The Lived Experience of Young People who Identify as Perfectionistic: Drivers and Outcomes

of Perfectionism

This thesis is in partial fulfilment of the Honours degree of Bachelor of Psychological Science

(Honours)

School of Psychology

University of Adelaide

September 2022

Word Count: 12,073

Word Count (without results quotations): 9,468

Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

Abstract

Perfectionism has been associated with various mental health disorders, including anxiety, depression, eating disorders, and personality disorders (Shafran & Mansell, 2001; Stoeber & Rambow, 2007). Although this is the case, perfectionism is not always recognised as negative. Perfectionism has been associated with positive outcomes, such as setting high standards of achievement and higher motivation to meet goals (Damian et al., 2017). In this sense, perfectionism may be viewed as a key component to increase academic efficacy. Although the literature has identified key aspects of perfectionism, there is limited qualitative research directed towards the experiences of young people who identify as perfectionistic. In light of this gap in the literature, this thesis aims to understand the lived experiences of young people who identify as perfectionistic. To examine this, the following research aims were addressed: to understand the lived experience of perfectionistic young people, to understand what drives perfectionistic behaviours, and to understand the outcomes of perfectionistic behaviours. Employing a qualitative interview design, thematic analysis was used to examine the results. A sample of 7 perfectionistic individuals aged 17-26 were interviewed. The themes personal meaning, drivers of perfectionism, outcomes of perfectionism, and help-seeking were identified. Findings from this study highlight the perceived benefits of perfectionism, namely to the individuals' achievements. This study has relevance to perfectionism interventions. Future interventions should target the thought processes that perfectionism is necessary for high standards to be achieved. Additionally, practitioners may benefit from understanding the positives of perfectionism to better support perfectionistic clients.

Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree of diploma in any University, and, to the best of my knowledge, this thesis contains no material previously published except where due reference is made. I give permission for the digital version of this thesis to be made available on the web, via the University of Adelaide's digital thesis repository, the Library Search and through web search engines, unless permission has been granted by the School to restrict access for a period of time.

September 2022

Contribution Statement

In writing my thesis, my supervisor and I collaborated to generate the research aims of interest, designed interview questions for the participants, and identified the thematic themes. I conducted the literature search and completed the ethics application under my supervisor's guidance. My supervisor and staff from University Senior College supported me with the data collection process for the high school participants. I was responsible for the recruitment of the remaining participants, data collection, data analysis, and thesis write-up.

The Lived Experience of Young People who Identify as Perfectionistic: Drivers and

Outcomes of Perfectionism

Perfectionism has been understood as a contributing factor to psychopathology, with it being recognised throughout various mental health disorders (Stoeber & Rambow, 2007). A large part of the literature has indicated that anxiety, depression, eating disorders, and personality disorders are higher in perfectionistic individuals (Shafran et al., 2002). Through these associations, traditional theories thought of perfectionism as unidimensional (Burns, 1980; Shafran et al., 2002). However, as research grew, so did our understanding of the positive components of perfectionism, giving compelling evidence of the multidimensional nature of this construct (Hewitt et al., 2003; Rice & Ashby, 2007; Stoeber & Otto, 2006). Perfectionism has been associated with positive outcomes, such as setting high standards of achievement and higher motivation to meet goals (Damian et al., 2017). Moreover, perfectionism has been associated with higher performance and achievement in an academic setting (Stoeber, 2012). These links are particularly important in adolescent and young adult populations, as these groups are under immense pressure to reach certain academic goals, where a fear of academic failure is a common stressor (Conroy et al., 2007). In this sense, perfectionism may be viewed as a key component for their academic efficacy. Studies suggest that perfectionistic adolescents often relate their self-worth to their achievements (Mofield & Parker, 2015; Wang et al., 2012). In a world where young people are expected to meet higher standards of academic performance, young adults' self-worth could be threatened if their performance does not meet their high expectations, further maintaining their perfectionistic qualities (Curran & Hill, 2019; Wang et al., 2021).

While the literature has identified key aspects of perfectionism in young people, there is a

paucity of qualitative literature directed towards the experiences and insights of perfectionistic individuals, particularly related to young people. Enhancing our knowledge of the experiences and perspectives of perfectionistic young people is vital when considering psychological interventions for this population. If individuals see value in their perfectionistic traits, they may experience ambivalence in seeking help for the maladaptive components of their perfectionism which can reduce the effectiveness of interventions for associated mental health disorders. More recent studies have shown a decrease of perfectionistic tendencies in adolescents through targeted intervention strategies, suggesting that this may be a promising approach for reducing maladaptive perfectionism (Fairweather-Schmidt & Wade, 2015; Nehmy & Wade, 2015; Wilksch et al., 2008). The majority of studies on perfectionism have been quantitative in nature. Little research has used qualitative methods to understand the concerns of an individual who identifies as perfectionistic. As Flett and Hewitt (2006) remark, "conclusive statements about whether perfectionism is positive or negative cannot be made without taking into account the outcomes that the perfectionist is experiencing in his or her environment" (p. 479) Therefore, the current research begins to address the gap in the literature regarding young people's lived experiences with perfectionism and what it means to identify as perfectionistic by using an inductive qualitative approach. It looks at perfectionism from a broad perspective, considering the drivers and outcomes of perfectionism. The aim of this thesis is to understand the lived experiences of self-identified perfectionistic young people, to understand what drives their perfectionistic behaviours, and the outcomes of these behaviours.

What is Perfectionism?

Perfectionism is often referred to as a personality variable that is characterised by striving for flawlessness, setting high standards in performance, and having overly critical evaluations of

one's own behaviour (Frost et al., 1990; Stoeber & Otto, 2006). Hamachek (1978) defined

perfectionism as a psychological phenomenon consisting of two categories: normal

perfectionism and neurotic perfectionism. He described individuals with normal perfectionism as

finding pleasure from doing well in tasks perceived as difficult and who accept their own

personal and circumstantial limitations. Those with neurotic perfectionism, however, were

described as striving for unrealistic goals and experiencing feelings of dissatisfaction when these

goals were not met. Supporting these findings, more recent research has continued with the

notion of these two basic domains of perfectionism, with the concepts of perfectionistic strivings

and perfectionistic concerns (Frost et al., 1993), and adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism

(Rice, Ashby & Slaney, 1998).

Maladaptive perfectionism, also known as perfectionistic concerns, describe the

individual engaging in behaviour that aim to avoid failures, while also setting unachievable goals

in various areas of their life (Hamachek, 1978; Slade & Owens, 1998). When individuals with

maladaptive perfectionism are met with failure, it can lead to severe distress, causing them to

become highly critical of themselves (Shafran, Cooper & Fairburn, 2002). These reactions to

failure can lead to those with maladaptive perfectionism developing a fear over mistakes and can

have negative effects on learning outcomes, such as procrastination, test anxiety, and burnout

(Osenk et al., 2022; Soysa & Weiss, 2014). Through these negative associations, Egan and

colleagues (2011) proposed that definitions of clinical perfectionism should include subsequent

models of cognition and behaviours, including the overdependence of self-evaluation, the

determination of reaching unreasonably high standards, and dichotomous thinking. In contrast to

maladaptive perfectionism, researchers have explained that individuals with adaptive

perfectionism, also known as perfectionistic strivings, aim to achieve their goals in a manageable

and appropriate way (Hamachek, 1978; Slade & Owens, 1998). Adaptive perfectionism is largely associated with motivation to achieve high standards of performance (Stoeber & Becker, 2008), taking pride in accomplishments (Burnam et al., 2014), and low levels of self-evaluation (Rice & Ashby, 2007). In adaptive perfectionism, individuals are motivated to reach their goals and when met with failure and do not experience the same level of distress as maladaptive perfectionism (Rice et al., 2003). Some evidence has suggested that adaptive perfectionism may also be associated with greater academic success (Madigan, 2019). Although perfectionism is considered a multidimensional process, most of the research has predominantly focused on the negative correlates of perfectionism, commonly focusing on psychopathology (Flett & Hewitt, 2015; Marshall et al., 2008). Most research in perfectionism has largely used a quantitative approach, leading to a lack of qualitative literature on this subject. Only a few studies have employed qualitative methods in understanding perfectionism's deeper meanings.

Measure of Perfectionism

Traditional and most widely used measures of perfectionism include the Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (FMPS; Frost et al., 1990), the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS; Hewitt et al., 1991), and the Almost Perfect Scale-Revised (APS-R; Slaney et al., 2001). Although numerous scales have been created, a common flaw involves their inability to separate adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism (Gotwals et al., 2012; Flett & Hewitt, 2006) and their inability to appropriately measure perfectionism (Flett et al., 2016; Mitchell-Parker et al., 2018). It has been proposed by Gaudreau (2019) that these issues are due to errors in conceptualisation. He suggested that perfectionistic strivings include both elements of perfectionism and adaptive excellencism, leading to difficulties in separating the two constructs. In this sense, subscales that aim to measure adaptive perfectionism, such as the High

Standards subscale in the APS-R (Slaney et al., 2001), do not represent perfectionistic characteristics, but rather a pursuit of excellence (Osenk et al., 2022). With this in mind, the Scale of Perfectionism and Excellencism (SCOPE; Gaudreau & Schellenberg, 2018) was created to measure perfectionism and adaptive excellencism.

Theories on Perfectionism: Excellencism vs Perfectionism

Gaudreau (2019) advocates for the change of conceptualisation towards the idea that there are two overarching areas: perfectionism and excellencism. He states that although perfectionism and excellencism share commonalities with goal setting and goal striving, what differs is the intensity with which individuals work towards their goal (Achtziger & Gollwitzer, 2018; Diefendorff & Lord, 2008). Perfectionism can describe the desire for absolute flawlessness without any room for error, whereas excellencism can describe those with more modest goals and appropriately high standards. In this sense, Gaudreau (2019) discusses that excellence can be attained without perfection, but perfection cannot be attained without excellence, making them two very connected yet distinct constructs. This issue has been discussed by several researchers (Flett et al., 2016; Greenspon, 2000; Gaudreau, 2019) and Wade (2017) who states "Generally, we require a clearer differentiation between the functional pursuit of excellence and the dysfunctional pursuit of black-and-white, personally demanding high standards" (p. 267). Research on perfectionism has suggested that by differentiating excellencism from perfectionism, it can be determined if perfectionism is healthy, unneeded, or harmful (Gaudreau, 2019). These clearer definitions could therefore have a larger impact on perfectionism research and could help differentiate the positive and negative components more explicitly.

Perfectionism and Young People

Although there are no clear guidelines for definitions of young adulthood, young adulthood is typically described as a critical period after adolescence where the individual develops the cognitive and emotional building blocks required for independence, completing education, and transitioning to employment (Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, 2015). For the purpose of this study, young adulthood was defined as the age period between 16-26 years. As individuals reach this stage of their life, they are encouraged to make decisions about the future and to set realistic goals to help accomplish their ambitions (Gelabert et al., 2022). As perfectionistic individuals may set higher standards of achievement for themselves, their motivation and goal setting may be different from non-perfectionistic individuals (Bong et al., 2014). Furthermore, high goal setting in this population may lead to a difference in behaviour, persistence, effort and quality of performance (Locke & Latham, 2007). Hence, perfectionism can be perceived as a significant trait as young adults make their place in the world.

Within perfectionism literature, researchers suggest that perfectionistic tendencies commonly emerge in adolescence, with Self-Oriented Perfectionism increasing around Grade 7, and Socially Prescribed Perfectionism accelerating around Grade 10 (Herman et al., 2013). Recent meta-analyses have observed an increase in perfectionism over the last 27 years (Smith et al., 2019). Longitudinal studies have observed trends in perfectionism from 1989 to 2016, noting that young adults are harder on themselves and report higher scores of societal pressures and expectations than previous years (Curran and Hill, 2019). They noted that almost 60% of young people in 2016 were above the levels of perfectionism documented in 1989 (Curran and Hill, 2019). Within an Australian context, it is estimated that three out of ten adolescents are described

as perfectionistic (Sironic & Reeve, 2015). Researchers have named generation Z "the generation

of performance anxiety", whereby the pressures of achieving excellencism and perfection have

been heightened (Woodfin et al., 2020). With this evidence, it is more crucial than ever to

conduct qualitative research to understand the experiences of perfectionistic young people and to

discover what factors contribute to the rise in perfectionism.

Researchers have partly attributed this trend to the use of social media platforms, which

can lead to greater opportunities for comparison and increased feelings of dissatisfaction about

self (Etherson et al., 2022). Notably, social media has become an overwhelmingly large part of

our society, occupying every 2 out of 5 minutes spent online (Woodfin et al., 2020). The

popularity of platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram, have in part, led to individuals' drive

to cultivate a "perfect" representation of themselves through social media (Woodfin et al., 2020).

Additionally, perfectionism researchers have considered academics a crucial context when

considering young people. As young people spend most of their time in an educational

environment, academic pressures may contribute to increased perfectionistic tendencies, making

adolescence a particularly sensitive period for the development of perfectionism (Flett & Hewitt,

2002; Gilman & Ashby, 2006; Stoeber & Childs, 2011). The school environment emphasises

objective evaluation measurements, which can aid in the development and maintenance of

perfectionistic tendencies (Flett & Hewitt, 2002). As students transition to secondary education,

greater significance is placed on grades and formal evaluations, which can be further stressed by

teachers and parents (Damian et al., 2017). This is often presented in objective goals, such as

Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR), which uses academic scores to rank high school

students' during Year 12. Generally, ATAR scores are used to evaluate students' overall

capabilities and can be used as entry into over-subscribed university courses (Norton et al.,

2016). Therefore, the better the person's past academic results, the better chance they will have

of being awarded a place at university. In this sense, emphasis is placed on academics in young

adulthood as grades can impact future study opportunities and career prospects (Feldman, 2003).

