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Exploring the Nature of Perfectionism and Middle School Student Achievement

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EXPLORING THE NATURE OF PERFECTIONISM
AND
MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

By

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B.S. Ed. University of Southern Maine, 1976

M.S. Ed. University of New Hampshire, 1978

C.A.S. University of Southern Maine, 2009

A DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

in Public Policy

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May 2015

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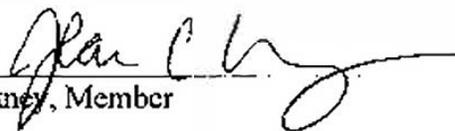
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EXPLORING THE NATURE OF PERFECTIONISM

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By Jean M. Beaulieu, CAS

Dissertation Advisor: Dr. Catherine Fallona

An Abstract of the Dissertation Presented in
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Ph.D. in Public Policy
Concentration in
Educational Policy and Leadership
May 2015

The purpose of this dissertation is to describe a doctoral research study designed to explore the nature of perfectionism and middle school student achievement. Perfectionism is currently perceived as a multi-dimensional construct with both adaptive and maladaptive features. This qualitative research study focuses on the views of nine seventh grade participants who were identified as adaptive or maladaptive perfectionists in a survey of students in one seventh grade cohort using the Almost Perfect Scale - Revised (Slaney, Mobley, Trippi, Ashby, & Johnson, 1996). Each of the participants met with the researcher and completed three individual interviews and two focus group sessions. Data gathered from those meetings were analyzed to answer the following questions: What are the traits of middle school students who are identified as demonstrating adaptive perfectionism and maladaptive perfectionism? How do middle school students who are identified as demonstrating adaptive or maladaptive

perfectionism view their academic achievement? And, how do middle school students who are identified as demonstrating adaptive or maladaptive perfectionism perceive the impact of parents, teachers and peers on their academic achievement?

Findings were explored through a conceptual framework created for this study based upon the multidimensional model of perfectionism originally proposed by researchers Hewitt and Flett (1991). Conclusions drawn from this exploration into the intrapersonal and interpersonal facets of perfectionism reveal that student attitudes and beliefs about their efficacy as learners are deep-seated and appear to influence their achievement outcomes and potential in either positive or negative ways. Adaptive perfectionists display more positive outcomes than maladaptive perfectionists whose frequent unrealistic expectations about achievement lead to anxiety and stress that is seen to inhibit performance. There is strong evidence of malleability in students' potential for learning success and that transition from maladaptive tendencies to more adaptive ones, with appropriate support by parents and teachers, is possible. Furthermore, the findings of this study point to several implications for policy and practice that show promising potential as early interventions leading to the development of non-cognitive traits and approaches to social and academic behavior that will result in healthier lifestyles and more successful long-term academic achievement.

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First and foremost, I am extremely grateful to the nine participants of this study who gave me the gift of their time, in the midst of their very busy schedules, to discuss their lives and perspectives as students. I am most thankful to their supportive parents who entrusted me to listen and to honor their contributions toward making the culture for learning in our schools the most positive experience that it can be for all students. It has been an honor, each and every day, to work alongside the dedicated teachers and staff in my school. They represent an unwavering commitment to helping middle schoolers thrive both academically and emotionally. I have had the extreme good fortune to have worked with Principal Jeff Rodman for the last seven years. He is among the very finest school leaders in education today. I am so very thankful for his support and guidance as I pursued my research.

I thank my advisor, Catherine Fallona, for her constant and timely support and advice as I made the journey through the dissertation process. I thank my dissertation committee, Jean Whitney and Julie Canniff, who along with Catherine, read through drafts of my work in progress, and presented me with many invaluable recommendations for revisions and improvements, all leading to a product we can share with pride.

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gift of their collective wisdom and experience in the field of educational research and public policy has transformed my thinking and the way I, as an educator, see the world.

And finally, and most of all, I am so very thankful for the love and support of my husband, Steve, and my children, Cynthia and Daniel. Their patience and understanding through the last three years while I was engaged in this work means everything to me.

When I proudly graduate and receive my diploma in recognition of completing the degree of Ph.D., I will also be celebrating my 60th birthday. Perhaps the most important lesson of all that I have learned from this experience is that I am not nearing the end of my career as an educator, of my education. I have only just begun.

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Introduction

Statement of the Problem

At a time when so much focus in education is aimed at increasing student achievement and engagement in learning, and at decreasing dropout rates in high school and college, it may not seem reasonable to consider the issue of students who set high personal standards and strive to be perfect. On the surface, those characteristics would seem valuable assets leading to high achievement and strong educational outcomes. Yet competition for awards, honors, and accolades, striving for top grades, can become so stressful for some students that their academic achievements, career preparations, and success can be seriously jeopardized.

Studies in the last decade have begun to investigate non-cognitive traits that affect learning outcomes. Brunello and Schlotter (2011) differentiate non-cognitive traits from cognitive abilities and skills, which "are usually identified with intelligence and the ability to solve abstract problems. Measures of those skills include the IQ test and standardized tests on reading, science and math." Non-cognitive traits, in contrast, "are personality traits that are weakly correlated with measures of intelligence" (Brunello & Schlotter, 2011, p. 5). Empirical studies (see Appendix A) of the effects of those non-cognitive traits upon school performance have become an important and intriguing subject of study. One of those traits is perfectionism, and its relationship with

achievement variables such as GPA and standardized test scores has become of interest to researchers.

In the relevant studies, perfectionism is defined as the maintenance of personal standards that exceed what is considered to be realistic or attainable. Over time, theories involving perfectionism have evolved to the present model where "Perfectionism is currently conceptualized as a multidimensional construct that consists of adaptive and maladaptive tendencies" (Nounopoulos, Ashby & Gilman, 2006, p. 614). Several studies examine multiple behavioral factors related to perfectionism, both adaptive and maladaptive, and measure some very specific differences in how those two tendencies affect student learning behavior and learning outcomes. Students with *adaptive perfectionism* use their high standards to motivate improved performance and outcomes. Students with *maladaptive perfectionism* are overcome by psychological stress, including anxiety and depression, which can lead to self-handicapping behaviors that seriously impact learning achievement. The studies measure perfectionism in students, and report that the GPAs of students with adaptive perfectionism are significantly higher than those with maladaptive perfectionism. The studies reveal a need to further examine a broad variety of non-cognitive factors involved in addressing student underperformance including coping strategies as mediators, the effects of classroom and school goal structures (mastery vs. performance), grading policies, cognitive styles, and support for mental health interventions in schools.

To date, the majority of studies of perfectionism have involved surveys of high school and college students, particularly the gifted. All the researchers emphasize the need for further understanding, and early response to the problem with younger students

as essential to improving their odds for future success (Accordino, Accordino & Slaney, 2000; Gilman & Ashby, 2003; Nounopoulos, Ashby & Gilman, 2006; Nugent, 2000; Orange, 1997; Pintrich, 2000; Urdan & Midgley, 2001; Wang & Holcombe, 2010).

Past research identifying the factors leading to high school and college attrition has focused primarily upon financial issues and academic preparedness for college (Ladd, 2012; Ludwig, Duncan, Gennetian, Katz, Kessler, Kling & Sanbonmatsu, 2013; Murnane, 2013; Reardon, 2011). It is only more recently that the impact of non-cognitive factors has begun, not only to gain attention, but also to challenge the traditional standard of assuming the primacy of cognitive ability in producing successful lifetime outcomes (Heckman, Pinto & Savelyev, 2012).

James Heckman and Yona Rubenstein refer to research on non-cognitive skills and their impact on learning outcomes as "dark matter" and liken it "in spirit" to research in astrophysics. They described it thus when that field of research was in its infancy over a decade ago. "Too little is understood about the formation of these skills or about the separate effects of all of these diverse traits currently subsumed under the rubric of non-cognitive skills" (Heckman & Rubenstein, 2001, p. 149). Fables such as "The Tortoise and the Hare," the story of "The Little Engine that Could," and Thomas Edison's oft-quoted aphorism "Genius is 1 percent inspiration and 99 percent perspiration," are all cultural acknowledgements that motivation, tenacity and perseverance are important traits for success in life (Heckman & Rubenstein, 2001).

The tidal wave of belief that the skills that can be measured by standardized achievement tests are the essential elements for success in schooling, fueled by No Child Left Behind (2002) mandates, seems to have overwhelmed any significant consideration

of non-cognitive factors in either K-12 education, or beyond. For example: in spring 2013, Maine followed Florida and other states by releasing an A to F rating of each school's quality based upon student growth as measured by its NECAP scores in math and language arts. In 2015, as Maine begins to measure student progress toward proficiency in Common Core State Standards using the MEA/SBAC Achievement Test, the stakes are growing even higher for schools and educators. Not only will federal funding be tied to scoring outcomes, but student diplomas will also be on the line. Furthermore, teacher evaluations must now include a value-added measure based upon their students' achievement test results. Therefore, when planning for student success, educational leaders should take into consideration the significance of all factors, both cognitive and non-cognitive, that contribute to student achievement. In this study, perfectionism is theorized to be a non-cognitive factor of great significance, and its relationship to student learning outcomes warrants significant attention, particularly because those outcomes can be quite diverse due to the multidimensionality of perfectionism, with both adaptive and maladaptive features.

Urdan and Midgley (2001) view the maladaptive aspects of perfectionism as contributory to a phenomenon called "academic self-handicapping." Academic self-handicapping is seen as selected behaviors leading to underperformance, or more specifically, to making specific choices or actions that result in a failure to perform up to one's potential. Self-handicapping occurs when students choose impediments or obstacles to performance that enable them to deflect the causes of failure from their competence levels and toward acquired impediments, strategically reducing effort

(Hattie, 2012). Thus, in the event of failure, a person has an immediate excuse. "The dog ate my homework," or "I didn't study, so I got a low grade."

Urdan and Midgley (2001) state the following:

> To more fully understand the nature of academic self-handicapping, it may be important to increase the variety of methods and subjects researchers use to study the phenomenon…A combination of methods, including classroom observations, surveys, and interviews with students, may help researchers better understand both the precursors of academic handicapping as well as the processes through which contextual features of the learning environment facilitate or inhibit handicapping. (p. 134)

More recently, in John Hattie's (2012) meta-analyses and report of effect sizes of over 900 influences on student achievement, he found that student expectations about their success as learners had one of the highest effect sizes of all. "The effect was d= 1.44, or a correlation of about 0.80 between students' estimates (via self-reported GPA) and their subsequent performance in school tasks" (Hattie, 2012, p. 59). He concluded that there is a high level of predictability about achievement in the classroom and also that expectations of success, or lack thereof, may become a barrier for some students "as they may only perform to whatever expectations they already have of their ability" (Hattie, 2012, p. 59).

This study joins the body of literature that supports the significance of understanding and responding to non-cognitive factors in student learning behavior. It

also supports educational policies that seek to improve educational outcomes and the future productivity of our students.

To summarize, there has been very limited qualitative study of adaptive perfectionism and maladaptive perfectionism in adolescent students at the middle school level, including the associated behaviors that support student achievement or inhibit it, such as self-handicapping behaviors and student expectations or beliefs about their success as learners. The literature that does exist reveals a preponderance of quantitative study involving data gathered from surveys and self-reported GPA scores. ~~There is a lack of qualitative study into this issue at any grade level.~~ The studies address "what is," but do not expand upon understanding the nature of students' perceptions, of their beliefs about themselves as learners, and what drives their perfectionist tendencies, particularly when their goals and expectations become unrealistic and lead to stress, anxiety and underperformance at a most vulnerable time in their lives, adolescence.

Significance of the Study

Parental expectations and state and federal pressures for schools to promote academic achievement have never been higher. With high school and college looming, and students at middle level experiencing the growing weight of expectations to achieve high grades, show strong summative and standardized test scores, or to stand out in athletic competition, it is important to understand the impact of those expectations on adolescents and their achievement outcomes. With specific regard to perfectionism and prior studies noting the negative impact of many intrapersonal and academic school factors on students exhibiting maladaptive perfectionism (Parker & Adkins, 1995), it is important to expand research into an area acknowledged to be underexplored, with

middle level students (Accordino, Accordino & Slaney, 2000; Flett, Gilman & Ashby, 2003, Nugent, 2000; Panico & Hewitt, 2011). Secondly, there is also a dearth of research investigating perfectionism in the general population of middle school students; past research has mainly focused on those learners with high intellectual ability. Nugent (2000) states that it is important to know that perfectionism is not a trait specific to gifted learners: neither is stress, anxiety, depression and worry about grades, tests, and other academic outcomes. What remains to be explored is perfectionism in the academic and social milieu of all middle-level learners if we are to identify appropriate interventions to overcome self-handicapping behaviors and reconsider current school policies, particularly grading policies that may be an impediment to student academic success. The scarcity of empirical study on perfectionism at the middle level is surprising given that early intervention is a hallmark of so many other educational initiatives. The goal of this study is to remedy those deficiencies by adding to the scholarly research into perfectionism in middle level students.

The transition from childhood to adulthood, which begins in earnest with adolescence, is a time of tremendous change in the physical, mental and emotional development of a human being. It is generally recognized that adolescents are highly concerned about how they appear to others (Hewitt et al., 2011); they are invested in maintaining an ideal public image. Their awkwardness is often embarrassing to them, and false displays of confidence frequently mask self-doubt. Adolescents are focused upon social acceptance and integration. They harbor the "fallacy of uniqueness" in that they perceive that all their peers are coping well, and they therefore do not want to admit to a personal shortcoming or mistake (Pine & Aronson, 1981; Hewitt et al., 2011). In sum,

they strive to project images that are without flaw, and they may exhibit certain dimensions of perfectionism to a greater degree than adults, who have been the subject of the majority of studies of perfectionism. Perfectionistic self-presentation in adolescents was the subject of a recent study by Hewitt et al. (2011) who noted that the need to appear to others as if perfect is in frequent discrepancy to their inner experience of themselves. "A case can be made that perfectionistic self-presentation is perhaps most relevant to study among young adolescents" (Hewitt et al., 2011, p. 127).

