phenomena it is useful to first artificially separate it into its parts. The core concept, main categories, and subcategories represent an attempt to make this artificial separation. In the following sections of this chapter the core concept and each main category along with its subcategories will be described and explained, and any overlap among them will be acknowledged. Table 2 provides an overview and listing of the core concept, main categories, and subcategories in the order they will be presented below.

Core Concept: Cognitive Diathesis for Perfectionism (CDP).

The core concept represents the core of perfectionism, or that which best describes the “perfectionist” or object of perfectionism described in the FECP. The term “perfectionist” will be used in conjunction with what may be termed a “Cognitive Diathesis for Perfectionism (CDP)”. In this core concept a “perfectionist” is a person who has a CDP, and a CDP is the object of perfectionism. Therefore a “perfectionist”, a CDP, and the object of perfectionism are one in the same. The following characterizes the most salient aspects of the CDP and describes its nature.

CDP as Permanent Predisposition - A “cognitive diathesis” can best be described as a stable and permanent cognitive predisposition or predetermined

← Core Concept: Cognitive Diathesis for Perfectionism →							
Main Categories ►	Ideals of Perfection	Striving for Perfection	Evaluating for Perfection	Cognitive Responses to Perfectionism	Consequences and Correlates of Perfectionism	Antecedents and Maintenance of Perfectionism	Managing Perfectionism
Subcategories ▼							
Subcategory One	Nature of Ideals of Perfection	Nature of Striving for Perfection	Nature of Evaluating for Perfection	Cognitive Dissonance	Positive Consequences and Correlates of Perfectionism	Genetic Influences on Perfectionism	CDP Strategies
Subcategory Two	Formation of Ideals of Perfection	Intensity of Striving for Perfection	Dualistic Evaluating for Perfection	Cognitive Consonance	Negative Consequences and Correlates of Perfectionism	Learning Influences on Perfectionism	Ideals of Perfection Strategies
Subcategory Three	Content of Ideals of Perfection	Selectivity of Striving for Perfection					Striving for Perfection Strategies
Subcategory Four							Evaluating for Perfection Strategies
Subcategory Five							Cognitive Responses to Perfectionism Strategies
Subcategory Six							Distal Consequences and Correlates of perfectionism Strategies
Subcategory Seven							Antecedents and Maintenance of Perfectionism Strategies

Table 2: Summary of Core Concept, Main Categories, and Subcategories Found in First Stage of Data Analysis

set of cognitive variables with which individuals process information (see Abramson, Alloy, & Metalsky, 1988). As will be seen later, the process of perfectionism can be considered a rarified type of information processing. A Cognitive Diathesis for Perfectionism (CDP) is therefore a predetermined set of cognitive variables that is used when engaging in the process of perfectionism. In other words, it is both a prerequisite and corequisite for perfectionism. All participants in this study agreed that their perfectionism is a product of their information processing tendencies, and seemed to experience them as “ever present”, “permanent”, and “relentless”. All participants were adamant that their perfectionist tendencies are unchangeable or “hard-wired in”, and that there is no possibility for changing them in the future. For instance, Holly said,

It doesn't go away. ...I don't think I'll ever change.

Richard said,

...my perfectionism pervades most of my life. ...it's this daily need... it's definitely an all pervading need to have things right.

And Bonnie said,

...my gut feeling is that it probably won't just go away. I think it's just become part of my identity as a person, how I deal with information, my world view...

The participants predominantly described two cognitive variables as being part of this stable and permanent predisposition or diathesis for perfectionism. The characteristics of these two variables are covered next.

Pattern Manipulation - The first cognitive variable participants described seems to be three-fold in that it involves a drive toward and abilities for pattern recognition, pattern completion, and pattern generation. The participants had very strong affinities for operating on patterns. They tended to have exaggerated and robust abilities for recognizing patterns, and for either completing existing patterns or generating new and more perfect ones. From this point on these abilities will be referred to as "pattern manipulation" abilities. Richard illustrated these abilities with the following,

I sometimes think about... Well, like, when I count... I can remember when I was a kid counting, counting to four, and starting all over again, and then grouping those groups of four into four groups. You count to four, and then you have to count to four four more times so it would be a group of four four's. And then that would be one of a group of four more of those. This is how I

would put myself to sleep at night. Bizarre geometric and abstract things in your mind. Patterns.

June also revealed that she engages in pattern manipulation when she remarked that her perfectionism is “mostly a visual tendency”, and that she has “an eye for flaws, and missing parts of patterns”. When she was explaining about how she tends to see patterns she said that when a pattern is incomplete “it just visually looks funny... it looks half done, maybe that’s what it is... it doesn’t look finished”. She noted that she experiences cognitive dissonance when patterns are incomplete and that she is driven to complete them. June described her drive to complete patterns specifically as a tendency to impose patterns on text. She manifests this by editing already existing text, or by generating new text.

The other participants related similar experiences. All participants mentioned in one way or another that when they are perceiving their thoughts and environments they are usually compelled or driven to engage in pattern manipulation of some sort. Also, they were all like June in that if they recognized or generated patterns and perceived that they were incomplete (i.e., flawed), they seemed compelled toward operating on these patterns until they were complete. For instance, Bonnie said that her perfectionism is a “a binary

sorting device” that she uses for evaluating whether or not things are “right”, and she tends to “immediately try and correct anything that is not right”.

Although perfectionists probably manipulate all types of patterns, the patterns participants liked to comment on most were visual (e.g., tidy households, text, etc.), and auditory (e.g., music, speech, etc.) patterns. All of the participants agreed that they like to “impose structure” on both their inner and outer environments, and equated this with imposing patterns.

Perceptual Sensitivity - The other cognitive variable of the CDP that participants described is one that may intensify this affinity for pattern manipulation the participants seemed to exhibit. Most of the participants declared themselves to be extra perceptually sensitive, or “extremely sensitive instruments” as Leanne put it. Because it is necessary to be very attentive if individuals are going to be able to recognize and complete or generate patterns, and perceptual sensitivity must be present in order to be attentive, it follows that being extremely sensitive perceptual instruments would also make individuals more finely tuned instruments for pattern manipulation.

June agreed with this and emphasized the role of her keen perceptual abilities in doing finely tuned work involving text. In fact, when initially describing her perfectionism she said,

It [perfectionism] almost seems like a visual tendency to me... constantly present... focussed on details... sort of like a perceptual filtering thing.

This perceptual sensitivity probably accounts for participants' claims that they are very observant and notice things that others probably do not. It also makes intuitive sense that this "noticing", or exceptional perceptual attentiveness may facilitate any highly complex pattern manipulation the participants engage in. June confirmed this by saying,

The people I know that self-identify as perfectionists tend to be highly observant people. Not necessarily observant of people's emotional or intellectual feedback but very physical objects or physical attributes, very observant about that. ...it's a heightened visual observational power.

Summary of core concept.

The Cognitive Diathesis of Perfectionism (CDP) represents the object of perfectionism and must be present before the process of perfectionism and any responses to it can occur. It is a stable and "hard-wired in" predisposition for a certain type of information processing that involves a drive toward pattern manipulation (i.e., completing already present patterns or generating new ones). It also involves heightened perceptual sensitivity. Activation of the CDP occurs simultaneously with and is inextricably linked to engaging in the

process of perfectionism.

Main Category One: Ideals of Perfection.

The “Ideals of Perfection” category is most closely aligned with the first behavioural imperative of the FECP, i.e., “setting goals/standards aimed at perfection”, and represents the first step in the process of perfectionism. It also represents one of the information processing capabilities of the Cognitive Diathesis of Perfectionism (CDP) which is in a state of activation when forming ideals of perfection. All of the participants confirmed that forming ideals of perfection is their first step when engaging in the process of perfectionism. Leanne stated that for her, “Perfectionism is about expectations”, expectations being akin to ideals. Tina stated that perfectionism is about forming “subjective ideals”. This category addresses the nature of ideals of perfection, any factors entailed in the formation of these ideals, and the content of these ideals. Any influence the Cognitive Diathesis for Perfectionism (CDP) has on these ideals of perfection represents an overlap with the core concept “CDP”. This overlap will be covered in the first subcategory.

Subcategory One: Nature of Ideals of Perfection - An ideal, most simply put,

is a type of pattern. To summarize what was mentioned earlier, the CDP seems to be a perceptually sensitive pattern manipulation instrument. Given this, ideals of perfection are the patterns that the CDP manipulates or processes. The participants revealed that for them ideals of perfection are patterns which are perceived as perfect or flawless. This flawlessness can be interpreted to mean that these patterns embody the highest measure of organization and detailed complexity possible for each pattern. They are templates that epitomize the essence of perfection in that by any standard they are in no need of correction, completion, or regeneration.

Some participants described their ideals of perfection in absolute terms. For instance, Bonnie described them as “utopian ideals grounded in fantasy”, fantasy for her being the unreachable and absolute. She described one of these ideals as her “Anne of Green Gables” effect, and she conveyed the following,

I totally tried to imagine myself beyond, always, what I was daily experiencing. And it worked in a sense of fuelling me to move forward so it had a good effect. But it also had the effect of really dividing myself off from who I really was. Like, when I thought about myself doing something I never, ever thought of myself actually making movement. I always sort of had this sort of film camera of another person doing activity. You know what I mean? Like I never actually imagined myself kind of in my own body picking weeds out of the

garden. I'd imagine this girl in a long white dress. You know, kind of the Victorian image. But it was like I was sort of seeing another person doing something and imagining it to be me, and not really actually doing the activity.

Tina had an absolute ideal that "everything should be in its place". Also, Richard went as far as saying that he sees his whole life is one all encompassing pattern for which there is a firm ideal.

As explained in the next main category, ideals of perfection also have the potential to inspire intentionality, and may be translated into operational definitions that set the stage for action geared toward achieving flawless patterns. Bonnie and Holly described their ideals of perfection in terms of being "shoulds" because these ideals represent what they "should" be striving for. Leanne described them as expectations and said this,

Perfectionism is expectations. Like, these two words are totally linked, and, like, if you have no expectations then everything's perfect right? ...the higher your expectations are, the more perfect and more perfect you think you have to be.

The above characteristics are present for all ideals of perfection regardless of content or domain, and are what make up their nature. Any rigidity attributed to them refers to their nature and not to their content. Tina

described an example of this rigidity when she described her ideals as “more rigid, less flexible than what other people think”.

Subcategory Two: Formation of Ideals of Perfection - Although all people are equipped to formulate ideals, the participants differ from others in that they likely do it more perfectionistically. In other words, they are more likely to form more complex and highly organized ideals than nonperfectionists.

Richard does copious research in order to form some of his ideals of perfection.

He said,

...part of this research and learning about things is part of setting the ideal so I have a clear picture in my head of what I'm going to do. Any research leading to the formation of an ideal involves assessment, concrete analysis, and critical evaluation.

June said that ideal formation for her is not such a conscious process.

She reported that,

I don't think it's as conscious as an ideal, it's more “something looks wrong”, and then it's a matter of figuring out why.

If it can be conjectured that the Cognitive Diathesis for Perfectionism (CDP) acts as a filter for all incoming perceptual stimulation or data which is

then organized into ideals of perfection, it can be assumed that this is what happens for the participants as perfectionists. This fits with the notion that perfectionism represents a rarified type of information processing, and this processing is different from nonperfectionists' in that perfectionists form more complex and highly organized ideals. This sense of perfectionistic filtering or processing that the participants frequently reported is involuntary and automatic, hence the participants' subjective feelings that they frequently have no choice but to form ideals of perfection. Bonnie said that when she is doing this she is "idealizing mode" and that she is having "a fragmented life experience". June described her ideals of perfection as "automatic or unconscious expectation" and said,

I don't have a strong sense of how I set standards. I have a stronger sense with visual, nit-picky things like text on a page, or layout, or really concrete things...
For me it's perceptual filtering thing that I do automatically.

This part of engaging in the process of perfectionism, the formation of ideals of perfection, can also be referred to as the perfectionistic internalization of expectation. The participants were more likely to see an expectation present in the environment as being expectant of perfection. In other words, they

perceived or imagined details or subtle nuances in outside stimulation that others did not, and included these as they internalized into ideals of perfection what may have been intended as more benign expectation. This allowed them to derive ideals of perfection from both actual expectations of perfection and expectations of non-perfection. For instance, Tina revealed that her ideals are “probably higher than the average person’s”, and says this is true even when she is given the same information as others upon which to base her ideals.

Subcategory Three: Content of Ideals of Perfection - There is one aspect to ideals of perfection that is potentially impermanent, and that is the content which gives them structure or makes them describable in concrete terms. The participants described many different examples of this content. For instance, Tina had very clear ideals regarding how her household should be kept, and Bonnie had a strong notion of how she should look. Their content ranged in scope from centring around the smallest detail (like June’s ideal regarding text), to centring around the entirety of a whole life (like Richard’s description of his whole life being one all-encompassing ideal).

The participants thought that, with the possible exception of things like archetypes or platonian concepts, the content of all internalized expectation of perfection (ideals of perfection) is originally learned or perceived in the

environment. This content was described as ready-made ideals put forward by others like parents, or as building blocks requiring interpretation and structuring into patterns (e.g., as the raw materials needed by the CDP for generating patterns or forming ideals aimed at perfection). Either way, this content eventually become internalized by participants as ideals of perfection.

Internalization of content was in motion when expectation present in the environment was processed by the participants and either formed into new ideals of perfection or integrated into existing ideals of perfection. This expectation took many forms. For instance, it was implicit in the consciously or unconsciously imposed expectations of others (e.g., via spoken communication, text, visual imagery, or modelling of behaviour). All participants cited school, family and friends as having the most influence in this regard. The participants remembered many instances where they were exposed to the expectations of others (especially parents), and agreed that many of these expectations became internalized as ideals of perfection.

Richard revealed examples of these expectations when he said,

When I was a child my father had me do certain tasks that, if they weren't completed properly, and for him it was almost perfectly, they had to be redone.

And,

...with my mother primarily behind the motivation of my music studies you learned pretty soon to work hard at it... It was pushed over the edge. I remember it was my birthday, and I was practising. I was nearly finished, it was an hour and a half session, I was 11 years old, and my Dad sent out a tank, a toy tank from the kitchen. And I heard this sound, it came out into the lobby. It was a cute little thing, wonderful thing, it was on batteries and pumping the barrel back and forth. There were sparks flying and lights going, and I had five minutes left in my practice and my mother wouldn't let me stand up and go to it. She started whacking me, I started crying...

Expectation was also implicit in the perfection participants observed in nature. Bonnie asked, "Who can deny the perfection of a glorious sunset?" Whatever its sources, the content of ideals of perfection was seen by the participants as impermanent. That is because this content could be altered once they acquired new learning that challenged what was perceived as true or proven for them. For instance, June said this about her ideals regarding text,

I'm pretty rigid in terms of text being accurate. Not in content, definitely not in content. But, you know, don't mix styles or hybridize. I don't like that.

Although it was probably not accurate to do so, some participants

viewed certain content as permanent or immutable. For example, Tina was a believer in absolute truth and was unwilling to acknowledge that she could choose to change the content in her ideal of having “everything in its place”. Participants agreed that if the content in their ideals is seen as irrefutable or as absolute truth it is rigid and has gained permanence. As will be seen later, this contributes to a tendency to perpetuate the process of perfectionism.

Main Category Two: Striving for Perfection.

This category accounts for another aspect of perfectionism as process in that it represents the second behavioural imperative of the FECP, i.e., “striving toward goals/standards aimed at perfection”, and it represents the second step in the process of perfectionism. Although striving for perfection is part of the process of perfectionism, it does not necessarily represent the activation of the Cognitive Diathesis for Perfectionism (CDP) as an information processing device. It does so only when forming ideals of perfection is in itself considered a type of striving for perfection. This type of striving represents an overlap between the main categories “Ideals of Perfection” and “Striving for Perfection”, and it also represents an overlap with the core concept “Cognitive Diathesis for Perfectionism (CDP)”. This, and other aspects of the category “Striving for Perfection” will be addressed in the three subcategories outlined

below.

Subcategory One: Nature of Striving for Perfection - Bonnie described her *striving for perfection* as “an accommodation of any drive toward achieving her utopic ideals”. Striving for perfection is both observable and nonobservable behaviour, and participants aimed it at both forming and manifesting ideals of perfection. In keeping with what has been posited earlier regarding the CDP and pattern manipulation, participants’ nonobservable striving for perfection was directed at conceiving of or generating patterns and/or ideals. This involved them organizing their thoughts into beliefs, concepts, and finally, ideals. This metaphysical type of striving was necessary before any observable or physical form of striving for perfection could be undertaken by the participants.

Observable striving for perfection included the concrete actions participants demonstrated while physically manifesting their ideals of perfection. This represents an imposition of the patterns conceived of and generated by participants. In summary, striving for perfection was first expressed by the participants via thought, and then expressed as concrete, observable action. That they cannot strive for an ideal before they strive to form the ideal represents the aforementioned overlap between the Ideals of

Perfection and Striving for Perfection categories. That the CDP is activated while forming ideals of perfection represents the overlap with both categories.

Tina gave an example of how the setting ideals and striving for them are inextricably linked. She said,

I see it as structuring the way I live, and what I think, and what I do. This ideal that I'm thinking, or that I'm trying to reach, it's created me, it's ruled what I've done. Like, the basis for my action is based on it.

For Tina, keeping a tidy and organized household illustrates how she conceives of and then imposes a pattern or ideal. She starts by conceiving of how her household should look and then she proceeds to impose this conception on physical reality by moving objects into place, cleaning, rearranging, etc.

Another way the participants described the nature of striving for perfection was to say that it is a method for imposing structure. Another way to describe imposing structure is to say that it is an attempt to control or avoid entropy. Entropy is the natural tendency for all things in the universe to lose structure and revert to chaos. All participants agreed that these descriptions align with their experiences of perfectionism. Although everyone deals with this to some extent, the sophistication of the participants' ideals and their drivenness around achieving these ideals caused them to say that they exert

greater efforts toward this end.

The most common examples of participants' efforts to avoid entropy or impose structure on chaos include organizing, using logic, scheduling, planning, list making, exacting behaviour, precision, doing research and other attempts to control the environment. Tina described these tangible expressions of her perfectionism as ensuring her vision of "how things should be". Bonnie described one specific striving behaviour in the following terms,

I really show my perfectionism in little things I do like writing things down a lot. Like, I want to... For me writing is a big one. I love, I want to write neat, and I want everything scheduled and organized. For example, when I'm done with pages in my journal I rip them out so all the days that have gone before are ripped out and I only see the one in front of me. So I don't like my messy writing, and when I'm writing in a hurry during the day, like I'll... Ha, I'm making myself sound like a psycho perfectionist... But when I, you know, I'm middle of my day planning things, crossing things out, you know, it gets messy, and then when I start a new day I want all that crap gone, and I want just nice writing, I'll start the morning with nice writing. I like things like that, little things...

Subcategory Two: Intensity of Striving for Perfection - "Intensity of striving"
refers to the repetition or pace of striving for perfection that occurred for

participants. It was found that the participants tended to excessively repeat certain behaviours over and over while striving for perfection (e.g., while attempting to impose structure or avoid entropy), and that they kept up a very fast pace lest they lack enough time to succeed.

One interesting finding regarding the repetition of striving was that most of the participants chose to ignore or were unaware of the principle of diminishing returns. This principle describes a tendency for each repeated effort to yield less reward than the last one. For all of the participants, there was only one acceptable reward for striving for perfection and that was the achievement of perfection. As long as perfection was the only acceptable reward, other rewards such as money or good grades went unacknowledged, and striving for perfection continued to excess. This helps to explain why the participants tended to strive for perfection even when there were no apparent rewards for doing so. All of the participants including Tina acknowledged that they strive for perfection for perfection's sake, and that they do this to excess.

Tina said,

...like gift wrapping. I like things to be done nicely. I like things to look nice. So, when I wrap a gift sometimes I don't like it and I'll rewrap it, and rewrap it, and rewrap it...

Subcategory Three: Selectivity of Striving for Perfection - This refers to directionality of striving for perfection. Given that all individuals have limited resources (i.e., time, energy, materials, etc.), the participants acknowledged that it was not possible for them to strive toward achieving all their ideals of perfection. They said they must choose which ideals of perfection they will strive toward, and how much striving they will aim toward these ideals given their resources. June coined the term “contextualized perfectionism” to describe the selectivity of her striving for perfection. Richard said,

...it's very difficult for me to do more than one important task at a time. I find that frustrating, very frustrating. ...Everything has to be singular in a sense.

Holly called this tendency to be selective “tunnel vision”, and this is the term several researchers have also given it (e.g., Hamachek, 1978). Holly said that tunnel vision effectively limits her world such that she does not have to attend to all that needs perfecting. Bonnie described her perfectionist father as having this type of tunnel vision. Participants said that their tunnel vision usually comes from a sense of what is most important or necessary in their lives. For instance, June viewed it as necessary to her career that she particularly aim much of her striving toward her workplace duties. She chose

this over striving toward other ideals such as having a clean and tidy household that had less overall importance for her or were less pressing for her.

Main Category Three: Evaluating for Perfection.

Evaluating for perfection, the last step in the process of perfectionism, is akin to the third and last behavioural imperative of the FECP, i.e., “negatively evaluating the results of striving to achieve goals/standards aimed at perfection”. This category overlaps with the core concept “Cognitive Diathesis for Perfection (CDP)” in that it describes another processing ability of the CDP. It also overlaps with the categories “Ideals of Perfection” and “Striving for Perfection” in that it focuses on how participants use their CDPs to determine whether or not they have realized their ideals of perfection via striving for perfection. All three categories preceding “Evaluating for Perfection” are inextricably tied to it. Without the evaluative ability of the CDP, forming ideals of perfection and striving for perfection would be inconsequential. The following two subcategories clarify this further.

Subcategory One: Nature of Evaluating for Perfection - The main evidence for an overlap between the “Evaluation for Perfection” category and the core concept is that participants said they use their “perceptual filter” or, as Bonnie

called it, “binary sorting device” for comparing their ideals of perfection against what is actually achieved. In other words they use their CDPs to check for congruency between their ideals and their actions. Disclosing these comparisons allowed participants to demonstrate the contribution the CDP makes to perfectionism with its information processing ability to screen for flaws.

Contrary to popular belief it seems perfectionists do not check for a match with their ideals by looking for perfection. The participants confirmed this by reporting that they engage in a flaw detection process rather than in a process that confirms perfection. June described this as a process of “eliminating what doesn’t fit” with the pattern or ideal she has internalized to be correct. Bonnie said that she considers herself an “imperfectionist” because she tries to avoid flaws rather than seek perfection. Holly called her process “reverse perfectionism”, and said that flaws “burn a hole in her psyche”.

Subcategory Two: Dualistic Evaluating for Perfection - The participants said that the only possible evaluations they could make when assessing their efforts toward matching ideals of perfection were the binary evaluations of “perfect” or “imperfect”. They equated “perfect” with success, and “imperfect” with failure. This is the type of dualistic, “black and white”, or “all-or-nothing”

thinking most researchers agree perfectionists typically engage in (e.g., Burns, 1980).

Although the above allows for the theoretical possibility that an evaluation of “perfect” can occur, it does so amidst participants’ doubts about whether perfection can actually be attained. The argument presented in Chapter Three regarding the question of whether perfection should be viewed as relative or absolute has implications for this issue. The participants tended to think in absolute terms and believed that attaining perfection is impossible. For instance, Richard said,

...there are very few things that really are perfect. ...There are things in philosophy we call *a priori* that would always have existed if humanity had never been around, or even if there wasn’t a universe. There are these concepts. Things like mathematics or a perfect circle. That’s an abstract concept, you cannot make a perfect circle, it’s a concept. My ideals are like that. ...I must believe in an imminent sense of perfection.

He also contended,

If there’s an absoluteness, then it’s, it’s imminent in the sense that there’s no choice. That bothers me. I’ve been trying to look at answers to that by reading about quantum theory, and, um, the latest in quantum theory takes us away from

one universe. There are now thoughts and theories that there's more than one universe. That really bothers me. So, if it bothers me, I guess my core would say that I believe in absoluteness, or I would like to believe in one.

Given this type of thinking, it is safe to assume that Richard never evaluates the results of his efforts as "perfect". All of the participants thought similarly.

Alternatively to the above, the participants reported that they usually detect mistakes or flaws in the formation or manifestation of the patterns or ideals they are assessing, and evaluate them as "imperfect". Most participants used the phrase "nothing is ever good enough" to exemplify this proclivity. For instance, Leanne stated of her experience,

...I was just unsatisfied [sic] with everything. Like, no matter what I did, it wasn't good enough, and it came to a point where even no matter what everyone else around me did, it wasn't good enough. I expected so much of myself.