These academic pressures along with the normal stressors that occur within this developmental

stage, such as an increased awareness of social standards, make this group particularly sensitive

to developing perfectionistic qualities.

Perfectionism and Mental Health

As of date, there is no inclusion of perfectionism as a stand-alone disorder in the

Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), however, there has been a call for

this in following revisions (DSM-5; American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Ayearst et al.,

2012). Gaudreau (2019) suggested that if the adaptive excellencism is separated from

maladaptive perfectionism through quantitative based criteria, clinicians could accurately

measure the damaging components of perfectionism. This could lead to the potential of

redefining perfectionism as a diagnosable personality disorder. Already, clinically relevant

outcomes of perfectionism have been noted in research and can be organised into domains

including self-enhancing cognitive distortions, deficits in self-esteem and self-concept,

internalising and externalising problems, and impaired interpersonal relationships (Ayearst et al.,

2012). A growing body of research has suggested perfectionism is an underlying factor across

multiple mental health disorders. Notably, perfectionism has been linked with obsessive-

compulsive disorder (OCD; Limburg et al., 2017), eating disorders (Bardone-Cone et al., 2007),

and depression (Cox et al., 2009; Smith et al., 2019). Perfectionism has also been linked with

suicidal idealisations, suicide attempts, and parasuicidal behaviours (Hewitt, et al., 2006; Smith

et al., 2019). Perfectionism has been labelled as a transdiagnostic process through these associations with multiple mental health disorders (Egan et al., 2011).

Addressing perfectionism in individuals is crucial, as perfectionism can often interfere with the treatment process (Hewitt et al., 2008), and has been linked as a predictor of poor treatment outcomes (Blatt & Zuroff, 2002). In fact, Shannon and colleagues (2018) found that perfectionism was associated with more negative attitudes towards help-seeking for mental health difficulties and seeking professional help in general. With compelling evidence showing the association between perfectionism and mental health disorders, it is important to investigate this area further, particularly as research suggests perfectionism as a barrier to seeking help. Research addressing the beliefs and attitudes of perfectionistic young people can aid in tailored intervention strategies for perfectionistic individuals, who are already vulnerable to distress and mental health problems.

Although extensive quantitative research on perfectionism exists, little research in this area has used a qualitative approach. The limited qualitative research on perfectionism has largely used North American university samples (see Farmer et al., 2017; Mackinnon et al., 2013; Neumeister, 2004; Rice et al., 2003 for review). Although these studies assisted in understanding perfectionistic behaviours of university students and adult samples, limited research has provided an understanding on what drives perfectionistic behaviours in other cultural and educational contexts. One study has looked at the motives behind perfectionism in a sample of middle-aged adults (Egan et al., 2013). Although participants in the study identified negative aspects of perfectionism, including negative thoughts of self and implications to others, most participants stated they were not motivated to change their perfectionistic qualities and behaviours. A common theme throughout this study involved the perceived benefits

perfectionism brought to their life, particularly surrounding the credit they gave perfectionism in achieving goals and the perceived respect gained from others following this success. While this study gave important insight into middle-aged perfectionistic individuals, the experiences and perspectives of young people with perfectionism are still largely unknown. Due to the pressures of reaching goals and success in this age period, it is important to gain an insight into how young people perceive their perfectionism, and to understand if this is something they are motivated to change. As Wilson and Schlam (2004) have noted, 'If psychological treatments are to be maximally effective, they must include empirically supported strategies for reinforcing and enhancing patients' motivation to change' (p. 370). If perfectionistic young people also share an ambivalence towards change as noted in the study above, it can impact their help-seeking behaviours. Conversely, if this population is more open to the idea of change, young adults could be an age group of focus for intervention strategies for maladaptive perfectionism. Through identifying how perfectionistic individuals conceptualise and view their perfectionism, it can aid in a better understanding of perfectionistic individuals and the role perfectionism plays in their life.

The Current Study

For perfectionistic young people, the normal stressors of meeting future goals and success can be exacerbated through their perfectionism. Consequently, perfectionistic individuals may believe their perfectionism is beneficial during these periods when high standards and achievement are rewarded. This may interfere in perfectionistic individuals seeking help for their behaviours that are causing them distress. These factors showcase the importance for understanding the youths' experiences with perfectionism to identify how perfectionism serves them in their life and if it is something they are ultimately motivated to change. Accordingly, the

following research aims were addressed: 1) To understand the lived experiences of those with

perfectionism, 2) To understand what drives perfectionistic behaviours and 3) To understand the

outcomes of perfectionistic behaviours. As most studies in perfectionism has focused on a North

American cohort, this study will explore these research aims using a sample of Australian young

people to understand their experiences with perfectionism. An inductive qualitative approach

was chosen to allow the in-depth and rich data to be explored in a way not done so in previous

quantitative research.

Method

Participants

Participants were young people who self-identified as perfectionistic. A total of 7 participants (5 female, 2 male, 1 gender diverse) were interviewed, with ages ranging from 17-26 years. To be eligible for this study, participants had to be aged between 16-26, fluent in English, and identify as perfectionistic. All participants filled in the survey (see Appendix 6) comprising of demographic variables and a copy of the Short Almost Perfect Scale (SAPS; Rice et al., 2014). Participants were all born in Australia and had a mixed education level, ranging from less than high school completion through to completion of post-graduate degree. Employment status ranged from being a student to full-time employment. Excluding one participant, all participants reported only speaking English at home. See Table 1 for specific demographic variables of the participants.

Table 1

Demographic variables and Short Almost Perfect Scale (SAPS) score of perfectionistic participants (N=7)

Participant	Gender	Age	Country of Birth	Education Level	Employment Status	Language other than English at home	SAPS Score – Standards*	SAPS Score – Discrepancy*
▬▬	Female	23	Australia	TAFE certificate/ diploma	Full-time	No	28	23
▬	Female	26	Australia	Post-graduate degree	Full-time	No	28	22

Participant	Gender	Age	Country of Birth	Education Level	Employment Status	Language other than English at home	SAPS Score – Standards*	SAPS Score – Discrepancy*
▬	Female	17	Australia	Less than high school diploma	Student Part-time	No	26	20
▬	Male	17	Australia	High school diploma	Student	Yes	26	19
▬	Gender diverse*	17	Australia	Less than high school diploma	Student	No	26	20
▬	Female	22	Australia	Bachelor's Degree	Student Casual	No	28	26
▬	Male	20	Australia	High school diploma	Student Part-time	No	28	23

Note: The SAPS questionnaire includes 4 items for Standards and 4 items for Discrepancy. Results are being compared to the university sample used in the original SAPS (Rice et al., 2014) where they calculated a mean of 24.17 for Standards and 13.63 for Discrepancy.

* The SAPS questionnaire includes 4 items for Standards and 4 items for Discrepancy. Results are being compared to the university sample used in the original SAPS (Rice et al., 2014) where they calculated a mean of 24.17 for Standards and 13.63 for Discrepancy.

 **Gender diverse includes (but is not limited to) transgender, intersex, gender fluid, non-binary, and unsure

Procedure

This study was approved by the University of Adelaide Human Research Ethics Sub-Committee (18-22) on 02 May 2022. The study was advertised through flyers presented around the University of Adelaide North Terrace campus and a National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) organisation in Adelaide. Flyers were posted online through the University of Adelaide Research Participation Portal and on the unofficial University of Adelaide Psychology Honours

2022 Facebook page. This study was also advertised at University Senior College, where students were sent information about the study through their student emails. Participants who were interested in the study were told to contact the researcher via email. All participants who emailed were provided with a Participant Information Sheet and a Consent Form (see Appendix 1 & 3) prior to the interview. Participants who were under the age of 18 were provided with a Guardian Information Sheet and a Consent Form which required guardian consent as well (see Appendix 2 & 4). The participants were informed about the purpose of the study and that their participation would remain anonymous. The participants were also briefed that their participation was completely voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw at any time. They were reminded of this before the commencement of the interview.

A total of 7 interviews were conducted via zoom with the shortest interview lasting for 26 minutes and the longest interview lasting for 43 minutes. (M= 33.60 mins, SD=6.40). All interviews were conducted by the student researcher during May 2022 until July 2022. All interviews were recorded using the audio recorder built in Zoom, and by using the voice memo app on an iPhone 12, in case there was any malfunctions with either recording. Given the exploratory nature of this study, a semi-structured interview approach was utilised to explore the unique individual experiences of each participant. This allowed questions to be open-ended and off script at times, and to allow any topics that the participant mentioned to be investigated further. Questions were formulated with each research aims in mind. Examples of questions for aim 1 included questions, such as "Can you tell me a bit about what perfectionism means to you in your life?", examples of aim 2 included "Can you tell me a bit about what drives or motivates your perfectionism?", and examples of aim 3 included "Can you tell me some positive outcomes of your perfectionism?"

The student researcher developed the interview schedule (see Appendix 5) which was then reviewed by the academic supervisor before the first pilot interview was conducted. Following the pilot interview, the researcher and academic supervisor met again to discuss if the interview questions were suitable for the remaining interviews. A following question was added regarding when the participants first noticed their perfectionistic tendencies. As no questions were removed or changed, the pilot interview was included in the final analysis.

At the completion of each interview, the researcher updated the audit trail with her reflections and to highlight any details that may be important for the analysis. All interviews were transcribed verbatim by the student researcher. Pseudonyms were used in the transcription to preserve anonymity of the participants. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, each participant was given a number and all personal information was removed from the transcripts. All audio recordings were uploaded to a password-protected online system where only the student researcher had access before removing it from the recording devices. All de-identified transcripts were uploaded to the Box, a protected University of Adelaide server that only the researcher and academic supervisor had access to. As suggested by Tracy's (2010) criteria for robust qualitative research, all participants had the option to receive a copy of their transcript and to take part in the member-checking process which 3 participants chose to do. These participants did not give any additional feedback.

At the completion of the interview, participants were sent a link to a survey on Qualtrics which included demographic questions and the Short Almost Perfect Scale (SAPS; Rice et al., 2014). The SAPS is an 8-item scale that measures two subscales: Standards ("I have high expectations for myself") and Discrepancy ("My performance rarely meets up to my standards"). These items are rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). The

SAPS was chosen as a measure of perfectionism as it has sound psychometric properties and was deemed to be just as suitable as the original Almost Perfect Scale-Revised (APS-R) in measuring perfectionism for research and screening purposes (Rice et al., 2014). Due to its condensed number of questions (N=8) compared to the APS-R (N=23), the SAPS was thought to potentially lead to a higher completion rate, while also reducing the participant's burden. All participants completed the survey.

As Tracey (2010) states, personal reflexivity is crucial for sincere research to occur. To achieve this, the researcher was conscious to reflect on her own personal connection to the study. It is acknowledged that the researcher shared similarities in age, education level and gender to most of the participants. As the researchers own experiences can influence the analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2012), it is also acknowledged that the researcher shared some similar experiences to the answers shared by the participants. The NDIS organisation where some flyers were advertised is the researchers place of employment. Although the researcher has limited interactions with clients in her role, it is important to note that this may have influenced some participants in entering the study or to share more about their experiences than usual.

Analysis

To analyse the data in the study, Braun and Clarke's 6-step process to thematic analysis was utilised to identify meanings and experiences from the data. By using a realist epistemology, meaning was not applied beyond what the participant stated in the interview (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Due to the lack of qualitative literature about the lived experience of young people who identify as perfectionistic, an inductive approach was utilised for the analysis. This approach allowed for flexibility when analysing the data and encouraged the development of new

concepts, models, or theories in an area where little is known about the experiences of perfectionism (Alhojailan, 2012; Braun & Clarke, 2012)

To analyse the data through an inductive lens, the immersion stage first took place. In this process, the transcripts were repeatedly reviewed alongside notes from the audit trail kept by the researcher. Within this stage, notes were also taken with any new ideas and any initial observations about the data. Secondly, the data were coded to allow any potentially relevant information to be highlighted. These were coded manually using NVivo 12 software. Thirdly, these codes were organised into themes that captured reoccurring experiences, or particularly meaningful ideas within the data. This involved reviewing the coded data and identifying similarities between codes, to then collapse and categorise the data into themes. These themes were presented in a thematic map, where the themes were defined, and the relationship between these themes were explored (see figure 1 in Results). These themes were reviewed with the entire data set in mind, to ensure the themes captured the essence of the data in a meaningful way. Extracts of the data were then chosen to assist in describing the identified themes. Through a series of discussions with the research supervisor, these themes were then refined, named, described, and cross-referenced to ensure the themes represented the data and to enhance rigor and trustworthiness of the results. Extracts that fit each theme were then chosen to further aid in the explanation of the themes.

