

**Rules for Me but Not For Thee:
Combating Rigid Perfectionism
In an In an Imperfect Way**

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Goals of this talk...

- Help you **identify** what is perfectionism
- **Outline** the concepts driving perfectionism and what maintains the cycle
- Provide ways that you can begin to **combat perfectionism**
- Find the 5 spelling errors in our presentation

Don't fret, we won't do this the entire talk 😊



Double click to add a title

Sound familiar?

- “Ugh. I failed again. It’s (and I’m) so stupid that I can’t resist compulsing at work. I’m such a fraud for advocating for mental health and I can’t even do ERP right. ”
- “Ouch! That was harsh. Would you tell your coworker that if they had OCD and were working their way through exposure?”
- *horrified look* “No! That would be so mean. I would never say that to someone else. The rules are different for others.”

... and off we go!

“Perfect thoughts,
perfect feelings,
perfect journey... or
else I’m a failure.”

- You, perhaps?

The Complicated Story of Perfectionism

There are two principles to address before diving in:

- It isn't a “**do or do not**” situation
 - Sometimes these tendencies can be helpful
 - Can we be **flexible** with situation to situation

- Perfectionism might feel harder to change because **you may not want to**
 - OCD is often “**ego-dystonic**” while perfectionism can often be “**ego-syntonic**”
 - “What if you were perfect?” probably wouldn't illicit the same reaction as “what if you were a murderer?”

What is Perfectionism?

A pattern of **unhelpful thoughts** and **beliefs** that focus on **unreasonably high self-standards** and **endless self-criticism**.

Common perfectionism behavior patterns:

- High and inflexible standards
- Endless self-criticism
- Avoidance and procrastination
- Fear of failure
- Stagnation in life and other areas of functioning

How a perfectionist **thinks...**

- If I can't do it perfectly, **what's the point?**
- **Every detail** of a project must be **flawless**.
- Things should be done right the first time.
- If I make a mistake, people will think I am...
 - Incompetent
 - Stupid
 - Lazy
- **I'm great if I'm perfect**, but I (insert criticism here) if I make a mistake.
- There is only perfection and failure.
- I always have to make sure to **stay ahead of others**.

How a perfectionist **feels...**

- **Embarrassed** to make a mistake noticed by others
- **Ashamed** when they cannot do something perfectly
- **Disgusted** with themselves when **critiqued** by others
- **Guilty** about being a **burden** or letting others down
- **Exhausted** and has difficulty relaxing
- **Anxious** and **worried** about minute details
 - Could be details of a project, social interaction, etc
- **Anxious** when needing to state their own opinion
- **Anxious** to make any decision and **fearful** of the decision being wrong
- **Depressed** with the lack of forward movement in their life

How a perfectionist acts...

- Urge to always **be in control**
- Gets **stuck** in the details, costing them time
- **Paralyzed** by decisions
- Consistently **procrastinates**
- Focuses and magnifies negative comments over positive (**mental filter**)
- Endlessly **unsatisfied** with their work
- **Overcommits** and **overwhelms** themselves
- Completely **avoids** some tasks
- **Reliant on others** to make decisions

Advantages of Perfectionism

- Feeling **accomplished**
- Feeling **successful**
- **Catching mistakes** that others may miss
- Viewed by others as **dependable**
- Increased **attention and praise** by others
- Feelings of **uniqueness**

Costs of Perfectionism

- **Leaving tasks unfinished** due to concerns about not being good enough
- Having two options: **perfection or failure**
- **Avoidance** of attempting anything new
- **Setting impossible goals** for themselves and then **criticizing** themselves
- Difficulty laughing at themselves
- Difficult to accept even constructive criticism
- **Stagnation in life** due to the concern of not making the right choice
- Seeing ourselves as “not good enough”

Costs of Perfectionism

Much like with OCD, perfectionist behaviors can lead to feared consequence coming true.