The uniqueness and importance of early adolescence cannot be overemphasized. Those human beings, neither child nor adult, are experiencing very distinct and powerful physical, social, emotional and cognitive changes that require great adjustment. "Their intellectual capabilities increase rapidly in complexity, and they crave opportunities to exercise more control over their lives" (Lipka, 1997, p. 32). When they enter the middle grades, many adolescents struggle to cope with new settings, new academic expectations and grading systems, and to form their individual identities, while at the same time becoming increasingly reliant on peer acceptance (Daniels, 2011; Mizelle & Mullins, 1997; Vanlede, Little & Card, 2006). Middle school is a ripe foundation for many coping behaviors to bloom, including maladaptive perfectionism, and it is important to understand the nature of perfectionism and its impact on achievement during that critical time in human development.

In addition to expanding the inquiry of perfectionism in younger subjects, this study will expand on the nature of the information gathered. Prior studies, as noted, are mostly quantitative, and provide survey information as to the type and extent of perfectionism in older students, and the relationship between it and grade outcomes or

other behavior measures. This study seeks to add to the research by investigating

perfectionism qualitatively in order to build a deeper understanding of perfectionism and

its relationship to how students approach learning tasks and assessments at the middle

school level. Through the lens of their perfectionism, this study seeks to capture students'

voices, perceptions, behaviors and beliefs about themselves as learners as they encounter

learning tasks and academic and social challenges typical of their middle school setting.

This study will delve further into the issue of perfectionism by observing and

interviewing middle school students, whose survey results show strong indications for

perfectionism, either adaptive or maladaptive, in their natural school setting. That will be

done in order to reveal the meanings that students hold about their engagement, their

achievement, their grades, what it means to be a successful learner, and what gets in the

way.

For educators, parents, and educational policymakers, understanding the issue is

key to the development of successful and early intervention strategies. Crone and Dahl

(2012) state as follows:

> The exciting challenge is to better understand how these incentives exert such
>
> strong influences on adolescents' engagement, decisions and behavior - not only
>
> in ways that create vulnerabilities towards unhealthy incentives but also in ways
>
> that create unique opportunities for learning, adaptation and positive
>
> motivations relevant to health, education and social development in
>
> adolescence. (p. 645)

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to contribute to the understanding of adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism in the middle school setting. A broad variety of factors, both cognitive and non-cognitive, impacts student learning and achievement. Environmental factors such as home environments, parents, teachers and peers and communities are also significant influences on learning outcomes. Student beliefs about themselves as learners have recently emerged as extremely important and powerful factors influencing academic achievement. The scarcity of empirical study on perfectionism at the middle level is surprising given that early intervention is a hallmark of so many educational initiatives. Furthermore, middle school aged students are at a critical developmental phase: they have begun, in earnest, to develop their own academic and performance identities. Therefore, it is the goal of this study to remedy those deficiencies by adding to the scholarly research into perfectionism in middle level students.

Perfectionism has been identified as a significant non-cognitive factor influencing student achievement. Perfectionism, defined as the maintenance of personal standards that exceed what is realistic or attainable, is "conceptualized as a multidimensional construct that consists of adaptive and maladaptive tendencies" (Nounopoulos, Ashby & Gilman, 2006, p. 614). While adaptive perfectionists use their high standards to motivate improved performance and achievement, empirical studies show that students identified as maladaptive perfectionists experience stress, anxiety, depression and self-handicapping behaviors that negatively impact their learning, and result in academic underachievement.

Extensive quantitative survey studies of high school, college students and adults, who are identified as maladaptive perfectionist report significant anxiety about grades,

testing outcomes, competition, and pressures to excel. To more fully understand the nature of perfectionism in the academic setting, it is important to broaden the variety of methods and subjects used to study the phenomenon, both its precursors and the processes through which contextual features of the learning environment are facilitative or inhibitory to student achievement and identity formation. "Prior research suggests that perfectionism is not only a concern beginning in late adolescence and young adulthood. Indeed, perfectionism among children and early to middle adolescents has emerged as an important area of research" (Rice, Ashby & Gilman, 2011, p. 564). Excessive concern about making mistakes; worries about living up to the expectations of parents, teachers and peers; high personal standards; and self-criticism may affect children and young adolescents in the same ways that it does older adolescents or adults (Gilman & Ashby, 2006). Childhood is considered a first crucial period for the genesis of perfectionism (Blatt, 1995; Soenens et al., 2008). Flett, Hewitt, Oliver and MacDonald (2002) suggest that adolescence constitutes a particularly sensitive period for the development of perfectionist tendencies because it is characterized by increasing self-consciousness, and by a growing awareness of social standards and achievement expectations.

Since the purpose of this study is to explore the meaning of adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism in the middle school setting, it will add to the understanding of student underperformance at a younger age. Earlier educational and mental health interventions will increase the potential for student academic success in high school, in college, and beyond. Furthermore, qualitative study of the problem may contribute to greater understanding and efforts to improve adolescent mental health treatment, improvements in the development of healthy coping skills, classroom management

practices, and educational policy reform that supports increased student achievement in school. Thus the following research questions will be examined in this study.

Research Questions

The overarching question guiding this study is: What is the nature of perfectionism, adaptive and maladaptive, as experienced by middle school students, and their concomitant perceptions about their academic achievement?

1. What are the traits of middle school students who are identified as demonstrating adaptive perfectionism and maladaptive perfectionism?

2. How do middle school students who are identified as demonstrating adaptive or maladaptive perfectionism view their academic achievements?

3. How do middle school students who are identified as demonstrating adaptive or maladaptive perfectionism perceive the impacts of parents, teachers and peers on their academic achievements?

Chapter Two

Literature Review

"Have no fear of perfection – you'll never reach it." Salvador Dali

The purpose of this study is to contribute to the understanding of adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism in the middle school setting. Salvador Dali's frequently quoted warning is a gentle reminder of the necessity of balance and reason in life. And yet, society's persistent passion for competition is alive and well in schools, a microcosm of that society. Messages, both overt and subtle still flow into our classrooms: that intelligence is fixed and constant, that grades will motivate students to learn, and that grades and test results, rather than personal growth and the learning itself, are what matter most. Hundreds of research studies have been focused over the last three decades upon expanding our understanding of non-cognitive factors such as motivation and achievement goal theory and their impact on learning. (See Ames & Archer, 1988; Covington, 2000; Harackiewicz, Barron & Elliot, 1998; Kaplan & Maehr, 1999; Meece, Anderman & Anderman, 2006; Midgely, Kaplan & Middleton, 2001; Midgley & Urdan, 1995; Patrick, Kaplan & Ryan, 2011; Reschly, Huebner, Appleton, & Antaramian, 2008; Skinner & Belmont, 1993) Those are but some examples of the literature that have made a great contribution to understanding the policies, practices and behaviors that exist in schools and classrooms: those that lead to positive student motivation and achievement outcomes, and conversely, significant factors that may contribute to disengagement and underachievement.

There is a significant body of study seeking to identify the factors, specifically, financial, academic, and social, involved in attrition or persistence to a college degree (Angrist, Lang, & Oreopoulos, 2009; Bailey & Dynarski, 2011; DeBerard, Spielmans, & Julka, 2004; Garibaldi, Giavazzi, Ichino, & Rettore, 2010). For example, it has been estimated that over a lifetime, college graduates earn over $1 million more than high school graduates (Northeastern University, 2009). Those findings present a very hefty case for the importance of the pursuit of high school graduation and higher education. It is also becoming increasingly evident that the training necessary for the jobs of the 21st century not only suggests, but requires a post-secondary education, particularly in technical fields requiring proficiency in science, technology, engineering and math-related subjects (Carnevale, Smith, & Stroh, 2010). The computer age has greatly reduced the need for less-skilled labor, and increased the need for analytic and non-routine skills. The capabilities demanded by the 21st century labor market are for workers who are more highly skilled and "education that confers these skills on workers is likely to have a bigger payoff in the labor market and generate earnings returns" (Blanden & Machin, 2010, p. 107). What factors get in the way and contribute to college attrition vs. factors that support persistence to completion?

John Dewey writes, "The most important attitude that can be formed is that of desire to go on learning" (Dewey, 1938/1997, p. 48). Dewey speaks to one of the many habits of mind, to the non-cognitive skills that are crucial to a student's future success, not just the subject knowledge. There are many interpretations of success, but here, it is broadly interpreted to be persistence with skills development through high school and post-secondary education leading to a career, job attainment and the ability to sustain

personal growth, combined with active citizenship and involvement or contributions to society. Martin Covington adds, "The greatest legacy of education is to encourage a will to learn and to continue learning as personal circumstances change – in short, to promote a capacity for resiliency and self-renewal" (Covington, 1992, p. 4). Resiliency and perseverance in the face of change: educators agree those values are important. But how, exactly are they achieved? Covington (1992) asks, how can those traits be encouraged and nurtured in schools? This study is based upon the need to extrapolate those concepts, and to uncover extremes of human motivation that may result in either strong academic achievement or academic underachievement.

Empirical literature on the contribution of non-cognitive skills to successful school and college completion is an area of recently evolving interest. Researchers are discovering that it is a very important one (Brunello & Schlotter, 2011; Carneiro, Crawford & Goodman, 2006; Deke & Heimson, 2006; Duckworth & Seligman, 2005; Heckman, Sixtrud & Urzua, 2006). Studies of associations among self-esteem, self-discipline, self-adjustment and high school /college completion support that those personality traits are significant prerequisites to success in college. While the relationships between cognitive and non-cognitive skills remain complex, and much is yet to be understood about the shared roles that they play in student achievement or how non-cognitive traits can or should be developed in students, Brunello and Schlotter (2011) conclude that:

> Individuals who are more self-disciplined and exhibit higher perseverance
> and motivation are likely to attain higher educational attainment and better
> grades at school. Although cognitive abilities seem to be the most important

factor, personality traits play an important role in school attainment and

performance. (p. 13)

Much of the limited consideration of non-cognitive factors in educational studies appears

to be due to the lack of any reliable measure or consideration of them in terms of

indicators of college readiness, the effectiveness of schools or policy reform efforts. But

interest in study of the role that non-cognitive skills play in school and career success is

growing, in part due to the dynamic shift in skills necessary for workplace success in the

age of technology, and the interest of economists in studying the factors that are

necessary for development of a skilled and effective 21st century labor force.

The significant impact that non-cognitive factors can have in student learning is

exhibited by the work of Wang and Yang, researchers who have studied perfectionism as

a non-cognitive factor in student learning by borrowing from behavioral economics

theories such as *loss aversion* and *self-worth* to explain why students actually make

choices in their levels of effort. Wang and Yang base their analysis on prior studies of

student learning incentives and motivation involving high school students in the United

States and Norway (Bonesronning, 1999; Correa & Gruver, 1987). They pose the

question: "Does competition among students motivate increased effort?" They

hypothesized that competition among students for limited rewards such as good grades

leads to an "ability game." In that competitive learning game, students are ranked on their

relative performance. And then, one's rank within a group is interpreted as the perception

of her/his ability (Wang &Yang, 2003, p. 118). The reasoning follows that measures of

self-worth become attached to a perceived ability and can become major determinants of

behavior. Effort, then, becomes a substitute for ability, and when great effort results in

failure, it is perceived as indicative of low ability. That chain of events can be averted with the "winning-by-not-losing strategy" in which capable students lower their efforts, and thus, the outcomes are ruled by their choices and not their abilities. The issues surrounding grades competition as an ability game have also been discussed, following a decade of research, by Martin Covington (1992) in his book, *Making the Grade: A Self-Worth Perspective on Motivation and School Reform.* Educational researchers frequently describe maladaptive aspects of perfectionism as an externality of the "ability game." Often in the game, the greater the competition, the greater the blow to self-worth when the desired results are not achieved (Wang & Yang, 2003).

Grading policies are usually seen as an incentive to motivate students' efforts with grades serving as rewards. Some educators who support change in ranking and letter grade policies in favor of a narrative standards-based report of progress might also say that some grading policies are punitive and serve as "gotchas." Wang and Yang (2003) theorize that: (1) When grading policies introduce competition and evaluate performance relative to position in class, a student's choice in effort is also influenced by his/her perceived relative ability. (2) Self-perceived better students will make greater efforts than other students. (3) The more competitive the scheme, the more effort that above average students will make, and the less effort those who perceive themselves as below average will make. In that analysis, researchers Wang and Yang see the model as addressing competition both as a positive incentive scheme that produces results for some students, but discourages others from making the effort needed to be successful. When self-worth factors are included in the analysis, and competition factors are increased, results support

the proposition that "better" students can be both encouraged and discouraged from making greater efforts that produce successful outcomes.

Gusky and Bailey (2001) describe grading and reporting practices in schools as follows:

> Grading is an exercise in professional judgment on the part of teachers. It involves the collection and evaluation of evidence on students' achievement or performance over a specified period of time, such as nine weeks, an academic semester, or entire school year. Through this process, various types of descriptive information and measures of students' performance are converted into grades or marks that summarize students' accomplishments. Although some educators distinguish between *grades* and *marks,* most consider these terms synonymous. Both imply a set of symbols, words, or numbers that are used to designate different levels of achievement or performance. They might be letter grades such as *A, B, C, D,* and *F;* symbols such as, + or - ,descriptive words such as *Exemplary, Satisfactory,* and *Needs Improvement;* or numerals such as *4, 3, 2,* and *1.* Reporting is the process by which these judgments are communicated to parents, students, or others. (p. 9)

Wang and Yang conclude that "although competition among firms in a market system can help allocate economic resources efficiently, it can be harmful to introduce it into schools as an incentive scheme. In a sound education system, learning and intellectual development should be a human capital investment process rather than a means to beat each other" (Wang & Yang, 2003, p. 126). Grades and performance measures might be

used to screen for new hires in a firm, but in educational institutions, incentives for students should be explicitly tied to the process of learning and learning outcomes.

In conclusion, grading policies and academic competition are seen as two of many examples of mainstream school culture and educational practices that influence students both positively and negatively, with learning outcomes that are the result of both the learners' cognitive and non-cognitive skills working in concert. This study focuses on perfectionism as an important non-cognitive trait with adaptive aspects that support a motivation to learn and to be successful, and maladaptive aspects that may disrupt successful learning outcomes. Grades are seen as a very important signal to students about their progress and their attitudes about themselves as learners. As such, they can have a significant impact upon performance.