What is paradoxical is that even when participants did not detect any flaws in the observable concrete results of striving toward an ideal of perfection they still gave the results an evaluation of "imperfect". This is because they detected flaws in their nonobservable striving for perfection in that they found fault with their ideals of perfection. This was influenced by the participants'

belief that perfection is unattainable. If perfection is unattainable, an ideal that is attainable is nonrepresentative of perfection, that is, not really an ideal of perfection. Therefore, the achievement of such an ideal must be evaluated as “imperfect”. And so, although it was theoretically possible for participants to make evaluations of “perfect”, in reality they could not do this while holding the belief that perfection is unobtainable.

Main Category Four: Cognitive Responses to Perfectionism.

This category includes participants’ descriptions of how they cognitively responded to their perfectionism and it has no equivalent in the FECF. It overlaps with the preceding main categories in that there would be no cognitive responses to report if there were no Cognitive Diathesis for Perfectionism (CDF) or process of perfectionism. The CDF and process of perfectionism are inextricably tied to this category in that the participants found it almost impossible to separate their perfectionism from the cognitive responses they experienced in relation to it. They described two types of cognitive response, and reported that these responses are mainly linked to evaluating for perfection. They revealed that they predominantly experience cognitive dissonance, and that this type of response motivates them to reengage in perfectionism. This cognitive response is described in Subcategory One.

Subcategory One: Cognitive Dissonance - Lefrancois (1982) described cognitive dissonance as,

A state of conflict between beliefs and behaviour or between expectations and behaviour. (P. 518)

He also stated that when there is a conflict between cognitions individuals will consciously or unconsciously engage in behaviours designed to eliminate or reduce the conflict. This conflict, or cognitive dissonance was also described by the participants as “pain” or “discomfort”, and it was sometimes confounded with negative emotions like dissatisfaction, irritation, or anger. All of the participants reported experiencing cognitive dissonance and accompanying negative emotions. For instance, Bonnie said she experiences cognitive dissonance and associates it with “that gut feeling of failure” she gets when she has “expectations that do not match actual capabilities”. All participants thought of it as a type of psychological pain that is best avoided, and Richard said that cognitive dissonance is what makes perfectionism a negative experience for him. The participants said they experience cognitive dissonance when they evaluate for perfection and inevitably determine that what they are perceiving is incongruent with perfection. Tina gave an example of this when she said,

I want the perfect household, again the perfect household, I try to put everything in its order, and I ask people to pick up after themselves. And if they don't do it that's fine. If it's their mess then I won't touch it. I'll try to tolerate it but sometimes I can't stand it and I'll wash their dishes along with mine... ...I like things in a certain place...

And June gave an example when she said,

...the first time I got feedback from my thesis supervisor... ...I was so upset at seeing her marks all over my thesis draft. ...I was so upset at her marking up my draft I didn't touch it for two weeks. It was too emotionally close, and I was upset.

At the point of evaluating something as imperfect, the participants reported that they either accept this and live with the cognitive dissonance they are experiencing, or they seek to relieve this dissonance by perpetuating the process of perfectionism. As the recognition of imperfection, i.e., an incomplete pattern, produces the same effect for the participants that a red cape produces for a bull, i.e., a call to action, all of them reported that they are usually motivated to perpetuate the process. For instance, Holly described cognitive dissonance as a feeling of "being twisted", and said that this feeling "chases her to avoid failure".

Participants said that how the process of perfectionism is perpetuated after they experience cognitive dissonance is dependant on whether an evaluation of “imperfect” comes as a result of determining that there are mistakes or flaws in their observable efforts toward an ideal, or as a result of determining that the ideal is not representative of perfection. Detecting mistakes or flaws requires them to reenter the process of perfectionism at the point of Striving for Perfection, and causes further striving toward the same ideal of perfection. Determining that an ideal is not an ideal of perfection requires participants to reenter the process of perfectionism at the point of Ideals of Perfection, and causes them to reformulate the ideal such that it will more accurately embody perfection if successfully manifested.

Notice that entering at either point serves to perpetuate the process for participants by way of further striving for perfection. This becomes a self-perpetuating and never-ending process of striving for perfection as any new attempts at manifesting perfection will also be evaluated by the participants as “imperfect”, and the process will have to be repeated again and again.

The above process resembles a high-jumping contest, and this analogy was validated by the participants. When the bar is not cleared jumpers will keep trying to clear it. If the jumpers clear the bar it is immediately set higher and more attempts to clear it are made. This process is repeated until the

jumpers decide that they have achieved the best jump possible for a human being and stop trying, they accept they can no longer clear the bar and stop trying, or they keep trying. If this analogy were to be used to describe the efforts of the participants, it seems they most often choose the last option. As Holly put it,

...if I do something that's less than I think I should do, or if I achieve something and people say, "Oh that's really good", it's like, "Well I don't think it's anything special". It's like that what it should be... that's to be expected, and then I immediately go for the next goal.

Holly takes her achievements for granted and said,

...it is no big deal because that's what's supposed to be done in the first place. Like, it's like going back to school now eh? I just think, "What a loser. I should've done this a long time ago!" ...That's how I think.

Holly immediately reaches higher after accomplishing her goals. She sees it as "slacking off" if she does not "set the bar higher", and does her best to avoid any cognitive dissonance she may feel as a result of "slacking off".

The tendency to "set the bar higher" is worrisome in that the bar can be "set higher to infinity" causing relentless and excessive striving for perfection.

Richard called his perfectionism “an all pervasive need to get the thing right” and said that it drives him to strive excessively for perfection. The participants reported that they are often unable to rest until their ideals of perfection are achieved, and because they think perfection is unobtainable they never achieve these ideals. Hence they are either caught in a vicious cycle of self-perpetuating perfectionism, or they must accept failure and live with the cognitive dissonance that results. Either way, perfectionism becomes a negative influence in their lives.

In summary, the above examples reflect the cognitive response to perfectionism that was most prevalent for the participants, that of cognitive dissonance (e.g., conflict, pain, or discomfort). The participants had this response when they were evaluating as “imperfect” their efforts to achieve perfection, and they either endured this pain or allowed it to motivate them toward perpetuating the process of perfectionism. They perpetuated this process by continuing to strive for their ideals of perfection, or by reformulating their ideals and continuing to strive for perfection. Either way, these responses to cognitive dissonance put them “on a never-ending treadmill of striving” as Holly called it.

Subcategory Two: Cognitive Consonance - The participants acknowledged

the theoretical possibility that an evaluation of “perfect” could occur, and that if it did, they would probably experience cognitive consonance, that is, the opposite of cognitive dissonance. They also thought that this cognitive response would cause them to end the process of perfectionism in that they would neither reformulate the ideals they were pursuing nor continue striving for them. None of the participants said that they had ever had the experience of ending perfectionism due to cognitive consonance. They said the only time they ever ended the process of perfectionism was when they felt cognitive dissonance but lacked the resources to continue striving for perfection.

Main Category Five: Distal Consequences and Correlates of Perfectionism.

This category encompasses all consequences, outcomes, or effects the participants of this study may have experienced in relation to perfectionism and their cognitive responses to it. It also includes any conditions the participants thought were associated with their perfectionism. The content of this category resembles both the “probable consequences of perfectionism” and “possible correlates of perfectionism” sections of the FECF, and it overlaps with the preceding main categories only to the extent that the following distal consequences and correlates may be associated with perfectionism.

Subcategory One: Positive Distal Consequences and Correlates of Perfectionism - The only positive distal consequences or correlates cited by all of the participants were increased productivity and high achievement. These outcomes validated the participants and tended to allow them to view themselves as competent, efficacious, and worthy. In fact, all participants valued these positive outcomes so much that when asked if they would be willing to give up their perfectionism none of them would. Richard said that he is more interested in transforming it into something more useful and less apt to cause negative consequences and correlates. He quoted one example of this as being,

I have learned as a teacher as well to turn [perfectionism] around into learning how to be critical in a positive manner. And I have been told that I am one of the best at it.

Subcategory Two: Negative Distal Consequences and Correlates of Perfectionism - The above positive distal consequences and correlates of perfectionism came at a high price for the participants because they listed so many more negative consequences and correlates. However, as society reinforces the positive outcomes so strongly, they continued to be valued by

the participants such that they were willing to endure the following negative outcomes.

1) *Fear and expectation of failure* - The most prevalent and potent negative outcome for the participants was the fear and expectation of failure, and the reactive (as opposed to proactive) orientation it produces. Bonnie described her perfectionism as “that fearful driven thing that feels like a closed fist”, and said she has a “fear of being average”. Holly described fear of failure as something that drives most of her behaviour. She said that as she expects to fail, she does not so much pursue perfection as avoid failure and the cognitive dissonance it produces for her. More specifically, she said this about it,

I’m always surprised still when I do well. Right? Like, at school even after this long, which is so bizarre. You know, I mean I’m not a genius by any means. I work hard. Right? But it’s like every time I do something, I expect not to do well, which I don’t understand about myself. But, um, but I definitely focus on things I don’t do well, and that fear of not being right, of failure.

This is an example of a reactive orientation in that it inspires action designed to avoid pain or punishment rather than action designed to gain satisfaction or reward. Fear and expectation of failure and its reactive orientation resulted in

procrastination behaviours for some of the participants like Tina.

2) Intolerance of chaos/Excessive need for control - Another potent negative outcome of perfectionism for the participants was that they all expressed an intolerance of chaos, i.e., clutter, disarray, confusion, disorder, etc., and a need for control. Remember that all of the participants disclosed that they have cognitive dissonance when they make mistakes or detect flaws. It can be argued that mistakes and flaws are a type of chaos in that they are akin to static interfering with a clear picture of what is supposed to be. To the participants chaos was like a loud or glaring perceptual “noise”, and it was to be avoided if cognitive consonance or peace of mind was to be achieved. Experiencing a modicum of success when repeatedly trying to clear away all that is extraneous to their ideals gave them the illusion of control. This led to an excessive need for control for some participants like Holly and Richard who were especially averse to experiencing cognitive dissonance. Control became synonymous with perfection and replaced it as the ultimate goal. Tina demonstrated a need for control by saying,

I like to plan everything, and then I go through... like, you know, I plan the day before what I'm going to wear, what I'm going to do, and then I plan my whole day basically, like, in hour blocks. And if something goes wrong then I put some

leeway in it.

Tina also told of a need for control at work,

I go to work, and officially my time starts at 8:45am, but I know I won't be able to do everything in the 15 minutes before I open the store. It opens at 9:00am, so I make sure I take the bus [cough]... I make sure I take the bus that gets there by 8:00am, and if I miss that bus, I'll get there by 8:15am. So that gives me half an hour, forty-five minutes between the time I actually start. I don't asked to be paid for that time because I know in a normal person, they can do it in that fifteen minutes. Just because I like everything done better, or not necessarily better but to the way I want it done. It doesn't mean that I let it bother other people, so I'll go in early and do things my way to make sure I open in time.

3) Low self-esteem/self-worth - If individuals' efforts are, in the words of the participants, "never good enough", it eventually follows that any evaluation of self will be "I am not good enough". This was confirmed by most of the participants as true for them, and they said that they experience a lot of self-doubt. Holly said,

...that feeling of never being good enough will probably never go away... It's

always never being good enough. That's what it is. That's what drives me.

4) Associated pathologies - The participants mentioned several conditions they thought were related to or correlated with their perfectionism. All participants admitted to experiencing depression or engaging in procrastination, and all cited stress and/or anxiety concerns. In addition to this, both Bonnie and Leanne disclosed they had eating disorders. Leanne described her experiences with bulimia and perfectionism thus,

...perfectionism was kind of part and parcel of the eating disorder, like... It's not like I wanted to look wonderful, and, like, it didn't really have anything to do with being thin. It had everything to do with, um, the stresses of trying to make myself perfect for everybody. And then, I could release... like it was a stress release kind of thing. If I ate a whole bunch of food and then threw it up, I felt like I was throwing up all the stress, I was getting rid of it, and then the burden on my back was just off.

5) Negative social consequences - All the participants told of how they, in the words of almost all of them, "drive people crazy" with their perfectionism. When they impose their expectations on others they are usually accused of being overly critical, and it either causes conflict or causes others to avoid

them. June illustrated this when she said,

You know, you can drive people crazy. I remember having a flight with a very good friend of mine on an airplane... ..it was a really long flight and they kept doing food service every two hours... ..and every time they would tell you to put your trays back up... ..I kept adjusting the little catch on my friend's tray so that it was perpendicular.

It also goes the other way in that some participants did not like to be around those who did not live up to their expectations. Either way, perfectionism was sometimes a socially isolating condition for all of the participants.

6) Addiction - Several of the participants like Bonnie, Leanne, and Holly said that they see perfectionism as either an addiction in itself, or related to other addictions like food, exercise, or alcohol addiction. All participants agreed that striving for perfection helps them to avoid the pain or cognitive dissonance they associated with negatively evaluating for perfection. As long as they were striving they were avoiding pain, something that represents an addictive cycle. For instance Tina remarked,

I strive for it [perfection] so I don't feel guilty, or I don't feel bad,

or I don't worry about it. ...Sometimes I strive for perfection because I'm trying to avoid pain.

7) Obsessive rumination - Most of the participants commented on their inability to "let go" or relax due to obsessive rumination or thinking about achieving perfection or avoiding mistakes. June said that it disrupts "being in her flow" in that she gets "hung up on details". Holly reported that she sometimes must go to sleep in order to avoid thinking too much about her mistakes, and that she finds it "extremely difficult to relax". Tina said,

It's irritating, like, I keep thinking "Oh I could have done it", or "Oh gee, I can't do it, and I really want to do it". It's just, like, it bothers you because sometimes you'll think about it, sometimes you'll stress over it, think about it for days, sometimes for an hour, sometimes... It's just... it's the thought in your head that continues to bug you.

8) Tunnel vision - All participants reported a tendency to have "tunnel vision", or the tendency to focus exclusively on one task or goal at the expense of others. As Bonnie and June noted for themselves, they mostly choose tasks they feel they will be best at. The participants said that tunnel vision produces a positive result for them in that it effectively limits how much striving for

perfection they can do. This in turn helps them to avoid feelings of being overwhelmed. However, tunnel vision also produces negative results in that it fosters an inability to deal with the multiplicity of life, and it causes neglect in certain areas of life.

9) Negative Emotions - The participants experienced many negative emotions in relation to perfectionism. Some negative emotions like anger, irritation, and feeling “bugged” resulted from experiencing too much cognitive dissonance. Others like hopelessness, frustration, and sadness resulted from the participants perception that they would never achieve their goals, or from becoming too identified with their perfectionism. For instance, Bonnie revealed this about her sense of becoming too identified with her perfectionism,

...perfectionism is based on continually denying your own limitations, and continually denying your own needs and even your desires to the point where you really lose track of who you are really. You constantly see yourself as just this, a possible ideal or a totally failure, and when you're in total failure mode you don't even want to identify with yourself at all because you feel so bad about yourself. So you have this fragmented self experience I think.

Main Category Six: Antecedents and Maintenance of Perfectionism.

This category expands on the information included in the “possible

antecedents for perfectionism” section of the FECP, and overlaps with the preceding main categories to the extent that it accurately describes what produces and maintains a Cognitive Diathesis for Perfectionism (CDP) and the process of perfectionism. This category accounts for participants’ views on which prebirth factors contributed to them becoming perfectionists, what aided in the development of their perfectionism, and what helps to maintain it. These include genetic and learning influences, and they are described in the following three subcategories.

Subcategory One: Genetic Influences - Evidence for a genetic component to perfectionism was that most of the participants mentioned that they had other perfectionists in their families of origin, and that these perfectionists were most likely one or both parents. Leanne said,

...I personally think perfectionism is genetic. Like, being a science major. I think everything’s genetic.

If Cognitive Diatheses for Perfectionism (CDPs) do exist they may be partially due to genes inherited for information processing and perceptual abilities. However, it is beyond the scope of this study to speculate on this further.

Subcategory Two: Learning Influences - Participants tended to cite reinforcement and modelling as aiding in both the development and maintenance of their perfectionism. Society tends to strongly reinforce perfectionism by both rewarding perfect results and punishing non-perfect results (Hollender, 1965). Participants listed many instances of this. Most of them indicated that they had family members or teachers that rewarded them if they fulfilled expectations of perfection, and punished them if they did not. For example, Holly told of her figure skating coach who is also a perfectionist. He made very high demands with regard to her skating, and was punitive when Holly did not measure up to his standards. Also, Richard said this of his father and mother,

When I was a child, my father had me do certain tasks that, if they weren't completed properly, and for him it was almost perfectly, then they had to be redone. So, one learns to do well or you end up losing time to play... ..my mother... If she gave me a task, and it wasn't filled to her expectations I would be hit. So you learned pretty quick to do things beyond what was expected.

It was also apparent that if participants were exposed to any modelling of reinforcement for perfectionism it strengthened their own perfectionism. In

other words, if they saw other people rewarded for achieving expectations of perfection or punished for not achieving them, they were more likely to internalize these expectations of perfection as their own ideals of perfection. For instance, Leanne saw a family member being rewarded for perfectionism so she adopted his behaviour for herself.

All of the participants said that they originally attempted to be perfect in order to gain rewards like acceptance, approval, attention, awards, and, most importantly, love. They also cited an avoidance of punishment like criticism, physical or psychological abuse, judgement, ridicule, etc. as a reason for trying to be perfect. Richard revealed an example of abuse when he said,

I can remember one particular example of [my mother] asking me to clean up something off the floor, and I remember sweeping something onto a piece of newspaper, and I folded it in such a way that I knew it couldn't be released. That wasn't good enough for her, and she proceeded to hit me because she was convinced that I could drop it again on the floor.

However, participants like Holly said they have now lost any sense of this and now attempt to be perfect for perfection's sake. In other words, they have forgotten what originally reinforced their perfectionism, and seem to have lost the ability to see any connection between perfectionism and external

reinforcement. They now strive for perfection because it is self-reinforcing, or because they can avoid self-punishment. It has become part of their belief system or identity. Holly said,

I don't spend a lot of time comparing myself to other people and I don't care what they think. You know what I mean? Like, it's what I have to do. And, it is because I have my own goals and standards, and really, what everyone else does is kind of irrelevant.

Tina said that she now engages in perfectionism because it is "what I like, it's what I'm used to...". June said "It's just who I am". This type of thinking explains why the participants tended to ignore diminishing returns.

Domains within which reinforcement and modelling occurred for the participants included social, educational, religious, workplace, artistic, and competitive sport domains. It appears that reinforcement and modelling received within these domains contributed to exacerbating the excessive striving associated with participants' perfectionism, and, as mentioned above, to a further strengthening of permanence for the content contained within certain ideals of perfection.

It seems that for some participants like Bonnie, Tina and Holly certain content has become so reinforced that they experience it as an absolute truth

or a permanent ideal of perfection. They no longer know the origins of this content but they adhere to it without fail. Bonnie explained her experience of it like this,

...it starts early when your parents, or somebody important in your life is really putting a lot of, like, demands on you, and then over time it seems their voice just kind of melds with your own self-voice. And then you are kind of putting those expectations on yourself.

In other words, Bonnie began to experience her ideals of perfection as part of the object of perfectionism or being a “perfectionist” rather than as part of being “engaged in the process of perfectionism”. This added more rigidity to her ideals and produced more of the black and white thinking that perfectionists typically engage in (Burns, 1980). Holly and Richard both said that they are very prone to engaging in black and white thinking and viewed this as contributing to a need for control.

Main Category Seven: Managing Perfectionism.

This final category summarizes all that the study participants did to manage their perfectionism and it has no equivalent in the FECF. It overlaps with the preceding main categories to the extent that managing perfectionism

moderates the effects of the CDP, the process of perfectionism, the cognitive responses to perfectionism, the consequences and correlates of perfectionism, and the antecedents and maintenance of perfectionism.

It seems the participants either coped with perfectionism, or attempted to temper it in some way. At this point the distinction should be made again between being a “perfectionist” or perfectionism as object, and “perfectionism” or perfectionism as process. The participants attributed permanence to perfectionism as object (i.e., being a perfectionist) and managed this by attempting to cope with it. They attributed impermanence to engaging in the process of perfectionism and managed this by attempting to temper it. To cope with something implies that one endures, survives, or struggles with something. To temper something implies that one regulates, controls, moderates, restrains or otherwise changes something. For this reason, strategies aimed at permanence or at being a “perfectionist” are best described as coping strategies. Strategies aimed at impermanence or engaging in the “process of perfectionism” are best described as tempering strategies.

It should be noted that neither coping nor tempering strategies have anything to do with changing perfectionism into non-perfectionism. Below are the subcategories that summarize these strategies. Each are aligned with either the core concept or one of the main categories.

Subcategory One: Cognitive Diathesis for Perfectionism (CDP) Strategies -

The CDP was the part of perfectionism participants saw as most difficult if not impossible to change. When pressed to be specific, most participants cited the perceptually driven, pattern manipulation aspect of their perfectionism as being most pervasive and unchangeable. In other words, they viewed the CDP as permanent rather than impermanent. Instances of this view of permanence were evident when Leanne saw her perfectionism as “genetic”, and June saw it as “...just the way I am, and always will be”. Because of this view that the CDP is permanent, strategies in this subcategory are referred to as coping strategies rather than tempering strategies. The participants reported that they were trying to cope with the permanent qualities of the CDP via three strategies.

First, participants coped by acquiescing to the inevitability of these permanent qualities, and did not resist them by way of attempting to make insurmountable changes. Second, they coped by cultivating self-acceptance. Holly did this by accepting there was a good reason for much of her perfectionist behaviour. She said,

...he [my brother] and I are very much alike, and he said “I felt a sense of not having to be so hard on myself whenever I fucked up”. You know what I mean?

It was like there was a reason. There was a reason for some of the problems I have. ...it's like knowing that there was some cause or connection for perhaps why, you know, you behave the way you do. Not to excuse it, but to understand it.

Third, the participants tended to reframe these frequently self-destructive qualities as useful. They said things to themselves like, "I don't need to try to change my perfectionism anymore", "I like myself this way", and/or "Perfectionism allows me to be really productive". June said,

I don't know, I find being able to be really key on details is a useful trait at times. As long as it doesn't, you know, go into a scary end. If you can channel it into what you actually need to do, it can really shape your work.

Richard remarked that he was a very prodigious pianist as a result of being a child perfectionist, and despite many hardships he experienced alongside this he is still not interested in losing any of these qualities. In fact, when all the participants were asked if they were interested in losing these qualities if it were possible, nobody was.

Subcategory Two: Ideals of Perfection Strategies - This subcategory describes

strategies directed at the first step in engaging in the process of perfectionism. Because participants attributed impermanence to this process they tended to use tempering strategies when managing it. Although it demands raised consciousness, and much willingness to do the work, participants thought that ideals of perfection are potentially changeable because they are somewhat “soft-wired” in or impermanent. As mentioned earlier, the formation of these ideals is highly influenced by learning, and the participants thought they could work on changing the content of most ideals by correcting or transforming what they had internalized earlier in their lives.

When the content of an ideal was seen as changeable (i.e., recognized as impermanent) and part of the process of learning, intervention via the employment of tempering strategies was evident for the participants. They did this by challenging and correcting or transforming the origins of their existing ideals of perfection. In other words, they took a creative approach to changing their ideals of perfection by testing what they had learned previously and changing any content they no longer believed was useful.

An example of changing inaccurate ideals was illustrated when Richard related that he used to have religious beliefs that compelled him to strive for a certain type of perfect morality. Now, although he still strives toward a type of perfect morality, it is a morality of his own creation. In other words, he

challenged and transformed the ideals of perfection he had internalized earlier in life from other people.

Although it may or may not be true in Richard's case, for some participants ideals of perfection sometimes took on permanence once their content had been corrected, adjusted, or transformed to reflect participants' preferences. In other words, for some participants ideals initially viewed as changeable eventually became perceived as immutable. For example, although Tina was willing to learn new housekeeping information at first, she is now unwilling to change the content of her ideal regarding housekeeping.

However it came about, in cases where the content of a certain ideal of perfection was perceived as unchangeable, participants tended to blur being a "perfectionist" with engaging in "perfectionism". This is because they experienced certain outcomes of learning (internalizations) as part of being a "perfectionist" (i.e., as being permanently hard-wired in like a CDP) rather than as the result of engaging in perfectionism. For this reason, intervening with these immutable ideals by employing tempering strategies directed at changing them was too formidable, and they did not even attempt it. Instead they took a more reactive approach in that they employed coping strategies similar to those used for coping with the CDP, i.e., they cultivated self-acceptance around their ideals, accepted the inevitability of them, or reframed

them as useful. For instance, Tina now sees her ideal regarding housekeeping as “just being there”, and she accepts it and sees it as useful.