Ingredients of Perfectionism

High and Rigid Standards

- Setting **rigorous** and **rigid standards** for yourself that leave little room for error or deviation
- Standards are set to an **unattainable level demanding**:
 - Obsessive focus on minor details
 - Demand of flawless outcomes
 - Rejection of the possibility of a flawed outcome
- This rigidity can **create distress** at minor setbacks or imperfections

Self-Criticism

What happens when we can't meet these IMPOSSIBLE STANDARDS, ALL OF THE TIME?

Self-Criticism.

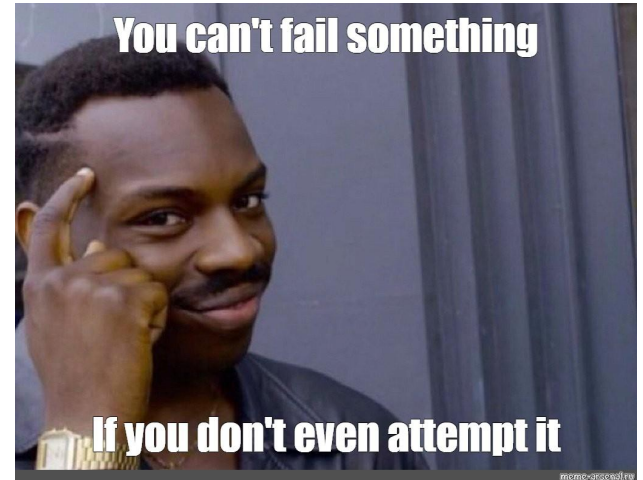
- **Impact** of not meeting rigid/high standards
- **Over-acknowledgment** of failures
- **Disregarding success** (it's expected, so no need to celebrate)
- Often can lead to feelings of **inadequacy, self-doubt, and never being “good enough”**.
- Leads to **lower self esteem, less motivation, and less self-confidence**

Procrastination and Avoidance

- Procrastination = \ lazy
- Procrastination = overwhelmed

Science has not yet uncovered the mystery of perfectionists being overwhelmed but promising theories include:

- Expecting to never make a mistake, ever.
- Completing every task perfectly.
- Making perfect choices every time.
- Being able to excel at every task imaginable.
- Never saying anything wrong to anyone, ever.



Fear of Failure

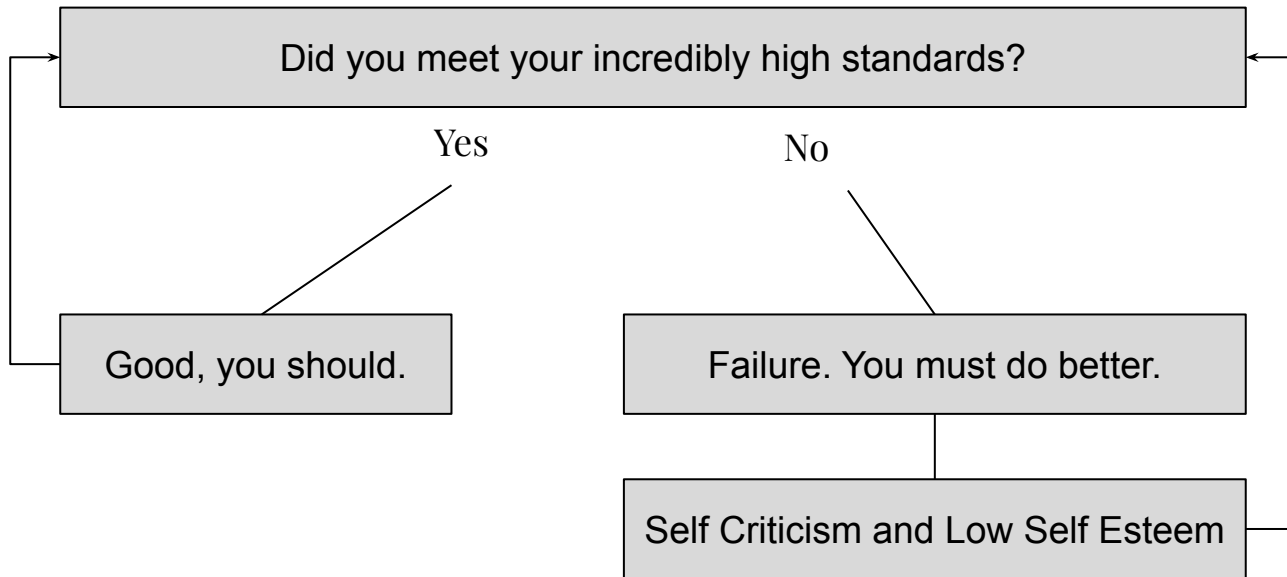
The **intense and persistent fear of failure** is at the heart of perfectionism