Fueled by the gains of the last decade in establishing many of the important influences that non-cognitive skills have on learning outcomes, it is important to fully understand the role that perfectionism plays for many students. This review of literature on the study of perfectionism is divided into four sections. The first section explores the development of the current definition of the construct of perfectionism. Section two discusses empirical research into the measurement of perfectionism. The third section focuses upon studies of adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism and their effects on student achievement, engagement and learning outcomes, and the final section explores qualitative studies of maladaptive perfectionism and indications for further study with young adolescents. (Major studies reviewed in this chapter are summarized in Appendix C.)

Defining Perfectionism

What is perfectionism? How does it impact students? How can some students who report strong perfectionist tendencies thrive, while others underperform and become disengaged? Perfectionists are extremely goal oriented and motivated to excel at all costs. They anticipate and are energized by success and competition, and are driven to seek high grades and honors that recognize their efforts. But, other perfectionists become so anxious about their performance that they suffer a motivation derailment, and their fear of failure overrides their will to succeed. A review of literature exploring that phenomenon reveals that the study of perfectionism has grown significantly over the last two decades, beginning as a construct that has generated great discussion surrounding its very definition. The review also reveals that early literature on perfectionism features primarily psychological studies attempting to understand it in order to support needed therapies for negative tendencies emerging from excessive perfectionism such as anxiety, depression and suicide. Perfectionism studies were not in the realm of educational research in the 1980s or early 1990s, which are more typified by broad research into motivation (Covington, 1992). But once researchers began to make connections to education, the study of perfectionism bloomed. Results from those studies strengthened the case for addressing the connections between education outcomes and psychologically based attitudes and beliefs. Similarly, Carol Dweck's research on fixed vs. growth mindsets also shows a similar and significant positive or negative impact of certain personal beliefs held by a student affecting learning and achievement outcomes (Dweck, 2003).

The multi-dimensionality of the construct excites both interest and investigative tension in that individuals who report high personal standards display either positive or negative achievement outcomes. To understand how that is so, it is necessary to review the timeline of study on the topic. Slaney, et al., (2001) quotes Webster's dictionary definition of perfectionism: " an extreme or excessive striving for perfection, as in one's work" (Webster's 9th New Collegiate Dictionary, 1988, p. 873). Additionally, it is defined as a "predilection for setting extremely high standards and being displeased with anything else" (Webster's 11th New College Dictionary, 1995, p. 816). Perfection is defined as " an unsurpassable degree of accuracy or excellence" (Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 1993, p. 863). The American Psychiatric Association discusses perfection in the context of OCD (Obsessive Compulsive Personality Disorder) "perfectionism that interferes with task completion, e.g., is unable to complete a project because his or her overly strict standards are not met" (American Psychiatric Association, 1994, p. 672). Those definitions assume that having excessively high standards is key to the definition of perfectionism and that it is a problem, perhaps pathological. Beginning in 1980, Burn's Perfectionism Scale, the first to measure perfectionism, grew from prior measures of depression and anxiety and measured "a number of self-defeating attitudes" (Slaney et al., 2001, p. 131). Hewitt & Flett (1991) also viewed perfectionism as a negative construct in developing their Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale. Frost, et al., (1990) also created a scale with items from Burn's scale, and added additional subscales for eating disorders and obsessiveness.

In 1992, Slaney and Johnson (1992) reported their development of the Almost Perfect Scale (APS), which was the first to include positive dimensions. Since the

available prior literature all featured mostly negative dimensions, so did the Slaney &

Johnson scale. By 1996, confirmatory factor analyses of the scale were published to

support its validity and reliability. Results also strengthened the support of more positive

aspects of the construct including "positive striving" (Slaney et al., 2001). What was also

becoming clearer was the growing case for the hypothesis that perfectionism was a multi-

dimensional construct exhibiting both adaptive (positive outcomes) and maladaptive

(negative outcomes) aspects. Even more critical were observations by Slaney and Ashby

(1996) that the negative aspects of perfectionism still eluded clear definition, and that the

subscales featured only assumed causes or the resultant effects. A revision of the APS,

referred to as APS-R (Slaney, Mobley, Trippi, Ashby, & Johnson, 1996) attempted to

address this issue by meeting the following criteria: "(a) It should clearly specify the

variables that define perfectionism as discriminated from variables that are seen as

causal, correlational, or the effects of being perfectionistic; (b) it should pay close

attention to the empirically supported negative AND positive aspects of perfectionism;

(c) it should be closely related to commonly held ideas about perfectionism as

exemplified in the dictionary definitions; (d) it should be empirically sound.

Roedell (1984) stated:

In a positive form, perfectionism can provide the driving energy, which leads to

great achievement. The meticulous attention to detail necessary for scientific

investigation, the commitment which pushes composers to keep working until

the music realizes the glorious sounds playing in the imagination, and the

persistence which keeps great artists at their easels until their creation matches

their conception all result from perfectionism. Setting high standards is not in

itself a bad thing. However, perfectionism, coupled with a punishing attitude toward one's own efforts can cripple the imagination, kill the spirit, and so handicap performance that an individual may never fulfill the promise of early talent. (p. 127)

In summary, perfectionism is widely understood as a multi-dimensional construct with two main subtypes or dimensions, adaptive and maladaptive. "**Adaptive perfectionists** are individuals who set high standards for themselves and are highly motivated by the need for achievement, yet recognize and accept their limitations in striving to meet these standards. **Maladaptive perfectionists** set high standards in every situation and do not accept their limitations" (Hamacheck, 1978, p. 27). Parker (1997) adds that maladaptive perfectionists set excessively high personal standards and frequently express doubts about meeting those standards. Nugent (2000) adds that maladaptive perfectionists are never totally satisfied with themselves or their performance. John Hattie (2012) states that:

Perfectionism comes in many forms. We can set such demanding standards for ourselves that, when they are not met, we see it as failure; we can demand that resources be perfect and blame their absence (for example, a lack of time) when we do not succeed; we can procrastinate because conditions are not perfect for success; we can attend to irrelevant details and overzealously invest time in tasks that may not be worth the increased investment; or we may have an 'all or nothing' approach, believing that the task is not at all or very much worth completing. While there can be a sense of pleasure derived from taking

painstaking effort, there are more likely to be negative consequences. (p. 49-50)

Perfectionism as a Multi-Dimensional Construct

Growing recognition and study of perfectionism as a multi-dimensional construct with both positive features and negative features emerged alongside the development and validation of surveys to measure these dimensions. An overarching feature of perfectionism is the setting of high achievement standards. "To the extent that people are able to adjust their standards according to situational demands, holding high standards may provide people with a sense of goal directedness and purpose. As such, the endorsement and pursuit of high standards may be relatively adaptive" (Soenens et al., 2008, p. 466). Hamacheck (1978) contrasts that perspective with that of the maladaptive perfectionist for whom good is never good enough. Adaptive perfectionists set realistic goals and can be flexible and readjust, whereas maladaptive perfectionists are rigid, set standards that may be impossible to meet, and do not readjust them. They continually report negative self-evaluations, are highly concerned about failure and express deep self-doubts. "Across time, they develop deep-seated feelings of inferiority and ineffectiveness because they rarely feel able to attain their standards, resulting in an endless cycle of self-defeating over-striving in which each task becomes a threatening challenge" (Blatt, 1995, p. 1007).

"Perfectionism has been linked to various negative outcomes including characterological feelings of failure, guilt indecisiveness, procrastination, shame, and low self-esteem as well as more serious forms of psychopathology such as alcoholism, anorexia, depression and personality disorders" (Hewitt & Flett, 1991, p. 456).

Researchers believe that those conditions are the result of a perfectionist's tendency to set unrealistic standards and engage in an enormous effort to attain them. Perfectionists selectively attend to failure; they make stringent self-evaluations; and they tend to engage in all or none thinking wherein only total success or total failure exist as outcomes (Burns, 1980; Hamachek, 1978; Hewitt & Flett, 1991).

Other studies that supported the multi-dimensionality of perfectionism include Burns (1980), who identified several kinds of perfectionism, including moralistic, performance, identity, emotional, romantic, relationship, sexual, and appearance perfectionism, and Hamachek (1978), who described perfectionism as a manner of behaving and a manner of thinking about the behavior, and postulated a continuum of perfectionistic behaviors, often overlapping, that range from normal to neurotic. Hewitt and Flett (1991) furthered the study of perfectionism as multi-dimensional in their 1991 study in which they theorized that perfectionism consisted of three dimensions and then measured those with a 45-item scale that they created called the Multi-dimensional Perfectionism Scale or MPS.

The three dimensions of perfectionism in the Hewitt and Flett (1991) study were theorized to be: self-oriented perfectionism, other-oriented perfectionism and socially prescribed perfectionism. In that construct, self-oriented perfectionists are described as self-directed, setting exacting personal standards. Self-oriented perfectionism focuses upon the intrapersonal nature of perfectionism. Other-oriented perfectionism involves placing high expectations on others. Socially prescribed perfectionism involves the perceived need to attain high standards that are set and expected by significant others. Those facets of perfectionism involve focus and interactions with others and, as such, are

the interpersonal facets of perfectionism. The significance of Hewitt and Flett's study is that it encouraged further study and growth in the understanding of perfectionism as a multi-dimensional construct. However, it also touched off a great debate about the variety of scales that were being developed to measure perfectionism, as well as the lens through which it should be most accurately viewed.

Slaney, Ashby, and Trippi (1996) have been highly critical of Hewitt and Flett's MPS scale, and of the scales from which the MPS evolved. They defend their position by citing literature that consistently suggests that the setting of high personal standards and orderliness are not necessarily problems. Additionally, they felt that scales such as those developed by Hewitt and Flett (1991), Burns (1980) and Frost, Marten, Lahart and Rosenblatt (1990), "were based almost exclusively on the thoughts and impressions of theorists and clinicians who saw perfectionism as problematic and pathological" (Slaney & Ashby, 1996, p. 393) and their biases, therefore, influenced and flawed the scales that they developed. It was that predominating tension in the 1990s that led to the development of the Almost Perfect Scale.

More recent studies have consistently viewed and accepted the multi-dimensionality of the construct not as purely positive or negative but as a dynamic structure through which positive or negative outcomes can be achieved. The three-dimensional construct proposed by Hewitt and Flett (1991) has fared well in studies published in the past decade mostly due to the fact that research interest leans heavily toward understanding maladaptive behaviors.

Periasamy and Ashby (2002) took a closer look at perfectionism by investigating the relationship between adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism and locus of control

based upon Rotter's definition. Rotter (1990) maintained that those with an internal locus of control perceive outcomes as the results of their own actions. That is, they have a strong sense of their own power to control events in their lives, and a strong sense of self-efficacy. Individuals with an external locus of control view outcomes as being the result of external events and factors that are not in their control, or that they are powerless to control. They frequently demonstrate low self-efficacy. Periasamy and Ashby administered the APS-R (Slaney et al., 2001) and the Locus of Control Scale or LOCS to 262 college students, and found that adaptive and maladaptive perfectionists had significantly higher levels of internal locus of control that those who are not identified as perfectionistic. They also found that maladaptive perfectionists had significantly higher levels of external locus of control than both adaptive perfectionists and non-perfectionists (Periasamy & Ashby, 2002).

More recently, Hewitt, Blasberg, Flett, et al. (2011) have proposed an additional dimension of perfectionism called perfectionistic self-presentation. Perfectionistic self-presentation, along with other-oriented perfectionism and socially prescribed perfectionism, currently make up the interpersonal aspects of perfectionism. That newer conceptualization of perfectionism therefore identifies self-oriented perfectionism as its intrapersonal expression.

For adolescents, the subjects of this study, perfectionistic self-presentation may reflect issues involving personal identity confusion, normative pressures, fears of making mistakes, and needs to fit in with peers in both the classroom and extracurricular activities. Perfectionistic self-presentation may reflect trying to appear to fit in with the perceived expectations and norms (Hewitt et al., 2011).

Perfectionistic self-presentation is further divided into three facets or dimensions. The first is perfectionistic self-promotion, which represents the excessive need to appear to others as if one is perfect. The second facet is called nondisplay of imperfection, which entails avoiding or hiding imperfection or perceived imperfection. It also may entail avoiding situations where imperfection might be revealed, or of hiding mistakes from others. The third facet is nondisclosure of imperfection, which involves evasiveness in interpersonal interactions based upon a need to avoid admitting or revealing imperfections to others.

It is important to inquire as to how those beliefs may uniquely affect young adolescent students and impact their achievement in the middle school setting. The more current conceptualization of perfectionism, which includes perfectionistic self-presentation, suggests that is a very relevant construct for studying perfectionism in adolescents.

It is from those more contemporary evolutions in the conceptualization of perfectionism that the conceptual framework for studying perfectionism in this study was created. The framework, pictured in Figure 2.1, emerges from the conclusions of researchers including Hewitt, et al., (2011) who describe perfectionism as a multidimensional construct, either adaptive or maladaptive, with intrapersonal and interpersonal features. The application of the framework, which is further described in Chapter Three, Methodology, also appears in Chapter Five where it is used to analyze the findings emerging from this study.

Figure 2.1 Conceptual Framework the Multidimensional Construct of Perfectionism
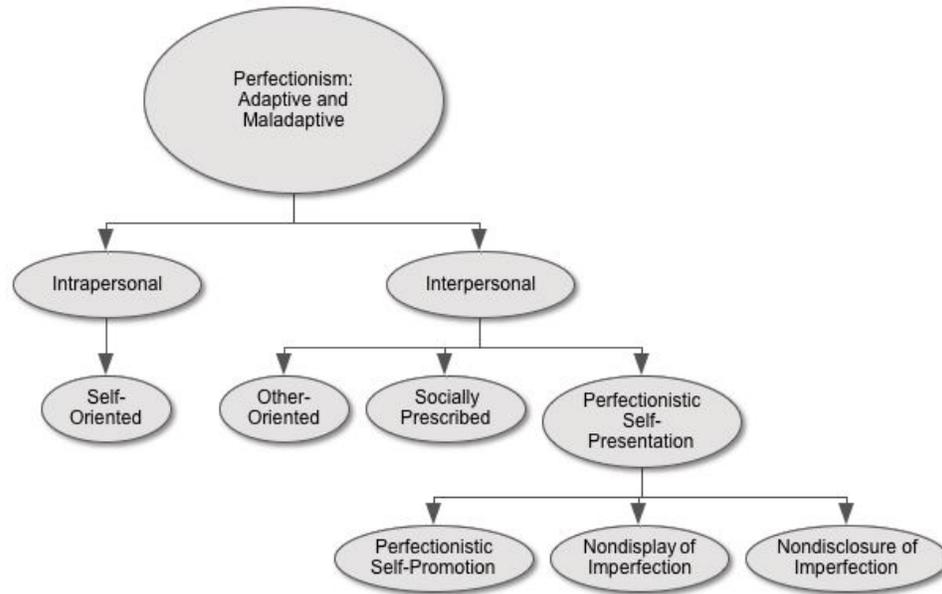
(Adapted from the research of Slaney et al., 1991; Hewitt & Flett, 1991; and Hewitt et al. 2011.)