Results

Overview

After undertaking thematic analysis of the data in line with the research aims, the following themes were identified: 1) Personal Meanings of Perfectionism, 2) Drivers, 3) Help-seeking, 4) Outcomes. Each theme produced three to four subthemes, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Thematic map representing relationships between themes and subthemes
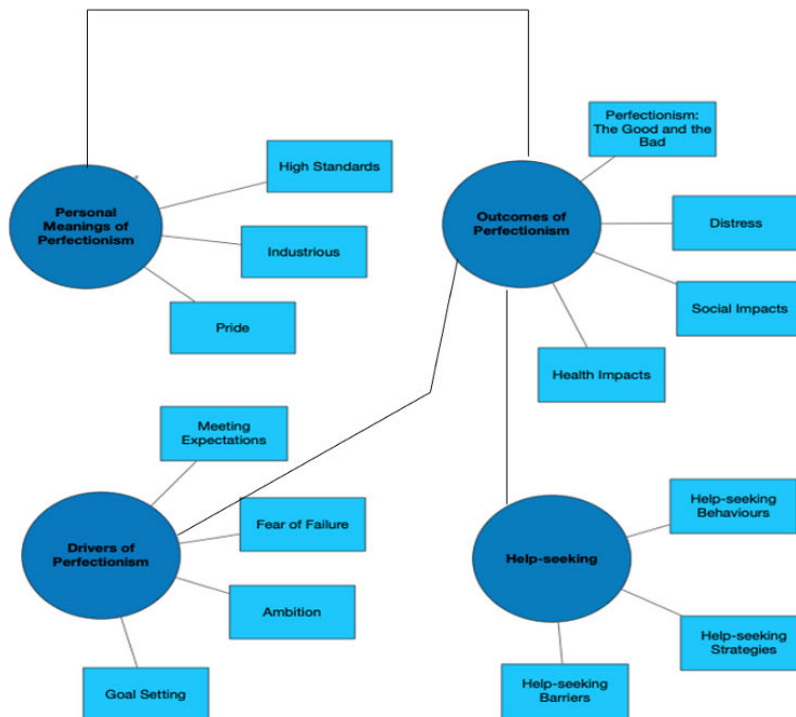
Lived Experiences of young people with perfectionism: Personal Meanings of Perfectionism

In every aspect of participants' lived experience, they described the deep impact perfectionism had on their personality, traits, and sense of self. Therefore, a major theme that

arose was the meaning participants derived from their perfectionism. Within this, three sub-themes emerged: *High Standards, Industrious, and Pride.*

High Standards

When asked what made them perfectionistic, all participants interpreted the question in terms of having set high standards for themselves. Although most participants discussed having high standards largely in academic or work settings, it was mentioned that this is not domain specific, but expressed in everything they do. One participant discussed her experiences with starting a new hobby. She explained that when she first started this hobby, she had to put in a tremendous amount of time and effort in order to perform at a standard she deemed sufficient. She said,

> Last year I started getting into bouldering quite a lot. And that was something I was really bad at to begin with, but I really enjoyed it and going with my friends who were a lot better than me. And so, it was something I had to put in a lot of effort to begin… I would have to go multiple times a week and be like willing to fail on some climbs that other people could very easily do… I did end up improving eventually which also felt good. (█, p. 03)

Some participants acknowledged the impacts of their high standards on their relationships. When discussing their high standards, participants often referenced the fact that their high standards extended to not only themselves, but to others. █ noted that her high standards extended to judging other people in addition to herself, such as potential employers. She said,

I went to go have an interview with them in person and they didn't have anything

organised. Especially when I do the role myself, like I know how to set up for an

interview for like a role, it would kind of just - it would be like oh, you haven't got

yourself sorted. Like it would interfere and then I'd be like, I don't want the job. I don't

want to work here. Even if the interview went really well, I just wouldn't like the place,

because it wasn't set right. (███████, p. 10-11)

James noted that his high standards impacted his relationships, leading to him becoming

critical of his partner. He said,

I'd say that it's definitely comes up in my relationships it's like very difficult to not try

and like think about what the perfect partner would be in terms of like, oh like they have

a great personality, but I could be more attracted to them. Like trying to basically stitch a

person together Dr Frankenstein style, trying to work out who exactly is that perfect

person. (██████, p.08)

Some participants also discussed that these high standards led them to have a positive

reputation, such as being known as the straight-A student. Although some participants noted that

having the reputation of being high performing can lead to additional pressures to succeed,

others discussed enjoying how they are perceived. One participant said, "I get that image that I'm

well put together even know behind the scenes I'm probably not. You know so that's probably a

positive and something that's helped contribute to my life." (███████, p. 12)

Industrious

Participants noted traits about themselves that they believe are derived from their perfectionism. Participants discussed how these attributes help them achieve high standards, such as being meticulous with their work, being hardworking, organised and dedicated. These qualities were frequently mentioned as a positive aspect of perfectionism, leading them to have success in their work or academic life. One participant discussed their attention to detail with assignments.

It does motivate me to you know, review things a little bit more, or perhaps work on things a little bit more. It motivates me to spend more times more time on things, more time researching, more time making sure that standard of work is maintained so that I can achieve those goals. (█████, p.08)

The word 'effort' was consistently brought up, with participants expressing they would spend a tremendous amount of time and energy on their work and academrdics. Participants would note that this effort they spent on tasks would lead to them producing high quality projects and would leave them feeling proud of the outcome. This was associated with other words, such as 'never giving up' where participants felt as if they would put in noticeably more effort in tasks than their peers to ensure their work is up to the high standard that they are satisfied with. One participant said, "[…] I think that is the biggest outcome, that I tend to work pretty hard in comparison, like I have never been able to just leave things incomplete." (███, p.06)

Some participants expressed that a large part of their perfectionism includes the importance of organisation and schedules. Participants noted organisation in their life, such as needing their surroundings neat and tidy, having strict schedules, and having high control over their day-to-day activities. Participants indicated that this organisation helps achieve productivity and optimal performance throughout their day. One participant went on to talk about his daily routine and said,

> I started using a dated journal, and making goals, setting goals for myself, and just being able to stick into a routine where I follow almost the same thing, every day. Just switching up the subject, switching up the thing, because that's I guess led to me building self-discipline as well (████, p.04)

Another participant discussed how her traits contribute to her reputation of being trustworthy in the workplace, leading to positive work outcomes. She said,

> Yeah, so I think one of the biggest things that I noticed is people find it quite reliable which is, which is great. So, because I always make sure that I know what I'm doing, where I need to be, other people can sort of set their watch by me and count on me to be there (████, p.14)

Pride

Participants noted a sense of deep satisfaction derived from their own achievements. It is important to note that pride could often act as a driver of perfectionism. However, pride was

categorised under the personal meanings of perfectionism as participants often mentioned feeling proud of themselves when they have successfully met their own standards or accomplished challenging goals. This was shown by ▮▮▮ who expressed his excitement after achieving high grades at high school. He said,

[…] You feel accomplished first of all. Like your hard work did pay off and what you did worked out, like what you planned to happen, happened. You feel like you need to tell someone as well like "oh mum I got an A" or something like that. You also want to brag about it a lot of the time, and you want to tell people "Oh I got an A what did you get? Oh, a B, well I got an A" and it also just motivates you to continue working. (▮▮▮, p.12-13)

Throughout interviews, participants reflected on their past accomplishments with a sense of pride. When discussing specific moments of distress due to perfectionism, participants often finished their reflections by stating that they were proud of the result. ▮▮▮ was one of these participants who shared this mentality. ▮▮▮ had shared her story of undertaking her masters during COVID. She said,

I kind of stayed quite sedentary for like weeks on end while I was working. It got to the stage where I was on my bed on my laptop, close my laptop and put it away, and I would sleep, get up and eat food and not even like a nutritious meal, but just then back on my laptop… by the end of that I had, I got great grades. Like I got really, really high marks which, I earned them, so I was very happy. (▮▮▮, p.12)

Drivers of Perfectionism: "If I have a passion for it, I will achieve it"

Four sub-themes were analysed in the theme Drivers of Perfectionism: *Meeting Expectations, Goal Setting, Fear of Failure, and Ambition*.

Meeting Expectations

Participants often referred to the idea of meeting certain standards set by themselves, and the perceived standards set by others. Participants noted that these expectations act as a motivator to continue to perform highly but can also lead to negative consequences. When discussing the drivers of perfectionism, participants shared how they felt immense pressure to perform highly and meet these high expectations. Participants also indicated their desire to not only meet but exceed the expectations of others. Some participants discussed setting expectations of themselves based on the people around them. ▇▇▇▇ discussed how their expectations for their performance became harsher once when they were in a new environment with other high performing people. Many participants illustrated similar experiences to ▇▇▇ regarding their desire to meet expectations. They said,

> […] Whilst at my previous school I did maintain and try to maintain that standard of being an 'A' all around, because I now go to a school where all the students are pretty high performing, that bar and that expectation for how I do things have changed. So, it's like, am I getting drafts in on time? Am I, you know, doing drafts good? Am I reviewing my work good? What are other students doing? How does my work compare to theirs? Does my work meet the standard of the school generally speaking? And will I qualify for a certain ATAR or something? Like, it's those sorts of things, I suppose. (▇▇▇, p. 06)

██████ went on to talk about the implications of meeting these expectations. They discussed how constantly trying to meet these expectations and standards takes a toll on their mental health. They explained,

> I've had certain teachers or people tell me "Perfectionism oh that's good, that's good that you're a perfectionist." I kind of think about it a little bit more, and I realise that it's actually extremely detrimental to my mental health. Because constantly expecting yourself to meet a certain standard, and not only meet that standard but maintain it for as long as possible is extremely draining and it takes up a lot of my emotional and mental energy. (██████ p. 04)

Goal Setting

When asked about the positive aspects of perfectionism, all participants referred to perfectionism's influence on goal setting and achievement. Participants frequently discussed goals, such as getting accepted into university, achieving academic success, and accomplishing career goals. ██████ reflected on his feelings towards success and discussed that he is sometimes not as excited about his accomplishments compared to others. He noticed that instead of feeling happy with his success, he is always looking towards the bigger picture and shifting his focus to higher goals. He said,

> […] Stuff like getting an internship really like early, people will be like wow it's amazing and I was like it is what it is, like it's just time to keep moving, like it's not that hard, it's not the job I want so it's not perfect, let's keep moving. (██████, p. 09)

████ expressed that she sometimes sets challenging goals as a way to demonstrate her own capabilities. She discussed that in high school, her largest driver to perform highly was to achieve a high ATAR score that would allow her to get into an extremely competitive university course. Once she was accepted into this degree, ████ realised she did not want a career in this field and later withdrew from the course. When reflecting on this, she said, "[…] I think I also kind of chose XXX a little bit because it was a high ATAR one and I was like, I can prove to myself that I can get into it." (████, p.07)

Fear of Failure

Several participants also highlighted concerns of being unable to achieve their goals, expressed in the subtheme *fear of failure*. Participants would often associate failure as reflective of their self-worth, expressing that they would experience great disappointment if they could not achieve their goals. Consequently, participants used this fear as a motivator to strive for success. ████ commented on this in her professional career. She said,

> […] I spent so much time and energy getting to where I am now. I always had the fear of oh this is what you want more than anything, what does that mean for you if you can't even achieve that goal? So, I was always kind of a bit afraid of failing and not being good enough for the career. (████, p. 08)

Although this fear of failure is being presented under the theme Drivers, it is important to note that fear was also seen at times as distressful to the participants. Not only were participants

worried about disappointing themselves, but some were also concerned about the judgement of others. One participant expressed, "I'm scared of disappointing my teachers. I'm scared of disappointing my parents. I'm scared of disappointing myself. A lot just involves like this massive fear of failure and disappointment." (███████, p. 13-14)

Ambition

All participants shared a determination for success and gave credit to perfectionism for their ambitions and their likelihood to achieve them. Some participants attributed perfectionism to their previous success, indicating that their perfectionistic tendencies led them to excel. ███████ noted that their overall goals of being successful drives their desire for perfection. They said,

> I think my desire to get into XXX school and university motivates my desire for perfectionism. But also, my overarching goal of wanting to succeed in life and to be extremely successful, not only financially but you know, successful in terms of you know, having people that I trust around me and close people around me and having a good group of friends and relationships, those sorts of things. So, I think that it's perhaps my future motivates my perfectionism, my desire to succeed, to be successful. (███████ p.08)

Outcomes of Perfectionism: A double-edged sword

When discussing outcomes of perfectionism, four sub-themes were identified; *Perfectionism: The Good and the Bad, Distress, Social Impacts,* and *Health Impacts.*

Perfectionism: The Good and the Bad

All participants discussed perfectionism as not being entirely positive or negative. Although participants could acknowledge that perfectionism impacted their well-being, they continuously reflected on perfectionism bringing them several beneficial workplace and academic outcomes. ▮▮▮▮ talked about the difficulties of not being able to categorise perfectionism in an exclusively positive or negative characteristic, leaving him feeling stuck at times.