- Believing that **you don't have the skills** or knowledge to achieve something
- Feeling like **you won't be able to reach your goals**
- Telling others that you might fail to **keep expectations low**
- **Underestimating your abilities** to avoid/tolerate disappointment
- Worrying that mistakes or imperfections will **make other think less of you**
- Worrying that you will **disappoint others** if you fail

How we get trapped...

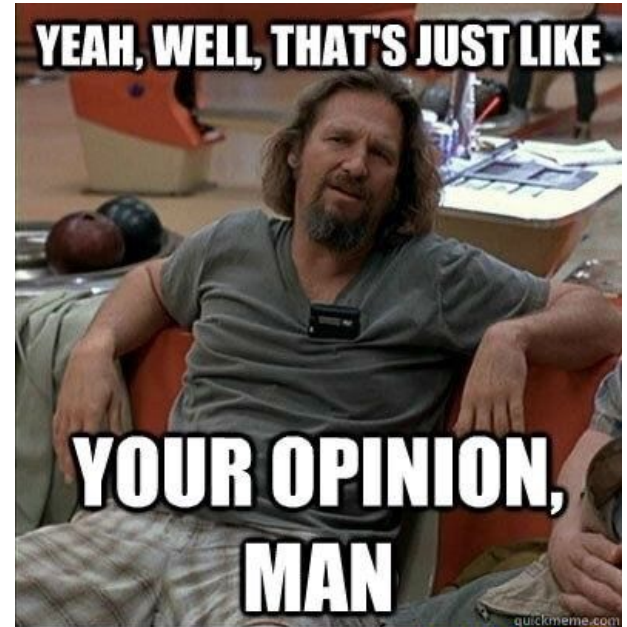
The Vicious Cycle of Perfectionism

Perfectionism becomes an impossible game that you can NEVER win:



What does Critic Say?

- Remember: every thought that we have is **real** but not every thought we have is **factual**
- What's the difference?
 - **Real**: it exists. It's there.
 - **Factual**: Is our critic someone that we can trust?



What does Critic Say?

- Is our critic spitting **facts** or **beliefs**?
 - **Facts:** cannot be disputed. Would be silly.
 - *Ex: This talk is about perfectionism.*
 - **Beliefs:** can be seen differently.
 - *Ex: This is the best talk ever.* 😞**maybe a fact?**
- If ANYONE in your life sees something differently than your critic.....
- This being the case gives us hope!
 - Facts cannot be changed, beliefs can.
 - Take this example: **I am such an idiot because I made a mistake.**
 - This may resonate with you like a fact but other people may see it differently, which by definition has to make it a belief

Beliefs that get us stuck...

There are common traps that can get you stuck in perfectionism:

- **Should** statements
- If I can't do it **perfectly**, I won't do it at all
- **Chronic indecisiveness** / Analysis Paralysis
- If I'm **kind** to myself, I won't be pushed to do better. (Two teacher ex)
- If I'm not perfect, other people will **notice** / think i'm **incompetent** / **lose respect** for me
- If I am not **perfect**, it means I will do a **terrible job**

Excellence vs Perfection

Excellence Oriented: a person that gets personal satisfaction and pride from excelling in their performance.