Measuring Perfectionism and Student Achievement

In this study, student achievement is broadly regarded as progress toward concept and skill attainment, that is, in the academic environment, measured and reported both formally, as in standardized testing, and informally, as in subject-based, teacher-developed assessments of learning. It is acknowledged that standardized test scores and grade reporting typify the measures, but are not all inclusive of the methods used to present evidence of student achievement. There are over 2,000 research studies alone that include the word achievement in their titles, but there is no shared understanding of the definition of student achievement. Many terms such as student success, student improvement, student attainment, student growth, and student progress are used interchangeably. Furthermore, school leaders, policymakers, legislators, researchers, parents and the students themselves define achievement differently (Guskey, 2012).

Therefore, pertaining to this study, the term "student achievement" is used in the context of the public school as it relates most closely to student performance as measured with test scores and summarized in grade reports, and "student perceptions of performance" are explored more specifically in terms of what students actually say about themselves and their achievements.

Since 1996, the measurement of perfectionism has primarily been accomplished with survey scales such as The Almost Perfect Scale (Slaney et al., 1996) in a broad spectrum of individuals both in the United States and abroad. It has become increasingly important to studies of education and student success (Accordino et al., 2000; Gilman & Ashby, 2003; LoCicero & Ashby, 2000; Nounopoulos et al., 2006; Rice et al., 2011; Slaney et al.,1996) and it is regarded as a highly reliable and valid measure of the multi-dimensional construct of perfectionism supported by both exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses (Rice, Ashby & Slaney, 1998; Slaney et al., 1996). Those correlational studies determined the relationship between student self-reports from the Likert-scaled APS-R (Appendix B) and self-reported GPA.

In its current form, The Slaney, Mobley, Rice, Trippi & Ashby (2001) Almost Perfect Scale-Revised (APS-R) is a seven-point Likert-scale survey designed to assess both adaptive and maladaptive dimensions of perfectionism. The scale has a three-factor structure. The first factor, **Standards** (7 items), measures positive indicators (setting high personal standards and expectations of perfectionism). The second factor, **Discrepancy** (12 items), assesses the degree of distress (and other negative aspects) experienced when the individual's performance does not meet their high standards. The third factor, **Order** (4 items), measures the preference for order and organization.

The APS-R has also assisted in the study of inter-relationships between perfectionism and test anxiety and goal orientation with college students (Eum & Rice, 2011), achievement goal theory with students at the Citadel (Hanchon, 2011), coping mediation strategies for college students exhibiting maladaptive perfectionism (Gnilka, Ashby, & Noble, 2012) and perfectionism and hope (Ashby, Dickinson, Gnilka & Noble, 2011). As previously discussed, there was little study of perfectionism in the middle school grades until Gilman and Ashby (2003) and Nounopoulos, Gilman and Ashby (2006) sought to investigate perfectionism in adolescents. The 2003 correlational study measured the relationship between the APS-R, the BASC-Self Report (Behavioral Assessment System for Children) (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 1992) and their self-reported GPAs. The 2006 correlational study involved examining the relationship between the APS-R with coping resources as measured by the Coping Resources Inventory Scales for Educational Enhancement (Curlette, Wheeler & Kern, 1993). Those researchers make a strong case for the importance of more study with that age group. The findings with the adolescent group matched prior results that reported strong correlations between positive educational outcomes for students whose APS-R scores revealed adaptive perfectionism and more negative outcomes for students reporting maladaptive tendencies. Another interesting finding was reported by Ashby, Dickinson, Gnilka, and Noble (2011) in the study of hope as mediator of multi-dimensional perfectionism in middle school students. The researchers concluded that hope provided one explanation for why adaptive perfectionists experience fewer of the destructive effects of perfectionism than both non-perfectionists and maladaptive perfectionists. They also emphasize the importance of

continued study with that age group and the reliability and validity of the APS-R for use in identifying perfectionism in middle school students.

Quantitative study using the APS-R, BASC and GPA of middle school students (Gilman & Ashby, 2003) also revealed several findings and speculations, which, it is anticipated, will be both corroborated and further developed by this qualitative study of adolescent perfectionism. Those are:

- Findings are consistent with previous study of high school students using the APS-R (Rice et al., 1998).

- Findings regarding maintenance of high standards are inconsistent with previous theories in that "high standards beneficially influence, rather than negatively detract from a number of academic variables " (Gilman & Ashby, 2003, p. 685).

- Findings indicate that adaptive perfectionists have more positive intrapersonal, interpersonal, and academic experiences than maladaptive perfectionists or non-perfectionists.

- Maladaptive perfectionists reported more social stress than adaptive perfectionists.

- "Perfectionism should not be construed as specific only to children with high intellectual ability" (Gilman & Ashby, 2003, p.678).

- GPA findings show that maladaptive perfectionists not only report distress over lower than expected grades, their GPAs in comparison to adaptive perfectionists, are indeed lower.

- It is speculated that maladaptive perfectionists are "driven more by fear of failure rather than the pursuit of academic excellence" (Gilman & Ashby, 2003, p. 686).

- "It appears that parents' achievement orientations can send important messages to their children and affect their perfectionistic tendencies" (Ablard & Parker, 1997, p. 663.)

In the last decade, researchers have increasingly explored the role that parents may play in influencing or transferring perfectionistic tendencies to their children through psychological control. Again, due to the acknowledged multi-dimensionality of the construct, the influence itself may be viewed as either positive and adaptive, or deleterious and maladaptive. Parents who exhibited adaptive perfectionism were not observed to have developed elevated levels of psychological control over their children, while parents who exhibited maladaptive tendencies passed those behaviors on to their children to an elevated and significant degree. "Psychological control refers to a rearing style used by parents who are primarily focused on their own psychological needs and emotional problems and on their authority position in the relationship with the child. Parents who use psychological control pressure their children to comply with their personal standards through the excessive use of techniques such as guilt induction and love withdrawal. Because psychologically controlling parents are thought to inhibit their children's autonomy, this parenting dimension can be expected to have particularly detrimental consequences during late adolescence" (Barber, 1996, p. 3296). Soenens et al., (2005), Soenens et al., (2008) and McArdle and Duda (2004) support that view in a series of studies investigating the role of parental adaptive and maladaptive intrapersonal perfectionism as a predictor of parental psychological control and the role of the parent in transmission to their children. Those studies are viewed as essential to children who exhibit negative outcomes including depression, low self-esteem, maladaptive guilt,

anxiety, withdrawn behavior, and the externalization of behavior problems. Results and conclusions from those correlational studies are all based upon questionnaires and Likert-scale surveys including the Frost (1990) MPS scale. In addition, the construct was measured in a clinical rather than an academic context. Furthermore, there are limitations to the studies because they explore perfectionism in specific populations. Soenens et al. (2005 and 2008) explore the relationship between parents and college age females. Ablard and Parker (1997) explore the relationship between adaptive and maladaptive parents and gifted sixth grade students. McArdle and Duda (2004) focus upon athletes ages 12 to 17. Of note, in the concluding remarks to the McArdle and Duda study, they state:

> To date, no research has examined the potential implications of other critical domains outside the home for the development of adaptive or maladaptive perfectionistic tendencies. Although the family milieu is believed to exert a strong influence on the social psychological development of the child, contemporary socialization research stresses the importance of examining the potential effect of other social agents such as siblings, peer groups, teachers and coaches. (p. 785)

There is a clear need to examine the contextual correlates of perfectionism from the multi-dimensional perspective. Contextual correlates are those settings and relationships that have been discovered or identified through research to be influential to the development of either adaptive or maladaptive perfectionism. Findings from the cited studies involving correlations with parental perfectionism all highlight the importance of further study within the school context where a variety of perspectives and practices may

also play a significant role in influencing both adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism tendencies in students. For example, those findings strongly suggest that "where self-mastery is encouraged and moderate expectations are expressed in a flexible and accepting manner, this may correspond to more positive achievement striving and greater self-determination among invested youth. Conversely, where environments with a strong focus on an ego-oriented construal of achievement or those in which neither the demonstration of personal mastery nor superiority is rewarded, but high standards are held and criticism prevails, they may be a deterrent to the optimal development and achievement striving of the child" (McArdle & Duda, 2004, p. 785). In other words, adaptive perfectionism predominates in students who experience a supportive environment where individual growth leading to skill mastery is encouraged, and comparison and criticism are minimized. The opposing experience, one of an achievement environment where student progress is competitive, only the best outcomes are celebrated, and students are subject to comparisons of their progress with that of others, is seen as leading to more maladaptive tendencies in students.

Gilman and Ashby (2003) also support the importance of understanding perfectionism as a multi-dimensional construct requiring differentiated approaches to supporting students with adaptive, maladaptive or non-adaptive tendencies. "The educational and psychological literature is replete with articles explicating how to motivate and teach students who are disengaged from the learning process. Ironically, given their high achievement standards, students identified as maladaptive perfectionists are motivated to excel, but are hindered from reaching their goals due to their beliefs that their work is simply never good enough. That hindrance may subsequently lead to

frustration, procrastination, and an overall inability to reach their fullest academic and personal potential, and thus academic self-handicapping is a frequently observed outcome. In that regard, interventions that target maladaptive perfectionistic students (who are not reaching academic potential) may be quite different from interventions that target non-perfectionistic students" (Gilman & Ashby, 2003, p. 686).

The popularity and empirical support of the three-dimensional structure of perfectionism in the last decade has also led to development of new scales to identify and measure the various factors that contribute to the dimensions. The Child-Adolescent Perfectionism Scale, or CAPS was developed specifically for children, and measured self-oriented and socially prescribed perfectionism in youths (Flett, Hewitt, Boucher, Davidson, & Munro, 2000; Hewitt et al., 2002). A more recent development of the scale, The Perfectionistic Self-Presentation Scale-Junior Form, has further refined and validated, through confirmatory factor analysis, the measurement of perfectionism according to perfectionistic self-promotion (Hewitt et al., 2011).

Quantitative correlational studies seeking to understand the construct of perfectionism and measure its impact may have reached a tipping point. Further growth in understanding this construct, specifically in the educational setting, will require different methodologies such as phenomenological case studies, interviewing and other qualitative designs. The current review of literature reveals that those are very few in number.

Qualitative and Mixed-Methods Studies of Perfectionism

It is theorized that qualitative research such as case studies or interviews can provide a richness, depth, and greater perspective that surveys, questionnaires and assessment data alone, cannot. Qualitative study of the problem can also contribute the needed insight to develop educational interventions and policies that will help students, who are identified as maladaptive perfectionists, to become more academically and socially successful.   One study of that type involved a six-member research team who interviewed 37 adults from ages 16 to 62 who were either graduate, undergraduate students or teachers (21 women and 16 men) who reported that they were perfectionists. In the study, the relationship between perfectionism and school-based concerns was not explored, however questions about relationships, their working lives, and their personal thoughts about their perfectionism and how they defined it were discussed in depth. The study was "an attempt to use qualitative interviewing methods in order to build further understanding about the characteristics of perfectionists, and, whether those possible characteristics would be consistent with the suggestions derived from anecdotal literature" (Slaney & Ashby, 1996, p.394). Again, as has already been noted in Slaney and Ashby's review of anecdotal literature on perfectionism, the study was almost exclusively influenced by the prior conclusions "of theorists and clinicians who viewed perfectionism as problematic and pathological" (Slaney & Ashby, 1996, p. 393).

In the interview study, there was almost unanimous agreement that the academic and work lives of the interviewees were affected by their perfectionism. The most frequently mentioned reason was that they all set very high standards and were quite disappointed when they did not meet them, or when others did not meet their standards.

The female subjects were particularly distressed about how their perfectionism affected their relationships, much more so than males. The authors also noted a particularly interesting set of responses to discussion about procrastination, and some fogginess of definition. Many participants who said they were neat and organized also admitted that they procrastinated (Slaney & Ashby, 1996). Overall, what is very clear is that many of the participants were quite positive about their evaluations of their perfectionism. They did not see it as a problem as observed in these remarks: "It works for me. I enjoy challenges."; "Overall, it's good. I'm on top of things."; "It's positive. What I do, I do well."; "It's a drive that pushes me to accomplish close to my ability level." One participant acknowledged that his perfectionism caused him distress, but he added, "Nobody's perfect." (Slaney & Ashby, 1996, p. 397). The study, emphasizing the positive nature of perfectionism, was the turning point for many researchers, with Slaney and Ashby leading a field of study of both adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism.

In 2000, a qualitative study using mixed-methods in a sequential explanatory design with subjects in India, college students and professors, completing the Almost Perfect Scale followed by interviews, was published. It revealed that most participants found their perfectionism distressing, and also that the source of that distress seemed to be the difference or discrepancy many saw between the standards they set for themselves and their actual performance (Slaney, Chandha, Mobley & Kennedy, 2000).

Rice and Slaney (2002) also cite the conclusions drawn in the qualitative study of Indian subjects to emphasize the significance of the Discrepancy subscale of the APS-R scale. The discrepancy subscale refers to 12 items on the APS-R scale that were specifically developed to measure the negative aspects of perfectionism. "Discrepancy is

defined as the perception that persons have that they are not meeting their own high standards. It is seen as representing the defining negative aspect of perfectionism" (Rice & Slaney, 2002, p. 36). The mixed-methods India study is important because it not only produced outcomes of the APS-R scale that replicated results conducted with subjects in the United States, but it also showed that individuals who scored high on the discrepancy subscales validated their results when they expressed those same opinions during their interviews. It also sets a precedent for mixed-methods studies of the construct of perfectionism using the APS-R to identify subjects for extended qualitative study. Furthermore, the multi-dimensionality of perfectionism, adaptive and maladaptive, was confirmed by scale score and interview responses that indicated adaptive perfectionists to be more flexible, to score high on the high standards subscale, but low on the discrepancy subscale. Maladaptive perfectionists, however, were observed to score high on both the high standards and discrepancy subscales, coupled with interview responses that showed them to hold inflexible standards and a chronic sense that they were not meeting those standards (Rice & Slaney, 2002).