> People just sort of say oh being a perfectionist is really good, and then there's people that say being a perfectionist is really bad. Like, it doesn't really like leave you anywhere, it just sort of leaves you with like okay there's good parts to it there's bad parts to it. But nobody kind of looks at you, and goes like yeah like actually, this is damaging for you, or this is good for you. So, you kind of just sit there being like oh yeah, I'm a perfectionist. (▮▮▮▮, p.14)

Distress

All the participants noted varying levels of distress as a response to their high standards and pressures to meet expectations. Participants noted overthinking and experiencing self-doubt as they worried about assignments or not meeting their personal goals. Participants mentioned that this distress could be unmotivating and all-consuming, leading to procrastination over tasks. Participants also mentioned constantly ruminating over tasks and worrying about future and past experiences. ▮▮▮▮ discussed overthinking frequently when it comes to his friendships. He said,

> It's [perfectionism] extremely tiring. Like, it definitely lends itself into a constant internal monologue which doesn't really have an end ever. Like, that's extremely difficult, it

makes it really hard to be happy with like friendships because if they haven't done like

the exact right thing, instantly it's like oh something must be wrong. ███████, p. 8-9)

████████ even questioned the helpfulness of perfectionism with the attached distress it

causes. They reflected on their experiences with overthinking and commented on the fact that

these thoughts can be unproductive and can negatively influence their work. They said,

> It's really difficult because it's like, it does motivate me to do the best that I can but it also
>
> sets me back because sometimes it makes me overthink things and it gets to the point
>
> where lately I've been feeling that you know, my certain like perfectionistic qualities, for
>
> instance, are actually setting me back because I am overthinking what I know or what I
>
> think I know. Like, do I know that enough? Do I need to know more about this? Do I
>
> need to be more elaborate upon this? Those sorts of questions and in order to striving to
>
> be better, and you know, be the best that I can be I kind of delve deeper into that and I
>
> find myself going down like rabbit holes, which isn't really the greatest. (████████, p. 04)

████ also felt similarly about her perfectionism. She reflected that once she worked on her

perfectionistic tendencies, she found she performed the exact same without them. She discussed,

> Last year I was quite caught up in the whole perfectionistic tendencies, and so I would
>
> you know push really hard, but this year I've sort of taken the load off a little bit and I'm
>
> kind of performing exactly the same if that makes sense. Because, when you don't have
>
> the added stress of needing to be perfect it's like, things become a lot easier to just to you

know, do your best and most the time my best is what I was doing anyway (███, p. 05-

06)

Similarly, ████████ touched on these unhelpful thoughts when she receives feedback at

work. She expressed that any criticism made at work could lead to unhelpful thinking styles. She

said,

I know it's silly to get so upset by like a spelling mistake or him saying "maybe we

should change that word mandate to require" and I'll just like spiral. Like that could be

the first [negative] thing he says in a half an hour meeting, but it'll cause me to just focus

on that one thing and then have all this self-doubt. Then, like, I'll go into this thing and

be like, you should have done better like you're shit, you know and it's very hard.

(████████, p.10)

Social Impacts

Participants frequently alluded to the impacts of perfectionism on their friendships and

social life. Participants reported overthinking social interactions and feeling concerned about the

opinion of others. One participant noted that she would often be concerned about disappointing

other people. In order to appear as a 'perfect' friend, she would partake in social activities that

she believed that is what is expected of her to secure social approval. She said,

Recently I've noticed that with like going out and things, like I feel quite disappointed if

I'm not in the mood to go out. Because I feel like oh, if I don't go out, then you know my

friends might not still be there, because you know you're not constantly being perfect and going out with your friends and having a good time. (█████, p.03)

In other instances, participants reported socialising as a distraction from their goals. One participant in particular expressed his conscious decision to distance himself from his friendship group to focus on his studies during Year 12. He discussed,

I guess I distance myself from a lot of people. Not just like because they've bad people or something, it's just because I think working towards something like XXX, you need to be able to I guess understand yourself and understand like all the goals you set for yourself and be able to study by yourself as well. Like, self-directed learning and stuff like that. (█████, p. 19)

Many participants mentioned that they would often compare themselves with other peers which sometimes led to feelings of self-doubt or feeling in competition with others. Social comparison was mainly used as a guide by participants to assess their level of achievement. █████ explained that,

I suppose it's just a lot of like looking at people that are better than myself is where a lot of that comes from. Sort of comparing someone - even if they're younger or like older it's being like oh, they're doing that already like, why am I not doing that already? Or how are they managing to do that, like I'm doing the same stuff as them and I don't see the same results. So, a lot of, a lot of like questions that, like circular questions of like oh if I

did this better would that be better, and then if did that better would this be better. (█████,

p.23)

Health Impacts

Some participants noted the negative impact that their perfectionistic behaviours had on their mental wellbeing and physical health. Participants frequently reported spending extensive periods of time focusing on tasks which would lead to sleep deprivation and poor eating habits. Participants also noted their perfectionism contributing to mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression. ███ shared her mental health struggles, particularly with her diagnosis of anorexia nervosa. She said,

Well, it [perfectionism] takes quite a big toll my mental health, because obviously it kind of leads to feelings of worthlessness and you know depression and even with my eating disorder… I was in serious medical danger, so it was taking those physical implications on my body and things like that. But yeah, I think my mental health has suffered the most greatly like I feel like that's the biggest negative impact it has on me. (███ p.08)

██████ expressed that she often puts tasks and other people before herself. She discussed that she would often become so fixated on a task that she would delay self-care to complete tasks to a higher standard. She said,

Sometimes I don't eat properly or if I'm caught up in something I won't care about like my emotional well-being because I just need to get it done and get it done right. So, quite often I'll just put myself aside to do those things. (█████ p.12)

█████ also shared his experiences with lack of sleep, fatigue and burn out. This fatigue has at times left him unable to continue with tasks. He stated,

[…] I've worked so hard and trying to like keep everything up to a perfect standard, but I just get to a point where I'm extremely burnt out and then absolutely, with no lack of trying, can't even just get myself up off the couch. (█████ p.05)

Help-seeking: "perfect people don't ask for help"

There were three sub-themes identified under the theme help-seeking, namely *Help-seeking Behaviours*, *Help-seeking Strategies* and *Barriers to Help-seeking*. These themes continue to explore the third aim of the study: to understand the outcomes of perfectionistic behaviours.

Help-seeking Behaviours

Help-seeking behaviours entail any action of seeking support from either mental health services or trusted people in the community. One of the key factors that influenced participants' help-seeking behaviours were their willingness to share their challenges and seek support. Some participants shared their experiences with seeking professional help for their perfectionism. █████ shared her initial conflict with help-seeking but expressed she overall had positive outcomes from her experiences. She said,

I find it really hard to ask for help, because I feel like perfect people don't ask for help.

But yeah, it's been really hard but it's kind of something I've had to come to terms with

that everyone needs help sometimes and I'm no different.... But I feel like now that I've

kind of got a really good support team it's really benefited me in multiple ways, even with

my school supports and things like that. (█████, p.22)

Other participants noted that reaching out to talk to social supports can be beneficial in easing any distress they felt about a perceived failure. Toby discussed the benefits of reaching out to family members and teachers for support. He said,

When I go to my mum about it [a disappointing grade], she like calms me down and tells

me like it's okay, to work on it and do things this way or another way, and she makes me

like have a better outlook on things. Um, I guess also going back to school and talking to

a teacher…You do regret it [the grade], but then you understand that you didn't do too

badly. (█████, p.11-12)

Help-seeking Strategies

All participants indicated using coping mechanisms to lessen the burden of perfectionism. Coping mechanisms refer to all strategies participants use to reduce any unpleasant emotions associated with perfectionism. Most of these emotions refer to disappointment after not achieving their desired goal. The most common coping strategy discussed by participants were self-soothing strategies, where the individual would consciously remind themselves that their

efforts are important. These help-seeking strategies were both individual and social. Taylor

shared their experiences with this. They said,

> Sometimes I try and say you know, "that's okay we'll get them next time" that's sort of
>
> my mentality. So, instead of bugging myself too much, I might be like "Oh, you know
>
> that's okay next time I'll try my best, I'll do better hopefully" ... I think just sort of
>
> reminding myself like Oh, you know, I tried my best, and having, you know, support
>
> around me from my parents, particularly sort of helps me cope with that. Yeah, just
>
> reassurance really. (██████, p.20)

██ mentioned that her community help her to recognise that trying to achieve perfection

is not sustainable. She explained that,

> Say if I'm studying there'll [her parents] be like, come on, like reminding me that you
>
> know, you can't really strive to be perfect all the time. But yeah, especially through
>
> therapy and things like that, like my support team and even teachers as well. Because
>
> teachers are aware of like how ruthless I am in terms of like work and things like that.
>
> Just, I feel like a lot of people around me just like to remind me and things that you know
>
> we can't be perfect all the time. (██, p.22)

Another participant explained that she keeps her expectations low when she is

approaching a new task to protect herself from possibly feeling disappointment in the future. Ava

explained,

[…] It's kind of bad because whenever I try to do positive self-talk, like the assignment turns out to be bad. So, I always kind of look at it negatively. So, I'll think, oh, you know, if I don't get it, I was correct in my assessment, or if I do get it, then I am pleasantly surprised. And I know that probably sounds unhealthy, but I feel like that is the only way I can rationalise it in my mind. (█, p. 17)

Help-seeking Barriers

Although all participants could see the negative aspects of perfectionism, they also identified various barriers to accessing support. These entailed any obstacles or circumstances that prevented the individual from seeking help for the negative aspects of perfectionism. Although one participant mentioned expense as a barrier, most participants discussed barriers that were psychological, where there were no external reasons that hindered them from seeking help. These barriers included feeling as if mental health services were not adequate, feeling as if they are managing the negative aspects well enough on their own, and feeling uncomfortable about seeking help for perfectionism. █ shared her experiences with this in saying,

I think it is probably something that I can just figure out on my own rather than you know, paying so much money for a psych and then they might not be good. But I know that Uni has like counselling facilities but then it's kind of like, it's a very short term-based thing so I'm not sure if that would actually be a lot of help. So, I don't know, I've just been you know, doing whatever I can on my own because I don't know if it would be much worth it. (█, p. 13-14)

█████ shared that she also does not feel like seeking professional help is necessary, stating that her perfectionism is a part of her identity, and not something that she believes requires change.

I definitely knew that it wasn't like very healthy, the way that I would kind of focus on work or get really upset if I didn't get the grade that I wanted and whatever. But I definitely didn't think like oh going to see a professional like, I don't need that. That was very much a me thing, I was like no I don't need that, I'm totally fine. Like I'm stressed but it was very much, I think it was almost like in my being, in my core, in my personality. I was like no, this is how I function, this is how it's supposed to be. (█████, p. 20)

█████ also discussed feeling misunderstood when people try to interfere without first trying to understand the impacts of perfectionism. He said,

"But it's when someone tells me "just relax like you just, like you're going way too hard, like you just need to chill out, like I don't understand, like you're doing so well" it means absolutely nothing because it's like you just really don't understand who I am at all if you're just telling me to relax because it's - it's like not something that I want to be doing." (█████, p.06)

Discussion

Overview

The aims of the study were to explore the lived experience of self-identified perfectionistic young people and to understand the drivers and outcomes of their perfectionistic behaviours. Four main themes were identified by analysing the interview data through thematic analysis: *Personal Meaning of Perfectionism*, *Drivers of Perfectionism*, *Outcomes of Perfectionism*, and *Help-seeking*.

Consistent with previous research (Frost et al., 1990; Hill et al., 2015; Rice et al., 2003; Shannon et al., 2018), participants felt as if perfectionism was a prominent personality characteristic. While describing some of the drivers of their perfectionism, participants noted meeting expectations, goal setting, fear of failure, and ambition as important drivers. Overall, the participants aspired to be successful, and their perfectionism stemmed from the desire to reach and maintain high standards. While these standards and goals were often achieved, some outcomes were inherently negative. Participants discussed how the high levels of distress they experienced could have severe impacts to their mental and physical health. These experiences with perfectionism are reflected in the wider literature (Shannon et al., 2018; Sirois & Molnar, 2016; Patterson et al., 2021). Although participants reported adverse consequences of perfectionism, most of the participants were reluctant to seek support. The participants reported several psychological barriers to seeking help, feeling as if they are managing the negative aspects sufficiently by themselves. Some coping strategies that the participants reported using when facing distress included self-soothing strategies and reminders of their efforts.

It is noted that the themes *Personal Meaning of Perfectionism*, *Drivers of Perfectionism*, *Outcomes of Perfectionism*, and *Help-seeking* are interrelated in a way that gives the individual

their own unique experience of perfectionism. As there are few qualitative studies in

perfectionism research, these themes are all used to capture the overall lived experience of

perfectionistic young people.

Aim 1: To understand the lived experiences of those with perfectionism

In relation to aim one, to understand the lived experiences of someone with

perfectionism, the theme personal meaning, comprising of subthemes *High standards*,

Industrious, and *Pride,* was identified.

In general, participants discussed perfectionism as being a large part of their identity. The

most frequently discussed aspect of their own perfectionism was having high standards in

everything they do. Participants reported having high standards of themselves in a professional

or academic setting, or having high standards of others, such as in friendships or relationships.

Therefore, these high standards impact how the participants interact with assignments, duties,

and others in their community. Following on, participants felt as if they possessed particular

perfectionistic traits. These traits were covered in the subtheme *industrious*. Participants often

recalled perfectionism being there "as long as I remember" and recalled having perfectionistic

qualities, such as organisation and neatness from a very young age.