- Will try new things / risks
- Good self-esteem
- Works hard
- Is confident (enough!)
- Gets thing accomplished
- Less than 100% can still be success

Perfection Oriented: a person that believes that anything short of perfection is unacceptable.

- Avoid new things / risks
- Poor self-esteem
- Is overworked
- Rarely feels confident
- Often procrastinates
- Less than 100% is failure

Getting Unstuck

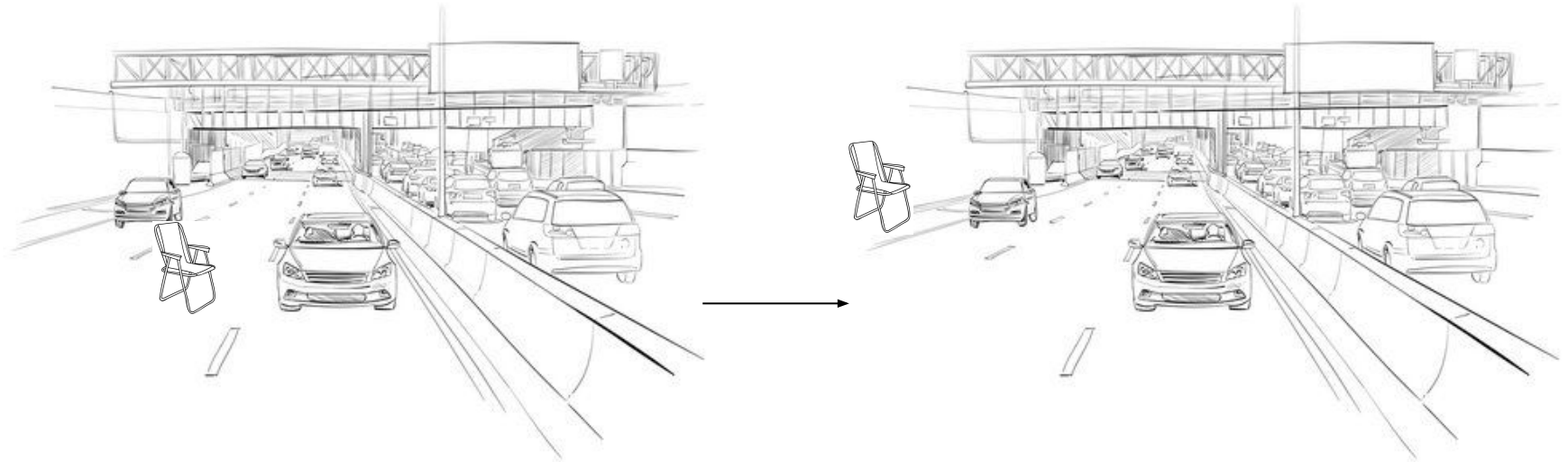
Shifting our Perspective on Perfectionism

- ...your standards are too high and you need to stop (**please?**)
- Research indicates that individuals who set high standards for themselves frequently have better outcomes.

- **Helpful vs. unhelpful**
 - “Do I typically meet the goals I set for myself? Or come close enough?”
 - “Do I typically miss my goals?”
 - “Do I allow flexibility within my goal setting?”

Shifting our Perspective on Perfectionism

Cognitive defusion encourages to see some of our thoughts and experiences in a different perspective. For instance, take this example of a busy highway.



Changing Relationship with Critic

We can apply this principle to be able to help us have a different relationship with our inner critic.

Think about a name that you can assign your critic. My favorite is this: Diane (no offense to anyone here named Diane. I still really like you)



Applying rules for others to you

Your friend tells you that they are trying to eat healthier for themselves. They have been trying to make progress towards this goal but walked by a shop that was making fresh sourdough bread and could not resist! Your friend is very disappointed with themselves.