Another study published in 2000, involved a multiple case mixed-methods design to study perfectionism in gifted adolescents in a rural school setting (Schuler, 2000). Twenty participants, male and female in grades 6 through 8 were selected from a school population of 735. The selection was based upon their identification as highly gifted. The students were administered an adaptation of Frost's Multidimensional Perfection Scale (Frost et al., 1990) called the Goals and Work Habits Survey (Schuler, 1994). Semi-structured interviews, which included in-depth explanations of responses to the survey, were conducted. Schuler also interviewed teachers, counselors and parents and reported

on the themes that arose from the "normal perfectionists" vs. the "neurotic perfectionists." Cluster analysis of the scores on the survey indicated that neurotic perfectionists "showed the highest scores for concern over mistakes, personal standards, perceived parental expectations, perceived parental criticism, and doubts about actions in comparison with all other respondents in the study" (Schuler, 2000, p. 5). Another important finding in the study was that teachers had different perceptions about perfectionistic behaviors than their gifted students. Almost all of the participants' teachers did not indicate that any of the students might be in distress, which Schuler explains is the result of a neurotic perfectionistic gifted adolescent's need to please, and to work diligently so as not to reveal any flaws. Most of the perfectionists were model students with very good grades, and they usually avoided counselors "who work only with kids who had problems" (Schuler, 2000, p. 11). Further study of the perspectives of those adolescents, and not just the gifted, is essential to ensuring their safety, health, academic success and future productiveness because studies also indicate that they have a higher suicide risk, and exhibit other impacts to well-being including depression, anxiety, and anorexia (Orange, 1997; Rice, Ashby, & Gilman, 2011; Schuler, 2000).

A 2008 mixed-methods study of 768 boys and girls ages 10 and 11 was conducted to further understanding of maladaptive perfectionism and its theoretical association with depression. Socially prescribed perfectionism, or SPP, as defined by Hewitt and Flett (1991), involves the perception that other people demand perfectionism of a person, and that it is necessary to achieve those unrealistic goals to be accepted or approved. That perceived pressure from others to be perfect was measured by the Child-Adolescent Perfectionism Scale, or CAPS created by Flett et al., (2002), which was administered

along with The Children's Depression Inventory (Kovacs, 1992) and The Diagnostic

Interview for Children and Adolescents (Reich, Welner, & Herjanic, 1997). The

Diagnostic Interview is a computerized interview read to participants, and assesses

psychiatric depression according to criteria set by the American Psychiatric Association.

Researchers discovered strong correlations between depressive status and SPP. They

theorized that the relationship between SPP and a depressive diagnosis strongly

suggested that children's perceptions of expectations from significant adults in their lives

to be perfect were highly related to their depressive status. They reasoned that might be

because pre-adolescents are still developing their sense of self and personal standards,

and that they rely on external agents such as family members, teachers, and peers to

guide and evaluate their behaviors and standards (Huggins, Davis, Rooney, & Kane,

2008). The findings also support the need for further qualitative study of perceptions

about academic achievement by adolescents who score positively for perfectionism,

particularly the maladaptive aspects.

Another study of perfectionism with gifted students from a private academy in the

Midwestern United States used Hewitt & Flett's Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale,

or MPS (1991) scores for criterion sampling of participants for further study. Selection

was based upon identifying those with scores at least one standard deviation higher than

the mean scores on at least one of the three subscales (Each subscale consisting of fifteen,

7- point Likert scale items). Fifteen students, juniors and seniors, were recruited for in-

depth semi-structured interviews (Neumeister, Williams, & Cross, 2009) which involved

asking open-ended questions designed for participants to reconstruct their experiences,

and to explore their meaning according to protocols described by Seidman (1998). In all

cases, the researchers found themes of strong family influence, as described in the interviews, that supported prior research of the effects of parental influences on perfectionism in the gifted (Nugent, 2000; Orange, 1997; Parker & Adkins, 1995). In addition to family factors, lack of challenge in the classroom early in their academic careers, and future expectations due to early success emerged as strong themes. That research influences the currently proposed study because it suggests a successful methodology for the exploration of perfectionism that includes identification of participants based upon a normed-scale followed by an in-depth interview process.

The interviews also revealed that environmental factors such as the culture of schools, competition in schools, classroom structures including self-contained, pullout programs, heterogeneous or homogeneous groupings, types of gifted service models and differentiation in the regular classroom, may influence the degree and nature of the perfectionist tendencies adopted by students (Neumeister et al., 2009). Environmental factors, specifically school related practices were not the central focus of the study, however. The interviews were intended to explore the nature of social expectations and the influence of parents on the development of their child's perfectionism. The study was conducted with gifted high school students, and was specifically designed to contribute to the study of the origins of perfectionism in the gifted. As such, it also underscores the need to expand the methodology to the study of younger, middle level students who may or may not be labeled as "gifted."

A recent study of socially prescribed perfectionism in college students incorporated a seven-day, fourteen-occasion diary study which measured responses from 317 undergraduates. The mixed-methods study revealed that students who scaled high for

socially prescribed perfectionism, or SPP, on several scales of perfectionism previously reviewed here, exhibited a cycle of self-defeating behavior that included binge eating, procrastination and interpersonal conflict. "These behaviors then undermined their efforts to be or to look perfect for others and set the stage for yet another go around in their cycle of self defeat" (Mushquash & Sherry, 2012, p. 1).

Summary

The majority of studies on perfectionism have been quantitative studies focused upon high school students, college students, and adults. Capturing the earlier manifestations of perfectionism is also critical, especially in determining interventions that schools may adopt in order to provide for the healthy and productive futures of students. The review of literature also reveals that the direction of further study of that construct is supported and demonstrated by more current studies that involve mixed-methods and qualitative methodologies.

Furthermore, perfectionism is not just the experience of the gifted. Empirical studies do not bear that out, even though many who work with the gifted make that assertion, and many studies have specifically explored perfectionism in the gifted (Parker & Adkins, 1995).

When studies involving interview and diary components seek entry into the daily thoughts and behaviors of people who identify for strong perfectionist tendencies, researchers are able to gather deep personal accounts as to how perfectionism develops and becomes embedded in the human personality, and then how and why it further manifests itself into adaptive and maladaptive dimensions. Leads as to how schools, teachers, parents and policymakers should respond are emerging from the voices of those

who experience those characteristics. Further opportunities for those individuals to describe their experiences will help educators, counselors, clinicians and parents to understand and to support strategies that may help to ameliorate, diminish, or perhaps even avoid, maladaptive perfectionism, and to address the behaviors that inhibit success in education and career pursuits.

Researchers have argued the importance of measuring and intervening early in the development of that construct. The need for further study of perfectionism in adolescents is essential, and a methodology that allows for deep phenomenological study of both adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism in that group will offer a needed contribution to research, educational improvements and policy changes that will support greater student success.

Chapter Three

Methodology

The literature review revealed a broad variety of interpersonal and intrapersonal factors, both cognitive and non-cognitive, that impact student learning and achievement. Perfectionism has been identified as a significant non-cognitive factor influencing student achievement. Perfectionism, defined as the maintenance of personal standards that exceed what is realistic or attainable, is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct that consists of adaptive and maladaptive tendencies. While adaptive perfectionists use their high standards to motivate improved performance and achievement, empirical studies report that students identified as maladaptive perfectionists experience stress, anxiety, depression, and self-handicapping behaviors that negatively impact their learning outcomes including GPA and school completion. Quantitative survey and questionnaire studies of high school, college students and adults who are identified as maladaptive perfectionists report significant anxiety about grades, testing outcomes, competition, and both intrapersonal and interpersonally perceived pressures to excel. Yet it has been demonstrated in prior studies that those perceptions often lead to academic self-handicapping behaviors, for example, procrastination and underachievement. To date, most of the studies of perfectionism have focused upon determining the strength of the various factors involved, characterizing a variety of typologies for maladaptive perfectionism, measuring perfectionism in the gifted, and validating a variety of scales and questionnaires that measure the intensity of factors involved in perfectionism.

Research on the phenomenon of perfectionist tendencies on student academic performance, including academic self-limitation, referred to by researchers as "self-

handicapping" is incomplete. The precursors, as well as the processes through which the contextual features of a learning environment are facilitative or inhibitory to student achievement should include study into how a school context may contribute to the development of either adaptive or maladaptive perfectionism in students. The review of literature supports what researchers have also concluded, which is that there is a lack of study, particularly qualitative study, designed to understand the experience of adolescents at the middle school level who identify as either adaptive or maladaptive perfectionists. Qualitative study of that multi-dimensional phenomenon may contribute to new understanding that will lead to successful improvements to mental health treatment, educational interventions, classroom management practices, progress reporting, and policy revisions that may increase student achievement in school. Furthermore, this study supports a more contemporary understanding of student learning outcomes as being the result of both cognitive ability and an important array of non-cognitive skills and traits that many researchers are describing as equal, perhaps even more essential to student academic success (Brunello & Schlotter, 2011).

Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to explore the meaning of the multidimensional construct of perfectionism in the middle school setting. Based upon that goal, the following research questions are examined in this study: What is the nature of perfectionism, both adaptive and maladaptive, as experienced by middle school students and their concomitant perceptions about their academic achievement?

1. What are the traits of middle school students who are identified as demonstrating adaptive perfectionism and maladaptive perfectionism?

2. How do middle school students who are identified as demonstrating adaptive or maladaptive perfectionism view their academic achievements?

3. How do middle school students who are identified as demonstrating adaptive or maladaptive perfectionism perceive the impacts of parents, teachers and peers on their academic achievements?

Methodological Overview

The selection of a qualitative methodology for this study is influenced by a social-constructivist worldview, a perspective typically seen in qualitative studies (Creswell, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 2000) in anticipation that middle school students, like the older subjects discussed in other studies, have developed varied and multiple views of themselves as learners. They are, as we have come to know adolescents, in search of self, of who they are, of their place in the world as independent of their parents, and of how they compare to others. They are complex and multi-faceted. They have encountered both success and failure, and are known to experience strong reactions to both experiences. They are also mature, and many are articulate enough to discuss their feelings and experiences with respect to themselves as learners. While it is true that some adolescents can be very impulsive, they are also deeply reflective. The goal of this research, as suggested by the constructivist paradigm (Creswell, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), is to uncover as much as is possible about the participants' view of their school lives through semi-structured interview questions to further understand the nature and impact of perfectionism on learning for those who indicate aspects of it as either strongly adaptive or maladaptive. The social constructivist paradigm also suggests that the researcher gather as much information from the students as possible as they experience the daily

tests, quizzes, and classroom interactions with their teachers, peers and parents, all viewed through the lens of their perfectionism.

Creswell describes the social constructivist worldview as "an intent to make sense or interpret the meanings others have about the world. Rather than starting with a theory, inquirers generate or inductively develop a theory or pattern of meaning" (Creswell, 2009, p. 8). Through the lens of that paradigm, of interacting with several participants in a series of interviews, and allowing for inductive interpretations of all of the findings, it was anticipated that a richness of data would be produced generating new insights about perfectionism in middle level students. In other words, it was the intent of this qualitative study to follow a phenomenological design in which the experiences and reflections of middle school students would help, as the data were collected and examined, to make contributions to the understanding of perfectionism and its influence on students and on student achievement during adolescence.

Interviewing, as phenomenological research, allows a researcher to "uncover the essence of an individual's experience," and "focuses on the deep, lived meanings that events have for individuals, assuming that these meanings guide actions and interactions" (Merriam, 2009, p. 93). Seidman (2013) identifies four phenomenological themes that provide a rationale for the use of interview study. Those are listed in Table 3.1 with a corresponding explanation as to how the present study is aligned with them.

Table 3.1 Alignment of Seidman's Four Phenomenological Themes for Interview Study with the current study.

Seidman's Themes for Interview Study	This study
Theme One: *The temporal and transitory nature of human experience*, focuses upon the experiences of participants and the meaning they make of these experiences as close to in the moment as possible.	Interviews and focus group sessions revealed how students approach learning and assessment of learning as it was happening, encouraging reflection to reveal attitudes, beliefs and actions through the lens of perfectionism as close to the experienced event as possible.
Theme Two: *Whose Understanding is it? Subjective Understanding*, seeks the participant's point of view, understanding the experiences from their subjective reconstructions.	Interviews explored the students' point of view: What do interviewees focus upon as they describe their school experiences? What perfectionistic traits are revealed from their reconstructed experiences, and how do these traits support or interrupt learning success as described by students?
Theme Three: *Lived Experience as the Foundation of Phenomena,* involves us in taking the language of the participants as they reflect and reconstruct what "was" and navigate as close as possible to what was the "is."	Interviews provided rich, in-the-moment descriptions by students of perceptions of themselves as learners and their reality, in their words, about their teachers, their families and their peers so that further understanding would be developed about the nature and impact of perfectionism in early adolescence, not as quantified by responses in Likert scales used in a majority of prior study of perfectionism.
Theme Four: *The Emphasis on Meaning and Meaning in Context,* urges participants to engage in an "act of attention" to consider the meaning of their lived experiences in the larger context of their lives.	The series of interviews and focus group sessions urged students to deeply reflect and focus attention to their beliefs and actions as learners and how these contexts related to their achievement outcomes, either successful or unsuccessful, as it was all unfolding during their 7th grade school year.

As indicated by the literature, the predominating methodologies of perfectionism studies have involved correlative studies and factor analyses with assorted questionnaires and surveys of college students, adults and gifted student populations. To date, published qualitative studies using in-depth interview of middle level students about their perfectionism are, by comparison, rare. Furthermore, the literature review did not uncover efforts to study the perspectives of students who demonstrate strong perfectionist tendencies about their actual learning outcomes either at middle- or high-school level other than to study the relationship between self-reported GPA and survey outcomes. The data from student interviews may provide important new insight into the understanding of perceptions about ability and student performance, relative to their reported perfectionism, that has not been captured by the use of survey and self-reported GPA scores alone.