Reflecting on the subthemes, these findings demonstrated that participants overall view

their perfectionistic traits and behaviours as a positive aspect of their identity. Participants

discussed that these traits are associated with positive outcomes, such as achievement and

personal motivation towards goals. Many reported having a positive reputation and being

renowned as a high achiever and a reliable person, adding valuing to their overall identity. As a

result, participants reported having a deep satisfaction with their abilities and traits, noted in the

subtheme *pride*. This finding is important, as it demonstrates that perfectionistic individuals may

see several benefits to their goals and self-esteem, therefore viewing perfectionism as positive. Perfectionistic individuals having high standards and being industrious is consistent with previous research (Hill et al., 2015; Rice et al., 2003; Shannon et al., 2018), however, limited research has investigated the personal meaning they have towards their perfectionism using qualitative methods. Through the subtheme *pride*, participants have discussed their personal reflections on their own perfectionism and have discussed the gratification and fulfilment they receive from these traits. This provides a greater understanding of their deep connection and the overall motives of perfectionism.

Aim 2: To understand what drives perfectionistic behaviours

In general, participants often referred to the drivers of their perfectionism, encompassing reasons, such as *Meeting Expectations*, *Goals Setting*, *Fear of Failure*, and *Ambition*. Participants reported setting goals which they were extremely driven to achieve. These goals created certain standards that they wanted to uphold and set perceived expectations from others. Moreover, a common driver reported by participants included a fear of failure and the associated feelings of unworthiness and contempt of self if they did not meet their goals. These findings indicated that drivers of perfectionism align with deeper meanings of self through attempts to decrease distress and in order to enhance self-worth and self-esteem. These findings are important as it indicates that a large driver of perfectionism is its capability to help with goal setting and goal success. More experiences with achieving goals would then lead to heightened satisfaction from meeting expectations. These benefits would likely then improve the individual's perception of themselves in the short-term, adding to their sense of self-worth.

In relation to fear of failure, many participants reported being distressed over the idea of upsetting others, having an uncertain future, and having a poor self-esteem. In this sense, fear of

failure represents an avoidance motive-based strategy. As failure can result in feelings of

disappointment and shame, it is perceived as a threat to the individual's self-esteem and

reputation. Therefore, to avoid these negative consequences, fear of failure is used as a driver

towards perfection. This is supported by previous research which describes how perfectionistic

individuals' viewpoints on failure can lead to interpersonal consequences and a devaluation of

their self-esteem (Conroy et al., 2007). This driver therefore acts as a fundamental barrier to self-

criticism and aims to avoid the possibility of social rejection from others.

Aim 3: To understand the outcomes of perfectionistic behaviours

In regard to the fourth aim of the study, to understand the outcomes of perfectionistic

behaviours, the theme *outcomes of perfectionism* was identified with subthemes of

perfectionism: *the good and the bad, distress, social impacts*, and *health impacts.*

The participants considered their perfectionism to be a source of distress in their life.

Various mental, physical, and emotional difficulties were discussed by participants, such as

anxiety, sleep disruptions, and doubts about themselves and their abilities. Participants reported

feeling overwhelmed by tasks and the associated pressures which could sometimes lead to

procrastination. This is consistent with previous findings which express procrastination as a

common maladaptive learning outcome faced by perfectionistic individuals (Xie et al., 2018).

This procrastination can result from a fear of failure, whereby procrastination is used as a tool to

avoid adverse feelings (Flett et al., 1992; Rice et al., 2012).

Participants reported perfectionism intruding on their leisure activities, as they have little

time to spend with those in their community. In this sense, the lack of balance between leisure

activities and tasks could lead to distress. The social disconnection model (SDM) has been used

to explain perfectionistic individuals' infrequent social contact with others (Roxborough et al.,

2012). Within this theory, researchers describe how perfectionism produces mental health problems through negative social behaviours (e.g., cancelling plans), cognitions (e.g., feeling as if others are disappointed), and outcomes (e.g., relationship dissolution; Sherry et al., 2016). In this sense, the SDM explains how perfectionism can generate perceived social disconnection.

Participants also discussed comparing themselves to others in order to evaluate their own performance. Prior research has demonstrated that social media may contribute to social comparison leading to an increase in negative consequences, such as psychological distress, rumination, and catastrophizing (Gomez et al., 2022; McComb & Mills, 2021). The rise of social media could give a possible explanation to the social comparison reported by participants. With these reasons in mind, social disconnection and social comparison could be two contributing factors towards the maladaptive perfectionism experienced by the participants.

Apart from the social consequences, participants mentioned perfectionism causing adversity to their mental and physical well-being. For example, participants discussed how the considerable amount of time they spent on tasks would cause sleep and eating disruptions. Researchers have suggested that the sleep problems and disordered eating behaviours reported by perfectionistic individuals could be caused by their tendency to ruminate over events and their experiences with high levels of stress (Molnar et al., 2012; Stricker et al., 2022). Interestingly, most studies on eating disturbances and perfectionism have focused their associations with concerns over physical appearance, but little research was found about the association between eating disturbances and fixation over tasks. Some participants in the study stressed that their eating disturbances were not because of an underlying mental health issue, but purely due to stress and time constraints. Mental health difficulties were also commonly experienced by the participants. Some participants noted having diagnosed disorders and others mentioned

experiencing illbeing without a formal diagnosis. This was consistent with previous research, which has found links between mental health issues and perfectionism (Egan et al., 2011).

Although many of the participants described various negative consequences to their well-being, they could not ignore some of their major strengths they accredited to perfectionism. Therefore, participants could not categorise the outcomes of perfectionism as either solely positive or negative. This was covered in the subtheme of *the good and the bad*. Most of the participants voiced that the benefits of perfectionism outweighed the drawbacks they experienced. Although the benefits differed depending on the individual, all the participants valued the outcomes associated with their perfectionistic tendencies. This is found in previous research, where perfectionism was correlated with higher levels of academic success and ability to achieve goals (Brown et al., 1999; Soteber et al., 2017). The importance placed on perfectionism in this aspect is not surprising, as participants often discussed achievement as being one of their highest priorities, putting it above social activities and often themselves.

Another outcome involved the participants' experiences with help-seeking. Although participants reported engaging with some help-seeking behaviours and coping strategies, such as self-soothing techniques and leaning on friends and family, almost all participants were hesitant to seek professional help. Many of the barriers discussed were psychological in nature, such as feeling uncomfortable seeking help or feeling as if they are managing their negative emotions well enough by themselves. Reflecting on the findings, participants perceived their perfectionism as a valued part of their identity and as an important factor to their achievements and positive reputation. This aids in understanding the reasons why perfectionistic individuals are often more reluctant to seek treatment for perfectionism (Blatt & Zuroff, 2002). As young people become more inherently committed to their set goals, future study, and career ambitions, the importance

of perfectionism may become amplified and deemed as a crucial component for achieving these goals.

Implications

This study addresses the gap in the literature by examining the experiences of perfectionistic young people through a qualitative approach. As this study noted, perfectionism has positive aspects, particularly surrounding goal setting, achievement, and industrious behaviours. Perfectionism is correlated with multiple psychological problems and is an important focus in clinical settings. However, perfectionistic individuals can be reluctant to receive help, leading to poor treatment outcomes (Blatt & Zuroff, 2002; Hewitt et al., 2008). This study highlights the perceived benefits of perfectionism which may contribute to hesitation around help-seeking. Therefore, clinicians may benefit from understanding the individual's personal meaning of their perfectionism and the associated positive features. This could help perfectionistic clients feel understood and validated, further strengthening the therapeutic relationship.

Secondly, the emphasis participants placed on their goals highlighted the close associations made with achievements and self-worth. Future interventions should target these all-or-nothing goals reported by the participants (e.g., I must achieve an A+ on this assignment or I am a failure) and aim to develop more flexible and realistic goals (e.g., I would like to achieve highly on this assignment, but I am still a good person regardless of the outcome). Current perfectionism interventions have largely utilised strategies form Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) in attempts to decrease perfectionism and its associated psychopathologies (Shafran et al., 2002). Therefore, CBT techniques that aim to reduce perfectionism should address the belief that perfectionism is necessary in order to maintain high standards and higher achievement (Osenk et

al., 2022). It is important to address these beliefs and explore the ambivalence towards challenging perfectionism due to the perceived benefits identified in this thesis. As Vekas & Wade (2017) suggest, interventions that emphasis the difference in pursuing perfection and pursuing excellence may be useful to show clients that seeking help does not mean giving up their high standards, but instead to encourage compassion and perseverance in the face of adversary. Future research should further investigate the effectiveness of CBT interventions for treating perfectionism and its associated mental health concerns (Galloway et al., 2022; Shu et al., 2019). Specifically, research should examine if CBT for perfectionism can aid in preventing the severity of anxiety and depression symptoms in young people.

Strengths

To the researcher's knowledge, limited research explores the lived experiences of perfectionistic young people using a qualitative approach. Moreover, the few qualitative studies in perfectionism have used a North American university sample. Little qualitative research has utilised an Australian cohort or population groups outside of university students. As this research included both high school and university students as well as participants who have entered the workforce, it allowed the experiences of a range of Australian perfectionistic individuals to be explored. Therefore, this study contributed to this literature gap and the knowledge of previous studies. By capturing first-hand rich and in-depth data through interviews, the researcher was able to ask further questions to clarify the participants' meanings and interpretations to ensure accuracy of data collection

Although it could be argued that the data were derived from a relatively small sample, purposive sampling allowed for rich data to be collected. All participants who took part in the study self-identified as perfectionistic. The SAPS was then used to reaffirm the participants'

assessments of themselves. All participants scored highly on the SAPS, therefore confirming their perfectionistic tendencies. All interviews were conducted before the SAPS survey was distributed to avoid priming. This was to ensure the SAPS did not influence any responses from the participants. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews allowed participants to highlight areas of perfectionism they deem important and allowed for these topics to be explored, thus allowing rich but focused data to be collected. Due to this format, all interviews went for a reasonable amount of time, with the shortest interview going for 26 minutes and the longest interview going for 43 minutes. This demonstrates that the participants provided thoughtful and rich descriptions of their experiences with perfectionism.

Limitations

Although an accurate sample was identified in this study, there were some limitations involving the sampling method. The study was only advertised throughout the Adelaide region through one university, one private high school, and one NDIS organisation. Hence, the participants were well educated. All participants had qualifications higher than a high school diploma or were currently studying at either a university level, or at high school with plans of applying to university. Although previous research has indicated that perfectionism is highly prevalent in academic settings (Flett et al., 2002), this study may have overlooked the experiences of perfectionistic young people in a non-academic setting due to the sampling method. Future research should aim to include those with broader demographic variables, such as those from rural areas and public high schools to allow perfectionism to be explored with a more diverse sample. As most studies on young perfectionistic individuals have focused on those in an academic setting, it is important to investigate the experiences of people who have entered the workforce to understand perfectionism in other settings.

Furthermore, there were significantly more females represented in this sample than other genders. Similarly, previous perfectionism literature has used a predominately female sample (Limburg et al., 2017). Due to the overrepresentation of females in perfectionism research, future studies should aim to understand the experiences of other genders. This is particularly important as quantitative methods have identified that males may experience fewer negative attributes of perfectionism (Vanstone & Hicks, 2019), which should be explored further. As this research was conducted using an Australian cohort, it focuses on the experiences of perfectionistic young people in a western context, which has a particular set of norms and values. This was reflected in the participants recruited, as all participants but one only spoke English at home. A disproportionate amount of literature in perfectionism has drawn on western populations. The few studies that have researched perfectionism in different cultural contexts have found more extreme levels of perfectionistic behaviours, particularly in Asian cultures (Nilsson et al., 2008; Yoon & Lau, 2008). Future research should aim to explore diverse cultural contexts using a qualitative approach to understand how perfectionistic experiences and behaviours change in different contexts.

Conclusion

Previous research has described perfectionism as multidimensional, involving both adaptive and maladaptive components. The majority of the research so far, however, has been quantitative and largely focused on the negative outcomes of perfectionism, such as its associations with mental illness. Little qualitative research has focused on understanding the experiences of perfectionism or how perfectionistic individuals conceptualise their perfectionism. The present findings provide valuable insight into the individual's personal meanings of perfectionism, including the drivers and outcomes of their perfectionistic

tendencies. Such insights can be used to understand some of the cognitions and behaviours of

perfectionistic individuals and may account for some of the hesitation towards psychological

treatment mentioned in previous studies (Blatt & Zuroff, 2002) due to the perceived benefits

perfectionism may bring to their achievements and success. Such insights can be used by

clinicians in therapeutic practice and may be of benefit when focusing on interventions for

perfectionism. Through further qualitative research, young people's experiences with

perfectionism may be utilised to co-create intervention strategies for perfectionism. Therefore,

future qualitative studies that utilise a diverse sample to investigate the experiences of

perfectionistic young people is recommended.

References

Achtziger, A., & Gollwitzer, P. M. (2018). Motivation and volition in the course of action. In Motivation and action (pp. 485-527). Springer.

Alhojailan, M. I. (2012). Thematic analysis: A critical review of its process and evaluation. West east journal of social sciences, 1(1), 39-47.

Ayearst, L. E., Flett, G. L., & Hewitt, P. L. (2012). Where is multidimensional perfectionism in DSM-5? A question posed to the DSM-5 personality and personality disorders work group. Personality Disorders: Theory, Research, and Treatment, 3(4), 458.