What would you say to them?

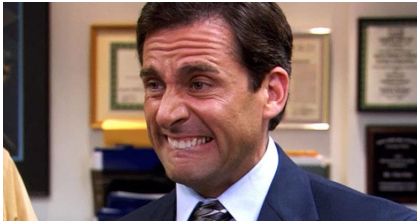
Applying rules for others to you

You are trying to eat healthier for yourself. You have been trying to make progress towards this goal but walked by a shop that was making fresh sourdough bread and could not resist! You are very disappointed with yourself.

What would you say to yourself?

Applying rules for others to you

- Your answer to your friend was probably very **understanding, compassionate, and kind.**
- Your answer to yourself was **probably.....not.**
- Why do we have different rules for ourselves than for others?
- It's only fair that we hold one set of rules for everyone



Apply rules you apply to yourself to others...



Apply rules you apply to others to yourself...

Stop Shoulding on Yourself

Wants > Shoulds

Should statements work sometimes when they have a **governing force**:

- I should drive 60 mph —> **laws**
- I should be at work by 9am —> **boss**
- I should pay for food I buy —> **store**

These should statements are a little different:

- I should always be perfect —> ??
- I shouldn't make mistakes —> ??
- I shouldn't ask for help —> ??

Wants > Shoulds

These don't work as well because there is no governing force, except for **you**.

- If you don't make the rule, **you probably can't change it**.
- If you do make the rule, **you can change it!**

- I should always be perfect —→ I **would like to** always be perfect.
- I shouldn't make mistakes —→ I **have the goal of** not making mistakes.
- I shouldn't ask for help —→ I **would like to** not ask for help.

Wants > Shoulds

This change also helps foster **self-compassion** and **understanding**:

- Should statements give us two options: should and shouldn't.
- In other words, **right or wrong**

When we rephrase these with the words “I would like to, have the goal to, aspire to, etc”:

- These statements gives us a variety of options
- In other words, if a mistake happens, **it may not be wrong but different from what you would have preferred.**

Failure is a
learning
opportunity.

Perfectionism about Therapy

If you don't think perfectionism will influence the way you approach therapy...

- “I can't start this exposure until I know I will do it perfectly.”
- “If I don't do ERP perfectly, I can't achieve recovery.”
- “Others can be flexible in their recovery, but not me.”
- “I have to know everytime I do a compulsion and intervene.”
- “If I get anxious / intrusive thought / do a compulsion, I am failing”
- “If I have a challenging day, I'm doing something wrong.”

This can quickly hijack recovery since it can lead to disappointment, hopelessness, and endless self-criticism.

Setting Adaptive Guidelines

The way the perfectionist approaches tasks can often leave us:

- **Spending too much time** on the task
- **Checking** over the task multiple times
- Stopping and **redoing** parts of the task
- Asking friends / others to **check** over tasks

Developing and working towards guidelines can serve two functions:

- Live by **more adaptive** and **helpful** standards to do the tasks
- Open up time that the person can **engage in meaningful and valuable activities**.

Setting Realistic Goals

With this new found time, the perfectionist now has time to pursue other wonderful things in life.....also in an imperfect way

- **SMART goals** (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time Based)
- Please, please, please, please make the goals “**reasonable**”



Setting Realistic Goals

- **Overly ambitious goals**
 - Are they too big or unclear?
- **Dead person's goals**
 - Don't set goals that a dead person is better at than you (Kemp, 2021)
 - Set a goal about something you can achieve
- **Perfection goals**
 - "I'm going to break up with perfectionism in a perfect way!"
 - Recovery isn't linear
- **Goals not aligned with our values**
 - Is your goal based on a "should" or a desire of someone else's?
 - Who cares?

Opposite Action

Your chance to be able to annoy your perfectionism like a 3 year old annoys their parent:

Do everything opposite!

This tool is not much more complicated than it sounds.