The contribution of Slaney and Ashby (1996) to the understanding of perfectionism is significant because it demonstrates how understanding and hypotheses can and do emerge from a qualitative study using the interview process in contrast to prior correlational survey studies only. It also reinforces the need to explore that construct through other lenses rather than viewing perfectionism as pathological. Although maladaptive perfectionism is very problematic, and presents many challenges and roadblocks to accomplishment for those who have the trait, it is important to ask what separates the two. Might the key to assisting maladaptive perfectionists to reduce their anxiety lie in supporting them to access and channel more fully the adaptive aspects of the construct? The mixed-methods study of perfectionism in India demonstrates that qualitative study of construct could be especially promising in terms of growth in

understanding perfectionism as it relates to academic and other achievements. What has not been explored in depth, to date, are the impressions and experiences of middle school students related to perfectionism in the context of their academic lives. The appropriate response to that lack of empirical study supports further research that will allow middle school students' perceptions about perfectionism and learning, both adaptive and maladaptive, to emerge from an in-depth series of semi-structured interview sessions according to the techniques described by Seidman (2013). Therefore, this study has followed a qualitative design that involved nine young adolescents in an in-depth phenomenological interview study of perfectionism and student achievement at the middle school level.

Research Context

Approximately 150 out of 178 students in the class of 7th graders, both male and female, from one middle school in Southern Maine, participated. The students' median age was 12; 97 percent were Caucasian; and 12 percent were eligible for free or reduced lunch services. Students who were unable to read or respond independently to written Likert-scale questions were excused from the study. The location was selected for its representation as a typical suburban middle-class public school, neither rural nor urban, but located within a 25 mile travelling distance of urban centers. The student graduation rate for 2013-2014 was 96 percent, and standardized testing results for 2013-2014 indicate a 79 percent proficient or higher for math and an 82 percent proficient or higher rate for reading district-wide (Maine Department of Education Data Warehouse, 2014). This location was also selected for its convenient access, where the researcher serves as

an administrator, due to the extensive plan for interviewing several participants on multiple occasions.

Participant Selection Process

In June of 2014, the sixth grade class of 178 students, were invited to take The Almost Perfect Survey-Revised. Prior to taking the survey, students took home letters to their parents or guardians explaining the survey, explaining that it was voluntary, confidential, that any student could elect not to participate, that students would only identify themselves with their ID number and that any use of the survey information for further study would be preceded by acquiring their and their child's full permission and signed IRB approval.

It was thought, in the early phases of the literature review, that it would be extremely important to begin with a mixed-methods approach to this study to verify that the scale used to identify the construct of perfectionism would produce similar results with the young participants selected for this study as it has with a plethora of studies that have preceded it. However, the review of literature showed that there was sufficiently strong support and validation from past studies of the APS-R (Slaney et al.,1996) as well as the Hewitt and Flett MPS (2002) and the MPS-Junior (Hewitt et al., 2011) perfectionism scales. Literature also revealed that there was a larger more compelling gap to be filled by the need to capture the perspectives of both adaptive and maladaptive perfectionistic adolescents in their academic settings as they seek to understand themselves as learners. Therefore, the main purpose of the APS-R survey was to identify participants for the interview study whose survey outcomes met specific criteria.

The APS-R Survey contains 23 items designed to measure adaptive and maladaptive aspects of perfectionism. The scale ranges from 7 = Strongly Agree to 1= Strongly Disagree. The 23 items emerge from three groups of statements, Standards, Discrepancies and Order. The Standards section contains seven items. Examples include: " I have high expectations of myself," or " I try to do my best at everything I do." The "Discrepancies" section contains 12 items. Examples include: " My best just never seems to be good enough," or "I am hardly ever satisfied with my performance." The Order section contains four measures of orderliness. Other researchers have said that these four items have lower internal consistency and are irrelevant to the classification of perfectionism and therefore chose not to include the Order section in their studies (Gilman & Ashby, 2003; LoCicero & Ashby, 2000; Rice, Ashby & Gilman, 2011; Slaney et al., 1996). That decision was repeated in this study. "Research using Slaney's (APS-R) appears appropriate considering that it is the only instrument that is specifically designed to assess both positive and negative dimensions of perfectionism and has consistently yielded adequate psychometric properties among college students" (Gilman & Ashby, 2003, p. 678). This study followed the recommendations of the other studies cited and used the 19 item survey to identify students whose APS-R scores were highly indicative for adaptive or maladaptive perfectionism. The survey may be viewed in Appendix C.

This school has 1:1 computing with either laptops or tablets for every student. An electronic version of the survey was delivered and results gathered using Survey Monkey collection software. Non-academic student advisory time was used to administer the survey and students were given a link to the online survey location. The survey took approximately five to seven minutes for all students to complete.

Of the 178 students in this class, 150 participated in the survey and 115 complete sets of survey responses were retrieved using SPSS software to calculate, sort and order the response totals. (Tables reporting the mean and standard deviation scores of each survey item for all students who took the survey may be viewed in Appendix D.) Some items were left blank by students, yet the responses, by item are reported in the Appendix. Incomplete surveys were excluded from the process of participant selection. From the completed surveys, nine students were selected, four whose survey responses indicated that they were highly adaptive, and five whose responses indicated that they had highly maladaptive perfectionist tendencies. The original plan called for a selection of eight candidates. The ninth was added as a precaution should one of the candidates need to leave the study. From the group, only those students, along with their parents who gave consent for them to participate in the interview process, established through IRB approval and signed forms, were contacted. Students were identified using their ID numbers, which they were asked to indicate on their surveys.

This criteria-based participant selection strategy was chosen because of the special range of possibilities it offered to make comparisons and contrasts among students who expressed either highly adaptive or maladaptive perfectionism. The strategy was also supported by prior studies where researchers observed that individuals identified as adaptive perfectionists tended to have similar expectations and descriptions of their attitudes toward their learning and grades, as did maladaptive perfectionists, and that these attitudes and learning outcomes were frequently in sharp contrast to one another (Accordino et al., 2000; Nounoupoulos et al., 2006). That tendency has not been explored broadly with adolescents.

The cut scores were used to identify students as adaptive perfectionists or maladaptive perfectionists following the approach used by Rice and Ashby (2007) and Rice, Ashby and Gilman (2011). On the APS-R, there are seven subscale items in the Standards category, thus a range of possible scores from 7 to 49. The Discrepancy subscale consists of 12 items with possible scores from 12 to 84. According to the prior studies, the starting point for inclusion in a perfectionism group was a score of at least 35 on the High Standards subscale. Non-perfectionists were considered to be those scoring $\leq$ 35 on the High Standards items. Discrepancy scores $\leq$ 41 were the cut score for adaptive perfectionists with $\geq$ 42 classifying participants as maladaptive perfectionists. To summarize:

"If High Standards $\geq$ 35 = perfectionist   (<35 = non-perfectionist)

If perfectionist, Discrepancy $\geq$ 42 = maladaptive perfectionist (<42 = adaptive perfectionist)." (Rice, Ashby & Gilman, 2011, p. 572)

Of the 115 completed sets of APS-R Survey results, 55.7 percent (64 students) were identified as adaptive perfectionists, 28.7 percent (33 students) were identified as maladaptive perfectionists and 15.7 percent (18 students) were identified as non-perfectionistic. Students' survey scores were arranged high to low and the top scores for adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism were selected for consideration as possible candidates for this study.

The parents of 12 resulting potential candidates, all of whom had completed the survey and expressed an interest in participating in the interviews were contacted. Six of the candidates received the highest scores for adaptive perfectionism and six for

maladaptive perfectionism. Ten of the twelve parents responded immediately and enthusiastically and nine sets of informed consent forms were signed by the parents and the candidates and returned. It was decided to include all nine respondents in the study as a precaution in the event that for some reason one of the participants could not complete the interviews and focus group sessions in the expected time frame. Five of the participants selected for the interview study indicated high scores for maladaptive perfectionism and four participants scored highly for adaptive perfectionism. (Their scoring outcomes, by item, may be viewed in Appendix E.) Table 3.2 indicates the participants' survey scores for standards and discrepancies with the resulting identification made according to their cut scores. (As detailed below, all names are pseudonyms.)

Table 3.2
Participant Survey Results and Perfectionism Identification

Name	Standards	Discrepancies	Identification
Kate	49	15	Adaptive Perfectionist
Jon	49	17	Adaptive Perfectionist
Jeff	48	27	Adaptive Perfectionist
Arya	49	34	Adaptive Perfectionist
Brienne	49	55	Maladaptive Perfectionist
Sansa	48	49	Maladaptive Perfectionist
Sam	47	53	Maladaptive Perfectionist
Robb	46	52	Maladaptive Perfectionist
Ned	46	55	Maladaptive Perfectionist

Note: Results are from June 2014 administration of Almost Perfect Survey-Revised (Slaney et al., 1996).

Participants

The nine participants in the interview and focus group study are all identified by pseudonym, as are their teachers, when discussed by the students. Identifying club sports or locales have also been given fictitious names. Other than that effort to protect participant privacy, their words appear, in the quotations that follow, just as they were recorded.

The Adaptive Perfectionists

Jeff: Jeff is a twelve-year-old 7th grade boy, the son of very busy parents who are active in the community, and deeply engaged and involved with the schools. Jeff's father works in the construction industry, and his mother in the media industry. Jeff has an older brother and a younger sister and moved to Maine when he was about five years old. He is very involved in sports including two soccer teams, basketball and lacrosse. Jeff plays school soccer and then travels on to practice with a private league that holds games on weekends.

Jeff and his parents responded immediately that he would be very interested in becoming a participant in the interview study. When discussing his busy life juggling academics and sports Jeff said, "That is my whole life and what it has been since September. It is like, three hours of sports and three hours of homework and then go to bed and wake up at six and do it again. And again. And then soccer games on the weekend, and then again." Despite his schedule, Jeff met for three interviews, speaking at a fast and constant clip, and offering rich and extended responses to all questions asked. Jeff is diminutive in height and most of his friends tower over him. He spoke about his

concerns with his height early in the first interview, yet he had a big smile and a self-confident energy and posture that remained constant throughout our meetings.

Jeff's survey results indicate that he is an adaptive perfectionist. He strongly agreed with all but one of the standards items on the survey and either disagreed or strongly disagreed with all but one of the discrepancy items. The one variance was his response of "agree" to the statement: "I am seldom able to meet my own high standards of performance."

Arya: Arya is the younger of two sisters, the children of divorced parents. She splits her week and vacations between two households. Her older sister attends a private high school and her family expects that Arya will do so as well. She plays soccer and lacrosse and spends all but a very few days of her summer attending both sports and private camps. Arya also participates on an elite ski racing team that competes most weekends, travelling throughout the Northeast. She also described strong involvement with her church, serving as a teacher for Sunday school and she expressed an interest in fundraising and travelling to Guatemala to help others.

Arya is outgoing, upbeat, and spoke throughout her interviews with an energy that left her, at times, almost breathless. She also said that she had ADHD and had recently begun suffering episodes of panic attacks that were occurring during sports competitions. Whether it is school or her sports, Arya repeated multiple times that she always strives to do her best and in her words, "to go beyond." Going beyond has its price. Arya is frequently seen wearing ankle, knee and wrist braces to treat sprains and strains, and has suffered more than one concussion for skiing racing accidents.

Arya's survey results indicate that she is an adaptive perfectionist. She strongly agreed to all of the standards items on the survey. Her discrepancies score, although falling within the required cut score boundaries, is several points higher than the other adaptive perfectionists. Noteworthy is her strong agreement to the following discrepancy statements: "I often worry about not measuring up to my own expectations." "I often feel disappointment after completing a task because I know I could have done better."

Kate: Kate and her family moved to Maine three years ago after two prior moves in New Hampshire. Kate has one younger brother in sixth grade. Kate's parents work in the insurance and hospitality businesses. Kate is very tall for her age, perhaps the tallest girl in the seventh grade, but she carries herself with confidence, and is friendly and outgoing. She claimed that she used to be a little self-conscious about her height, but described how she went to work with her dad one day and his co-workers said "that she was as pretty as a model and would probably be famous someday." She admitted that hearing this gave her quite a boost when she needed it, and she didn't worry about towering over her classmates much anymore. Kate's sport is exclusively softball, and her goal is to become a great pitcher.

"I love to get silly and laugh with my friends, but I am very serious in class," said Kate. She didn't admit to getting "stressed out" about much during her interviews and said that she could take things in stride most of the time. Kate spoke with confidence and energy during her interviews and reported that she really enjoys school.

Kate's survey results indicate that she is an adaptive perfectionist. Kate strongly agreed with every standards item on the survey. She also had the very lowest cut score of any of the participants on the discrepancy items, disagreeing strongly with all but one

statement: "I often feel disappointment after completing a task because I know I could have done better."

Jon: Jon has one younger brother in the fourth grade and has a broad, close extended family. Jon's father works for an insurance agency and his mother is an office manager at a nearby university. Jon is stocky of build, full of energy, and constantly surrounded by equally energetic friends. Jon is involved in several sports including basketball, baseball and skiing, both team and intramural. Jon was most often seen wearing the jerseys of the teams he supports. He said that he is a huge Red Sox fan, but doesn't wear his jersey when he visits his grandfather in New York because "he would be very, very upset."

Jon comes from a family that loves sports, and he described every member as being fiercely competitive. Jon frequently referred first to his athletics when discussing his views about success and achievement, but also discussed his school achievements with an equal commitment and focused on his efforts to do his very best. The word "perfection" was never mentioned in the survey; neither was it used in any of the interview protocols, but Jon introduced the word in his response to the very first interview question when discussing family. "My brother is nine and in the fourth grade. He does his very best on everything. He is a perfectionist. He is more of a perfectionist than me." Jon was also quite candid about his level of stress related to his academic achievement. He also described a lot of self-talk about staying focused and goal-oriented.

Jon's survey scores indicate that he is an adaptive perfectionist. He strongly agreed with every standards item on the survey and strongly disagreed or disagreed with all of the discrepancy items except for one. Jon indicated neutral feelings about the

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

The Maladaptive Perfectionists

    Robb: Robb is the youngest of three boys in his family. Robb's mother is a teacher, and his father is an engineer for the naval yard. Most of Robb's interests, like those of his brothers, revolved around football and basketball. Robb was a member of the school's math team, which consistently placed first or second in state competions.) Robb had a very quiet manner and a very serious demeanor. Robb was very aware that others perceived him to be quiet, but when he played on the basketball court, a member of his seventh grade team, he appeared confident and laser-focused upon his game.