Of note in the above examples is that the participants were not interested in changing the perfectionistic nature of their ideals even when they thought the content of their ideals was changeable. They may have transformed certain ideals content-wise (given that they had acquired new learning contrary to old internalizations), but they did not make them less perfectionistic. What this means in more specific terms is that while they may have been willing to challenge whether or not their current ideals continued to serve them, they were not willing to alter the fact that these ideals were complex, well-organized, and detailed patterns expectant of perfection. By not wanting to change the perfectionistic nature of their ideals they were trying not to “throw out the baby with the bathwater” in that they acknowledged that having perfectionistic ideals allows them many advantages.

Despite any appearances otherwise, it appears likely that, given the hard-wiredness of the CDPs that generate ideals of perfection, it is next to impossible for perfectionists to give up the perfectionistic nature of their ideals, i.e., it is impossible for them to throw the baby out with the bathwater. This was supported by the way in which perfectionists approach coping with, or tempering their ideals of perfection. If it were possible to make these ideals

less concerned with perfection, at least some of the participants would have been dealing with their perfectionism by attempting to so at the time of interviewing. None were.

The participants were all more interested in trying to either change the content of their ideals, or cultivate self-acceptance around the inevitability of both what they perceived to be their permanent ideals of perfection and the perfectionistic nature of these ideals. Examples of self-acceptance were when participants said that in order to relax about having ideals of perfection they occasionally said things to themselves like, "I expect a lot, and that's okay", or "Having high ideals makes me more productive".

One additional tempering strategy everyone engaged in was to downplay any importance they may place on a certain ideal. An example of downplaying the importance of certain ideals of perfection was revealed when June said she asks herself if meeting a certain ideal will be important in five years. If it will be she pursues it, if not she lets it go. Other participants implied they say, "What's the big deal", or "Let it go" when they want to downplay importance.

Subcategory Three: Striving for Perfection Strategies - As striving is also part of perfectionism as process, there were several tempering strategies participants employed in the area of striving for perfection. As striving results from the

drive perfectionists have to actualize patterns, it is the drive to generate or complete patterns that gets tempered.

Participants did this in several ways. First, they were selective about what they would spend their resources on in that they tended to focus their striving on what was most pressing for them. June was especially conscious of this. Second, they tended to limit resources like time, money, or energy such that their striving could be limited by external factors. For instance, Tina revealed that she left writing papers until the day before they were due so she could abbreviate the number of rewrites she would do. Finally, participants tried to remind themselves that there would be no external rewards for excessive striving, and that they could arbitrarily decide when they had done enough striving. June gave the following as an example,

I know in what I do there's some things I'm more perfectionistic in than others. Some things it seems more important, and some things it's more of a cost-benefit analysis. Is it really worth this amount of agony? So sometimes I find I can stop myself and say, "Okay you're really getting a little too focussed on details and you can take a step back and that's still okay."

Leanne talked about limiting her striving in relation to her tendency to resist entropy. First she said,

Everyone's trying to avoid entropy but I'm just more extreme I think. ...I carry lists with me wherever I go. My routine is very important. If something interferes with it really knocks me off balance.

Then Leanne said she realizes that resisting entropy is an infinite and impossible task, i.e., "bottomless pit" so she must consciously limit her attempts to resist it or she will strive to an unmanageable excess.

Subcategory Four: Evaluating for Perfection Strategies - Evaluating their efforts negatively also motivated participants to temper their perfectionism. If they could evaluate their efforts as successful they might experience satisfaction or cognitive consonance. This of course would lead to cessation of excessive striving toward perfection. However, as perfection rarely exists, or as the participants would argue, does not exist at all, it was very difficult for them to evaluate their efforts as successful and they continued to strive. All participants attested to some form of this.

What some participants like Richard and Bonnie did to temper evaluating for perfection was to try and evaluate their efforts in terms of what is excellent rather than what is perfect. In other words, they tried to lower any performance expectations by consciously "striving for excellence" instead of striving for perfection. Although this did not change their existing ideals of

perfection, it gave them permission not to achieve them. Subsequently, they were able to experience less cognitive dissonance, less excessive striving, and more satisfaction. They were also less likely to “set the bar higher to infinity” because they had imposed artificial limits on what is achievable. Bonnie had this to say about striving for excellence versus striving for perfection,

...the pursuit of excellence is so much more rewarding than the pursuit of perfection, and there's a real difference between them. ...I think it's really great to try to achieve excellence in your life. Maybe that's part of being human, and that's a really good thing. That keeps me moving forward and stuff. Um, but when you actually pursue perfection you're not really pursuing anything that exists really. It's almost life denying in a weird sort of way. ...I think in our culture it's [perfectionism] really identified as a positive, life affirming kind of approach. But I don't think it is. I think [striving for] excellence is so much better.

Subcategory Five: Cognitive Responses to Perfectionism Strategies - The participants did not attempt to manage their positive cognitive responses to perfectionism as these responses did not create problems. However, the negative response of cognitive dissonance did cause problems like excessive striving or addictive striving, and this response was mostly managed via the

above tempering strategies aimed at evaluating for perfection. As participants' cognitive dissonance resulted from evaluating achievements as "imperfect", the only way to remove it was to strive for excellence rather than perfection.

For the times that they were unable to temper evaluating for perfection and they experienced cognitive dissonance they either employed coping strategies or succumbed to perpetuating the process of perfectionism. Leanne and Bonnie described these coping strategies in terms of acceptance, and in terms of nonresistance to these feelings. They tried to adopt an "If you can't beat it, join it" attitude.

Subcategory Six: Distal Consequences and Correlates of Perfectionism

Strategies - The participants were not really encouraged to disclose what they did to cope or temper the distal consequences and correlates of their perfectionism as this represented a dissertation topic in itself. Suffice it to say that managing perfectionism is to some extent managing its consequences and correlates. It was beyond the scope of this study to get into detail regarding the management of things like depression, eating disorders, low self-esteem, relationship problems, etc. However, it is prudent to mention that the participants reported that they tend to work on lessening their need for approval in order to temper any fear of failure. They also said that they try to

cultivate more acceptance of disorder in order to temper any intolerance of chaos. As trying to exert control over chaos was usually more stressful and resulted in resistance from others, those that cultivated acceptance were more successful at tempering any intolerance of chaos.

Subcategory Seven: Antecedents and Maintenance Strategies - Participants employed several coping and tempering strategies in response to their genetic and learning influences. Mostly they coped with their genetics by nurturing acceptance or nonresistance. Holly said that this about how acceptance and nonresistance helps her,

...instead of internally, um, like beating yourself up, it's like knowing that there was some external cause or connection for perhaps why, you know, you behave the way you do. Not to excuse it but to understand it.

Several participants tempered their learning influences by way of self-reinforcement. For instance, Bonnie and Leanne consciously rewarded themselves for non-perfectionist behaviours, and did not accept punishment for non-perfectionist behaviours. Some of the participants like Bonnie also encouraged themselves to regard those who strive for excellence as better role models than those who strive for perfection. In other words, they were

challenging the *status quo* for themselves. They did not see trying to change society as a option as this required more than they could give. However, Leanne did say that she was going to dedicate much of her time trying to “make the world a better place”.

Summary

The above core concept, main categories, and subcategories represent a successful “fleshing out” of the theoretical “skeleton” put forward in the Framework for Evaluating Conceptualizations of Perfectionism (FECF). The core concept “Cognitive Diathesis for Perfectionism” (CDP), and the seven main categories “Ideals of Perfection”, “Striving for Perfection”, “Evaluating for Perfection”, “Cognitive Responses to Perfectionism”, “Distal Consequences and Correlates of Perfectionism”, “Antecedents and Maintenance of Perfectionism”, and “Managing Perfectionism” all contain new information from that provided in the FECF. In the next chapter the participants will be profiled according to their unique contributions to each category.

CHAPTER SIX: PARTICIPANT PROFILES

Participant Profiles According to Concept or Category

As reported in the previous chapter on research paradigm and methodology, there were six participants interviewed in this study. The following are profiles for each interviewee. In order to preserve confidentiality each participant has been given a pseudonym. Each profile is organized such that it outlines how each interviewee viewed herself or himself in relation to the core concept and each of the main categories that emerged during the first stage of analysis.

Interviewee One: June

Cognitive Diathesis for Perfectionism (CDP).

June, a student in her twenties, reported that her perfectionism is always present. She said that it is mostly a visual tendency, and that it is central to her perfectionism. She described it as a “a perceptual filter”, and said that she is very observant. She filters for overall patterns or trends (categories, matrices, etc.), and notices details that either do not fit or are missing from them, i.e., they look “not finished”. She especially does this in relation to text.

June saw perfectionism as a background element of her identity that

“informs how some things are done”. She did not see it as necessary so much as “just the way I am”. She said, “If it is who you are then by default it becomes necessary”. Although she considered it a moot question because she does not see the possibility of changing something so seemingly permanent, if she could change her perfectionism she would change it in relation to other people (e.g., by being less rigid).

Ideals of Perfection.

June described her perfectionism in terms of “being uncompromising in standards and quality”. She reported that she does not consciously set goals or standards, and that she just generally “wants to do well”. She distinguishes this from wanting to do things “right”. When pushed she said “top ten’s good” and that she expects A’s at school. When asked if she sees patterns in terms of being ideals she said “yes”.

Striving for Perfection.

June described her striving for perfection as part of her “way of being” (i.e., as being authentic or being true to her potential), and she does not necessarily think of it in terms of being aimed at perfection. However, an extrapolation that can be made from various parts of the interview is that her

striving for perfection can be characterized best by that striving which results from her self-professed tendency to utilize her “perceptual [pattern] filter”. For example, it follows that when she is forming an ideal for how text should look and she is striving to create this, these actions as well as any related actions may be labelled “striving for perfection”.

June was insistent that her perfectionism is a process, and striving for perfection could very well be the visible manifestations or action component of this process, that is, the epiphenomenality of the Cognitive Diathesis for Perfectionism (CDP). June reported that she thinks her perfectionism is selective rather than all-encompassing. She said that she does not strive for perfection in all areas. June also described her striving for perfection as being “on a continuum” (a matter of intensity) rather than being “on” or “off”.

Evaluating for Perfection.

June reported that she tends to evaluate herself harshly. Nothing is ever good enough. She said she uses her perceptual filter to decide what “looks wrong” in the ideals or patterns she is assessing. She said she is “bugged” by what looks wrong, and anything that contains mistakes or flaws is considered imperfect.

Cognitive Responses to Perfectionism.

The above feeling of being “bugged” when something does not look right is something that June termed discomfort or “cognitive dissonance”. She said that she feels this whenever she evaluates something as imperfect because it conflicts with her belief that everything should be perfect. Also, she said that however she evaluates her achievements she always wonders if she should not have “set the bar higher”, and this causes cognitive dissonance. For example, if she gets an A at school she wonders if she should not have gone for an A+, and this causes her dissatisfaction.

June tends to avoid looking back at her work because she always finds something she would change. She continues to screen for flaws because she believes there is always room for improvement. June expects that things must always represent “my maximum effort given my current resources. And so, part of the discomfort associated with looking back and detecting more flaws may result from the fact that it renews the possibility of more resources becoming available and more striving for perfection becoming necessary. Of note here is that June is only satisfied with calling something “finished” when she runs out of the resources (time, energy, space, etc.) to strive further. Otherwise, it is possible she could be driven to continue striving indefinitely.

In other words, if untempered by a lack of resources, her process of

evaluation tends to interact with her achievements to force a continuous setting of higher ideals to the point where they become unreachable. This is a “setting the bar higher to infinity” phenomenon, and June reported that she continues to strive even when her ideals are set at unreachable levels. She said that it is hard for her to reveal “works in progress” to anyone (i.e., first drafts of her thesis to her supervisor) because she is always looking to improve them first.

Distal Consequences and Correlates of Perfectionism.

June saw perfectionism as “only leading to something negative”, and wondered if it is a pathology. June mentioned tendencies toward procrastination, self-handicapping, and depression as negative effects of her perfectionism. June speculated that there may be links between competitiveness and her perfectionism, and self-handicapping behaviour and her perfectionism.

In addition to this, June described “being in her flow” as those times when she is able to let go and allow everything to “fall into place”. She said that perfectionism interferes with her flow in that it causes her to exert too much control over her life thereby disallowing her to “let go”. She did note, however, that she knows when she can exert control and when she cannot.

When she does have control she chooses whether or not to exercise her “perfectionism drive” for striving toward perfection.

Antecedents and Maintenance of Perfectionism.

June described her mother as a perfectionist. She said that she thinks she inherited and learned some of her perfectionism from her mother. She also said that she thinks that there is a lot of social conditioning and reinforcement for perfectionism present in society (especially at work and at school) along with a certain amount of self-reinforcement for it. She wondered if there is a genetic component to perfectionism in that perfectionists might be born with a more sensitive sensory system (especially visual).

June thought that other people probably expect some degree of perfectionism in her work, i.e., her mother probably expects her to be tidier, etc., and this helps to maintain it. More accurately, she felt that people expect her to be consistent, but she was unsure as to whether or not this involves her perfectionism. These expectations influence her expectations of others in that she tends to expect consistency and perfection of others in the workplace. This is especially true if she is responsible for their actions by way of supervising them, etc.

Managing Perfectionism.

June saw some rigidity to her perfectionism, especially when it is aimed at what is important to her. However, she said she tends to temper her reactions to imperfection according to her resources (i.e., energy, time, space), and according to whether it is useful (i.e., of social importance) to react. If her resources and the usefulness are high enough she strives to put things into place or otherwise operate on them to a perfect resolution. If they are not, she tries to ask herself questions like, “Will this really matter in five years?”, or, “Isn’t this good enough for now?”. She also likes to consider the principle of diminishing returns, i.e., “Will the continuing rewards equal the continuing effort in this case?”. Basically, she goes through a tempering and/or prioritizing process. Of interest here is that she must engage in this process in order to resist her automatic impulses to evaluate for perfection via focussing on details and/or flaws. As she must temper her perfectionism using a conscious awareness, this means that it is the perfectionism rather than the tempering that comes naturally.

Miscellaneous.

June had a “quibble” with the definition of perfectionism put forward in the screening questionnaire and it concerned the word “unacceptable”. She

said she has a strong agenda about what is perfect and what is not, but she does not necessarily regard all non-perfection as unacceptable. Something can be evaluated as imperfect but still be acceptable. Also, in some ways June thought she was being self-righteous in her perfectionism because there is the possible implication that having high standards somehow makes you a better person than others. However, she decided that this is dangerous thinking as it may reinforce her perfectionism if she perpetuates it.

Interviewee Two: Bonnie

Cognitive Diathesis for Perfectionism (CDP).

Bonnie, a student in her early twenties, accepted the definition of perfectionism in the screening questionnaire. Perfectionism for her “boils down to a tendency or predisposition to imagine utopic ideals”. She agreed that it is “hard-wired” in and unchangeable. She described her perfectionism as a constantly present, “fearful, driven thing” that feels like “a closed fist”.

Ideals of Perfection.

Bonnie described her goals and standards as “utopic ideals based on fantasy”. When asked if she “shoulds on herself” she said yes, and that this is related to her tendency to strive toward making her life congruent with utopic

ideals. In effect the “shoulds” are her ideals, and they are synonymous with goals, standards and expectations aimed at perfection.

Bonnie reported when she is exercising her perfectionism she is in “idealizing mode”, and she called this her “Anne of Green Gables effect”. She also said that she is not present to the moment, and that her ideal self is divided from her real self. She describes this as “a fragmented life experience” in which she feels separated from her body, her own “sentience”. She is in denial of her limitations, and ignores her reality-based needs and desires in pursuit of something she admits does not really exist, that is, perfection.

With regard to others’ ideals, Bonnie said that she does not expect others to have ideals of perfection. However, she reported that she occasionally gets overly critical of those closest to her (e.g., her boyfriend), and that she makes a conscious effort to minimize this.

Striving for Perfection.

Bonnie described her striving for perfection as “an accommodation of any drive toward achieving her utopic ideals”. She described several ways in which her perfectionism manifests itself via her behaviour. She likes to schedule and organize, make charts that allow her to tick off items as she gets them done, make incredibly neat notes, etc. Most of this is directed at

“putting a structure on” her drive toward the ideal. She sees striving for perfection as a contextualization of perfectionism. She says it makes up the content of perfectionism as a process and is the tangible expression of perfectionism.

Bonnie saw selectivity in her perfectionism in that she either does things full out or she avoids them all together (a form of “black and white” selectivity). She said her avoidance is usually based on the absence of ability in that she is attracted to things she knows she is good at, and she avoids things she is not good at. Because she does not like to put herself in the vulnerable position of not knowing how things will turn out, she also tends to avoid things for which her abilities are unknown. Paradoxically however, if Bonnie is forced to do something she is not good at (like taking math as a university prerequisite), she strives for perfection more excessively because her feelings of vulnerability cause her to desire more control over the situation.

Evaluating for Perfection.

Bonnie reported that she has been “intensely critical” of herself, and uses her perfectionism as a “binary” (i.e., all or nothing) “sorting device” for evaluation. She uses it to sort out whether or not her reality is congruent with her utopic ideals. In other words, she evaluates things as “perfect” or

“imperfect”, and she evaluates herself such that she either succeeds or fails. Because her expectations are usually tied to an unreachable ideal, she usually assigns a verdict of “imperfect” to her efforts and it is impossible for her to feel as though she has succeeded.

One particularly insightful observation that Bonnie made about evaluating for perfection was that perfectionists are really “imperfectionists” because they do not focus on perfection but instead focus on flaws or mistakes. She said that individuals have to be able to identify flaws if they are going to be able to evaluate whether or not there is a match between ideals and achievements, and that this is the only way they can determine whether perfection has been achieved.

One other aspect of evaluating for perfection that Bonnie noticed was that even if she meets higher and higher expectations, she is seldom able to celebrate her accomplishments because they do not necessarily represent perfection. Bonnie described how she has a hard time enjoying her successes because she is already thinking about achieving the next ones. Even when she wins awards she is not convinced that she has done her best and she discounts them. If she ever achieves her ideals she wonders if her successes were not “flukes” (“What if I can’t do it again?”), and must prove to herself that she can repeat the feat.

Cognitive Responses to Perfectionism.

As she most often evaluates her accomplishments as “lacking”, Bonnie said she repeatedly experiences the discomfort or cognitive dissonance she has come to associate with “that gut feeling of failure”. She in turn associates this with having “expectations that do not match my actual capabilities”. Although she said she is now trying to evaluate herself in a less black and white manner she has gone through her life on a “24/7 basis” feeling like she “doesn’t measure up” or feeling like a failure. Because of this tendency to see most of her accomplishments in terms of failure, Bonnie said that she sees perfectionism as negative. She said that the emotional fallout is very uncomfortable in that you feel bad about yourself all the time.

Something else to do with cognitive dissonance that Bonnie experienced with regard to her method of evaluating was that it causes her to feel like she is taking what she is good at for granted. She is too busy focussing on her cognitive dissonance to acknowledge her successes. What is specifically responsible for this is her tendency to discount her efforts as nonrepresentative of perfection. Being “good” at something is not being perfect, and being good therefore gets dismissed as “not good enough”. This causes her to experience cognitive dissonance which in turn motivates excessive striving for perfection.

In addition to the above, Bonnie reported that her cognitive dissonance

very often appears when she has to assert her worth based on who she is rather than on what she has accomplished. She thinks that people are mostly judged on externals, and feels uncomfortable when she does not have enough “laurels to rest on” when presenting herself to others. This accounts for some of her drive to actualize her ideals or strive for perfection, because if she achieves this she can avoid the cognitive dissonance associated with not being more visibly perfect. The only problem is that she thinks perfection does not exist so for her striving becomes incessant, or at the very least, excessive.

To summarize Bonnie’s cognitive responses to perfectionism, she tends to experience cognitive dissonance after evaluating for perfection for two reasons. First, she detects a mismatch between her utopian ideals and what she has actually accomplished, and she feels like a failure. Second, she fulfils some of her expectations but does not see these accomplishments as representative of perfection, and takes them for granted. Both outcomes motivate her toward more striving for perfection.

Distal Consequences and Correlates of Perfectionism.

Bonnie reported that she suffers from a lot of self doubt and has low self esteem because of feeling like a failure all the time. However, she noted that her perfectionism sometimes brings results and that this productivity is useful

for bolstering her self esteem. Another consequence of Bonnie's perfectionism is that she has a "fear of being average". Because she said she experiences her perfectionism as "that fearful driven thing that feels like a closed fist", it is safe to assume that it is reactive for her. Her perfectionism has put her in the position of having to defend herself against cognitive dissonance (or in this case fear) rather than in the more proactive position of pursuing cognitive consonance.

Bonnie also said that her perfectionism has produced in her a need for "being in control". She equates not meeting her ideals as being equal to chaos, and thinks that engaging in perfectionism represents an attempt to gain control over chaos. Bonnie described her past family life as being very chaotic, and because of her perfectionism she developed anorexia nervosa as a way of trying to achieve control in her life during those times. However, she is trying to not let her perfectionism push her to these lengths and is now trying to let go of her need for control.

Antecedents and Maintenance of Perfectionism.

Bonnie said she thinks of her perfectionism as part of her identity and/or "world view". She also said that she sees it as a product of learning, and noted that "society tends to reward perfectionism". Bonnie noted that her father had

the expectation that she be perfect, and that she has “really internalized the expectations of a Protestant work ethic”. She said she values what others think, and she is afraid that others will judge her as she judges herself. She said that “to be exceptional is to avoid being judged in a critical or punitive way”.

Bonnie said that she believes that her perfectionism is totally self-directed, but because she also believes that “the voice of others eventually melds with one’s own voice” this opens up the possibility that her perfectionism was internalized from others (especially because she thinks her perfectionism is fear-based or based on avoiding criticism). Bonnie said she requires herself to be exceptional because of that “fearful, driven thing” that makes her feel like she is on a treadmill trying to maximize her potential, and partly because she has that “fear of being average”. These beliefs presently serve to negatively reinforce and maintain her perfectionism.

Managing Perfectionism.

Bonnie saw her perfectionism as something she can cope with and temper, but not as something that will disappear over time (despite her best efforts in treatment for her eating disorder). Her ideas fit with a diathesis-stress perspective in that she thinks her perfectionism is more likely to flare up

in times of stress, especially if she is feeling the need to exert control over her life. In other words, Bonnie said she thinks that stress exacerbates the effects of perfectionism. Behaving like a perfectionist is her dominant automatic response to stressful situations. She would probably agree that to reduce her stress levels is also to treat her perfectionism.

When asked if she sees a difference between striving for excellence and perfectionism, Bonnie said “yes”. Striving for excellence is positive, and perfectionism is negative. She said she tries to temper her perfectionism by being conscious of the difference between it and striving for excellence, and by consciously choosing the latter whenever possible. Bonnie saw the main difference between the two as being concerned with whether or not one is engaged with reality, i.e., “meeting the world as opposed to fantasy”, “fantasy” meaning the ideal. When she is able to strive for excellence she feels more connected with reality, is able to set realistic goals and meet them, and has a sense of being in her body and present to the process. Bonnie saw this as part of being human, as life affirming, and saw perfectionism as the opposite.

Interviewee Three: Leanne

Cognitive Diathesis for Perfectionism (CDP).

Leanne, a student in her late teens, agreed with the dictionary definition

of perfectionism on the screening questionnaire. Because she thought that perfectionism is somewhat genetic she also agreed that it is “hard-wired in” or permanent. She said there is an element of compulsion involved, and that perfectionism is not something you can change. “Perfectionism is something one can only cope with.”

Leanne attributed her tendency for taking things to the extreme in part to a predisposition for sensitivity. She described herself as an “over-sensitive”, emotional person who “over-analyses everything”. She said she is “a more sensitive instrument perceptually”, and saw this as part of the genetic component of her perfectionism. She likened this predisposition with that of having oncogenes for cancer present in one’s body. Oncogenes may or may not be expressed depending upon one’s lifestyle. What she meant by this is that for her stress activates a permanent predisposition that she is now coming to label “perfectionism” or “that thing on my back”, and that stress serves to heighten its effects.

Ideals of Perfection.

Leanne said that she thinks “perfectionism is expectations... the higher your expectations are, the more perfect you think you have to be”. Leanne used the word “expectations” where others might use the words “ideals”,

“goals”, or “standards”. She said she used to have very high expectations of herself, i.e., higher than most people, but she is now trying to lower them. What she used to do was form ideals by eliminating what is not her ideal, i.e., by using her evaluative sorting device to determine what was acceptable and what was not, and by adopting that which was acceptable as her ideal. She said she wants “everything in its place”.