Bardone-Cone, A. M., Wonderlich, S. A., Frost, R. O., Bulik, C. M., Mitchell, J. E., Uppala, S., & Simonich, H. (2007). Perfectionism and eating disorders: Current status and future directions. Clinical psychology review, 27(3), 384-405.

Bartholomeu, D., Montiel, J. M., Couto, G., Bueno, C. H., Garcia, F. H. S., & Pessotto, F. (2021). Social skills and social acceptance in different educational levels: A cross-sectional Study. Psychology, 12(11), 1886-1899.

Blatt, S. J., & Zuroff, D. C. (2002). Perfectionism in the therapeutic process.

Bong, M., Hwang, A., Noh, A., & Kim, S.-i. (2014). Perfectionism and Motivation of Adolescents in Academic Contexts. Journal of educational psychology, 106(3), 711-729.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2012). Thematic analysis. American Psychological Association.

Brown, E. J., Heimberg, R. G., Frost, R. O., & Makris, G. S. (1999). Relationship of perfectionism to affect, expectations, attributions and performance in the classroom. Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 18(1), 98.

Burnam, A., Komarraju, M., Hamel, R., & Nadler, D. R. (2014). Do adaptive perfectionism and self-determined motivation reduce academic procrastination? Learning and Individual Differences, 36, 165-172.

Burns, D. D. (1980). The perfectionist's script for self-defeat. Psychology today, 14(6), 34-52.

Conroy, D. E., Kaye, M. P., & Fifer, A. M. (2007). Cognitive links between fear of failure and perfectionism. Journal of Rational-Emotive & Cognitive-Behavior Therapy, 25(4), 237-253.

Council, N. R. (2015). Investing in the health and well-being of young adults. National Academies Press.

Cox, B. J., Clara, I. P., & Enns, M. W. (2009). Self-criticism, maladaptive perfectionism, and depression symptoms in a community sample: A longitudinal test of the mediating effects of person-dependent stressful life events. Journal of Cognitive Psychotherapy, 23(4), 336-349.

Curran, T., & Hill, A. P. (2019). Perfectionism is increasing over time: A meta-analysis of birth cohort differences from 1989 to 2016. Psychological bulletin, 145(4), 410-429.

Damian, L. E., Stoeber, J., Negru-Subtirica, O., & Băban, A. (2017). On the development of perfectionism: the longitudinal role of academic achievement and academic efficacy: development of perfectionism. Journal of personality, 85(4), 565-577.

Diefendorff, J. M., & Lord, R. G. (2008). Goal-striving and self-regulation processes. Work motivation, 179-224.

Edition, F. (2013). Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders. Am Psychiatric Assoc, 21(21), 591-643.

Egan, S. J., Piek, J. P., Dyck, M. J., Rees, C. S., & Hagger, M. S. (2013). A clinical investigation of motivation to change standards and cognitions about failure in perfectionism. Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapy, 41(5), 565-578.

Egan, S. J., Wade, T. D., & Shafran, R. (2011). Perfectionism as a transdiagnostic process: A clinical review. Clinical psychology review, 31(2), 203-212.

Etherson, M. E., Curran, T., Smith, M. M., Sherry, S. B., & Hill, A. P. (2022). Perfectionism as a vulnerability following appearance-focussed social comparison: A multi-wave study with female adolescents. Personality and individual differences, 186, 111355.

Fairweather-Schmidt, A. K., & Wade, T. D. (2015). Piloting a perfectionism intervention for pre-adolescent children. Behaviour research and therapy, 73, 67-73.

Farmer, J. R., Mackinnon, S. P., & Cowie, M. (2017). Perfectionism and life narratives: A qualitative study. SAGE Open, 7(3), 2158244017721733.

Flett, G. L., Blankstein, K. R., Hewitt, P. L., & Koledin, S. (1992). Components of perfectionism and procrastination in college students. Social Behavior and Personality: an international journal, 20(2), 85-94.

Flett, G. L., & Hewitt, P. L. (2002). Perfectionism and maladjustment: An overview of theoretical, definitional, and treatment issues.

Flett, G. L., & Hewitt, P. L. (2006). Positive versus negative perfectionism in psychopathology: A comment on Slade and Owens's dual process model. Behavior modification, 30(4), 472-495.

Flett, G. L., & Hewitt, P. L. (2008). Treatment interventions for perfectionism—A cognitive perspective: Introduction to the special issue. In (Vol. 26, pp. 127-133): Springer.

Flett, G. L., & Hewitt, P. L. (2015). Measures of perfectionism. In Measures of personality and social psychological constructs (pp. 595-618). Elsevier.

Flett, G. L., Mara, C. A., Hewitt, P. L., Sirois, F., & Molnar, D. S. (2016). How should discrepancy be assessed in perfectionism research? A psychometric analysis and proposed refinement of the Almost Perfect Scale–Revised. Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment, 34(7), 718-732.

Frost, R. O., Heimberg, R. G., Holt, C. S., Mattia, J. I., & Neubauer, A. L. (1993). A comparison of two measures of perfectionism. Personality and individual differences, 14(1), 119-126.

Frost, R. O., Marten, P., Lahart, C., & Rosenblate, R. (1990). The dimensions of perfectionism. Cognitive therapy and research, 14(5), 449-468.

Galloway, R., Watson, H., Greene, D., Shafran, R., & Egan, S. J. (2022). The efficacy of randomised controlled trials of cognitive behaviour therapy for perfectionism: a systematic review and meta-analysis. Cognitive Behaviour Therapy, 51(2), 170-184.

Gaudreau, P. (2019). On the distinction between personal standards perfectionism and excellencism: A theory elaboration and research agenda. Perspectives on Psychological Science, 14(2), 197-215.

Gaudreau, P., Schellenberg, B. J., Gareau, A., Kljajic, K., & Manoni-Millar, S. (2022). Because excellencism is more than good enough: On the need to distinguish the pursuit of excellence from the pursuit of perfection. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology.

Gelabert, E., Subirà, S., García-Esteve, L., Navarro, P., Plaza, A., Cuyàs, E., Navinés, R., Gratacòs, M., Valdés, M., & Martín-Santos, R. (2012). Perfectionism dimensions in major postpartum depression. Journal of Affective Disorders, 136(1-2), 17-25.

Gilman, R., & Ashby, J. S. (2006). Perfectionism.

Gomez, M., Klare, D., Ceballos, N., Dailey, S., Kaiser, S., & Howard, K. (2022). Do you dare to compare?: The key characteristics of social media users who frequently make online upward social comparisons. International Journal of Human–Computer Interaction, 38(10), 938-948.

Gotwals, J. K., Stoeber, J., Dunn, J. G., & Stoll, O. (2012). Are perfectionistic strivings in sport adaptive? A systematic review of confirmatory, contradictory, and mixed evidence. Canadian Psychology/Psychologie canadienne, 53(4), 263.

Greenspon, T. S. (2000). "Healthy perfectionism" is an oxymoron!: Reflections on the psychology of

perfectionism and the sociology of science. Journal of Secondary Gifted Education, 11(4), 197-

208.

Hamachek, D. E. (1978). Psychodynamics of normal and neurotic perfectionism. Psychology: A journal

of human behavior.

Herman, K. C., Wang, K., Trotter, R., Reinke, W. M., & Ialongo, N. (2013). Developmental trajectories

of maladaptive perfectionism among African American adolescents. Child Development, 84(5),

1633-1650.

Hewitt, P., Flett, G., Besser, A., Sherry, S., & McGee, B. (2003). Perfectionism Is Multidimensional: a

reply to. Behaviour research and therapy, 41(10), 1221-1236.

Hewitt, P. L., Flett, G. L., Sherry, S. B., & Caelian, C. (2006). Trait Perfectionism Dimensions and

Suicidal Behavior.

Hewitt, P. L., Flett, G. L., Turnbull-Donovan, W., & Mikail, S. F. (1991). The Multidimensional

Perfectionism Scale: Reliability, validity, and psychometric properties in psychiatric samples.

Psychological Assessment: A Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 3(3), 464.

Hill, A. P., Witcher, C. S., Gotwals, J. K., & Leyland, A. F. (2015). A qualitative study of perfectionism

among self-identified perfectionists in sport and the performing arts. Sport, Exercise, and

Performance Psychology, 4(4), 237.

Latham, G. P., & Locke, E. A. (2007). New developments in and directions for goal-setting research.

European Psychologist, 12(4), 290.

Limburg, K., Watson, H. J., Hagger, M. S., & Egan, S. J. (2017). The relationship between

perfectionism and psychopathology: A meta-analysis. Journal of clinical psychology, 73(10),

1301-1326.

Mackinnon, S. P., Sherry, S. B., & Pratt, M. W. (2013). The relationship between perfectionism, agency,

and communion: A longitudinal mixed methods analysis. Journal of Research in Personality,

47(4), 263-271.

Madigan, D. J. (2019). A meta-analysis of perfectionism and academic achievement. Educational

Psychology Review, 31(4), 967-989.

Marshall, K., Forbes, A., Kearns, H., & Gardiner, M. (2008). When a high distinction isn't good enough:

A review of perfectionism and self-handicapping. Australian Educational Researcher, 35(3), 21-

36.

McComb, S. E., & Mills, J. S. (2021). Young women's body image following upwards comparison to

Instagram models: The role of physical appearance perfectionism and cognitive emotion

regulation. Body Image, 38, 49-62.

Mofield, E. L., & Parker Peters, M. (2015). The relationship between perfectionism and

overexcitabilities in gifted adolescents. Journal for the Education of the Gifted, 38(4), 405-427.

Molnar, D. S., Sadava, S. W., Flett, G. L., & Colautti, J. (2012). Perfectionism and health: A mediational

analysis of the roles of stress, social support and health-related behaviours. Psychology &

Health, 27(7), 846-864.

National Research Council. (2015). *Investing in the health and well-being of young adults*. National

Academies Press.

Nehmy, T. J., & Wade, T. D. (2015). Reducing the onset of negative affect in adolescents: Evaluation of

a perfectionism program in a universal prevention setting. Behaviour research and therapy, 67,

55-63.

Neumeister, K. L. S. (2004). Understanding the relationship between perfectionism and achievement

motivation in gifted college students. Gifted child quarterly, 48(3), 219-231.

Nilsson, J. E., Butler, J., Shouse, S., & Joshi, C. (2008). The relationships among perfectionism, acculturation, and stress in Asian international students. Journal of College Counseling, 11(2), 147-158.

Norton, A., Norton, A., & Cakitaki, B. (2016). Mapping Australian higher education 2016.

Osenk, I., Johnson, C., & Wade, T. D. (2022). A Pragmatic Randomized Controlled Trial Targeting Perfectionism in Young Adolescents. School mental health, 1-14.

Patterson, H., Firebaugh, C. M., Zolnikov, T. R., Wardlow, R., Morgan, S. M., & Gordon, B. (2021). A systematic review on the psychological effects of perfectionism and accompanying treatment. Psychology, 12(1), 1-24.

Rice, K. G., Ashby, J. S., & Slaney, R. B. (1998). Self-esteem as a mediator between perfectionism and depression: A structural equations analysis. Journal of counseling psychology, 45(3), 304.

Rice, K. G., Ashby, J. S., & Slaney, R. B. (2007). Perfectionism and the five-factor model of personality. Assessment, 14(4), 385-398.

Rice, K. G., Bair, C. J., Castro, J. R., Cohen, B. N., & Hood, C. A. (2003). Meanings of perfectionism: A quantitative and qualitative analysis. Journal of Cognitive Psychotherapy, 17(1), 39-58.

Rice, K. G., Leever, B. A., Christopher, J., & Porter, J. D. (2006). Perfectionism, stress, and social (dis)connection: A short-term study of hopelessness, depression, and academic adjustment among honors students. Journal of counseling psychology, 53(4), 524-534.

Rice, K. G., Richardson, C. M., & Clark, D. (2012). Perfectionism, procrastination, and psychological distress. Journal of counseling psychology, 59(2), 288.

Rice, K. G., Richardson, C. M., & Tueller, S. (2014). The short form of the revised almost perfect scale. Journal of personality assessment, 96(3), 368-379.

Roxborough, H. M., Hewitt, P. L., Kaldas, J., Flett, G. L., Caelian, C. M., Sherry, S., & Sherry, D. L. (2012). Perfectionistic self-presentation, socially prescribed perfectionism, and suicide in youth: A test of the perfectionism social disconnection model. Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior, 42(2), 217-233.

Shafran, R., Cooper, Z., & Fairburn, C. G. (2002). Clinical perfectionism: a cognitive–behavioural analysis. Behaviour research and therapy, 40(7), 773-791.

Shannon, A., Goldberg, J. O., Flett, G. L., & Hewitt, P. L. (2018). The relationship between perfectionism and mental illness stigma. Personality and individual differences, 126, 66-70.

Shu, C. Y., Watson, H. J., Anderson, R. A., Wade, T. D., Kane, R. T., & Egan, S. J. (2019). A randomized controlled trial of unguided internet cognitive behaviour therapy for perfectionism in adolescents: Impact on risk for eating disorders. Behaviour research and therapy, 120, 103429.

Sirois, F. M., & Molnar, D. S. (2016). Perfectionism, health, and well-being. Springer.

Sironic, A., & Reeve, R. A. (2015). A combined analysis of the Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (FMPS), Child and Adolescent Perfectionism Scale (CAPS), and Almost Perfect Scale—Revised (APS-R): different perfectionist profiles in adolescent high school students. Psychological Assessment, 27(4), 1471.