    True to what he described about himself and his teacher's frequent observations that Robb was too quiet and needed to "put himself out there more," Rob rarely smiled, but never appeared bored or inattentive. He offered only the answers to questions that were directly asked of him. Robb needed prompting in order to elaborate on his thinking. Robb's interests and time were spent on sports and school with little remaining down time. He preferred to talk about success and failure in terms of his perspectives about himself as an athlete rather than referring to classroom performance.

    Robb's survey results indicate that he is a maladaptive perfectionist. Robb agreed or strongly agreed with all of the standards items and at least slightly agreed with nine of the twelve discrepancy items. Robb agreed with the discrepancy statement "I often feel frustrated because I can't meet my goals." And he strongly agreed with the statement "I often feel disappointment after completing a task because I know I could have done better."

Brienne: Brienne has a brother and two sisters. She and her brother and one sister are triplets, all in the same grade at school. The youngest sister is in the fifth grade. Brienne's parents are both physicians, however her mother does not currently practice and devotes her time to her children, and involves herself in volunteering at their schools. Brienne was not interested in team sports. She preferred performing in plays and was rehearsing for her roles in two different productions during the fall and winter. She also described a love of reading and participation in gymnastics.

All of the siblings were excellent students and expected no less than high honors and outstanding performances in all that they did. Brienne was quiet, extremely polite, exacting in her every word, and often corrected herself to get it just right. She had a ready smile, was eager to please, but also appeared to be nervous and ill at ease. Two years ago, Brienne was hospitalized for an extended period for issues stemming from debilitating anxiety.

Multiple times throughout her interviews, Brienne referred to her siblings and the fact that they were taking more advanced classes than she was enrolled in. She admired them and also worried about the enormous levels of stress that they appeared to be under. She expressed great concerns over her own achievement as well, frequently discussing it in comparison to theirs.

Brienne's survey scores indicate that she is a maladaptive perfectionist. Brienne strongly agreed with all of the standards items and received the highest discrepancy score indicated by the participants in this study. Brienne strongly agreed with the statement "I often feel frustrated because I can't meet my goals."

Sansa: Sansa has one sister who is in kindergarten. Like Brienne, Sansa's parents are also doctors. Sansa was a member of two swim teams, the school's and also a private club that held daily practices during the week and swim meets on weekends. She played lacrosse in the spring and took private tennis lessons in the summer.

Sansa was quiet and serious in her demeanor, at first appearing shy and tentative in her words and smile. She was a devoted student who expected to achieve high honors in every class and reported feeling "very unsuccessful" with any grade below 100. She understood that she felt very competitive about her performance, but described most of that as a competition with herself. Sansa also discussed it in terms of her swimming. Sans described in detail her daily routine of exhausting practices followed by hours of homework and swim meets on weekends always referring to the frequent stress that she experienced.

Sansa's survey scores indicate that she is a maladaptive perfectionist. She strongly agreed with all of the standards items. Sansa also indicated that she strongly agreed with three of the discrepancy items including the statement "I hardly ever feel that what I've done is good enough. Sansa also strongly agrees with the statement "I often feel disappointment after completing a task because I know I could have done better."

Sam: Sam is a quiet boy with a warm and ready smile. He has one sister who is in high school. She struggles with significant learning disabilities. Sam's parents are very supportive, but as Sam reports, not always sure about how to help him with his schoolwork. Sam's father is in the insurance business, and his mother works in the media industry. Sam plays soccer, basketball, runs cross-country and was a member of the track team.

It was very important to Sam that other students and his teachers knew that he was a helpful and caring person, and that others saw kindness and willingness in him. Sam said that he looks for opportunities to help others with math, which he felt was his strength. But, he also struggled with his self-confidence, and was very reluctant to approach his teachers for help or further explanation when he needed to do so. Sam's fragile self-confidence took a huge blow when he failed to make the basketball team in tryouts, after describing that he felt he was definitely going to succeed. Only his parents knew the extent of his painful disappointment.

Sam's survey scores indicate that he is a maladaptive perfectionist. Sam strongly agreed with all but two of the seven standards items and indicated that he agreed with the other two. His discrepancy cut score is the second to highest of the five maladaptive perfectionists' scores. Sam indicated that while he strongly agreed that "I try to do my best at everything I do," he also strongly agreed with the discrepancy statement "I am seldom able to meet my own high standards of performance."

Ned: Ned is the second of three children, and presented himself as a very thoughtful and serious boy who did not often smile, and as he said, "never fools around." Ned's mother is a psychologist, and Ned expressed a strong interest in that as a possible future career. Ned's father moved the family to Maine when Ned was five so that he could join the family's business in real estate and development.

Ned was very quiet and shy around the other students and did not participate in sports. Ned said that he preferred to spend his spare time reading, writing, and playing intricate card games and chess at the school's gaming club. Most of the time, Ned was seen moving about the school alone, although he had two or three friends that he sat with

at lunch. Ned also loved writing and he described the stories he wrote as, "usually not for school, but I submit a chapter or so when teachers ask for fiction."   When asked what he liked best about school, Ned thought for several moments and then replied, "Probably just learning in general. I enjoy gaining knowledge whenever I can. I am not into the social aspect. I'm kind of shy."

Ned's survey scores indicate that he is a maladaptive perfectionist. Ned's standards score, although well above the cut score, is the lowest of the participant scores. He agreed with all seven statements in this category, but only strongly agreed with four of them. Ned's discrepancies score was the highest among the five maladaptive perfectionists in this study. Ned indicated strong agreement with the statement "I often feel frustrated because I can't meet my goals," and agreement with the statement "Doing my best never seems to be enough."

(A complete item-by-item report of survey results is located in Appendix D.)

Data Collection

The participants met with the researcher for three semi-structured individual interview sessions in which the interviews were recorded and then transcribed for later coding and analysis. The structure for these in-depth, phenomenological interviews followed the recommended protocols described by Seidman (2013). "The first interview establishes the context of the participants' experience. The second allows participants to reconstruct the details of their experience within the context in which it occurs. And the third encourages the participants to reflect on the meaning their experience holds for them" (Seidman, 2013, p.21). The goal of each interview was to elicit the lived experience of school and the unique meanings and interpretations each of the selected

students held for their experiences, all aligned to the phenomenological themes discussed in the methodological overview. Seidman recommends that each interview be spaced from three days to one week apart. The length of each interview, considering the age of the participants, was established to be roughly forty-five minutes to no longer than one hour in length. Additional data were generated and collected as follows:

- The researcher developed memos of impressions about the students and their responses as the interviews unfolded.

- Student participants met together with the researcher as a focus group on two occasions during the time of study, after the first round of interviews and after the third round. The focus group sessions enriched the course of inductive study by allowing students the opportunity to discuss and reflect, with their peers, upon themselves as learners and their achievement in the school setting, and to interact and react to the impressions and observations of their fellow students. Given these opportunities, the data collection process was greatly enhanced by the conversations of students exploring their shared experiences in ways that were not captured in full by the individual interview protocols.

- GPA scores from students' sixth grade year, prior to this study, were obtained from their records. OLSAT standardized ability index (total) scores from their 5th grade year were also gathered. This test measures verbal, quantitative, and spatial reasoning ability, considered necessary for success in school. The total score, called the School Ability Index, or SAI, is a normalized standard score with a mean of 100 and a standard deviation of 16 (Pearson Learning, 2014). Those data was used to develop a background for the context through which students

frequently discussed their academic performance and their ability with respect to grades.

Data Analysis

Verbatim transcripts of recorded interviews, interviewer's notes, and focus group transcripts were all studied through the process of inductive data analysis. The process began with coding the data for words and phrases that mark emerging patterns, topics, and categories of similar codes that were then merged together into broader themes and concepts, a traditional social sciences approach (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009). The process was facilitated using Dedoose software (SocioCultural Research Consultants, 2014). Data were then coded and arranged into themes and categories to contribute to a thoughtful and thorough analysis of the students' perceptions that would lead to findings addressing the research questions of this study. In this study, the categories emerged from the research questions, the researcher's impressions and the voices of the participants. Once transcribed, the data were uploaded to Dedoose for coding and analysis purposes. The structure and number of codes grew as themes began to emerge from the interview transcripts. Each transcript was reviewed and re-coded multiple times as new themes emerged.

Dedoose capably managed the process of recording recurrences of various themes and the contexts or circumstances in which they emerged from each of the participants so that the goal of identifying key findings would follow from a full and thoroughly explored base of evidence. Hundreds of excerpts were tagged for further review and possible inclusion to support the findings of this study.

A conceptual framework for understanding perfectionism was created in order to facilitate with the analysis of patterns, relationships, comparability and distinctions across the nine participant interviews and the resulting research findings. The framework is particularly helpful to understanding perfectionism because of its multi-dimensional nature, and the need to understand aspects of perfectionism that are shared by both adaptive and maladaptive groups as well as behaviors or beliefs that separate the two groups.   The conceptual framework is not seen as contradictory to the social constructivist paradigm because it is loosely framed to support a broad vision of the inductive process. The initial guidelines for the conceptual framework, grounded in the vision of perfectionism as a multi-dimensional construct with both adaptive and maladaptive tendencies, was conceived by applying the conclusions of Slaney et al. (1991), Hewitt and Flett (1991) and Hewitt et al. (2011). The framework, as pictured in Figure 3.1, represents the structure designed to understand the findings that emerged in this study.   The framework also supported data clumping or merging for thematic analysis, facilitated the coding process and assisted with organizing the data: what has been seen, heard and read, so that the process of understanding and of making meaning could be developed. Themes, or categories were grouped so that patterns could be traced, stories could be linked and interpretations could be developed (Glesne, 2006; Merriam, 2009). Miles and Huberman (1994) describe that as an analytic progression where:

> The progression is a sort of ladder of abstraction. You begin with a text, trying out coding categories on it, then moving to identify themes and trends, and then to testing hunches and findings, aiming first to delineate the "deep structure" and then to integrate the data into an explanatory framework. (p. 91)

It can also be called, "data transformation" in that the information was condensed, clustered, sorted, and linked from the time the interviews began to when all of the resulting data were analyzed (Gherardi & Turner, 1987) and interpreted.

Since Hewitt and Flett (1991) first conceptualized perfectionism, they and others have developed permutations that have added to the complexity of the construct in specifying manifestations of perfectionism that are either intrapersonal or interpersonal or combinations of both. For example, the context of interpersonal expressions of perfectionism, has been further expanded by Hewitt et al. (2011) to include perfectionistic self-presentation with three of its own facets: perfectionistic self-promotion; non-display of imperfection; and nondisclosure of imperfection. Therefore, the conceptual framework for this study, as it appears in Figure 3.1, was designed according to the views of perfectionism as Hewitt and Flett (2011) conceive it, with the added refinements as developed in more current studies.

Figure 3.1 Conceptual Framework for the Multidimensional Construct of Perfectionism

This concept map visualizes the multidimensional construct of perfectionism as proposed in major empirical studies in the last two decades. It should not be interpreted that the subsets of Adaptive and Maladaptive perfectionism are distinct and separate from one another as experienced in human subjects, but rather that all humans who demonstrate perfectionistic tendencies experience various levels of all of those factors with self-handicapping outcomes experienced by those who report high levels of the tendencies.
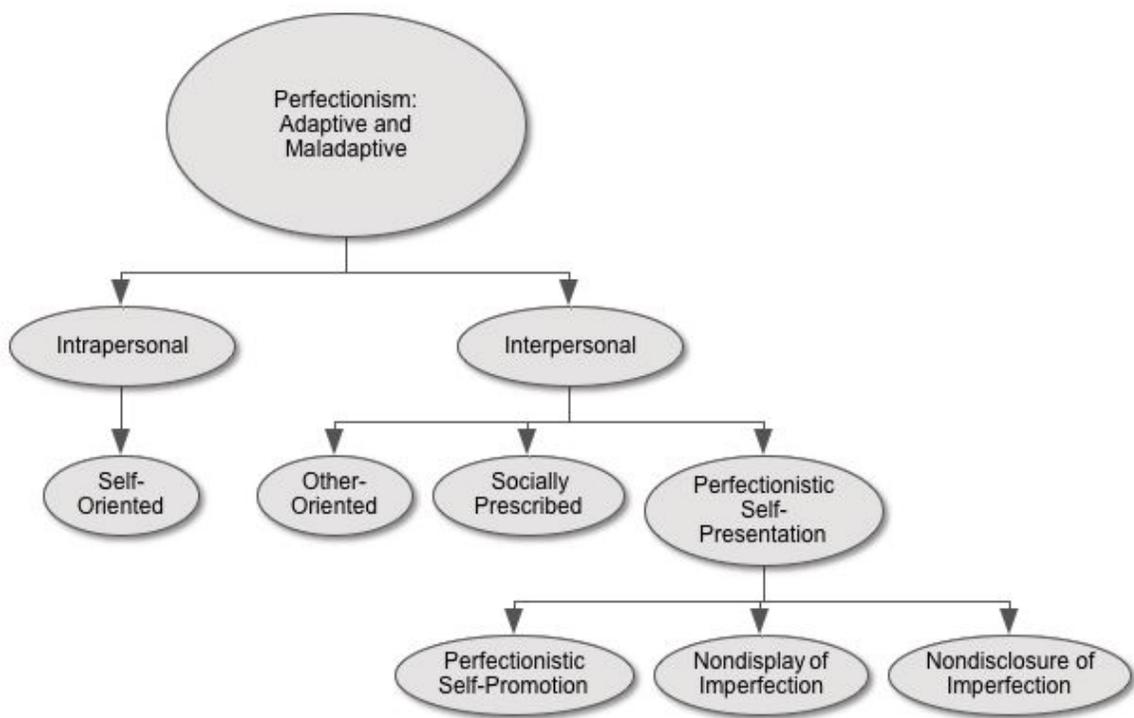
(Adapted from the research of Slaney et al., 1991; Hewitt & Flett, 1991; and Hewitt et al. 2011.)

The next step in the analysis involved a merging and triangulation of all the data gathered in order to establish the findings, and make interpretations or meaning of the whole. Triangulation uses multiple data sources for comparison and cross-checking as described by Merriam (2009). In this study these were the 27 coded interview sessions,

focus group data, and research memos. Recurring themes emerged that were both unique and interconnected from which a thick and in-depth qualitative narrative of the perceptions of students about their perfectionism as it related to their grades and their achievement in school was developed. The conceptual framework contributed to the further interpretation of the findings that emerged so that conclusions and implications for practice, policy and further research could be identified. The framework was used to identify and to verify the specific subcategories or facets of perfectionism exhibited by the participants, either adaptive or maladaptive, with the dimensions of the construct as defined in prior research (Hewitt & Flett, 1991; Hewitt et al., 2011; Slaney et al., 1991).