Leanne said her current ideals are fixed or rigid in the moment, but are open to shifting in the long term. One example of this is that although she is not flexible about whether or not she must volunteer for organizations which “make everything in the world better”, she is flexible about which organizations she chooses to volunteer with. In other words, the content of her ideals is flexible but not their perfectionistic nature.

Striving for Perfection.

Leanne reported that she has a drive to maximize her potential, and she admitted to striving for perfection beyond diminishing returns. One example of this striving is that she has been excessive about running. She said she used to run “farther, and farther, and farther...”. Another example is that Leanne plans or schedules her day to extreme, makes lists, and appears impatient to others, especially with regard to being on task. She said she strives to the

extreme to be in control, and many of her actions are aimed at avoiding entropy and imposing structure on her life. However, Leanne admitted that she “can’t do it all”, and this makes her striving somewhat selective in that she chooses where to direct her energy and how intensely she will strive.

Evaluating for Perfection.

Although Leanne was not sure she is still a perfectionist, she knows she used to be one because she was always “unsatisfied” [sic] with everything. Nothing was ever good enough, and she expected a lot from herself and others. In fact, she used to be described by others as “hard to please”. Leanne admitted that when she was “definitely a perfectionist” she used to set ideals, and then compare them with her reality in order to evaluate whether or not she had reached them. She hardly every reached her ideals, and evaluation was used as a pushing off point for further striving toward them, i.e., her perfectionism was a sorting device for evaluating things, and determining if further striving was needed. Even if she did achieve her ideal, she would immediately “set the bar higher”. She described this process as a motivating force, and a “competition with myself in my brain”. Leanne acknowledged that one can “set the bar higher to infinity”, and in so doing create the potential for infinite failure because one can never “arrive” or get everything

right once and for all.

Cognitive Responses to Perfectionism.

Leanne described her cognitive responses to perfectionism as feelings of being “very irritated”, and agreed that the term “cognitive dissonance” is a good descriptor for what she feels. She said she experiences cognitive dissonance when she does not get the perfect results she desires, and that it motivates her to perpetuate the process of perfectionism. She also said that she rarely feels satisfaction as a result of engaging in perfectionism.

Distal Consequences and Correlates of Perfectionism.

Leanne saw perfectionism as having a positive effect in that it drives her to keep moving, and to be more energetic, active and helpful. However, Leanne viewed some of her perfectionistic behaviours as self-punishing and as symptomatic of self-hate. She also saw perfectionism as a catalyst for being too selfish or self-focussed and for having tunnel vision. Leanne agreed her experience of it can be similar to having a brain glitch (*a la* obsessive-compulsive thinking) in that it causes her to be “like a fly at a light” repeatedly striving beyond what is reasonable.

Leanne reported she has had both food and exercise addictions, and

thinks these were caused by her perfectionism. She also had an eating disorder (which was accompanied by depression) that became like an addiction in that she used purging for stress reduction, i.e., pain relief. Although it was also a way of taking control, it was mainly a way to purge emotions brought on by thinking it necessary to be perfect. She said she thinks that perfectionism can be an addiction in itself and experiences it as such. This is because striving relentlessly toward perfection helps her to avoid the discomfort associated with failing to achieve the ideal, and she gets caught in a pain avoidance cycle.

Another way to explain this is that there is pain avoidance in striving for perfection and this leads to a vicious cycle of striving for the ideal, pain when the ideal is not achieved, more striving toward the ideal, more pain, etc. (i.e., a self-perpetuating process of payoffs that replaces diminishing returns). Leanne associated her pain (i.e., cognitive dissonance or depression) with feeling out of control and feeling hopeless about never arriving at perfection. She thought that her striving is an attempt to regain control, and to avoid depression. In other words, it was self-medicating. She also thought that this process has become normalized over time for her, and is transferable from one domain to another when all attempts to regain control or achieve perfection in a certain domain fail.

Antecedents and Maintenance of Perfectionism.

Leanne thought that perfectionism is partly genetic, and is a precursor to other conditions. She described her mother as controlling and her father as a “workaholic”. She also thought that perfectionism is partly a product of learning and acknowledges contributing factors in the environment. She said she thinks perfectionism is reinforced by society, and in her case, by her family and the expectations they place on her. Leanne said that “everyone has a component of perfectionism” because of media and societal influences. However, some people including her are willing to go to extreme great lengths to win the approval of others (especially in relation to her grandparents).

Leanne agreed that her developmental process has not been remarkable in that it is similar to what others have experienced. She described it linearly in the following way: she internalizes external expectations which then become directed at herself, and which then become directed at others. In the context of perfectionism Leanne reported that she takes this process to the extreme in two ways: 1) she chooses to perceive the expectations she is internalizing as being expectant of the ideal, and 2) she is compelled to strive for what become unreasonably high expectations of herself. She does not strive for perfection in order to get external rewards. Instead she does it in order to avoid being dissatisfied with herself or to avoid experiencing cognitive dissonance. In other

words, she engages in negative self-reinforcement.

Managing Perfectionism.

Leanne said she uses understanding, awareness, and reframing to help her cope with perfectionism. She tries to be grateful for what she has. She also reassures herself continuously, tries to be more “laid back”, less engaged in worrying about the little things (by asking herself, “Does it really matter?”), and works on surrendering to the fact that she will never “arrive”, i.e., achieve perfection. She said she imposes a limit on what is “good enough” and uses this as a “letting go point”. In addition to this, she allows that everyone is different, and she tries to be more accepting and less impatient with others by being more process-oriented and less task-oriented. She said she is also finding it useful to lower her expectations, i.e., evaluate herself in terms of realistic expectations (like whether or not she is contributing to society) rather than evaluating herself according to unrealistic expectations.

On a more practical level, Leanne revealed she uses balancing behaviours like bath-taking and socializing to help her feel calm, and she uses strategies like patterning her day or planning a daily routine to reduce uncertainty. She said these only work to a degree in that if something out of the ordinary happens like her alarm not going off in the morning, she is knocked off balance

and finds it hard to recover for the rest of the day.

Interviewee Four: Tina

Cognitive Diathesis for Perfectionism (CDP).

Tina, a student in her early twenties, sees the core of her perfectionism as a permanent predisposition of some sort. She said that it is a “filtering, sorting out thing” that processes according to “subjective ideals”.

Ideals of Perfection.

Tina said that “perfection is the ideal”. She also said, “This ideal that I’m thinking, or that I’m trying to reach, it’s created me, it’s ruled what I’ve done. Like, the basis for action is based on it.” Tina reported that she does not see her ideals as “too high” because they seem ordinary. She describes them mostly in terms of having “everything in its place”, and having “things done in a certain way”. She said she likes things “ordered” and “logical”, and her ideals reflect this. She admitted that some of her ideals are “beyond being human”, and that she thinks her idea of a perfect ideal is “higher than the average person’s”.

Tina equated her ideals with goals, standards or expectations. She admitted to a certain amount of restrictiveness, harshness, and rigidity

surrounding her ideals (i.e., black-and-white thinking), but defended this by saying that they are usually based on factual information gained from reading. She believes there are absolute truths backed up by science, and this contributes to the rigidity of her ideals. Tina said she knows she is a perfectionist as a result of how others react to her when she imposes her rigid ideals on them. She said she is always “driving everybody crazy” with suggestions as to how they might do things better.

Striving for Perfection.

As Tina thought that perfection is the ideal, she also thought that perfectionism is striving toward the ideal. She said she strives toward her ideals by thinking about or doing things “to the best of her abilities”, especially when maintaining her household or playing computer games. She said that one specific method for trying to get the best out of herself is to maximize control over her day by planning everything in one hour blocks. She even plans her spontaneity! Tina agreed that she is probably more extreme than others in her need for control and that much of her striving is aimed at being in control. She does not like chaos, and when asked if she would agree she is avoiding entropy by striving for perfection, she said “to some degree yes”.

Evaluating for Perfection.

Tina said she has an automatic tendency to compare objects and people against her ideal of what is ordered and logical. She looks for flaws, and may notice flaws that others do not notice. She said that if there are no flaws, and order or logic have been achieved, then she has matched her ideal. This is the only time she will not focus on flaws. She admitted that she hardly ever matches her ideal, and when she does, she is always immediately reaching for the next level, especially if she has access to the resources necessary for doing so. Tina said she has a tendency to “second-guess” herself, and takes extra time to redo things over and over until she “gets it right”. However, she believes she can always do better, even when things are “right” for now. Although she may occasionally bask in her perfection, she reported that evaluation is hardly ever used for achieving a sense of completion. It is instead used as an indicator for where striving for perfection should be directed next.

Cognitive Responses to Perfectionism.

Tina saw her perfectionism as negative for several reasons. First, she said she engages in perfectionism for “inner satisfaction”, and she “gets really annoyed” or “irritated” when she cannot reach her ideals via herself or another person. She agreed that this type of pain can be described as cognitive

dissonance, and that she engages in perfectionism to avoid cognitive dissonance. She noted that she is coming to rely more and more on this type of pain avoidance.

Second, Tina said she “stresses over” not being able to realize her ideals, and thinks or worries about them for days via obsessive thinking, another type of cognitive dissonance. Tina said one “side-effect” of this is that others tend to get annoyed with her. This in turn interferes with her ideal of who she wants to be, and so she experiences even more cognitive dissonance thereby exacerbating what appears to be a vicious cycle that produces excessive striving.

Distal Consequences and Correlates of Perfectionism.

Tina reported that her self-esteem is affected in a negative way when she finds she does not have the “willpower” to continue striving toward her unreachable ideals. She also finds that her self esteem is affected when others get annoyed with her for being a perfectionist, and that she tends to have relationship problems as a result.

When Tina was asked, “How are you with procrastination?” Tina said, “I’m bad with it.”, and attributed this to her perfectionism. She said she does not want to face feeling dissatisfied with her achievements so she avoids doing things. Tina said she sees perfectionism as very likely to produce negative

consequences and thinks it should be labelled a pathology. However, she did not like the negative connotations of this label.

Antecedents and Maintenance of Perfectionism.

Unlike the other participants Tina did not strongly attribute her perfectionism to family influences. However, she did say that being a middle child made her want to stand out, and she would attempt to do this by trying to “do everything right”. Tina said she used to strive for perfection to make sure that people liked and noticed her. Although she agreed that she engaged in perfectionism as a child for acceptance and approval, she said she no longer does it for those reasons.

Tina said that she now engages in perfectionism because it is “what I like, it’s what I’m used to...” and she is not willing to give it up. She said that she thinks striving to be perfect makes you a better person (unless you impose your perfectionism on others), and that it is reinforcing in that it reinforces her belief that people should “be the best they can be”.

Managing Perfectionism.

Tina reported that she reads a lot on the subject of perfectionism in order to better understand it, and generally tries to let go of things that “bug”

her. In other words, she tries to give up control, or tries to lessen her obsessive thinking by distracting herself. She says, "Hey, I'm only human", but refers to this as an "excuse for making mistakes". She added that saying she is only human lessens her annoyance and irritation until her thinking eventually drifts back to wanting to be perfect.

Another thing Tina said she does to temper her perfectionism involves limiting her resources, i.e., time, materials, etc. For example, she uses procrastination to limit her tendency to redo things to extreme (i.e., she uses it as a containment, or tempering device for her perfectionism). In order to avoid striving beyond diminishing returns she will leave writing a paper until she has time to do only so many rewrites.

Tina makes a distinction between striving for perfection and striving for excellence in that she thinks one can actually achieve excellence. She said that she believes people are left with more positive emotions when striving for excellence, and she uses this belief as motivation for lowering her standards. She said that consciously lowering her standards allows her to experience more success, and that she is less obsessive about "getting things right".

Tina thought that her perfectionism sometimes causes stress rather than relieving it. She said it can create the chaos she is trying to avoid or control, and that this is when she is more likely to impose her perfectionism on other

people by “blowing up”. Tina said she used to think she had 95% control over events by engaging in perfectionism. She now thinks she has about 80% control, because she is going for less perfectionism. She sees this as “giving in just a little bit”. When asked if she thinks there might be a diathesis-stress explanation for how and when her perfectionism gets activated she agreed that there could be. Despite all of the above Tina noted that she copes better with her perfectionism than she would with the results of not being a perfectionist. In saying this she forgot to acknowledge that nonperfect results would not bother her if she were not a perfectionist.

Interviewee Five: Richard

Cognitive Diathesis for Perfectionism (CDP).

Richard, a pianist and artist in his mid forties, said he sees perfectionism as both process and object. He takes a philosophical approach in reasoning that if there is an “imminence to life” (an “imminent perfection”), and we are just striving for what is already there, this “imminence is part of a core perfectionism”. In contrast to this, he said he sees his life as a process, and thus he is “perfectionism-ing”, i.e., in the process of striving for perfection, “something not distinguishable from imminence itself”. Richard agreed that this process might include an ideals>striving>evaluation triad, and that it

might result from a stable, permanent disposition.

Richard reported that he thinks perfectionism is rational rather than emotional, and agreed it could be a cognitive diathesis that is hard-wired in. When asked about his core perfectionism Richard described the following tendency: For whatever he is working with, be it tangible or intangible, he is compelled to screen for patterns, impose patterns where they are lacking, and form structure. Richard said that perfectionism pervades most of his life, and that he is aware of having a daily “all pervading need to have things right... put in place, in order.”

Ideals of Perfection.

Richard described himself as an “idealist”. He said that because he is idealistic, he cannot work from within a non-idealistic framework. He said that he sometimes thinks of his life as one giant “macro-ideal in on-going formation”. Richard described its development in terms of onion-layering or 3-D mapping. Within this macro-ideal he said he sets very specific, often well researched micro-ideals that are grounded in experience, and he admits that he finds it difficult to apply them unless he has a clear understanding of what they are and how they fit into a larger context. He said his newly formed ideals are quite often the result of using some sort of patterning system, and any research

leading to the formation of an ideal involves assessment, concrete analysis, and critical evaluation.

Because he believes in the interconnectedness of everything, and that there is an organizing force within the universe, it is no surprise that he also believes in the possibility of imminent, absolute truths, things that are a priori, archetypes, and Platonian concepts or ideals. These beliefs seem to contribute to any rigidity around his ideals because his ideals become “just the way it is” rather than arbitrarily chosen by him. In contrast to this, some of the theories Richard said he has studied state there are few things which are really perfect. Given this, he knows most of his attempts to strive for perfection are ill-conceived. This is because such striving would involve “setting the bar higher to infinity” because the ideal he is trying to match is either unreachable or it does not exist.

Striving for Perfection.

Richard reported that when he is striving for perfection he is “in flow”, and not experiencing pain or cognitive dissonance. Richard described his striving for perfection as selective in that he said he is singular in purpose and focuses exclusively on one task at a time. He agreed that much of his behaviour is directed at trying to match his ideals (at “chasing archetypes), and

generally speaking, he describes himself as a builder, a developer, and an organizer.

Richard reported that he has manifested his striving for perfection in many ways. The first example of this in his lifetime was practising piano as a young boy. He described it terms of having the self-discipline to do many memorizations and repetitions of piano compositions at a level most people never experience. He also tended to be obsessed with numbers as a child, and worked on forming them into patterns. He is currently a piano teacher and artist, and continues to strive for perfection in these areas.

Evaluating for Perfection.

Richard said he “assesses current reality, compares it to his ideal, and identifies any flaws or errors”. He tends to ignore the parts that already match the ideal because he takes for granted that they should be correct. He has to constantly remind himself to “acknowledge the positive part”. Richard agreed that this kind of evaluation can be described as a filter for flaws rather than perfection, and that he looks for what does not fit with his ideals. Like the other participants he said he also tends to set the bar higher with every evaluation, and that he never settles for what he has already accomplished.

Cognitive Responses to Perfectionism.

Richard said he does not see perfectionism as negative. Instead, he sees it as inherently without quality, as a state of being in its imminent, pure form. He said that perfectionism tends to be a “relentless, cold focus on perfection which does not take into consideration the feelings of others”. He said he thinks that the way it is “applied or expressed through humanity” makes it negative or positive. He agreed with the statement, “It’s okay to be a perfectionist, and it’s how you express it in your life that counts.”

He views perfectionism in terms of intention in that he thinks what we do with perfectionism is separate from its existence, and that this includes how we react to it. If we react negatively then perfectionism is negative, and if we react positively then it is positive. He said that he finds it difficult to react anything but negatively when not achieving perfection, and that this includes experiencing cognitive dissonance. He said that his reactions tend to motivate him toward perpetuating the process of perfectionism in that he ends up striving for perfection to relieve his cognitive dissonance.

Distal Consequences and Correlates of Perfectionism.

Richard agreed that if perfectionism by definition inevitably compels us to strive for something that cannot exist (perfection), it can only be negative in

consequence if it goes unchecked. He cited his parents as examples of how negative the effects of perfectionism can be. He also used himself as a negative example in that it might be getting in the way of his being more successful, and that it is tied to his inappropriate expressions of anger. He also said that many, including his wife, have accused him of being too critical.

Richard saw an overlap between addiction and perfectionism, and agreed with a pain-at-not-having-reached-the-ideal (cognitive dissonance) > striving > evaluation > pain > more striving... downward spiralling vicious cycle theory of perfectionism as addiction. Lastly, Richard was very aware of how perfectionism might be used in a positive way, and was not willing to give up his perfectionism because it allows him to be very productive.

Antecedents and Maintenance of Perfectionism.

Richard was very clear that external influences were strongly instrumental in developing his perfectionism. He especially internalized values, beliefs and expectations present within his family environment. Both his parents were very demanding that he do certain tasks properly. If he did not do things properly he was either forced to redo the tasks or he was punished. He felt he had no choice in the matter, and that it was “pushed over the edge” (especially in regard to playing piano). He said he fears his older

sister got worse treatment as he believes that parents ease up on later children. He is now working on forgiving his parents even though they do not acknowledge they were wrong to treat him in this way.

Another strong developmental influence for Richard has been religion. He said he was a devout Lutheran, and believes that fundamentalist religious beliefs and the expectations growing out of them encourage perfectionism in those who do not want to be seen as “bad”. He agreed this is one example of the way in which the whole of society generally reinforces perfectionism. Despite that society reinforces it, Richard said he does not behave like a perfectionist in order to gain rewards (although he admitted it would be nice to be acknowledged once in awhile). He said he does it in order to “make the thing right”. He understood what diminishing returns are, and admits to striving beyond them. Note: “Diminishing returns” refers to only external returns. Maybe the internal returns for striving for perfection never diminish?

Managing Perfectionism.

Richard said that he recognizes choice as an option in his life, and although he acknowledges he cannot give it up, he chooses not to let perfectionism take over his life. He took exception to the word “coping” in relation to his perfectionism. This is because he sees what he is doing as

transformative rather than reactive. For instance, he is trying to learn how to be critical in a positive manner, especially with regard to his family and teaching duties, and he is using his perfectionistic tendencies to set complex ideals that act as catalysts for striving for excellence. Rather than enduring it, he is reworking and tempering his perfectionism so that it works for him and not against him.

Richard also liked to refer to ways in which he “balances his psyche”. He uses meditative ways to let go, and he thinks he can temporarily but consciously suspend his perfectionism when playing music or creating artwork. For instance, he will attempt to suspend his perfectionism when he is well practised in the structural parts of something and he just wants to engage in the interpretation of it. However, he did contradict himself when he talked about letting go of the perfectionism “until you put things together the way they should look.” Of note here is that Richard believes that he can only suspend his perfectionism rather than eliminate it.

Interviewee Six: Holly

Cognitive Diathesis for Perfectionism (CDP).

Holly, a public administrator in her early forties, said she knows she is a perfectionist because she is driven to achieve, and always feels that she must

“accomplish stuff”. She sees perfectionism as something that never changes or goes away, as a way of life, as hard-wired in, and as a “drivenness” to be right or avoid failure. Holly said that although she recognizes that she is not perfect and never can be, the drive to be perfect or avoid failure is always present. Holly said she recognizes that her drivenness comes from within, and that it is not something she wants to impose on others although she tries to at times.

Because she saw it as an excuse, Holly agreed hesitantly that perceptually and emotionally she may be a more sensitive instrument than most. She said that in her family she “was always really tuned into [her] environment”, and that she is still very observant. This may be part of a predisposition toward her perfectionism in that it makes her more apt to notice flaws. She noted that flaws “burn a hole in her psyche”.

Ideals of Perfection.

Holly said she has a habit of “shoulding” on herself. She said that she has a double standard in that she sets the bar higher for herself than she does for others. In other words, she thinks her ideals are higher than most individuals. She does not think that this comes from arrogance or an “I’m superior ego”. She is simply not influenced by others’ goals and standards. However, although she said that “what everyone else does is kind of

irrelevant”, and she tries to help others be easier on themselves, she sometimes will expect others to have the same goals and standards as she does.

Holly said she tends to set high goals in many domains. It seems that some of her ideals are now unconscious as a result of being internalized long ago. She said she does not always know what she is trying to measure up to, or what drives her while “on the treadmill of perfectionism”.

Striving for Perfection.

Holly said she finds it extremely difficult to ease up on pushing herself. Holly’s “drivenness” toward reaching her ideals is quite often expressed as excessive striving to meet her expectations, to avoid failure (cognitive dissonance or pain), and to “arrive”. Holly’s striving for perfection may also be about pacing in that her drivenness seems to include emptying her “in basket of life” as fast as she can even though it is impossible to empty. This leaves her with the subjective experience of being on a treadmill. In contrast to this, she feels depressed, guilty, lazy, or at loose ends (i.e., in pain) when she is not striving.

Holly said her striving tends to be selective according to importance in that she tends to “pick her fights”. In other words, she does not try to compete or be perfect in every situation. She aims much of her striving for

perfection at imposing structure, organizing, and controlling her world. She agreed that this is an avoidance of chaos and entropy, and any cognitive dissonance she may experience if she does not succeed in this avoidance. She admitted that she can be “overpowering” in her striving to control situations, and that she sometimes has to consciously hold herself back from doing this. Holding back is more difficult to do if something is important to her. She said, “I work really hard”, and sometimes expects others like her skating students or school project group members to do the same if they are working toward a goal with her.

Evaluating for Perfection.

Holly said she evaluates herself very harshly and does this when she is comparing her outcomes with what she expects of herself. She reported that she evaluates whether her results are good or bad by focussing on whether or not there are mistakes and flaws. In addition to this, when she completes something she immediately looks to the next level of accomplishment. Holly said she sometimes imposes her perfectionism on others (like her skating students) via harsh evaluation. However, she finds it easier to forgive others their mistakes than she does her own mistakes.

Cognitive Responses to Perfectionism.

Holly said she gets “twisted” and experiences anger or lack of forgiveness for herself when she perceives she has failed. She agreed that these experiences are akin to cognitive dissonance. She said that she probably works to avoid it without being consciously aware of this. She also said that cognitive dissonance and its accompanying emotions are usually a catalyst for doing better next time.

For instance, she expects herself to get A’s at school, berates herself if she gets anything less, and makes sure she gets a better grade next time. She said she takes good results for granted in that she thinks, “...that’s to be expected”, or, “Well I don’t think it’s anything special”. She said, “How can I feel success when there is always another level to attain?”

Holly described hers as “reverse perfectionism” in that she is not so much pursuing perfection as avoiding those feelings of being wrong or not being good enough. In other words, she has a reactive response orientation to perceptions of imperfection, and when reacting she engages in avoidance behaviours like excessive striving for perfection.

Distal Consequences and Correlates of Perfectionism.

Holly saw perfectionism as negative in that it has many negative

consequences for her. She said she has developed addictive tendencies, and thinks perfectionism is an addiction in itself. Also, she hates making mistakes or being wrong. She is sometimes “horrified” at making mistakes, and excessively obsesses or ruminates about them, i.e., finds it hard to let them go. She reported that making mistakes meets an expectation she has of never doing well or of failing, and so perceiving mistakes activates a fear of failure.

Holly said she thinks that her perfectionism gets worse when she is stressed. She finds that “stupid little things drive her nuts” when she is stressed, and that group projects especially activate her perfectionism in that they stress her because of time being wasted while the groups process what they should be doing. She acknowledged that she is probably more task-oriented than process-oriented because of her perfectionism, and that a focus on process tends to stress her because of her belief that results are more important than process.

Antecedents and Maintenance of Perfectionism.

Holly said she thinks there have been environmental influences such as societal reinforcement, being part of her family, and participating in competitive figure skating that have contributed to her becoming a perfectionist. In all situations there has been a tendency to focus on flaws, and

to create high expectations for her to meet. She also thinks as the only girl in the family she may have taken on more responsibility for keeping family peace.