Slade, P. D., & Owens, R. G. (1998). A dual process model of perfectionism based on reinforcement theory. Behavior modification, 22(3), 372-390.

Slaney, R. B., Rice, K. G., Mobley, M., Trippi, J., & Ashby, J. S. (2001). The revised almost perfect scale. Measurement and evaluation in counseling and development, 34(3), 130-145.

Smith, M. M., Sherry, S. B., Vidovic, V., Saklofske, D. H., Stoeber, J., & Benoit, A. (2019). Perfectionism and the five-factor model of personality: A meta-analytic review. Personality and social psychology review, 23(4), 367-390.

Soysa, C. K., & Weiss, A. (2014). Mediating perceived parenting styles–test anxiety relationships: Academic procrastination and maladaptive perfectionism. Learning and Individual Differences, 34, 77-85.

Stoeber, J. (2012). Perfectionism and performance: The Oxford handbook of sport and performance psychology, 294-306

Stoeber, J., & Becker, C. (2008). Perfectionism, achievement motives, and attribution of success and failure in female soccer players. International Journal of Psychology, 43(6), 980-987.

Stoeber, J., & Childs, J. H. (2011). Perfectionism.

Stoeber, J., Damian, L. E., & Madigan, D. J. (2017). Perfectionism: A motivational perspective. In The psychology of perfectionism (pp. 20-44). Routledge.

Stoeber, J., & Otto, K. (2006). Positive conceptions of perfectionism: approaches, evidence, challenges. Personality and social psychology review, 10(4), 295-319.

Stoeber, J., & Rambow, A. (2007). Perfectionism in adolescent school students: Relations with motivation, achievement, and well-being. Personality and individual differences, 42(7), 1379-1389.

Stricker, J., Kröger, L., Küskens, A., Gieselmann, A., & Pietrowsky, R. (2022). No perfect sleep! A systematic review of the link between multidimensional perfectionism and sleep disturbance. Journal of Sleep Research.

Tracy, S. J. (2010). Qualitative quality: Eight "big-tent" criteria for excellent qualitative research. *Qualitative inquiry*, *16*(10), 837-851.

Vanstone, D. M., & Hicks, R. E. (2019). Transitioning to university: Coping styles as mediators between adaptive-maladaptive perfectionism and test anxiety. Personality and individual differences, 141, 68-75.

Vekas, E. J., & Wade, T. D. (2017). The impact of a universal intervention targeting perfectionism in children: An exploratory controlled trial. British Journal of Clinical Psychology, 56(4), 458-473.

Wade, T. D. (2017). Prevention of perfectionism in youth. In The Psychology of Perfectionism (pp. 265-283). Routledge.

Wang, K. T., Fu, C.-C., & Rice, K. G. (2012). Perfectionism in gifted students: Moderating effects of goal orientation and contingent self-worth. School Psychology Quarterly, 27(2), 96.

Wilksch, S. M., Durbridge, M. R., & Wade, T. D. (2008). A preliminary controlled comparison of programs designed to reduce risk of eating disorders targeting perfectionism and media literacy. Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 47(8), 939-947.

Wilson, G. T., & Schlam, T. R. (2004). The transtheoretical model and motivational interviewing in the treatment of eating and weight disorders. Clinical psychology review, 24(3), 361-378.

Woodfin, V., Binder, P.-E., & Molde, H. (2020). The psychometric properties of the frost multidimensional perfectionism scale–brief. Frontiers in Psychology, 1860.

Xie, Y., Yang, J., & Chen, F. (2018). Procrastination and multidimensional perfectionism: A meta-analysis of main, mediating, and moderating effects. Social Behavior and Personality: an international journal, 46(3), 395-408.

Yoon, J., & Lau, A. S. (2008). Maladaptive perfectionism and depressive symptoms among Asian American college students: contributions of interdependence and parental relations. Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority

Appendices

Appendix 1: Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet

PROJECT TITLE: How motivated are perfectionistic young people to change their perfectionistic behaviours and cognitions? A study on young people who identify as perfectionistic
HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS SUB-COMMITTEE APPROVAL NUMBER: 22/38
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: XXXX
STUDENT RESEARCHER: XXXX
STUDENT'S DEGREE: Bachelor of Psychological Science Honours

Dear Participant,
You are invited to participate in the research project described below.

What is the project about?
This research project is about perfectionism in young people. This study aims to see if they believe their perfectionism is something they are needing to seek help for, and how likely they are to seek help for their perfectionistic thoughts and behaviours. We want to learn more about young people's views on perfectionism, and how perfectionism operates in their life.

The study aims are:
- To understand what it means to them to identify as perfectionistic, and what functions perfectionism serves in their life
- To understand what drives their perfectionistic behaviours
- To understand what are the outcomes of their perfectionistic behaviours
- To understand if perfectionism is something they believe they need support with, or if they believe it is something they are not requiring help for

Who is undertaking the project?
This project is being conducted by student researcher, XXXX. The research will form the basis for the degree Honours Degree of Bachelor of Psychological Science at the University of Adelaide under the supervision of XXXX.

Why am I being invited to participate?
You are being invited as you are a young person aged between 16-24 who also self-identifies as perfectionistic. You are fluent in English, which will allow you to partake in the interview required for the study.

What am I being invited to do?
You are being invited to partake in an interview where your views and experiences with perfectionism will be discussed. These interviews will be conducted via Zoom at any time

which is convenient for you. After the interview, a short survey will be given which will include some basic demographic information and a measure of perfectionism. With your consent, the audio from the interviews will be recorded, transcribed, and analysed. Two devices will be used to record the audio from the interview for insurance in case one audio recorder fails. Some notes may also be taken during the interview. Your responses to the questions will be anonymised, and all personal information will be removed.

How much time will my involvement in the project take?
The overall involvement of the study will take approximately 35-55 minutes. This will include a 30-45-minute interview via zoom and a 5-10-minute survey which will be given after the interview.

Are there any risks associated with participating in this project?
We do not expect there to be any risk associated with participating in this study. As there will be discussions about perfectionism, there may be some themes surrounding mental health that arise they may cause some anxiety or discomfort. If this occurs during your participation, you are more than welcome to take a break, or withdraw from the study at any point. If any discomfort occurs after the study, please get in contact with your school or University counsellor, or contact Beyond Blue, Headspace, or The Kids Helpline. Please find these contact details below:
Beyond Blue:
- Call 1300 22 4636 for 24/7 support
- Chat online via this link: https://www.beyondblue.org.au/get-support/get-immediate-support
Headspace:
- Call **1800 650 890** for support between 9am-1am
- Chat online via this link: **https://headspace.org.au/online-and-phone-support/connect-with-us/talk-about-mental-health/**
The Kids Helpline:
- Call **1800 55 1800** for 24/7 support

What are the potential benefits of the research project?
While you will not receive any immediate benefits or compensation for being in the study, your input will provide important information into research about perfectionism. Your participation will allow us to better understand views of perfectionistic young people and if they are wanting to seek support for their perfectionistic thoughts and behaviours.

Can I withdraw from the project?
Participation in this project is completely voluntary. If you agree to participate, you can withdraw from the study any time before or during, or after your participation in the study. If you are wanting to withdraw before or after your participation, please send an email to XXXX. and ask to withdraw your information from the study. If you are wanting to withdraw from the study during the interview, please let your interviewer XXXX know that you are wanting to withdraw from the

study, and the interview can end immediately. Please note that participation can be withdrawn until transcripts are finalised which will occur 2 weeks after the interview takes place.

What will happen to my information?

All information collected in the study will be anonymised, meaning all personal information will be removed from your responses. This is to protect your privacy and confidentiality. Your responses from the interviews will be recorded with your consent, so it can then be transcribed. You will be invited to review your transcribed responses (a process called member checking). If you opt in for member checking, you will be sent your transcript within a week from when your interview was conducted. Once you are sent back your transcript, you are invited to read your original responses to check the accuracy and quality for your responses. If there is anything you are wanting to take out or change, you are welcome to do this. On your consent form, there will also be an option for you to tick if you would like to receive the research findings after the project is completed. All raw data which includes your personal information will only be handled by student researcher XXXX who will also be conducting the interviews. The supervisor on the project, XXXX, will only have access to the anonymised transcripts to reduce the amount of people seeing your personal information. All anonymised transcripts will be kept for 7 years as per guidelines by the Psychological Research Board and will be held by the principal researcher XXXX on a University of Adelaide secure server. The findings from this study will be presented in an Honours thesis which has the possibility to be published in an academic journal, media, or at a professional presentation. Your anonymous transcribed responses may also be used for future research projects that are similar to the original study. Your information will only be used as described in this participant information sheet and it will only be disclosed according to the consent provided, except as required by law.

Who do I contact if I have questions about the project?

If you have any questions about this project, please contact student researcher XXXX via email at XXXX. You can also contact the principal investigator XXXX at XXXX.

What if I have a complaint or any concerns?

The study has been approved by the Sub-Committee of the Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of Adelaide (approval number: 22/38) This research project will be conducted according to the NHMRC National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007 (Updated 2018). If you have questions or problems associated with the practical aspects of your participation in the project, or wish to raise a concern or complaint about the project, then you should consult the Human Research Committees Convenor. If you wish to speak with an independent person regarding concerns or a complaint, the University's policy on research involving human participants, or your rights as a participant, please contact the HREC Convenor Professor Paul Delfabbro on:
Phone: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮
Email: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮
Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

If I want to participate, what do I do?

If you would like to participate in this study, please return the signed consent form to XXXX and an interview will be scheduled at the time of your convenience.

Yours sincerely, XXX

Appendix 2: Guardian Participant Information Sheet

Perfectionism Study – *Parent/Guardian consenting on behalf of participant*

PROJECT DETAILS	
Project Title	How motivated are perfectionistic young people to change their perfectionistic behaviours and cognitions? A study on young people who identify as perfectionistic
Researcher's name	XXXX
Contact details	XXXX
Ethical Approvals	University of Adelaide

This is an invitation for the child in your care to take part in this research project, which is called 'How motivated are perfectionistic young people to change their perfectionistic behaviours and cognitions? A study on young people who identify as perfectionistic." They have been invited because they are aged between 16-24 and identify as perfectionistic. Your child had found this study through a flyer at University Senior College and has emailed us expressing interest to be a part the study.

The Participant Information Sheet tells you about the research project. It explains the processes involved with taking part. Knowing what is involved will help you decide if you want the child to take part in the research.

Please read this information carefully with the child in your care. If you have any questions, please contact student researcher XXXX XXXX or supervisor XXXX about anything that you don't understand or want to know more about.

Participation in this research is voluntary. If you do not wish for the child in your care to take part, they do not have to.

If you decide you want the child to take part in the research project, you will be asked to sign the consent section. By signing it you are telling us that you:
• Understand what you have read
• Consent to the child taking part in the research project
• Consent to the child being involved in the research described
• Consent to the use of the child's personal information as described.

PROJECT TITLE: How motivated are perfectionistic young people to change their perfectionistic behaviours and cognitions? A study on young people who identify as perfectionistic
HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE APPROVAL NUMBER: 22/38
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: XXXX
STUDENT RESEARCHER: XXXX
STUDENT'S DEGREE: Bachelor of Psychological Science Honours

Dear Parent/Guardian,
The child in your care is invited to participate in the research project described below.

What is the project about?
This research project is about perfectionism in young people. This study aims to see if they believe their perfectionism is something they are needing to seek help for, and how likely they are to seek help for their perfectionistic thoughts and behaviours. We want to learn more about young people's views on perfectionism, and how perfectionism operates in their life.

 The study aims are:
- To understand what it means to them to identify as perfectionistic, and what functions perfectionism serves in their life
- To understand what drives their perfectionistic behaviours
- To understand what are the outcomes of their perfectionistic behaviours
- To understand if perfectionism is something they believe they need support with, or if they believe it is something they are not requiring help for

Who is undertaking the project?
This project is being conducted by student researcher, XXXX. The research will form the basis for the degree Honours Degree of Bachelor of Psychological Science at the University of Adelaide under the supervision of XXXX.

Why are they being invited to participate?
The child in your care is being invited to participate as they are a young person aged between 16-24 who also self-identifies as perfectionistic. They are fluent in English, which will allow them to partake in the interview required for the study.

What are they being invited to do?
They are being invited to partake in an interview where their views and experiences with perfectionism will be discussed. These interviews will be conducted via Zoom at any time that is convenient for them. After the interview, a short survey will be given which will include some basic demographic information and a measure of perfectionism. With both your consent and the consent of the child in your care, the audio from the interviews will be recorded, transcribed, and analysed. Two devices will be used to record the audio from the interview for insurance in case one audio recorder fails. Some notes may also be taken during the interview. All responses to the questions will be anonymised, and all personal information will be removed.

How much time will their involvement in the project take?
The overall involvement of the study will take approximately 35-55 minutes. This will include a 30-45-minute interview via zoom and a 5-10-minute survey which will be given after the interview.