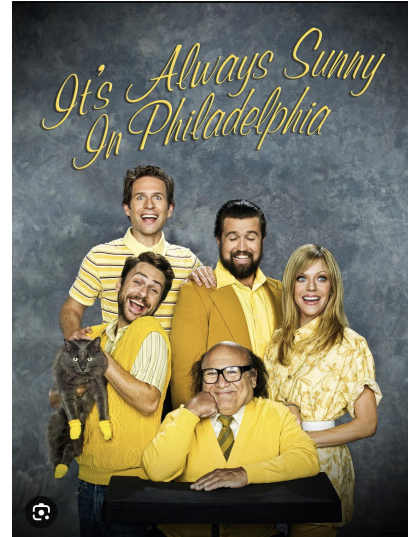


Pursuing Life and taking a chance!

Making a perfect decision leaves you between a rock and a hard place.



Or



Pursuing Life and taking a chance!

What about bigger life decisions?

We will never know what choice is best but we can take our **best guess** AND...

- Submit a job application
- Sign up for a sports team
- Join online dating
- Start learning a new hobby
- Go exercise
- *Insert any other life decision here*

We'll close this important topic with a few inspiring quotes...

“Anyone who never
made a mistake
never tried
anything new.”

-Albert Einstein

“You miss 100% of
the shots you don’t
take.”

– Wayne Gretzky

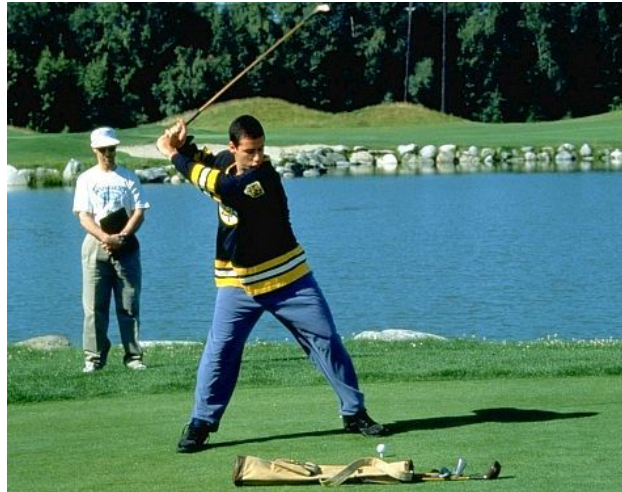
– Michael Scott

Self-compassion for you, too!

- **Requires** us to **pay attention to our suffering**
 - **Gentle, kind, and loving approach** to yourself and your suffering
 - Non-judgmental acceptance
 - Common humanity
 - Motivation to help
-
- It is possible to **be kind** while also **working** and **progressing** towards our goals

Practice makes perf..... progress.

Embracing imperfections and practicing self compassion is going to feel at first strange, weird, and possibly inauthentic.



Exposure time!

- Wear your shirt inside out
- Deodorant/toothpaste stain on shirt
- “Enjoy your movie!” “Thanks, you too!”
- Give your area code instead of zip code
- Pronounce something incorrectly when ordering
- “Accidentally” drop change on the floor when checking out at the store
- Purposely misspell a word in an email
- Turn off autocorrect on your phone and take the risk!
- Any other ideas???

Homework time!

Now it is your turn! Two challenges that we present to you:

- 1. Write down one perfectionist rule that you would be willing to shift.**
 - a. Ex: I must be perfect » I will allow myself to make mistakes.
 - b. Ex: I can't say something stupid » I may sometimes make a mistakes when talking to others

- 2. Write down one challenge for yourself that you can do today.**
 - a. Ex: Have a conversation with a new person (without trying to be perfect!)
 - b. Ex: Intentionally misspell words in your notes / course evaluation (maybe wrong hand?)
 - c. EX: Adjust something about your outfit / hair / etc

tl;dr

Stop beeng perFect

We're no good at it anyway.