Holly reported that there was a strong learning influence on how she got to be the way she is, and that these learning influences may now be so internalized that she is no longer conscious of what drives her. Her perfectionism seems to be maintained via internal negative reinforcement in that she fears failure. Holly said she does not strive for perfection in order to gain external rewards like the approval of others. She acknowledges that she may have done so somewhere along her developmental time line, and that she might be motivated by internalized expectations and rewards she is no longer aware of. She said that perfectionism is now unexplainably tied to her value system and part of her identity, i.e., "...just who I am".

As far as genetic influences go, Holly said that she is "super sensitive" and that she may have inherited this proclivity from family. She eyes this with suspicion because it is something she thinks can be used as an "excuse for lowering her expectations", especially the expectation she holds that she should not make any mistakes. However, this only serves to perpetuate her perfectionism in that when she disallows any excuses for her mistakes she has to become more of a perfectionist, i.e., has to work harder to avoid cognitive dissonance.

Managing Perfectionism.

Holly said that perfectionism is not something she is willing to give up because she values hard work and perseverance and she does not like laziness. Not being a perfectionist would represent a failure to live up to her own values! However, perfectionism tends to “take over” unless she consciously tries not to let it. Therefore, she sees perfectionism as something that she must either accept or temper. She said she has come to have an understanding and awareness of external causes for why she behaves the way she does, and this gives her some relief and peace of mind, i.e., “Takes some of the insanity out of it.” Although she acknowledges she is responsible for change, she still finds it freeing to have an explanation for how she is because it allows her to have more acceptance for herself. She can say, “Oh, I’m just doing it again!”, and choose whether or not to pay attention to it.

Holly also recognized that she does not want to give up her perfectionism because it serves her in many ways. For instance, she is very productive and has accomplished much. She said she sometimes imposes limits on the amount of striving she will do, but this is usually due to a lack of resources (time, energy, etc.). This is beyond her control, and she has trouble accepting any negative consequences of this. Holly reported that she tends to experience tunnel vision or “single-mindedness” in that she tends to focus

exclusively on what is most important to her. This helps to keep her from being overwhelmed with distractions (other things she may have to be perfectionistic about), that, if she were to act on them, would cause her to feel as though she cannot keep up. Because her perfectionism tends to get worse if she is stressed, Holly said that she sometimes tries to relax or sleep in order to get relief. She also said that her husband's attitude is calming for her and that this helps to temper her perfectionism.

Holly said she thinks the difference between perfectionism and striving for excellence is that when you strive for excellence you "arrive" or meet your goals. She said that striving for perfection results in that feeling she has of being on a treadmill, of setting the bar higher to infinity, or of always having a full "in basket". She said, "You can strive forever and never arrive where you are going" when striving for perfection. Holly said she finds it hard to take time off because it cuts into her striving time. She said that consciously trying to strive for excellence rather than perfection helps to temper her tendency to excessively strive for perfection.

CHAPTER SEVEN: ANALYSIS OF RELATIONSHIPS

This chapter contains results from the second stage of analysis; 1) An analysis of the relationships among the core concept, main categories, and subcategories that emerged during the first stage of analysis, and 2) A summary of these relationships in the form of new theory on perfectionism.

Analysis of Relationships: Core Concept, Main Categories, and Subcategories

There were seven relationship themes that emerged from the core concept, main categories, and subcategories. They are: 1) Distinguishing between object and process, 2) Pathways linking object with process, 3) Diverging pathways leading from evaluating for perfection, 4) Cognitive responses and their role in perpetuating perfectionism, 5) Distality of consequences and correlates of perfectionism, 6) Genetics and learning influences on perfectionism, and 7) Direction and effectiveness of strategies that manage perfectionism.

Distinguishing between object and process.

The study participants saw perfectionism as both object and process. The core concept Cognitive Diathesis for Perfectionism (CDP) represents the

static aspect or object of perfectionism which, according to Bonnie, “is in your brain circuitry”. The Ideals of Perfection, Striving for Perfection, and Evaluating for Perfection categories represent the dynamic aspects or process of perfectionism, or “perfectionism-ing” as Richard called it. This distinction represents the most basic and obvious relationship theme present in the data. Figure 6 shows this distinction between object and process. (Note that only categories are shown in Figure 6 and other figures to come. The subcategories are not shown unless it is necessary. See Table 2 for a complete list of main categories and subcategories.)

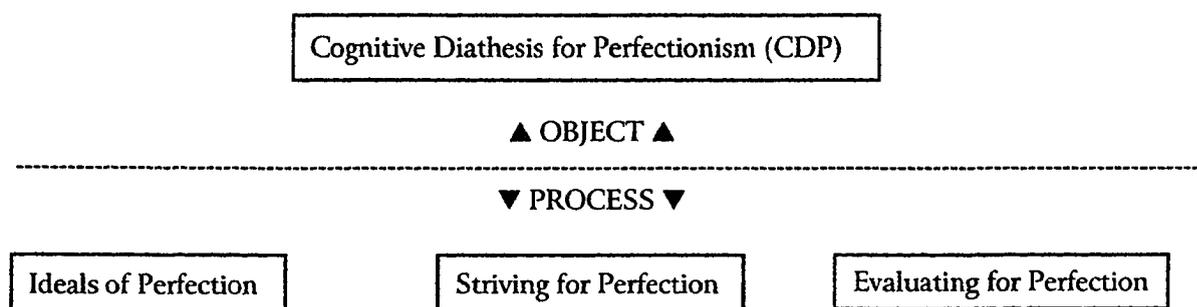


Figure 6: Distinction Between Object and Process

Pathways linking object with process.

A hierarchical set of relationships or pathways among the above core concept and three main categories represents the next relationship theme present in the data. This theme concerns how the three main categories can be linked to form a dynamic process, a process that requires the activation of a

static entity represented by the core concept. This static entity is the Cognitive Diathesis for Perfectionism (CDP), or permanent mechanism for perceptual sensitivity and pattern manipulation. The dynamic process that requires its activation starts with the formation of ideals as outlined in the Ideals of Perfection category. It progresses with attempts to manifest these ideals as described in the Striving for Perfection category, and ends with screening for flaws as described in the Evaluating for Perfection category. These relationships or pathways are delineated in Figure 7 using a hierarchical progression that begins with the CDP and ends with Evaluating for Perfection.

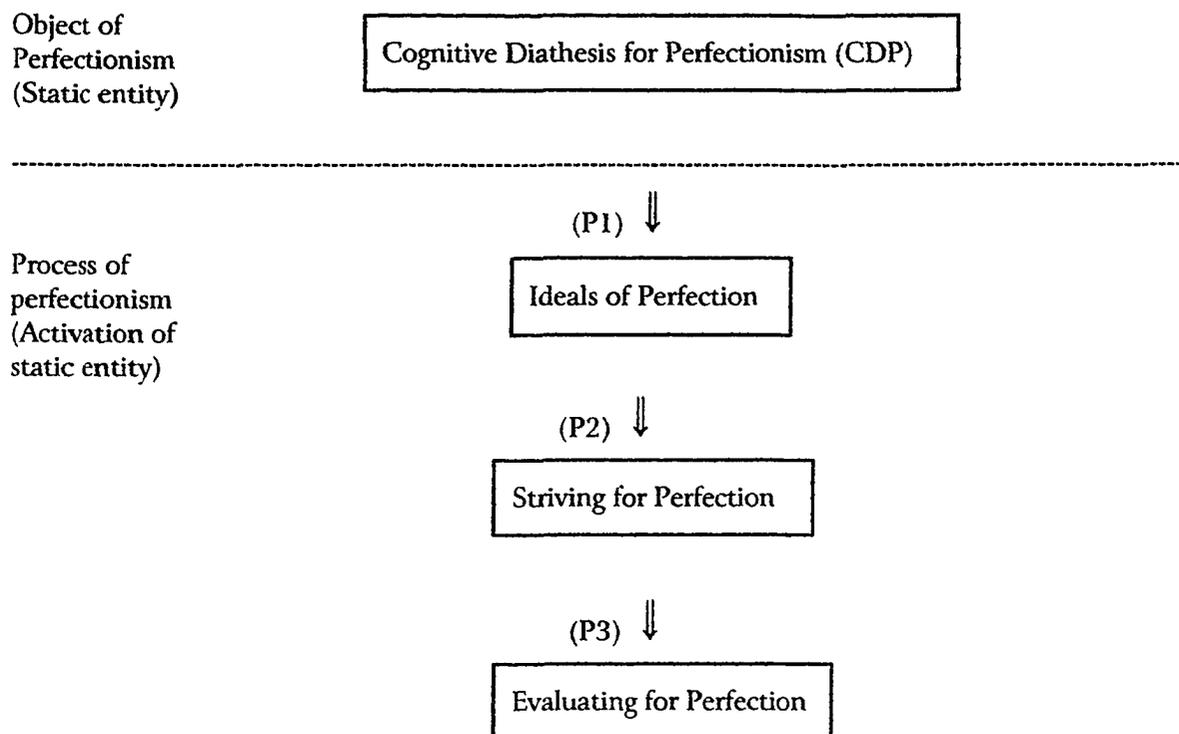


Figure 7: Pathways Linking Object with Process

As can be seen in Figure 7, Pathway 1 (P1) leads from perfectionism as object, i.e., as perfectionist or CDP, to perfectionism as process. Forming Ideals of Perfection is the first part of this process, and the CDP is necessary for forming these ideals. Pathway 2 (P2) leads from Ideals of Perfection to Striving for Perfection. Ideals must be formed before striving can occur. Pathway 3 (P3) leads from Striving for Perfection to Evaluating for Perfection. Unless striving for ideals of perfection occurs there is no evaluating for perfection. Of note is that once the above process is first set in motion via forming ideals, the CDP becomes involved in an additional behavioural component of the dynamic process of perfectionism. It not only influences the formulation of ideals, but influences evaluating for perfection as well. Figure 8 shows the dual influence of the CDP on the process of perfectionism.

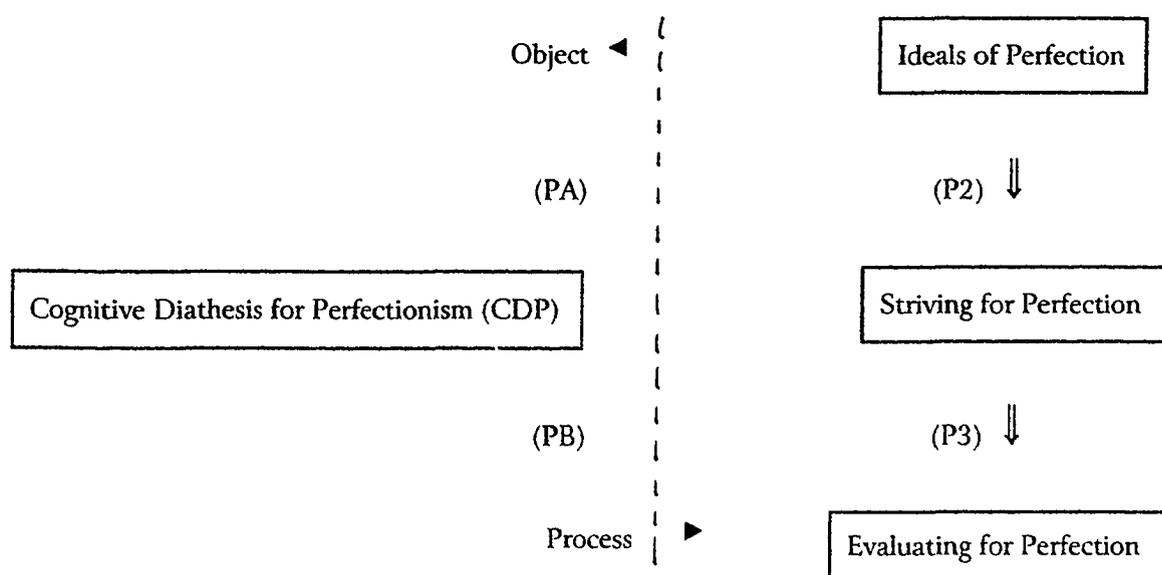


Figure 8: Influence of CDP on Process of Perfectionism

Pathways A (PA) and B (PB) demonstrate the dual effect the CDP has on the process of perfectionism in that it influences both formulating ideals of perfection (it helps to generate the notion or idea of what is perfect, i.e., a perfect pattern or template), and evaluating for perfection (it helps to screen for flaws in the ideals that are manifested via striving for perfection).

Participants experienced these effects as being automatic and involuntary. The CDP does not seem to have much direct influence on striving for perfection per se. Its influences are indirect in that the results of striving for perfection are evaluated with the help of the CDP, and striving for perfection will not occur if the CDP is not instrumental in forming ideals of perfection. Insofar as forming ideals of perfection may be labelled a type of striving for perfection, the CDP does have a direct influence on striving for perfection. However, for simplification purposes striving for perfection in this chapter will refer only to actions that occur after ideals are formed.

It should be reiterated at this point that the participants said their ideals of perfection are differentially acted upon with regard to striving for perfection. They indicated that the pathway (P2) between Ideals of Perfection and Striving for Perfection is influenced in two possible ways (as outlined in the second and third subcategories of the Striving for Perfection main category). First, Pathway 2 is influenced by selectivity. Certain ideals of perfection may

or may not become manifested given that participants said they have only a certain amount of resources at their disposal. In other words, perfectionists will select or choose which ideals they will strive toward based on how much time, energy, space, money, etc. they have. Those ideals which held the most importance for participants were most likely to be chosen.

Second, if an ideal is selected it will be manifested using various intensities of striving. For instance, striving can vary in amount or pace. Although all of the participants described their striving for perfection as excessive and quickly paced, it is possible for this striving to occur at varying rates. Figure 9 illustrates the influences of selectivity and intensity on Pathway 2 (P2) of the process of perfectionism (see Figure 7 in order to view all pathways in the process of perfectionism).

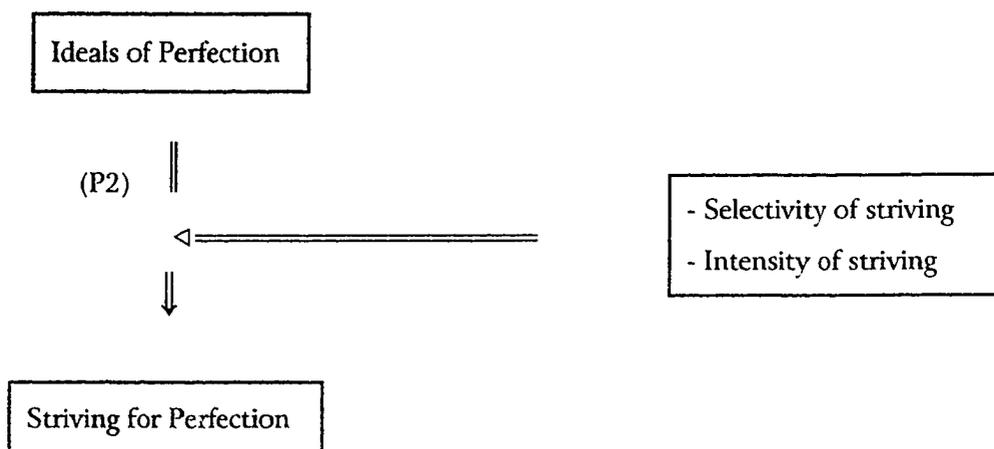


Figure 9: Selectivity and Intensity of Striving Influence Pathway 2

Figure 7 shows that Pathway 3 (P3) of the process of perfectionism indicates that when participants actually do strive toward ideals, they also evaluate whether or not they achieve them. As mentioned earlier, the participants said they engage their perceptual filters or binary sorting devices (CDPs) when evaluating the results of striving for ideals of perfection. Although some of the focus may be on what has been successfully achieved or deemed perfect, most of these successes are ignored or taken for granted. The main focus is on detecting flaws. Holly called this her “reverse perfectionism” in that her focus changes easily from seeking perfection to seeking and eliminating non-perfection. As will be seen later, this is an important distinction when gauging the impact of perfectionism on its practitioners.

Diverging pathways leading from evaluating for perfection.

Because participants screened for flaws instead of looking for perfection they tended to dualistically evaluate the results of striving toward an ideal of perfection as either “perfect” or “imperfect”. This is an example of what Burns (1980) termed “black and white” thinking. Figure 10 shows the possible outcome of “perfect” as Pathway 4a (P4a) and the possible outcome of “imperfect” as Pathway 4b (P4b). Although it never actually happened for the participants, if they had ever given an evaluation of “perfect” to an

achievement it would have meant that they perceived it as flawless or successful, and it would have marked an end to that particular attempt at achieving perfection. Figure 10 shows this as Pathway 5a (P5a).

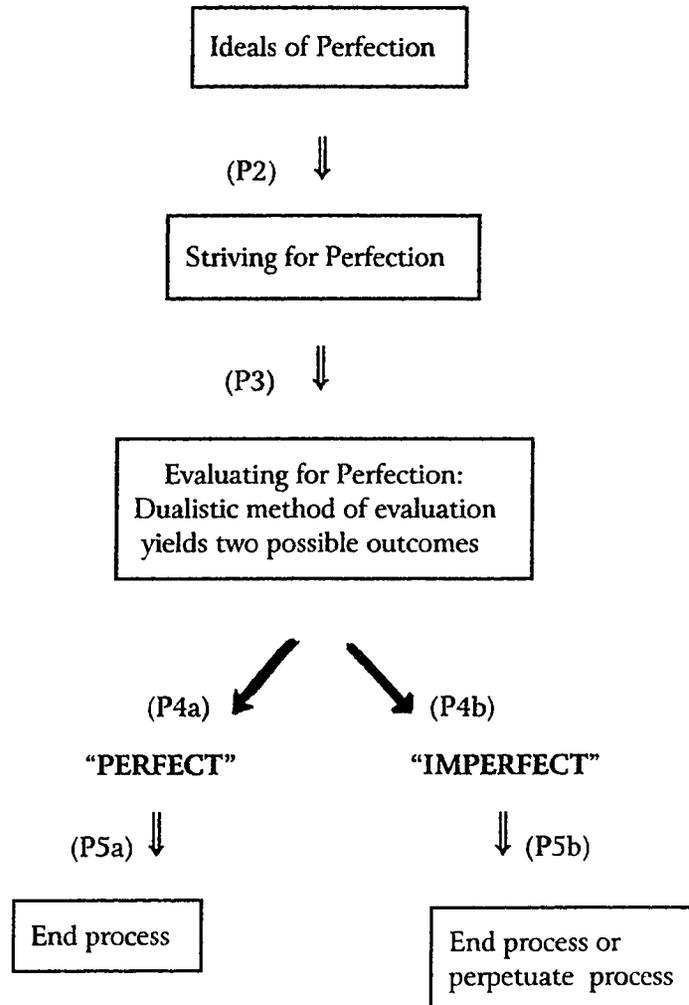


Figure 10: Possible Outcomes of Evaluating for Perfection and Possible Outcomes of Each Evaluation

Alternatively, Pathway 5b (P5b) in Figure 10 shows that the more common evaluation of “imperfect” caused participants to either end the process of perfectionism or perpetuate it for reasons given later. The participants evaluated their efforts as “imperfect” if they detected mistakes or flaws in either the formation or the manifestation of their ideals of perfection. The formation of an ideal of perfection was considered “imperfect” if it could be achieved. As all the participants considered perfection unattainable, any ideal that could be achieved was not an ideal of perfection, and its achievement had to be evaluated as “imperfect”. The manifestation of an ideal of perfection was considered “imperfect” if there were any flaws or mistakes detected in it. Bonnie had this to say about perfectionists’ tendency to evaluate dualistically,

I think most people who are perfectionists are actually imperfectionists because they’re just constantly, their real focus is isn’t on perfection, that which is really excellent and good about themselves or about the world. They’re really focussed on what’s wrong all the time.

Cognitive responses and their role in perpetuating perfectionism.

Although it never happened, if the participants were to assign an evaluation of “perfect” to their accomplishments, they imagined they would experience cognitive consonance, i.e., no conflict among cognitions, and that

positive emotion would be present. Alternatively, participants found that when they assigned evaluations of “imperfect” when evaluating their accomplishments, they experienced cognitive dissonance, or conflict among their cognitions, and negative emotion was present. Figure 11 demonstrates these differences in response to evaluating for perfection.

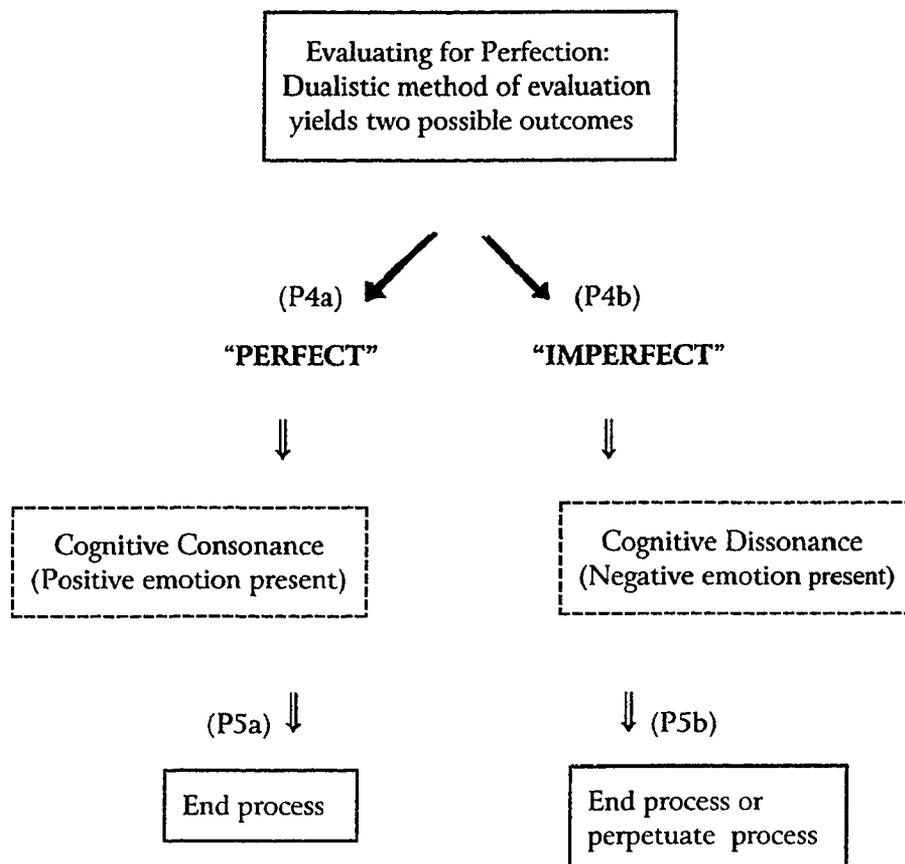


Figure 11: Cognitive Responses to Evaluating for Perfection

As mentioned previously, the process of perfectionism was either ended or perpetuated by participants after evaluating for perfection, and these outcomes are included again in Figure 11. It is logical that an evaluation of “perfect” would by necessity lead to ending the process of perfectionism as the process becomes redundant if perfection is achieved. Also, the cognitive response of cognitive consonance is of no consequence in that it is not something individuals would seek to avoid by repeating the process of perfectionism.

In contrast to this, the cognitive response of cognitive dissonance is of consequence because it is something individuals do seek to avoid, and this can lead to perpetuating the process of perfectionism. When the participants evaluated their efforts as “imperfect” and suffered cognitive dissonance they could either accept this and end the process, or they could relieve this suffering by perpetuating the process. All participants said they usually choose to perpetuate the process unless they lack the resources to do so.

Figure 12 shows that they perpetuate perfectionism in two ways. Pathways 6a and 6b (P6a and P6b) in Figure 12 show that participants perpetuate the process of perfectionism by retrogressing back to either Ideals of Perfection or Striving for Perfection. When perceiving that ideals are nonrepresentative of perfection, participants indicated that they tend to “set

the bar higher” or reformulate their ideals of perfection such that they are more representative of perfection. The retrogression from an evaluation of “imperfect” back to Ideals of Perfection represents this tendency. Bonnie described this in the following way,

...as soon as they [perfectionists] master a skill it's completely meaningless to them, they don't even appreciate themselves for having the skill, and they're always reaching to something they don't have.

A retrogression back to Striving for Perfection represents the tendency keep striving when an ideal of perfection is accepted as representative of perfection but not achieved. Tina's tendency to “redo things until they are right” is an example of this type of regression. Also an example is a story Richard related about his father's expectations about painting stairs,

...I have vivid memories of certain tasks like painting the stairwell down to the basement, and I remember him telling me that there were areas that I missed, tiny little areas. This was the basement! And, um, I was to do it again. I think I did it three times. In the end it was a very, very precise basement stairwell.