Are there any risks associated with participating in this project?
We do not expect there to be any risk associated with participating in this study. As there will be discussions about perfectionism, there may be some themes surrounding mental health that arise which may cause some anxiety or discomfort. If this occurs during their participation, they are more than welcome to take a break, or withdraw from the study at any point. If any discomfort occurs after the study, please get in contact with their school counsellor, or contact Beyond Blue, Headspace, or The Kids Helpline. Please find these contact details below:
Beyond Blue:

- Call 1300 22 4636 for 24/7 support
- Chat online via this link: https://www.beyondblue.org.au/get-support/get-immediate-support

Headspace:

- Call **1800 650 890** for support between 9am-1am
- Chat online via this link: **https://headspace.org.au/online-and-phone-support/connect-with-us/talk-about-mental-health/**

The Kids Helpline:

- Call **1800 55 1800** for 24/7 support

What are the potential benefits of the research project?
While they will not receive any immediate benefits or compensation for being in the study, their input will provide important information into research about perfectionism. Their participation will allow us to better understand views of perfectionistic young people and if they are wanting to seek support for their perfectionistic thoughts and behaviours.

Can they withdraw from the project?
Participation in this project is completely voluntary. If they participate, they can withdraw from the study any time before, during, or after their participation in the study. If they are wanting to withdraw before or after their participation, please send an email to XXXX and ask to withdraw your information from the study. If they are wanting to withdraw from the study during the interview, they can let interviewer XXXX know that they are wanting to withdraw from the study, and the interview can end immediately. Please note that participation can be withdrawn until transcripts are finalised which will occur 2 weeks after the interview takes place.

What will happen to their information?
All information collected in the study will be anonymised, meaning all personal information will be removed from their responses. This is to protect their privacy and confidentiality. Their responses from the interviews will be recorded with their consent, so it can then be transcribed. They will be invited to review their transcribed responses (a process called member checking). If they opt in for member checking, they will be sent a copy of their transcript within a week from

when their interview was conducted. Once they are sent their transcript, they will be invited to read their original responses to check the accuracy and quality of their responses. If there is anything they are wanting to take out or change, they are welcome to do this. On the consent form, there will also be an option to tick if they would like to receive the research findings after the project is completed. All raw data which includes their personal information will only be handled by student researcher XXXX who will also be conducting the interviews. The supervisor on the project, XXXX will only have access to the anonymised transcripts to reduce the amount of people seeing their personal information. All anonymised transcripts will be kept for 4 years as per guidelines by the Psychological Research Board and will be held by the principal researcher XXXX on a University of Adelaide secure server. The findings from this study will be presented in an Honours thesis which has the possibility to be published in an academic journal, media, or at a professional presentation. Their anonymous transcribed responses may also be used for future research projects that are similar to the original study. Their information will only be used as described in this participant information sheet and it will only be disclosed according to the consent provided, except as required by law.

Who do I contact if I have questions about the project?
If you have any questions about this project, please contact student researcher XXXX via email at XXXX You can also contact the principal investigator XXXX at XXXX

What if I have a complaint or any concerns?
The study has been approved by the School of Sub-Committee of the Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of Adelaide (approval number). This research project will be conducted according to the NHMRC National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007 (Updated 2018). If you have questions or problems associated with the practical aspects of your participation in the project, or wish to raise a concern or complaint about the project, then you should consult the Human Research Committees Convenor. If you wish to speak with an independent person regarding concerns or a complaint, the University's policy on research involving human participants, or your rights as a participant, please contact the HREC Convenor Professor Paul Delfabbro on:
Phone: 831 34936
Email: paul.delfabbro@adelaide.edu.au
Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

If I consent for the child in my care to participate, what do I do?
If you consent for them to participate in this study, please sign consent form. The child in your care can then return the consent form via email to XXXX and an interview will be scheduled at the time of their convenience.

Yours sincerely,
XXXX

Appendix 3: Participant Consent Form

Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) – Consent Form

1. I have read the attached Information Sheet and agree to take part in the following research project:

Title:	How motivated are perfectionistic young people to change their perfectionistic behaviours and cognitions? A study on young people who identify as a perfectionist
Human Ethics Sub-Committee Approval Number:	22/38

2. I have had the project, so far as it affects me, and the potential risks and burdens fully explained to my satisfaction by the research worker. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions I may have about the project and my participation. My consent is given freely.

3. Although I understand the purpose of the research project, it has also been explained that my involvement may not be of any benefit to me.

4. I agree to participate in the activities outlined in the participant information sheet.

5. I agree to be:
   Audio recorded ☐ Yes ☐ No
   Video recorded ☐ Yes ☐ No

6. I understand my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my information from the project until the finalisation of transcripts. I understand if I decide not to take part, or withdraw from the project, there will be no impact on my studies at the University, now or in the future.

7. I have been informed that the information gained in the project may be published in an Honours Thesis. This information may also be published in a journal article or on another media platform.

8. I have been informed that in the published materials I will not be identified and any personal information that could identify me will not be divulged. I have been informed that while I will not be named in the published materials, it may not be possible to guarantee my anonymity given the nature of the study and/or small number of participants involved.

9. I consent for the use of my data by the same or other researchers in future research projects that are an extension of, or closely related to, the original project. I understand personal information that may identify me (e.g. name, address, date of birth) will be removed or changed before it is shared with other researchers:

   ☐ Yes ☐ No

10. I understand my information will only be disclosed according to the consent provided, except where disclosure is required by law.

11. I am aware that I should keep a copy of this Consent Form, when completed, and the attached Information Sheet.

Would you like to receive a copy of your interview transcript (member checking)? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Would you like to receive the research findings after the project is completed? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Participant to complete:

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 4: Guardian Consent Form

Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) – Consent Form

1. I have read the attached Information Sheet and agree to take part in the following research project:

Title:	How motivated are perfectionistic young people to change their perfectionistic behaviours and cognitions? A study on young people who identify as a perfectionist
Human Research Ethics Sub-Committee Approval Number:	22/38

2. I have had the project, so far as it affects me, and the potential risks and burdens fully explained to my satisfaction by the research worker. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions I may have about the project and my participation. My consent is given freely.

3. Although I understand the purpose of the research project, it has also been explained that my involvement may not be of any benefit to me.

4. I agree to participate in the activities outlined in the participant information sheet.

5. I agree to be:
   Audio recorded ☐ Yes ☐ No
   Video recorded ☐ Yes ☐ No

6. I understand my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my information from the project until the finalisation of transcripts. I understand if I decide not to take part, or withdraw from the project, there will be no impact on my studies at the University, now or in the future.

7. I have been informed that the information gained in the project may be published in an Honours Thesis. This information may also be published in a journal article or on another media platform.

8. I have been informed that in the published materials I will not be identified and any personal information that could identify me will not be divulged. I have been informed that while I will not be named in the published materials, it may not be possible to guarantee my anonymity given the nature of the study and/or small number of participants involved.

9. I consent for the use of my data by the same or other researchers in future research projects that are an extension of, or closely related to, the original project. I understand personal information that may identify me (e.g. name, address, date of birth) will be removed or changed before it is shared with other researchers:

   ☐ Yes ☐ No

10. I understand my information will only be disclosed according to the consent provided, except where disclosure is required by law.

11. I am aware that I should keep a copy of this Consent Form, when completed, and the attached Information Sheet.

Would you like to receive a copy of your interview transcript (member checking)? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Would you like to receive the research findings after the project is completed? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Participant to complete:

Name: _____

Participant's Date of Birth: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Parent/Guardian to complete:

Parent/ Guardian Name: _____

Relationship to Participant: _____

I give consent for _____ (participant's name) to be involved in this study

Signature: _____   Date: _____

Appendix 5: Interview Schedule

Research Aim:	Example of Interview Questions:
To understand the lived experiences of perfectionism	1. What makes you a perfectionist? 2. What do you think are some of the behaviours and qualities of someone who is a perfectionist? 3. Following from question 2, tell me a little bit about your own perfectionistic characteristics and qualities? 4. Can you tell me a bit about what perfectionism means to you in your life? 5. Tell me about an area of your life where you see your perfectionism the most? 5.1. Potential Prompt: Can you tell me how perfectionism affects you in this area of your life? 6. Now tell me about any positive outcomes of your perfectionism 7. Prompt: Could you please give me an example?

To understand what drives perfectionistic behaviours	1. Tell me about what drives and motivates your perfectionistic behaviours?
	    1a) Potential prompt: Could you please give me an example?
	2. Now tell me what impedes or interferes or stops your perfectionistic behaviours?
	    2a) Potential prompt: Could you please give me an example?

To understand the outcomes of perfectionistic behaviours	1. Tell me about the positive outcomes of your perfectionistic behaviours?
	8. 1a) Potential Prompt: Could you please give me an example?
	2. Tell me about the negative outcomes of your perfectionistic behaviours?
	    2a) Potential Prompt: Could you please give me an example?
	3. Can you give me an example where you believe your perfectionism has been helpful in meeting up to the standard you set yourself?
	    3a) How did you feel in this situation?
	    3b) How long did this feeling last for?

4. Can you give me an example where you believe your perfectionism has been unhelpful in meeting you standard you set yourself?
   4a) how did you feel in this situation?
   4b) How long did this feeling last for?
5. Tell me about a time where perfectionism interfered with your goal
   4a) how did you feel in this situation?
   4b) how long did this feeling last for?
6. Tell me a little about how long you have been perfectionistic for?
   6a) Potential prompt: In the past, has your perfectionism tendencies been better or worse?
   6b) Potential Prompt: What do you think are the reasons for this?
7. Tell me if you have accessed any supports or help for your perfectionism?
8. Tell me a little bit about your experiences for seeking help or not seeking help?
   2a) Potential Prompt: what was helpful?
   2b) Potential Prompt: what was not helpful?
9. Tell me a little bit about your coping mechanism for perfectionism, if any?
   3b) Potential Prompt: How does this contribute to your help seeking behaviours?
10. Now reflecting on your perfectionism, what are your thoughts on seeking support for it?

Appendix 6: Survey including demographic variables and the Short Almost Perfect Scale

(SAPS; Rice et al., 2014)

Perfectionism Study Survey

Hi, my name is XXXX, and I am a student at The University of Adelaide. I am doing a study about the experiences of perfectionism in young people. This survey will include some questions about yourself and a short questionnaire. Your answers today will help us better understand perfectionism in young people - thank you for your help!

This survey will only take approximately 10 minutes to complete. We encourage you to participate, but you have the choice to withdraw from anytime. Please be honest with your answers and remember there are no wrong answers.

If you experience any emotional distress from answering the questions, please refer to your participant information sheet with contact details to The Kids Helpline, Headspace, and Beyond Blue.

Q1 What is your RPS Number? (If applicable)

_____

Q2 What is your student ID number? (if applicable)

_____

Q3 What is your Participant Number? (Received via email from XXXX)

_____

Q4 What is your gender?

○ Male

○ Female

○ Gender diverse (here gender diverse includes (but is not limited to) transgender, intersex, gender fluid, non-binary, and 'unsure')

○ Prefer not to say

Q5 What is your age?

_____

Q6 What is the highest level of education you have received?

○ Less than high school diploma

○ High school diploma or equivalent

○ Bachelor's degree

○ TAFE certificate/diploma

○ Post-graduate degree

Q7 What is your employment status?

☐ Unemployed

☐ Student

☐ Casual

☐ Part-time

☐ Full-time

☐ Self-employed

Q8 What country were you born in?

_____

Q9 Do you speak a language other than English at home?

○ Yes

○ No

End of Block: Demographic Questions

This next section will include questions from The Short Almost Perfect Scale (SAPS) by a measure created by Rice, Richardson, & Tueller (2014). This scale contains 8 statements and aims to identify adaptive (positive) and maladaptive (negative) perfectionism.

You will be asked to rank how much you agree or disagree to the statements from 1. strongly disagree to 7. strongly agree. Please be as honest as possible and remember there are no wrong answers.

Q1 I have high expectations for myself.

○ Strongly disagree

○ Disagree

○ Slightly Disagree

○ Neutral

○ Slightly agree

○ Agree

○ Strongly agree

Q2 I set very high standards for myself.

○ Strongly disagree

○ Disagree

○ Slightly disagree

○ Neutral

○ Slightly agree

○ Agree

○ Strongly agree

Q3 I expect the best from myself.

    ○ Strongly disagree

    ○ Disagree

    ○ Slightly disagree

    ○ Neutral

    ○ Slightly agree

    ○ Agree

    ○ Strongly agree

Q4 I have a strong need to strive for excellence.

    ○ Strongly disagree

    ○ Disagree

    ○ Slightly disagree

    ○ Neutral

    ○ Slightly agree

    ○ Agree

    ○ Strongly agree

Q5 Doing my best never seems to be enough.

○ Strongly disagree

○ Disagree

○ Slightly disagree

○ Neutral

○ Slightly agree

○ Agree

○ Strongly agree

Q6 My performance rarely measures up to my standards

○ Strongly disagree

○ Disagree

○ Slightly disagree

○ Neutral

○ Slightly agree

○ Agree

○ Strongly agree

Q7 I am hardly ever satisfied with my performance.

○ Strongly disagree

○ Disagree

○ Slightly disagree

○ Neutral

○ Slightly agree

○ Agree

○ Strongly agree

Q8 I often feel disappointment after completing a task because I know I could have done better.

○ Strongly disagree

○ Disagree

○ Slightly agree

○ Neutral

○ Slightly agree

○ Agree

○ Strongly agree

This is the end of the survey, thank you for taking part! If you are a first-year psychology student, you will be given course credit at the end of your interview.
Thank you again for your participation.