The participants all confirmed that if they do not match their ideals of

perfection they tend to keep striving until they do.

Of note is that both regressions back to earlier points in the process of perfectionism lead to further striving and evaluating for perfection or “a road already travelled”. The process can become a self-perpetuating vicious cycle unless individuals opt to accept imperfection and end the process. Again, because the participants loathed failure, they said they cease engaging in perfectionism only when they lack the resources to keep going. Many participants like Holly felt not reaching higher was equivalent to “slacking off”.

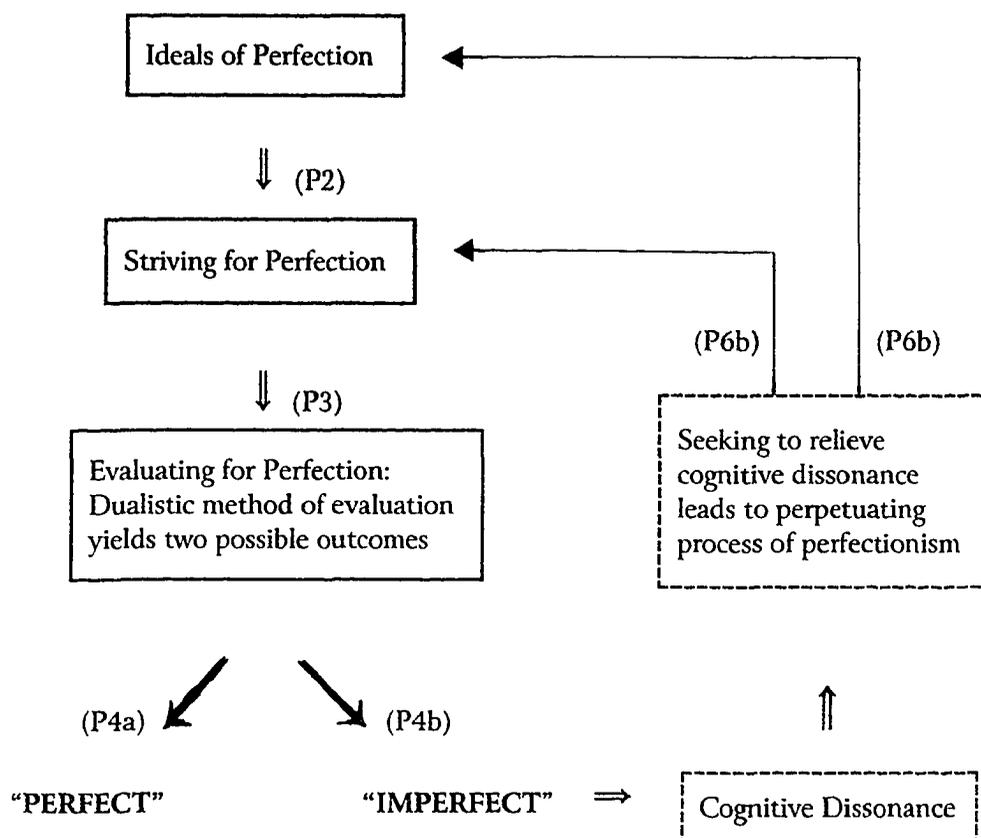


Figure 12: Pathways that Perpetuate the Process of Perfectionism

In summary of Figures 11 and 12, they demonstrated that participants tend to choose among several different pathways after evaluating their efforts to reach perfection. If an outcome is evaluated as “perfect”, i.e., there is a harmonious match between ideals and what was achieved, participants experience a positive cognitive response with accompanying emotion and accept success by ending the process. When an outcome is evaluated as “imperfect” they experience cognitive dissonance and either accept failure or perpetuate the process of perfectionism. They perpetuate the process by reentering it at Ideals of Perfection or Striving for Perfection. Either way they engage in more striving and evaluating for perfection thereby creating a vicious cycle of perfectionism. Being caught in this vicious cycle creates a potential for infinite striving for perfection, and this excessive striving may be a root cause for any dysfunction perfectionism brings to the lives of its participants.

Distality of consequences and correlates of perfectionism.

The next relationship theme involves the category “Distal Consequences and Correlates of Perfectionism” and its distal relationship to the process of perfectionism. Figure 13 demonstrates this distant relationship of the distal consequences and correlates to perfectionism. It also lists specific examples of them. It should be acknowledged that the participants’ cognitive responses to

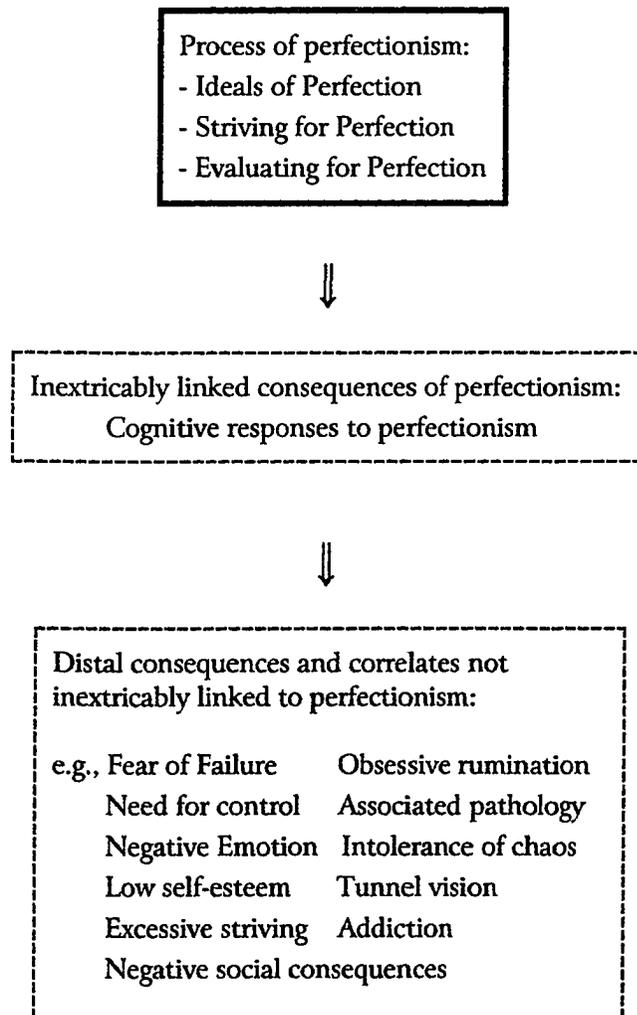


Figure 13: Distant Relationship of Distal Consequences and Correlates of Perfectionism to Process of Perfectionism and Cognitive Responses to Perfectionism

evaluating for perfection are also consequences of perfectionism. However, they were not included in the category “Distal Consequences and Correlates of Perfectionism” because they are inextricably linked to the process of perfectionism, and this category contains only more distal consequences and

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correlates that are not inextricably linked to perfectionism.

The more distal consequences and correlates of perfectionism were mainly the result of, or related to, participants' cognitive responses to perfectionism. As the participants usually experienced cognitive dissonance, these distal consequences and correlates tended to be negative. For example, for participants like Holly, Bonnie, and Leanne low self-esteem was a consequence that followed repeated evaluations of "imperfect". Richard and Tina described problems with procrastination that resulted when they could no longer face evaluating their efforts and the cognitive responses that followed. Bonnie and Leanne told of depression and eating disorder problems that were related to the feelings of hopelessness they experienced when "nothing was ever good enough". And finally, June spoke of an excessive need for control.

Although it was a rare occurrence for most participants, there were also some positive consequences that resulted from the process of perfectionism. One positive consequence that participants like June, Richard, and Holly liked to list was increased and higher quality productivity. They said that their complex ideals and the excessive striving brought on by wanting to avoid cognitive dissonance tended to yield results that were more satisfying albeit never totally satisfying. They listed this as the main reason they do not want to give up their perfectionism. Paradoxically they think it gets them closer to

experiencing cognitive consonance and positive emotion. They did not acknowledge that it is their perfectionism that initially causes the cognitive dissonance and negative emotion they are trying to avoid. This leads to one last point regarding the distal consequences of perfectionism.

All of the participants reported that the cognitive dissonance they experience as a result of perfectionism is akin to psychological pain. They use their perfectionism (especially excessive striving for perfection) as an avoidance tactic for escaping this pain. As long as they are taking action with regard to their negative evaluations they are dodging cognitive dissonance and/or pain. Ironically it is the perfectionism that initially provides the pain to be avoided and it begins a self-perpetuating cycle of pain avoidance. Tina provided an illustration of participating in this cycle when she said,

I strive for it [perfection] so that I don't feel guilty, or I don't feel bad, or I don't worry about it. ...It's both pursuit of the ideal and an avoidance of pain.

This represents an addictive cycle, and it is demonstrated in Figure 14.

Genetics and learning influences on perfectionism.

The next relationship theme involves the Antecedents and Maintenance of Perfectionism category. The factors outlined in this main category have an

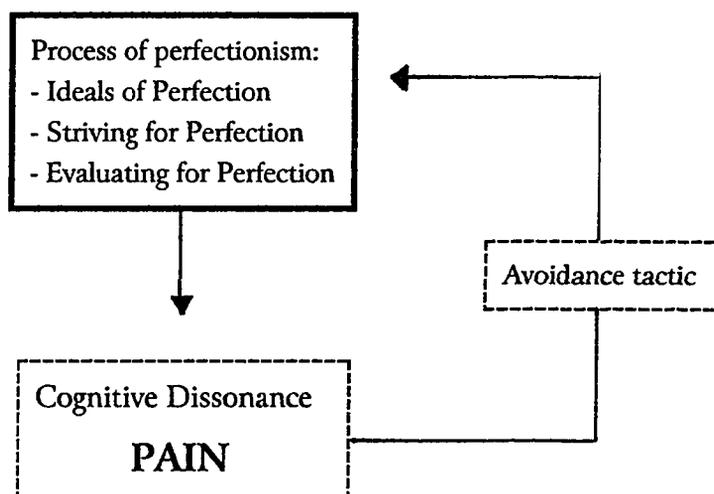


Figure 14: Perfectionism as Included in an Addictive Cycle

influence on each aspect of perfectionism. The participants provided evidence that genetics and learning influence the Cognitive Diathesis for Perfectionism (CDP) and its activation via forming ideals of perfection, striving for perfection, and evaluating for perfection. They also provided evidence that genetics and learning influence cognitive responses to perfectionism. Examples of the above are 1) Leanne speculated that genetic influences were probably a big contributor to her extreme perceptual sensitivity, and 2) Richard was clear that learning influenced all aspects of his perfectionism. In particular, Richard's excessive striving for perfection and harsh evaluating for perfection were both modelled or reinforced by his parents.

Figure 15 illustrates that the antecedents and maintenance of

perfectionism have influence on the CDP, the process of perfectionism, and the cognitive responses to perfectionism. The above factors also had influence on the participants' distal consequences and correlates of perfectionism, and on how they managed perfectionism. However, as the participants provided no examples of these influences they will be left for further study.

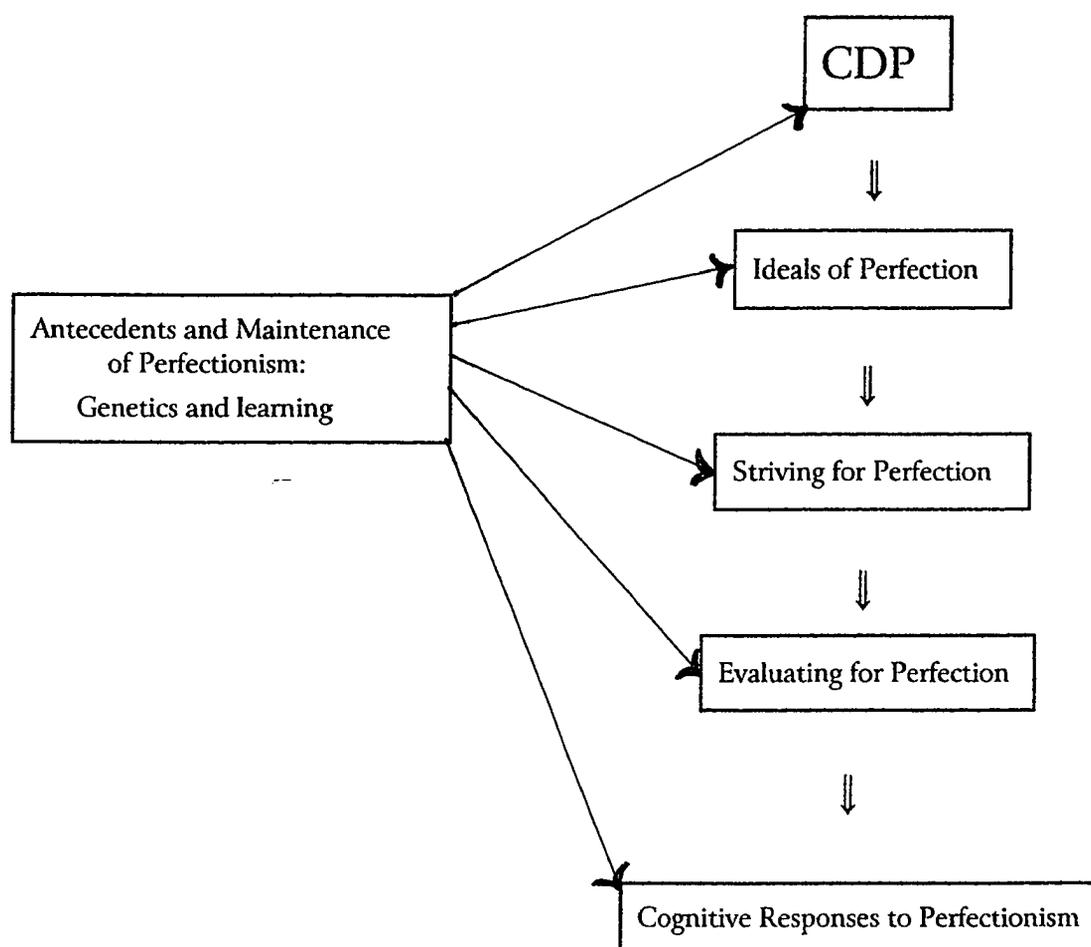


Figure 15: Influence of Antecedents and Maintenance of Perfectionism on CDP, Process of Perfectionism, and Cognitive Responses

Direction and effectiveness of strategies that manage perfectionism.

The final relationship theme involves the category Managing Perfectionism. Because perfectionism was mostly negative for the participants, strategies for tempering it and coping with it were necessary if they were to avoid manifesting negative consequences like addiction, depression, anxiety or low self-esteem. When outlining their strategies for managing perfectionism, participants said they aimed these interventions at both perfectionism and its consequences. The pathways in Figure 16 both demonstrate where participants aimed their interventions, and their perceived strength of effectiveness for these interventions.

The participants found their interventions ranged from weak to strong in effectiveness depending upon where they were aimed. They said it was most effective for them to aim intervention at how they evaluate their achievements, because they found it possible to consciously shift their focus from evaluating for perfection to evaluating for excellence. They found it second most effective to aim intervention at striving for perfection as they could moderate the intensity of their striving and be selective about where they aim it.

Participants found it least effective to aim intervention at the CDP, the nature of their ideals of perfection, and their cognitive responses to perfectionism because of the perception that change is almost impossible for

these seemingly permanent aspects of perfectionism. They seem to be “part of the circuitry” as Bonnie put it, and difficult to reconfigure.

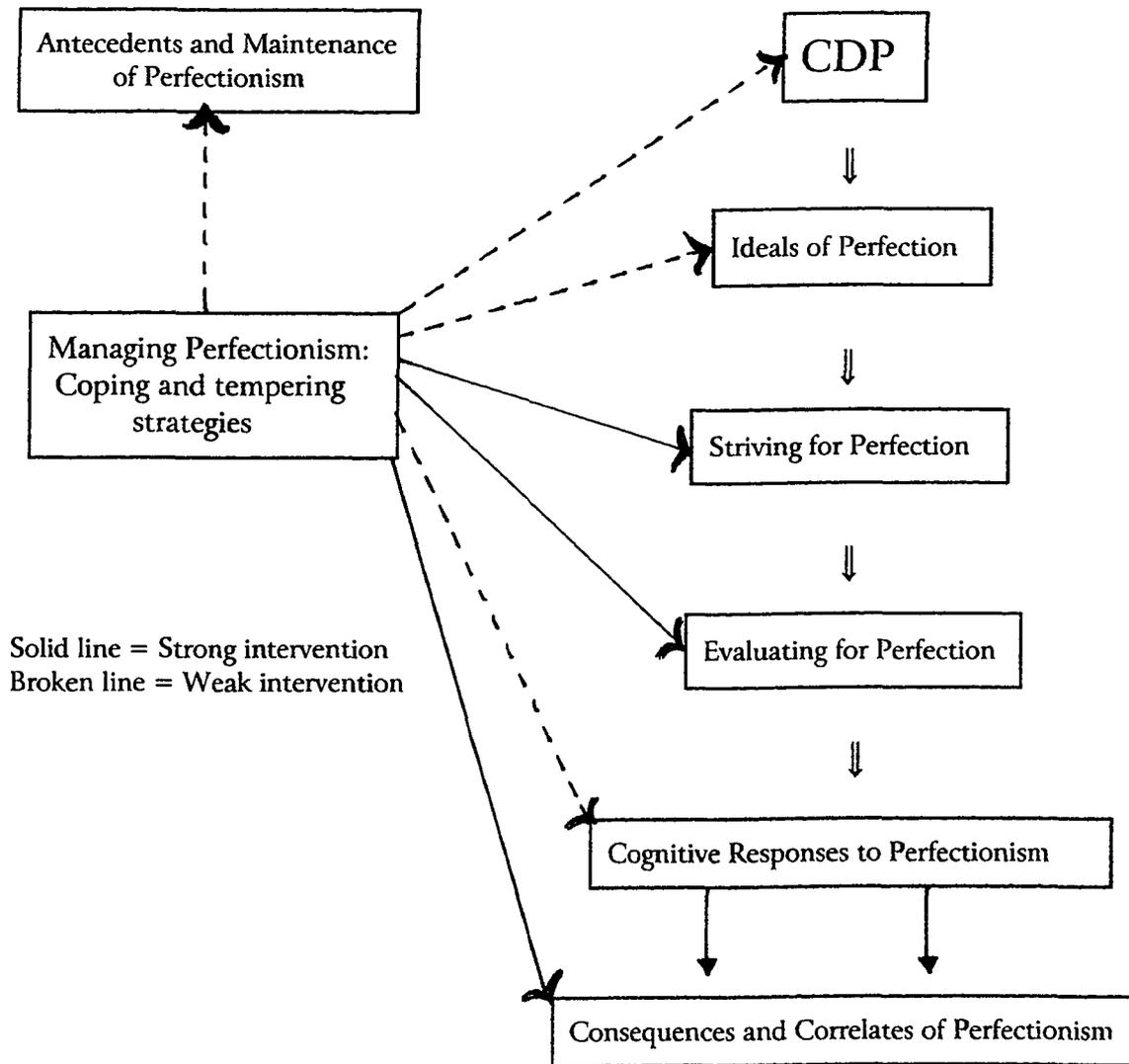


Figure 16: Managing Perfectionism: Strength and Direction of Interventions

Although Bonnie saw it as offering a “band-aid” solution, the participants thought it possible to strongly intervene with the distal consequences and

correlates of perfectionism. However, as interventions aimed at perfectionism itself would help to prevent these distal consequences and correlates, the participants tended to value them more. Also, the participants thought it was possible to weakly intervene with the antecedents and maintenance of perfectionism. Anything “hard-wired in” via genetics or well reinforced via learning was seen as very difficult if not impossible to change, and societal reinforcement was seen as an especially formidable opponent to intervention. However, participants like June thought that it was to some extent possible to control self-reinforcement, and they saw this as a potentially effective intervention site.

Synthesis: New Theory on Perfectionism

The above relationship themes that emerged from the core concept, main categories, and subcategories that were discovered in the first stage of data analysis also represent theoretical postulates which can be linked to represent new theory on perfectionism (see Figure 17 for a diagrammatic overview of this integration of the relationship themes or postulates into new perfectionism theory, and see Figure 18 for a similar overview couched in terms of examples or quotes from the participants). The integration of these postulates into new theory is as follows.

Perfectionism: Object, Process & Cognitive Responses

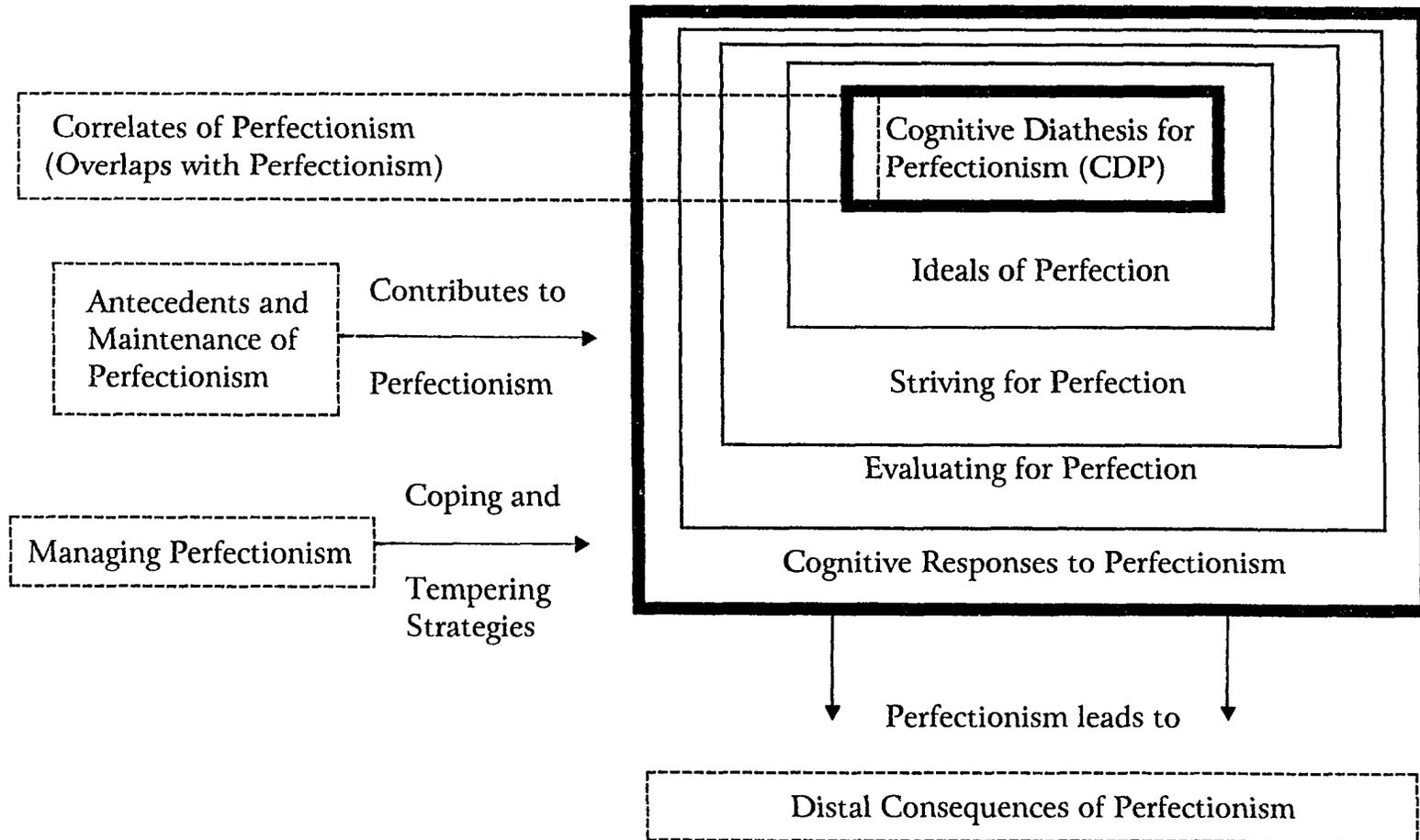


Figure 17: Integrating the Relationship Themes or Postulates: Overview of New Perfectionism Theory

Perfectionism: Object, Process & Cognitive Responses

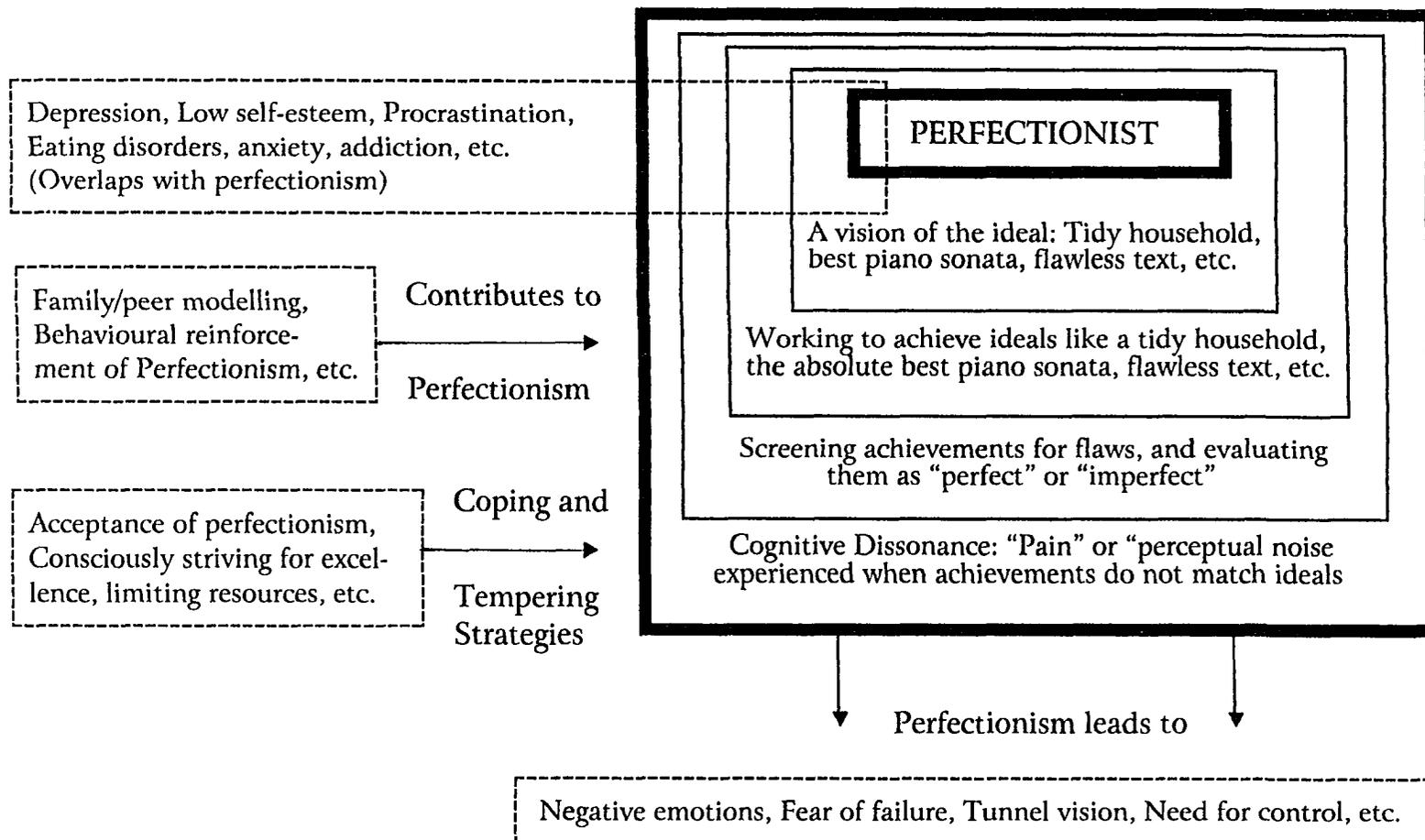


Figure 18: Overview of New Perfectionism Theory Using Participant Examples

First, there is a distinction to be made between the object of perfectionism and the process of perfectionism (see Figure 6). The information processing Cognitive Diathesis of Perfectionism (CDP), or pattern manipulation instrument, represents the core or object of perfectionism. A perfectionist is the embodiment of the CDP, and must exist before perfectionism can manifest as process. Ideals of Perfection, Striving for Perfection, and Evaluating for Perfection represent the process of perfectionism.

Second, a complex relationship between object and process exists in that the appearance of perfectionism indicates that a perfectionist's CDP has been activated, and that this activation is leading to a hierarchical progression through a series of three behavioural imperatives (see Figure 7): 1) Forming ideals of perfection, which means configuring organized and complex patterns that represent flawlessness. Ideals must exist before any observable behaviour can occur. 2) Striving for perfection, which includes any attempts to manifest ideals of perfection. Striving for perfection is susceptible to selectivity and levels of intensity. 3) Evaluating for perfection, which involves a binary flaw detection process. Engaging in it determines whether or not perfection has been achieved.

Third, evaluating for perfection yields dualistic or "black and white"

outcomes in that perfectionists tend to evaluate their efforts as either “perfect” or “imperfect” (see Figure 10). An evaluation of “perfect” represents the achievement of a harmonious match between ideals of perfection and attempts to manifest them. An evaluation of “imperfect” results from either detecting flaws or mistakes in an attempt to manifest an ideal of perfection, or detecting errors in the ideal itself, something that renders it nonrepresentative of perfection.

Fourth, there are two possible cognitive responses to perfectionism, those being cognitive dissonance and cognitive consonance (see Figure 11). If something is evaluated as “perfect” when evaluating for perfection, the response will be cognitive consonance. Conversely, if something is evaluated as “imperfect” the response will be cognitive dissonance. Because it is impossible to reach absolute perfection, perfectionists assign an evaluation of “imperfect” to most things and predominantly experience cognitive dissonance in response to perfectionism. When they experience this response they either end the process of perfectionism by choosing to accept imperfection and any accompanying cognitive dissonance, or they seek to relieve the dissonance by perpetuating the process.

Perfectionists perpetuate the process of perfectionism by retrogressing back from Evaluating for Perfection to one of the two earlier points along its

progression. They either retrogress back and reenter the process of perfectionism at Ideals of Perfection, i.e., they “set the bar higher”, or they reenter it at Striving for Perfection (see Figure 12). The reason for assigning an evaluation of “imperfect” determines the point of reentry. If something is “imperfect” because it is based on an ideal that is judged to be nonrepresentative of perfection, then the process of perfectionism will be reentered at Ideals of perfection. If something is “imperfect” because flaws or mistakes have been detected, the process will be reentered at Striving for Perfection. It seems perfectionists doom themselves to a treadmill-like vicious cycle of excessive striving for perfection when they continue to pursue something that even they tend to acknowledge does not exist, that being perfection.

Fifth, there are both proximal and distal consequences of perfectionism, and there are correlates of perfectionism (see Figure 13). The proximal consequences are the cognitive responses to perfectionism, and they are inextricably linked to perfectionism. Not inextricably linked are the distal consequences and correlates of perfectionism that result from, or are related to, the proximal consequences. As they predominantly experience the proximal consequence of cognitive dissonance, something negative and akin to psychological pain, perfectionists are especially prone to experiencing negative

distal consequences and correlates of perfectionism like fear of failure and depression. This cognitive dissonance can also be associated with addiction, and can cause perfectionism to become an addiction in itself. Using perfectionism as an avoidance tactic for escaping its own effects represents a self-perpetuating, addictive pain avoidance cycle (see Figure 14).

Sixth, there is a relationship between the antecedents and maintenance of perfectionism, and all other phenomena surrounding perfectionism (see Figure 15). Genetics and/or learning influences encourage perfectionism but are not to be confounded with it. Parental influences are common antecedents for perfectionism, and negative reinforcement frequently helps to maintain it.

Finally, it is possible to manage perfectionism and all of the other phenomena surrounding it by employing coping and tempering strategies (see Figure 16). Consciously striving for excellence is one example of tempering perfectionism, and nurturing acceptance for one's perfectionism is an example of coping with perfectionism. These strategies are employed to minimize the negative effects associated with perfectionism, and vary in effectiveness depending upon which aspects of perfectionism they are directed at.

CHAPTER EIGHT: IMPLICATIONS AND INTEGRATIVE DISCUSSION

If it is accepted that the Framework for Evaluating Conceptualizations of Perfectionism (FECp) and the results found while utilizing it are accurate, there are further implications from those put forward in the literature review for further conceptualizing, measuring, and treating perfectionism. The next four sections specify and describe these implications, and put forward any implications for future research. Following that, there will be two sections containing commentary on the choice of research methodology for this study, and on the strengths and weaknesses of this study. This chapter will end with the author's reflections.

Implications for Conceptualizing Perfectionism

One of the most important implications of this study, and more specifically of the FECp, is that perfectionism may be conceptualized using a proximal-distal approach. It has proven very useful in this study to investigate perfectionism using an approach that can determine the core of a psychological phenomenon, determine what is inextricably tied to that core, determine what is peripheral to it, and determine what developmental influences there are with

regard to it.

This approach yielded what may be considered the core of perfectionism in that it was used to determine the object of perfectionism. This approach also yielded what is inextricably tied to this object in that it was used to ascertain both the process of perfectionism and any cognitive responses to it. Finally this approach yielded what is peripheral to the phenomenon of perfectionism in that it was used to determine what may be considered the distal consequences or correlates of perfectionism (i.e., that which is possibly related to perfectionism), and what may be considered its antecedents (i.e., how perfectionism is developed and maintained).

As for the object of perfectionism, the implications of this study are that it is a cognitive diathesis or style, and that it may be considered a permanent predisposition. During the course of analysis this cognitive diathesis was given a name, the Cognitive Diathesis for Perfectionism (CDP), and any information already present in the literature regarding perfectionism as cognitive diathesis was elaborated upon. For instance, it was suggested that a heightened perceptual sensitivity and drive toward pattern manipulation may provide the basis for this cognitive diathesis for perfectionism.

This is a very clear and understandable conceptual definition for the object of perfectionism. Although more research is needed with more

participants, the implication for other researchers is to clearly define the core or object of perfectionism.

As for perfectionism as process, the participants in this study indicated that this involves both activation of the CDP and engaging in three behavioural imperatives. These imperatives include 1) the formation of ideals of perfection, 2) striving for perfection, and 3) evaluating for perfection. When researchers are conceptualizing perfectionism, the implications of this study suggest that all three of these behaviours should be included and that no other types of behaviour should be considered part of perfectionism itself.

Another finding of this study that has implications for conceptualizing perfectionism is that perfectionists experience mainly negative cognitive responses to the process of perfectionism, or, more specifically, to evaluating for perfection. These responses are inextricably linked to perfectionism because evaluating for perfection by definition must produce either harmony or conflict among cognitions. The participants in this study viewed conflict or cognitive dissonance as an inevitable consequence of detecting a mismatch between their ideals of perfection and their attempts to achieve them. As they viewed perfection as unreachable, experiencing cognitive dissonance was a permanent state of affairs for them, and they experienced many negative emotions as a result. For this reason they labelled perfectionism as negative.

This has implications for those researchers who have conceptualized perfectionism as being both positive or negative. What seems to be the crux of the matter is how perfectionists themselves define perfection. The study participants differentiated perfection from excellence in that they viewed perfection in absolute terms and excellence in relative terms. If they had seen perfection as relative and therefore achievable they may not have experienced high levels of cognitive dissonance, and for them perfectionism may have been more positive. However, because the participants viewed perfection as unattainable they experienced high levels of cognitive dissonance, and for them perfectionism was always negative.

The implication here is that researchers should determine in their conceptualizations whether or not perfection is to be viewed as attainable as this will influence whether perfectionism is viewed as positive or negative. According to the results of this study, perfection should be viewed as unattainable and therefore perfectionism should always be viewed as negative. Anything that is actually attainable should be referred to as excellence rather than perfection, and the pursuit of excellence should not be included when conceptualizing perfectionism.

The last implications of this study for conceptualizing perfectionism involve the peripheral and developmental aspects. Anything that may result

from the above behavioural imperatives and cognitive responses should be considered the distal consequences or residue of perfectionism (i.e., fear of failure). Anything directly related to or associated with the CDP, the process of perfectionism, or its cognitive responses should be considered correlates of perfectionism (i.e., depression). Finally, anything to do with the antecedents or the development and maintenance of perfectionism should be regarded as contributing to, but not part of, perfectionism (e.g., societal reinforcement of perfectionism). In other words, none of the above aspects should be confounded with perfectionism. Researchers should take this into account when conceptualizing perfectionism.

The preceding implications are useful for critiquing and/or suggesting adjustments to existing conceptualizations of perfectionism. Several examples will be discussed. These applications are based on the results of this study, and the suggested adjustments might be inconsistent with researchers' original intentions. The suggestions are offered mainly as examples for how the results of this study might be applied.

Frost and colleagues.

Results from the present study suggest modification to Frost et al.'s (1990) conceptualization of perfectionism. Not unlike Frost et al.'s

conceptualization, the FECP can be considered a multidimensional view of perfectionism if its proximal-distal approach to describing the various properties and related aspects of perfectionism is accepted as grounds for a new conceptualization of perfectionism. Although Frost et al. have asserted that perfectionism is multidimensional in that they address many but not all of the components suggested in the FECP, their conceptualization lacks an overall perspective that helps to organize it. For instance, it is vague in terms of what is considered the object of perfectionism. It is implied but never clearly stated that perfectionism is a cognitive style, and it is vague as to whether or not this is central to the conceptualization.

It is also vague as to which, if any, aspects of Frost et al.'s (1990) conceptualization are considered part of the process of perfectionism, and which are considered residual aspects of perfectionism. For instance, it is unclear whether "Doubts about actions" (DA) or "Concern over mistakes" (CM) are part of perfectionism or residual to it. In addition to this, although "Personal standards" (PS) and "Organization" (O) would most likely be included as part of the process of perfectionism, it is not presented as such. Lastly, "Parental criticism" (PC) and "Parental expectations" (PE) are obviously antecedents of perfectionism, but this is never made explicit in Frost et al.'s conceptualization of perfectionism. As will be seen later in the section

on the implications for measuring perfectionism, the current data suggest that the above aspects of this conceptualization be made more explicit, and that they be organized using a proximal-distal approach to perfectionism.

Hewitt and Flett.

Although Hewitt and Flett (1991a) also consider their conceptualization of perfectionism to be multidimensional, it is not multidimensional in the same way as the FECP or Frost et al.'s conceptualization. Their version of multidimensionality concerns where perfectionists direct their perfectionism (i.e., at themselves or others), and whether or not they believe others expect perfection from them. As their conceptualization of perfectionism is mainly focussed on these concerns, it includes a fairly simple definition of perfectionism that incorporates an emphasis on perfectionism as process. The heaviest emphasis is on ideals of perfection, the second heaviest emphasis is on evaluating for perfection, and the least heaviest emphasis is on striving for perfection.

The object of perfectionism is never really made explicit in Hewitt and Flett's conceptualization of perfectionism, although it appears that they probably view perfectionism as a cognitive diathesis. In addition, their conceptualization does not place much emphasis on the antecedents of

perfectionism. If Hewitt and Flett did address this aspect, their conceptualization would be more complete. Other aspects they do address quite thoroughly in their research are the correlates of perfectionism. They are continuously conducting studies that look for significant correlations between perfectionism and conditions like depression.

Where they are not so clear concerns a blur between perfectionism and some of its consequences. For instance, it is not clear whether they see controlling behaviour (a consequence of perfectionism according to the FECP) as part of perfectionism or residual to it. Their conceptualization would be more thorough if issues like these were addressed.

Slaney and colleagues.

Like the preceding two examples, Slaney et al.'s (1998) conceptualization of perfectionism is also lacking with regard to describing the object of perfectionism. Slaney's conceptualization loosely suggests that perfectionism is a cognitive diathesis or style, but this is never clearly stated. This conceptualization of perfectionism places great emphasis on the process of perfectionism, especially with regard to setting high standards, with regard to a certain type of striving for perfection (organization), and with regard to evaluating for perfection (discrepance).

The main difference between the results of this study and Slaney's conceptualization is that striving for perfection should not necessarily be limited to organizing behaviours. As for the antecedents, distal consequences, and correlates of perfectionism, Slaney et al. (1998) do not really address these in their conceptualization of perfectionism. Their conceptualization would be more complete if these aspects were addressed.

Slade and Owens.

Again, the object of perfectionism is not clearly stated in Slade and Owens' (1998) conceptualization of perfectionism. Their conceptualization would be more complete they were to name the object of perfectionism. What makes them distinct from the above researchers is that they describe two types of perfectionism, "positive perfectionism" and "negative perfectionism". They assert the difference between the two is what drives or motivates the process of perfectionism, a behavioural process that supposedly looks the same for both positive and negative perfectionism. This is incompatible with the results of this study in two ways.

First, the process of perfectionism is probably indeed not the same for both positive and negative perfectionists as Slade and Owens describe them. As they assert that positive perfectionists can actually achieve satisfaction, i.e.,

cognitive consonance, it stands to reason that they may be setting and striving for ideals that are not necessarily aimed at perfection. According to the participants in this study ideals aimed at perfection are not attainable, and therefore those who reach their goals are probably not striving for perfection and are instead striving for excellence.

Remembering that Slade and Owens (1998) assert that positive perfectionists experience satisfaction, it may be that Slade and Owens fail to take into account that positive perfectionists may not evaluate for perfection but instead evaluate for excellence. As the results of this study suggest that evaluating for perfection will almost always lead to cognitive dissonance and/or lack of satisfaction, they are not compatible with the claim that positive perfectionists can experience satisfaction as the result of engaging in the process of perfectionism.

The second incompatibility with the results of this study has to do with the contention that the difference between positive and negative types of perfectionism concerns motivation. Slade and Owens contend that motivation determines which type of perfectionist an individual is. If an individual is motivated to achieve ideals via pursuing success, i.e., is proactive, that individual is a positive perfectionist. If an individual is motivated to avoid failure via pursuing success, i.e., is reactive, that individual is a negative

perfectionist. The results of this study suggest that motivation, or that which results from the antecedents, development, and/or maintenance of perfectionism is not part of perfectionism itself, but peripheral and contributory to it. This study is incompatible with the assertion that there are two types of perfectionism because the data support one object of perfectionism and one process of perfectionism with accompanying cognitive responses that are the same regardless of motivation.

Slade and Owens (1998) are possibly positing two different processes of perfectionism, and this is something they could probably revisit. Their “positive perfectionism” would be better named “striving for excellence”. Their conceptualization of perfectionism is very thorough with regard to the antecedents and especially the maintenance of perfectionism. They also touch upon the consequences and correlates of perfectionism (i.e., eating disorders), and do view these as distinct from perfectionism.

Implications for Measuring Perfectionism

As already outlined, measuring perfectionism requires operationally defining conceptualizations of perfectionism such that perfectionism can be objectively observed. All of the researchers cited in the previous section have created measures of perfectionism based on operationalizing their own

conceptualizations of perfectionism. As there were implications of the Framework for Evaluating Conceptualizations of Perfectionism (FECF) and the results of this study for their conceptualizations, it follows that there are also implications for their measures.

These implications will be illustrated via a question and response format that asks general questions about how perfectionism should be measured given the results of this study. The implications will be given in the responses. These responses also represent criteria for evaluating current measures of perfectionism, and will be used to suggest what a new and better measure of perfectionism should include.

1) Can the object of perfectionism be measured? - Even though the core or object of perfectionism should be specified in any conceptualization of perfectionism, in most cases it is difficult to operationalize and measure because it is intangible. For instance, in the case of any results for this study, it would be necessary to operationalize the Cognitive Diathesis for Perfectionism (CDP). This is probably not possible. Given its abstract and impalpable nature, it is probably best not to attempt an objective measure of the object or core of perfectionism.

2) What should be included in a measure of perfectionism? - Given the FECP and results of this study what should be included when creating a measure of perfectionism are operationalizations of any behaviours or responses inextricably associated with the core of perfectionism. In the case of this study the three behavioural imperatives associated with CDP and its activation would be included along with any unavoidable cognitive responses to these imperatives. In other words, a measure of perfectionism should include a measure of it as process. This is because the process of perfectionism is operationalizable in concrete and objectifiable terms. Forming ideals of perfection, striving for perfection, evaluating for perfection, and cognitive responses can all be operationalized and should all be given equal weight in an overall measure of perfectionism. They might each make up a subscale.

3) Should the antecedents and maintenance of perfectionism be included in a measure of perfectionism? - If the FECP and results of this study are considered accurate, the antecedents and maintenance of perfectionism should not be included in a measure of perfectionism unless they are placed in a separate subscale and do not influence an overall measure of perfectionism.

In other words, as they do not measure perfectionism itself they should not be included in an overall score for perfectionism. It would be better to use

a measure of antecedents and/or maintenance as an indicator of whether or not a perfectionist's environment encourages or models the expression of perfectionism, and whether or not the environment maintains the behavioural manifestations of perfectionism (i.e., via behavioural reinforcement).

4) Should distal consequences or correlates of perfectionism be included in a measure of perfectionism? - The distal consequences and correlates of perfectionism should definitely not be included when measuring perfectionism. According to the FECP and the results of this study they are only peripheral to perfectionism, and are not to be confounded with it.

As previously mentioned, the preceding four questions and their responses can be used as criteria for both evaluating current measures of perfectionism and developing a new measure. A new measure based on the results of this study would be a more complete and possibly better measure of perfectionism than each of the main four measures of perfectionism currently being used in research (i.e., the MPSs, APS-R, and PANPS). The new measure would not attempt to measure perfectionism as object. It would measure perfectionism as process and give equal weighting to each of the three behavioural manifestations of this process. Each behavioural manifestation

would be assigned to a separate subscale.

As cognitive responses are more proximal to the process of perfectionism than emotional responses, the new measure would also include a subscale measuring only cognitive responses. It would not include a subscale measuring the antecedents and maintenance of perfectionism unless the subscale was not part of the overall score for perfectionism. The distal consequences and/or correlates of perfectionism would be totally excluded in this new measure of perfectionism. As the participants in this study defined perfection in absolute terms, it would also be important to make sure that words like “perfection”, “ideal”, and “flawless” are used in place of words like “excellence”, “very good”, and “high standards” when creating new items for a measure of perfectionism based on the results of this study.

Implications for Treating Perfectionism

Perfectionism seems to be a complaint frequently presented to mental health care practitioners, and as seen earlier in the literature review, may be linked to psychopathology. For example, it has been found that many individuals high in perfectionism can suffer from depression and/or anxiety (e.g., Hewitt & Flett, 1991b; Blatt, 1995), have diminished self-esteem (e.g., Flett, Hewitt, Blankstein, & O'Brien, 1991), exhibit irrational thinking (e.g.,

Flett, Hewitt, Blankstein, & Koledin, 1991) and Type A behaviour (e.g., Flett, Hewitt, Blankstein, & Dynin, 1994), suffer with eating disorders (e.g., Slade & Owens, 1998), and most tragically, manifest high levels of suicide ideation (e.g., Hewitt, Flett, & Weber, 1994). Obviously it would be helpful if effective treatment were available to perfectionists. Before addressing treatment for perfectionism, the possibility of perfectionism as psychopathology will be addressed.

Perfectionism as psychopathology: A possibility?

Although perfectionism has been found to be related to psychopathologies like depression and eating disorders, it has never been strongly considered a psychopathology in itself. Some researchers, Pacht (1984) for example, have gone as far as labelling it a psychopathology but most have not. A conclusion of this study is that perfectionism has the potential to be labelled a psychopathology. At the very least it should be considered negative and/or dysfunctional. Certainly the participants viewed perfectionism as negative, and some like June went as far as labelling it a pathology.

Surely a condition whereby its sufferers are driven to aim for nothing short of perfection, to strive for nothing other than perfection, and to evaluate for nothing other than perfection (thereby experiencing nothing but cognitive

dissonance) produces major interference with healthy functioning? In fact, if not managed, it necessarily produces dysfunction. In order to treat perfectionism, management techniques to cope with and temper perfectionism may be applied. Suggestions for this are described below.

Treating perfectionism.

Any implications for treating perfectionism that have been discovered as a result of conducting this investigation were generated by the study participants, and they are taken from the “Managing Perfectionism” category results. “Managing” perfectionism can be described in two ways: 1) Coping with perfectionism, and 2) Tempering perfectionism. “Coping” is what individuals do with something they cannot change. For instance, the participants could not change their Cognitive Diatheses for Perfectionism (CDPs), so they learned to cope with them, i.e., survive or endure them. “Tempering” is what individuals do with something they can change or moderate. For instance, the participants discovered that they can moderate how much they strive for perfection, and so they learned to temper striving, i.e., restrain or control striving. As already enumerated in Chapter Five, the participants found many ways to both cope with and temper their perfectionism. The following implications or suggestions for the treatment of

perfectionism take these into account

Managing the Cognitive Diathesis for Perfectionism (CDP).

It appears the only implication of this study for managing the CDP is to become educated about it and aware of it, and then to exercise both acceptance of it and a willingness to work with it. As it is probably difficult if not impossible to change individuals' perceptual sensitivity and information processing tendencies, all that can be done is to encourage individuals to accept things as they are and work with rather than against the status quo. In other words, they should be encouraged to find techniques that allow them to surrender to the inevitability of being perfectionists, and which allow them to put up less resistance to who they are. The participants cited many examples of this. For instance, Bonnie illustrated this via the following analogy,

Visually I'd say, call it, you know, opening your hand. It's [perfectionism is] just sort of the clenched fist of needing to drive yourself and achieve this thing, you know, impress everybody or whatever, impress yourself probably more than anybody else. It's just kind of like relaxing that grip... ..and opening yourself to just accepting yourself the way you are, and not having to be perfect to feel good about yourself.

Managing ideals of perfection.

As those who aim for excellence seem to experience more life satisfaction than those who aim for perfection, it obviously follows that perfectionists would suffer less if they could better manage their ideals of perfection. Note that it will not be suggested that perfectionists should change the perfectionistic nature of their ideals of perfection. Their CDPs seem to make it next to impossible for them to do this. Any changes made to their ideals should represent changes to the content of these ideals rather than changes to their nature (i.e., to their complexity, organization, etc.). It is suggested that perfectionists manage their ideals of perfection by viewing them as inevitable and acceptable. In other words, they should manage perfectionism by coping with their ideals of perfection in much the same way as they would cope with their CDPs. This is what the participants did.

As is obvious from the above, mental health practitioners should not advise perfectionists to lower their standards as they are asking the impossible. Rather, they should help them to define just what is “perfect” or “perfection” (this impacts the degree to which perfection is perceived as desirable and/or achievable). Also, they should help them to accept their ideals of perfection and to prioritize these ideals such that they are selective about which ideals they will hold up as important. As will be seen next, prioritizing is an

important factor in managing striving for perfection.

Managing striving for perfection.

Again, those who strive for excellence seem to experience more life satisfaction than those who strive for perfection. This means that perfectionists would suffer less if they could challenge any all pervasive need to actualize their ideals of perfection. It seems perfectionists are prone to excessive striving in order to reach their goals, and they are sometimes not able to recognize this. This means their efforts frequently go unchecked, and they burn themselves out or experience depression. Highlighting this and helping perfectionists to prioritize which of their ideals are important enough to warrant striving will help perfectionists to consciously set limits on their excessive striving, i.e., to temper striving for perfection. It is essential to emphasize that they are not being asked to lower their standards but are instead being asked to limit the amount of striving toward them.

Also, educating perfectionists about the principle of diminishing returns may help them to decide whether or not excessive striving is worth any rewards they may be receiving for their efforts. The perfectionist should be encouraged to ask, "Is matching this ideal of perfection worth my time and effort right now, or am I better off redirecting my energy or taking a break?" If this

reasoning does not work, and it may not if an individual is addicted to perfectionism (i.e., engages in it in order to avoid pain), another method for tempering striving for perfection is for the perfectionist to consciously limit his or her resources (i.e., time, space, materials, etc.). For instance, a student like Tina might procrastinate on writing a paper until several days before it is due thereby effectively limiting how much time she has to write it, that is, how much time she has to strive toward perfecting it. What also seems to cause much dysfunction for perfectionists is the unrelenting pace they keep up in order to match their ideals. It is also important that mental practitioners advise perfectionists to pace themselves more reasonably so as not to unduly stress themselves. This is especially important as participants like Bonnie demonstrated that stress seems to exacerbate perfectionism.

The above are potentially effective tempering techniques for perfectionists to use in managing their perfectionism. In fact, striving for perfection may be the most treatable behaviour of the three behavioural imperatives of the process of perfectionism. Perfectionists can make conscious choices as to whether or not they strive for perfection. They cannot make these choices with regard to activating their CDPs and forming ideals of perfection as these behaviours seem almost automatic. As will be seen below, this is also somewhat the case for evaluating for perfection.

Managing negative evaluations and cognitive dissonance.

Another aid in treating perfectionists takes into account how perfectionists most often evaluate their efforts negatively and consequently experience cognitive dissonance. Although it is impossible for perfectionists not to screen for flaws or imperfection when evaluating their own efforts or the efforts of others, it is possible to ask them to consider accepting a certain amount of imperfection as “good enough”.

In other words, they may not be able to give up trying to match their ideals of perfection, but they may be able to evaluate as “perfect” an attempt at achieving a predetermined portion of an ideal. This might allow them to experience some satisfaction and a temporary sense of completion before aiming for more, something they will almost certainly do. This may in turn allow them to take pauses between achievements such that they may either rest, or decide that they have put in as much striving toward a particular ideal as they are willing. As the unrelenting pace they must keep up in order to match their ideals causes dysfunction for perfectionists, striving for smaller portions (subgoals) of their ideals, allowing for some imperfection, and lessening the pace by taking rest periods all contribute toward decreasing this dysfunction.

Again, mental health practitioners should not ask perfectionists to

change that they evaluate for perfection. Rather, they should encourage perfectionists to evaluate for partial perfection each time so that they can pause before further striving, and they should encourage perfectionists to prioritize which, if any, evaluations of imperfection they will direct their energy toward rectifying. Constantly resetting ideals of perfection, i.e., “setting the bar higher to infinity” should also be discouraged by suggesting to perfectionists that they should not always seek ways to formulate ideals that are more representative of perfection. Instead they may settle for excellence. Bonnie found this particularly effective.

Managing antecedents and maintenance of perfectionism.

All of the above suggestions for treatment involve what individuals may manage within to cope with or temper their perfectionism. There are also suggestions for what perfectionists may change within their environments in order to better manage their perfectionism. For instance, there are reinforcement patterns present in the environment for perfectionism (schedules of positive and/or negative reinforcers) that may influence motivation, or the degree to which individuals perceive perfectionism as necessary (for self-esteem, approval, love, etc.). Identifying and either changing or discounting these reinforcers may help the perfectionist to lessen their effects. For

example, a mental health practitioner may help a perfectionist like Richard identify that his family encourages perfectionism by punishing him if he is not perfect, and help him to reconcile this with his family such that they no longer make these demands on him.

Also for example, a mental health practitioner might help a perfectionist like June identify that her job brings her many rewards for striving to be perfect, and help her to see that these rewards are being outweighed by the negative effects of stress and that she can choose to seek other rewards like health. For one last example, a mental health practitioner might help a perfectionist like Leanne identify that she is experiencing internal rewards for avoiding the pain she may feel if she lets up on trying to live up to the achievements of her idol the basketball superstar. The practitioner might help her see that these rewards serve only to ward off the inevitable cognitive dissonance she will feel once she faces that she is 5'5" and will never be a basketball superstar, and that she might set her sights on something else that may yield the reward of feeling satisfaction rather than the reward of avoiding pain.

One other influence present in the environment that may be managed is that of modelling. Perfectionists observe other perfectionists and/or those who are rewarded for high performance and adopt the same standards for

themselves. Obviously this is a problem if the standards are so high that they are unobtainable. Mental health practitioners can encourage perfectionists not to compare themselves with others, and to view models present in the environment as a suggestion for what is possible rather than as a requirement for their own behaviour. Practitioners can also encourage perfectionists not to expose themselves to models they cannot view in this way.

One last consideration in managing the antecedents and maintenance of perfectionism is that any genetic component of perfectionism cannot be tempered or changed. For instance, increased perceptual sensitivity is probably inherited and permanent, and any aspect of perfectionism such as this will require coping strategies similar to those put forward for managing the CDP and ideals of perfection. Again, acceptance is the key.

Perfectionism as addiction?

As already outlined in Chapter Seven, it may be that the internal rewards or punishment the perfectionist experiences as a result of striving for perfection may outweigh any external rewards or punishments, i.e., any regard for diminishing returns. If this is the case, there is probably a greater danger of an addiction to perfectionism forming, and those affected in this way should probably seek addiction counselling. Internal rewards or punishments may

allow for an avoidance of pain (in this case cognitive dissonance), something addicts usually engage in when behaving addictively (i.e., using drugs, drinking alcohol, shopping, gambling, working, etc.).

This avoidance of pain may be accommodating an intolerance for chaos (i.e., incomplete patterns) via attempts to exert control over entropy, an inevitability that human beings cannot avoid. Perfectionists like Leanne, Holly, and Bonnie must be educated such that they recognize that they cannot ever achieve perfect control over all the patterns in their lives. They must allow for a certain amount of chaos in their lives (i.e., incomplete patterns) or they will probably die trying to eliminate it. Focussing on all flaws present in the environment (i.e., being an “imperfectionist”) and trying to eliminate them in order to feel good is an endless and exhaustive task much like that experienced by a moth flying at a light. Mental health practitioners must help perfectionists see the folly of this, and teach them how to both moderate their actions and relieve their pain in other ways.

Perfectionism and diathesis-stress theory.

As previously mentioned, there are researchers who believe that stress exacerbates any negative effects that may result from certain types of cognitive diatheses like perfectionism (see Abramson, Alloy, & Metalsky, 1988; Flett,

Hewitt, Blankstein, & Mosher, 1995). The participants in this study all indicated that if there are more life stressors present in their lives their attempts to manage perfectionism begin to fail. For instance, Bonnie said,

...I'll grow for awhile and then something crazy will happen and then I'll just sort of reach back for awhile into the old way of seeing and doing things.

Tina also indicated that some of the stress is brought on by perfectionism itself, and that she sometimes get caught in a vicious cycle of perfectionism, stress, escalating perfectionism, more stress, etc. As it appears that to treat stress is also to treat perfectionism, mental health practitioners should encourage perfectionists to decrease their stress levels by learning stress relieving techniques such as relaxation and guided imagery. Also, as increased stress levels cause regression back to old habits, decreasing stress levels should help perfectionists to work more effectively toward change.

Current research on treating perfectionism.

The above is an incomplete list of treatment options that should be augmented and supported by further research. They are better understood as coping mechanisms and tempering techniques that can couple with a Cognitive Diathesis for Perfectionism (CDP) to either amplify, or reduce its

consequences and/or psychopathological effects. As there is a paucity of research concerning the treatment of perfectionism, hopefully this study has provided an impetus for further research with regard to the successful treatment of perfectionism. So far, only the following research has been conducted.

First, Hamachek (1978) has suggested that task selectiveness (i.e., selectivity of striving), giving oneself permission to be less than perfect, setting reachable goals, and choosing activities one can succeed at are important treatment considerations. Next, Brouwers and Wiggum (1993) have developed a programme in which they encourage perfectionists to challenge unrealistic expectations, identify and express fears underlying perfectionism, and develop the courage to accept their imperfections. They have not formally tested this programme but have observed good results with bulimic clients.

Burns (1980) has suggested that cognitive-behavioural therapy is useful for the treatment of perfectionism, and Ferguson and Rodway (1994) have confirmed this in a study that found decreased levels of perfectionism in clients who were subject to cognitive-behavioural intervention. In addition to this, Flett, Russo, and Hewitt (1994) have shown that constructive thinking is associated with increased coping ability for perfectionists.

Finally, Pacht (1984) asserted that a strong therapeutic alliance is

important for successfully treating perfectionism. However, Zuroff et al. (2000) demonstrated that therapeutic alliance is less important for perfectionists in the treatment of depression than it is for nonperfectionists. This calls into question Pacht's (1984) assertion.

Implications for Future Research

The most obvious implication of this study for future research is that a more comprehensive measure of perfectionism should be created to better assess the new aspects of perfectionism brought to light in this study. For instance, a new measure of perfectionism could be developed containing one subscale for each of the behavioural imperatives of perfectionism (ideals of perfection, striving for perfection, and evaluating for perfection), and one subscale for cognitive responses to perfectionism. The new measure could also include a separate subscale assessing antecedents, a subscale that would not be included in an overall measure of perfectionism.

Another implication of this study for future research is that additional studies similar to this should be conducted using participants from other demographic backgrounds. For example, a study using more male participants should be conducted, as well as a study that includes participants who are not university students.

Yet another implication for future research concerns treatment for perfectionism. Applications of the suggestions put forward in the above section on implications for the treatment of perfectionism could be made and assessed for efficacy. For example, a group of participants could be taught how to temper striving for perfection and compared with a non-treatment group who are not taught tempering strategies.

One last implication of this study is that the antecedents of perfectionism need to be studied more thoroughly. One area of interest is that of negative reinforcement. Because the participants in this study agreed that they usually fail to acknowledge diminishing returns, i.e., decreasing external rewards for their achievements, it is possible that perfectionists are predominantly internally reinforced for their perfectionist behaviour. It is also possible that this reinforcement is negative reinforcement, and perfectionists behave as they do in order to avoid cognitive dissonance or self-punishment.

Evaluating the Usefulness of Grounded Theory for this Study

Given that this study produced several meaningful contributions to theory on perfectionism, and given that these contributions provided the impetus for generating the above implications for conceptualizing, measuring, and treating perfectionism, it appears that grounded theory was a good choice

of research methodology for conducting this study. Although it was a pleasure to conduct interviews with the participants of this study, it was an onerous task to transcribe these interviews into data. It was also a slow going and arduous task to analyse the data into a core concept, main categories, and subcategories, and to discover the relationships among them. However, as I hit my stride the going got easier. In the end, the fruits of my labour were plentiful.

Perhaps the greatest benefit of making this methodological choice was that both the static and dynamic aspects of perfectionism could be addressed. The participants really grappled with this issue, and I along with them. Only the painstakingly thorough analysis of the data carried out using grounded theory techniques could have ferreted out the differences between the object and process of perfectionism as put forward in this study. The potential for grounded theory to determine both content and relationships among content was especially useful for making this distinction. It was also valuable for discovering what was peripheral to the object and process of perfectionism.

Also useful about using grounded theory was the fact that each participant was able to make a unique contribution to the study of perfectionism. The uniqueness of each of their responses would have been diluted in a quantitative study, or discounted as one time occurrences. Instead

these “one time occurrences” were used as the basis for future interview questions, the contents of which were usually confirmed by the next interviewees. They were able to expound on subjects they may not have conceived of had they not been asked questions regarding them. This expanded not only my understanding of perfectionism but the participants’ as well.

Strengths and Limitations of this Study

This study had both its strengths and limitations. They will be addressed in terms of the following topics: 1) Screening process for selecting participants, 2) Reproducibility, 3) Predictability, 4) Researcher bias, 5) Consistency, 6) Theory-observation compatibility, and 7) Quality and usefulness of new theory.

Screening process for selecting participants.

Although it proved to be productive to screen participants for perfectionism rather than just taking them at their word, there were some limitations to this process. First, the screening questionnaire itself was not pretested for reliability and validity. At the very least it would have been a good idea to have several colleagues examine the questionnaire items for face

validity. However, the questions were generated using information contained in the Framework for Evaluating Conceptualizations of Perfectionism (FECF), and to the extent that they accurately represent this information they successfully screened for perfectionism as defined in this study.

This leads to the second limitation of the screening process. As the participants were screened in accordance with the FECF, it stands to reason that only those who met the FECF criteria for perfectionism would be selected for this study. In other words, anyone who viewed perfectionism differently than that set out in the FECF would not have had a voice in this study thereby eliminating any possibility for major refutation of the FECF. However, as the FECF was a product of synthesizing the current literature on perfectionism, it was fairly safe to assume that it was at least partially representative of how many current researchers may now view perfectionism.

Reproducibility.

Reproducibility concerns whether or not a study can be replicated (Borg & Gall, 1989). A strength of this study is that it will probably be more easy to replicate than other studies using grounded theory. This is because the data was initially classified into a core concept, main categories, and subcategories using the FECF as a skeleton theoretical guide. In other words, as the initial

interview questions were based on the FECP, some of the categories were predetermined. This made it so that the data were not totally undifferentiated at the beginning of the data analysis. Because there were already signs of a pattern forming in the data as a result of using the FECP to help generate it, it was easy to choose a starting point for the analysis. If other researchers were to attempt replicating this study they would also have the advantage of this head start when analysing their data.

One procedure that was omitted in this study was that of category verification, or the practice of having an independent observer verify that the main categories found in any grounded theory study are valid. Because they were mostly predetermined, it is doubtful that an independent observer would have disagreed with the main categories delineated in this study. However, if category verification had been conducted, the results of this study would have been less subject to error and/or researcher bias. Omission of this procedure was a limitation of this study.

Predictability.

Generalizability concerns whether or not the results of a study can be generalized to its target population (Borg & Gall, 1989). One limitation of this study is that the six participants were all female except for one. Even

though six is not a large enough number of participants to make the claim that this study is generalizable to the whole perfectionist population, what little generalizability there is with six participants would have been enhanced if there had been an equal number of males and females. In addition to this, all of the participants were past or current university students of similar socio-economic backgrounds, and four out six were in the same age range. More variety regarding these demographical attributes would also have enhanced the generalizability of this study.

Aside from the limitations listed above, it should be acknowledged that qualitative studies are not generally concerned with generalizability in the quantitative sense. They are more concerned with predictability, i.e., that which can be said about the particular participants studied. Given that this study was conducted such that it accurately reflects the voices of the participants, predictability was not a limitation of this study.

Researcher bias .

Researcher bias concerns whether or not researchers' biases, values and beliefs influence the results of their studies (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). A limitation of this study is that I the researcher had some pretty strong biases in terms of what I expected to find with regard to perfectionism. A huge

challenge in conducting this study was to suspend these biases. Being a perfectionist myself I was tremendously empathic toward the study participants, and found it difficult to keep from becoming identified with them. However, I did manage to keep my biases in check well enough for this to become a strength. Although I revealed to the participants that I was a fellow perfectionist, I was still able to use empathic questions that were open-ended but not leading. I was able to draw out the participants in an objective way and at the same time they felt comfortable sharing their experiences with someone of the same ilk.

Consistency.

Consistency refers to whether or not a study can demonstrate that certain conditions can be consistently related to other conditions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As in other grounded theory studies the procedures of theoretical sampling and constant comparison were used to make consistency more probable in this study. To the extent that these procedures were successfully carried out, consistency was achieved in this study. As everything went as planned during the data analysis, consistency proved to be a strength rather than a weakness for this study.

Theory-observation compatibility.

Theory-observation compatibility, which is akin to the requirement of face validity in quantitative research studies, was achieved in this study. It was a strength that the theory generated by this study emerged from all of the data and reflected the everyday reality of the participants' perfectionism. For these reasons the new theory on perfectionism will probably make intuitive sense to those studying perfectionism. It will also make sense to those who experience perfectionism and to those involved in the treatment of perfectionism.

Quality and usefulness of new theory.

The greatest strength of this study is the quality and usefulness of the new model of perfectionism that it generated. The new theoretical information contained within it is functional in that it has scope, it has predictive ability, and it contributes to a better understanding of how perfectionism should be conceptualized. The model is also flexible in that the possibility for modification via further inquiry is present. In addition to this, this new model of perfectionism is logical and has internal consistency. More specifically, the concepts or categories generated in the analyses are clear and detailed in that they contain a number of properties that describe each concept. In turn, the concepts have been systematically linked together, and are related to the core

of perfectionism.

Further to having internal consistency, the new model has relevance for researchers or mental health practitioners dealing with perfectionism in that it has implications for expanding current conceptualizations of perfectionism, implications for operationalizing and measuring perfectionism, and implications for treating perfectionism. At the very least, this study provides new direction for further inquiry.

Author's Reflections

The greatest challenge in conducting this study was to wade through the undifferentiated mass of data that presented itself throughout the research process and make sense of it all. Being a perfectionist myself I found the whole thing extremely chaotic, and my lack of tolerance for chaos was more evident than I would have preferred. As I went along I began to see this whole study in terms of being a complex pattern that I had to obsessively manipulate by organizing its pieces, generating new ones, and eliminating others. It seemed I was always tinkering with something in order to get it to fit. In other words, this study became an exercise in perfectionism! Some would say I got too perfectionistic about perfecting my perfectionism study!

One last challenge in conducting this study was to do it a way that

would allow its participants to view themselves positively after being interviewed. I did this by asking them to tell me why they value their perfectionism and by giving support and debriefing wherever it was needed. Most said, "I can't change, this is just the way I am", and they cited instances of increased productivity as the reason for valuing their perfectionism. I think they were correct in assuming that they cannot change, and my biggest hope for this study is that it will lead other researchers to a better understanding of perfectionism and its treatment. At the very least it has given me a better understanding of my perfectionism and how to live with it. For that I am grateful.

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APPENDIX A

SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE: Perfectionism study

NAME: _____ TEL: _____

Dictionary definition of “perfectionist”: Someone with “a disposition to regard anything short of perfection as unacceptable”. (**Perfection** can be defined as, “flawlessness, or an unsurpassable degree of accuracy or excellence”, and **disposition** as a, “prevailing tendency, mood, or inclination”).

- 1) Given the above definition, would you consider yourself a perfectionist?
(Yes or No)
- 2) Would others consider you a perfectionist? (Yes or No)
- 3) Have you ever been told by a counsellor, psychologist or psychiatrist
(i.e., therapist) that you are a perfectionist? (Yes or No)

Please indicate (by circling your answer) whether or not you agree with the following statements:

1. Anything short of perfection is unacceptable

Agree	Disagree
-------	----------
2. I require flawlessness in all performances or things

Agree	Disagree
-------	----------
3. I set goals and standards aimed at no less than perfection

Agree	Disagree
-------	----------
4. I strive toward reaching goals/standards aimed at perfection

Agree	Disagree
-------	----------
5. I evaluate whether or not I accomplish goals/standards aimed at perfection

Agree	Disagree
-------	----------

APPENDIX B

Are You a Perfectionist?

If so, you might enjoy voluntarily participating in a project entitled “Creating a New Model of Perfectionism” that is being conducted by myself, a doctoral student at the University of Victoria. The purpose of this project is to gather more information about perfectionism. Because I would like to have a better understanding of what perfectionism actually is, and because there seems to be disagreement about how perfectionism affects people, I would like to see what you have to say about it.

The benefits of participating in this study include chances to explore one’s own perfectionism, and chances to learn more about perfectionism in general.

If you agree to participate you will be required to make yourself available for one or two confidential tape-recorded interviews (1-2 hours each) at my home counseling office, or at my on-campus office. During the interviews I will ask you to answer questions about your experiences as a perfectionist, and about your impressions as to what defines perfectionism. (Of course participants can withdraw from the study at any time, no questions asked.) At the end of the project I will make a summary of the results available to you and other participants of this study.

Interested parties please contact Sharolyn Sloat at:

385-4059

or

sgsloat@uvic.ca

APPENDIX C

CONSENT FORM

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You are being asked to voluntarily participate in a project entitled "Creating a New Model of Perfectionism" that is being conducted by myself, Sharolyn Sloat (a graduate student), as part of the requirements for the PhD in Educational Psychology degree at the University of Victoria. The purpose of this project is to gather more information about perfectionism. Because I would like to have a better understanding of what perfectionism is, and because there seems to be disagreement about how perfectionism affects people, I would like to see what you have to say about it.

The benefits of participating in this study include self-exploration of one's perfectionism and possible clarification of perfectionism in general, and the costs include giving up 1-4 hours of time.

If you agree to participate you will be required to make yourself available for one or two tape-recorded interviews (1-2 hours each) at my home counseling office, or on-campus office. During the interviews I will ask you to answer questions about your experiences as a perfectionist, and about your impressions as to what defines perfectionism.

Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary and you are free to refuse to participate, to withdraw from it at any time, or to refuse to answer certain questions, without any negative consequences. In the event that you withdraw from the study, your data will not be used.

Your anonymity and confidentiality will be protected by using a code name on tapes and transcriptions that contain information provided by you. Although some transcription may be done by a typist other than myself, I will be the only person who knows the identity behind the code name. All documentation or cassette tapes, as well as a list of code names and corresponding identities, will be kept at my home in either a locked filing cabinet, or in a password-protected computer disk file.

At the conclusion of the study, all of the raw data will be erased (as in the case of cassette tapes) or shredded (as in the case of the transcriptions). The tapes will be erased immediately after the study, and the transcriptions will be kept for no longer than one year after possible publication of this study in an article.

The results of this study will be prepared for presentation at a special meeting with my supervisor, committee members, external examiner, and anyone else interested in attending the meeting. In addition, a copy of my dissertation will be available in the library, an article summarizing it may appear in a scholastic journal, and I may use information from it to conduct workshops and/or write books or magazine articles. I will also make a summary of the results available to you and other participants of this study.

If you have any questions or concerns about the project, you may contact either myself at 385-4059 or call my graduate supervisor, Max Uhlemann at 721-7827. You may also contact the Associate Vice President Research at the University of Victoria if you have any concerns about the study that I or my supervisor cannot help you with.

Having understood the above information and been given an opportunity to have my questions answered, I agree to participate in this study:

Signature of Participant _____

Tel: _____

Thank you for agreeing to participate.

Sharolyn Sloat