Trustworthiness

Prior to the beginning of this study, the planned strategy for data collection and analysis were tested in a pilot study (May 2014) involving the survey, interview protocols and initial coding of interview transcripts with Dedoose Coding software. Participants for the interview study were selected according to the same criterion selection methods used and validated to identify perfectionism in several prior studies and repeated in the pilot study. Those include Neumeister et al. (2009); Rice, Ashby and Gilman (2011); Nounoupoulos et al. (2006), Slaney, Chandha, Mobley and Kennedy (2000), for example, and used the APS-R survey with participants' cut scores to identify them for either adaptive or maladaptive perfectionism. To confirm survey outcomes and further bolster the trustworthiness of survey findings, teachers and counselors from the students' previous school year (avoiding their current teachers to preserve student confidentiality), were consulted as to their perspectives on the students' approaches to learning. Teacher recommendations were also used to seek participants for the pilot

study. Their insights about the students selected and the resulting interview findings were highly aligned in the process of identifying the students' with strong perfectionist tendencies.

Throughout the process of gathering participant interview and focus group discussion data, trustworthiness was established through a number of strategies including triangulation, member checking, and an audit trail. Wolcott describes increasing the credibility of findings as "the correspondence between research and the real world" (Wolcott, 2005, p. 160). Triangulation, described by Merriam (2009), is the use of multiple sources of data, which are compared and crosschecked at different times during the study from people with different perspectives or from follow-up interviews with the same people. Triangulation also contributes to the trustworthiness of the interpretations that will follow from this process (Glesne, 2006; Merriam, 2009). Seidman's three-interview approach (2013) with the nine participants described earlier, provided multiple opportunities to develop, compare and crosscheck several perspectives of the phenomenon of perfectionism in the educational setting.

Merriam also recommends member checking as another strategy for ensuring internal validity and trustworthiness of the data. "The idea here, is that you solicit feedback on your emerging findings from some of the people that you interviewed" (Merriam, 2009, p. 217). Maxwell states that "this is the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on, as well as being an important way of identifying your own biases and misunderstandings of what you observed" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 111). Member checks were conducted at the second and third interview sessions.

Another strategy for ensuring the trustworthiness of this study was achieved through the use of an audit trail. That practice is highly recommended as a means of building a strong and convincing account of every action, problem, solution, interpretation and decision made as a study unfolds (Merriam, 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The audit trail was a journal of the process of developing understanding with participants about their perfectionism, their views on grading and how their perfectionism impacted their learning. It was also a trail map of how all of the data from interviews, forum group sessions and researcher memos, GPA and SAI, were triangulated to arrive at the best possible representation of the participants' perspectives. The research memos also served as a method for the researcher to reflect upon possible biases and assumptions as findings, and the conclusions that followed, were developed. That reflection was also critical to establishing the trustworthiness of the interpretations. It emerged from four questions identified by Hollway and Jefferson (2000): What does the researcher notice, and therefore, what is not noticed? What are possible biases and predispositions (of the researcher)? How much time is spent in developing observational depth? How does the researcher know that the interpretation is the right one?

Delimitations

- Sampling size was determined to be one class of students in one public school setting only. Understanding the nature of perfectionism in a range of contexts, grades and schools is a necessary goal, but one that is best approached from the combined outcomes of several studies. The researcher determined that was an appropriate delimitation due to the goal of understanding the issue through a well-developed qualitative interview study. "The method of in-depth,

phenomenological interviewing applied to a sample of participants who all experience similar structural and social conditions gives enormous power to the stories of relatively few participants" (Seidman, 2013, p.59).

- The location of this study was also the location where the researcher worked. It was a location of convenience. The researcher served as a school administrator in this location and did not teach, evaluate or assign grades to any of the participants. It was extremely important, therefore, to be constantly aware of objectivity and participant perspectives as opposed to personal bias. A research journal was kept as a means of monitoring personal observations and interpretations, and of ensuring trustworthiness so that the data analysis and conclusions of this study were as true to the experience and reality of the participants as was possible (Merriam, 2009). That practice is also aligned with the principles of hermeneutic phenomenology, which is a constructivist approach. "It assumes that multiple, socially constructed realities exist and that the meanings individuals give to their experiences ought to be the objects of study" (Hatch, 2002, p. 30).

- The conceptual framework was created specifically for this study. The use of that type of analytic tool, although highly recommended for data analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1991), has not been tested elsewhere. Nevertheless, the framework complements a construct that is multi-dimensional and multi-layered by providing an organized means of clarifying, categorizing, connecting or contrasting the findings with current understandings about the nature of perfectionism and middle school student achievement.

Chapter Four

Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore the meaning of the multidimensional construct of perfectionism in the middle school setting, and to answer the research questions. What is the nature of perfectionism, both adaptive and maladaptive, as experienced by middle school students and their concomitant perceptions about their academic achievements?,

1. What are the traits of middle school students identified as demonstrating adaptive perfectionism and maladaptive perfectionism?

2. How do middle school students who demonstrate adaptive or maladaptive perfectionism view their academic achievements?

3. How do middle school students who demonstrate adaptive or maladaptive perfectionism perceive the impact of parents, teachers and peers on their academic achievements?

Ultimately, in this qualitative interview study, it is the voices of the students that tell the full story of their middle school academic experience, with the quoted excerpts providing rich and often emotionally human evidence as to how their lives and their school achievement are impacted by perfectionism. The students' experiences and perceptions, told through the lenses of their perfectionism, reveal the traits of adolescent adaptive and maladaptive perfectionists, their perspectives about their achievements, and their thoughts about the influences that parents, teachers and peers have on them related to their academic achievements. The accounts build a case rich in compelling evidence to support the findings that emerged from this study. This chapter reports the study's

findings, and identifies each finding's position relative to the conceptual framework for this study. In the chapter that follows, the findings are analyzed using the conceptual framework in order to better understand the participant perceptions relative to the multiple dimensions of perfectionism.

Findings

The report of the findings is arranged into three sections. Findings are supported by multiple illustrative quotes, tables or matrices that organize coding outcomes leading to the finding and a table of quantitative data including APS-R survey data, GPA and standardized testing scores. The first section explores findings that are common to most, if not all the participants, both adaptive and maladaptive. The second section explores findings that emerged relative to the adaptive perfectionists. The third section explores findings related to maladaptive perfectionists. Table 4.1 displays the organization.

Table 4.1: Key Findings on the nature of perfectionism and middle school student achievement and personality traits.

The Nature of Perfectionism and Middle School Student Achievement and Personality Traits Key Findings
I. Findings for All Participants Scoring High for Perfectionism (APS-R Standards)
A. All participants' views of their academic success are highly connected to grade outcomes regardless of their perceived level of effort or learning.
B. Participants scoring highly for perfectionism reported strong levels of concern, stress or anxiety about their achievements.
C.   All the participants report a variety of coping strategies to address their stresses and anxiety.
D. All the participants described a strong need to be perceived as "smart,"

successful, and hard-working by their peers.
E. All the participants believe that success and high achievement outcomes for them are important to their parents.
II. Findings for Students Scoring High for Adaptive Perfectionism
A. The participants scoring highly for adaptive perfectionism describe and display great self-confidence both socially and academically.
B. Adaptive perfectionists are highly focused upon their own achievement and self-improvement.
C. Adaptive perfectionists are highly focused upon their teachers' instructional and assessment strategies, and the relationship of these to their academic success.
D. Adaptive perfectionists self-describe as competitive and intelligent.
III. Findings for Students Scoring High for Maladaptive Perfectionism
A. Maladaptive perfectionists indicate struggles with developing their self-confidence both socially and academically.
B. Maladaptive perfectionists frequently compare and gauge their level of success in relation to that of their peers.
C. Maladaptive perfectionists are highly concerned with their relationships with their teachers and their perceptions about their teachers' feelings for them as they view them as integral to their academic success.
D. Maladaptive perfectionists display a strong need to be seen as empathetic and caring, the more emotionally based non-cognitive traits.

Findings for All Participants

  Finding A. All nine participants' views of their academic success are highly connected to grade outcomes regardless of their perceived level of effort or learning. Conceptual Framework:

  Intrapersonal Domain: Self-Oriented Perfectionism

Both the adaptive and maladaptive perfectionists exhibited a high degree of self-oriented perfectionism in their focus upon their academic successes, and its close connection to grade outcomes. The standards that they set for themselves were extremely high, and their survey responses all indicated strong agreement. Naturally, in an educational setting, it is hoped, indeed expected, that students will be focused upon their learning and grades, however, in the case of self-oriented perfectionism, identified for all of the participants in their surveys, that focus becomes a strong expectation of the highest outcomes. For maladaptive perfectionists, there is also the belief that their best is never good enough.

  Interpersonal Domain: Perfectionistic Self-Presentation

The participants interpersonal expression of perfectionism was reflected in their needs to appear to others as if perfect. Participants varied in the facets of perfectionistic self-presentation that they revealed in their comments. More commonly, they exhibited tendencies toward perfectionistic self-promotion, or needing to appear to others as if perfect, and toward the nondisplay of imperfection, in which they held great concerns over grades that were not as high as others had achieved. Frequency of comments about grades appears to align with greater tendencies toward perfectionistic self-presentation.

  One of the most significant findings of this study is the overwhelming impact that grades have on the daily lives of students who are perfectionists, as represented by the

nine participants of this study. While they sometimes briefly focused upon their interest and engagement in their classes and on the learning, they were quick to connect those discussions to their grades and to striving for high honors. Time, effort and perceived level of learning took a back seat to their grade outcomes and their impact upon their averages for the quarter, and their need to achieve high honors, all A's. For some of the students, anything less than the top achievable score was a disappointment. For others, it was the need to be seen as achieving the best grades in the class. All of the participants reported enjoying the recognition of honor rolls, awards assemblies, and certificates that their school gave them each quarter. And to each of them, being a successful student means achieving high honors. Figure 4.1 reports the frequency with which participants referenced concerns about their grades. While the mean score for the maladaptive group is higher (5.80) than the adaptive group's score (3.75) it should be noted that six of the nine participants mentioned grades an average of four times, while one maladaptive participant, Robb, did not discuss his grades at all, and Brienne and Ned focused upon grades far more frequently than the other seven participants.

Figure 4.1 Frequency of Participant References of Concerns about Grades
(MP=Maladaptive Perfectionist; AP= Adaptive Perfectionist)
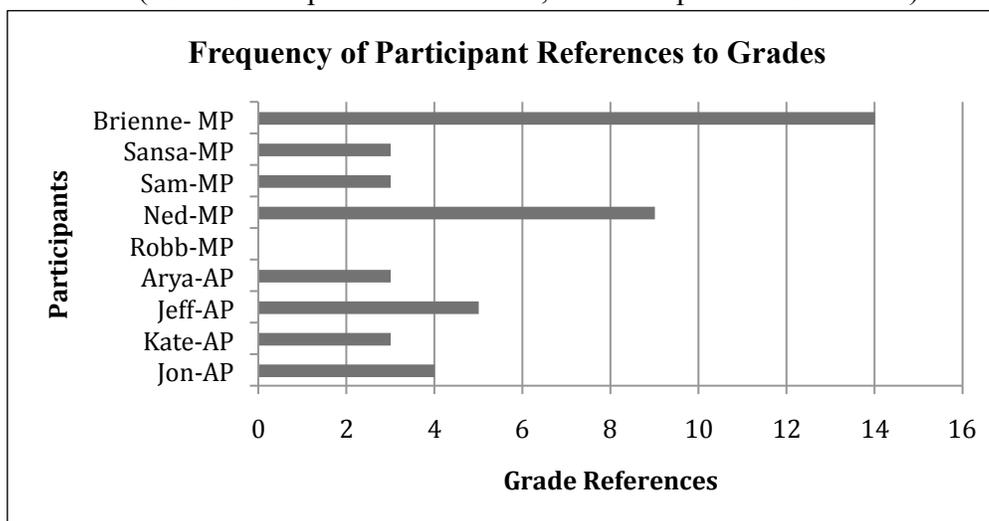
The participants described their feelings about the impact that grades have on them and their sense of achievement in many ways. Ned, who scored highly for maladaptive perfectionism said this:

> Someone with an 80 average, would feel very good about a B+. But, if you are someone with 100 average, you are going to feel very bad about that. Um, feeling achievement is important, but not that important overall, but definitely more important than what other people feel you have achieved. Like if you got a 90 on your project and you were hoping for a 100, you would feel very unsuccessful. The teacher might say, but that's a very good grade, that's the best grade in the class. You would still feel unachieved because you were hoping for a 100. Even though other people feel that you have achieved, unless you feel it for yourself, then it doesn't matter at all. (Ned)

Many of the participants describe strong feelings of disappointment when their grade does not meet their high standards, such as Brienne (MP), who said, " I do feel at my lowest point when I get a bad grade. I think it's the grades, when I get below a 90." She later added:

> I really wanted to get high honors. The more that you want something, the better it will be. But sometimes, you could try so hard that you could break, well, not hurt yourself physically, but mentally. Sometimes I break down in tears. I wanted so hard to get a good grade and actually, it wasn't a bad grade, but I got so upset I cried. (Brienne)

Arya describes how one "bad" grade affected her progress for the whole quarter:

Just that one bad grade, for most of the quarter, was all I saw because he (the

teacher) hadn't put the other grades in yet. I didn't know how I was really doing

because of that, so it got into my head. I didn't really think about how if I tried

really hard I could bring it up. I think that was why I didn't bring it up

tremendously in that class. (Arya)

Arya's response typifies the importance the participants held for grades which they used

to gauge their progress and to validate their ability. Arya's ability to think

metacognitively about how she understands herself as a learner and articulate her feelings

about her grades is more unusual, but indeed, quite fortuitous in terms of studying her

perfectionism.

Sam shared his pride in a good grade and the importance to him that his peers

were aware of his accomplishment, "When I take a test and ace it, I sort of reveal my test

by putting it down on the table, knowing that people can see it. If I got a bad grade, I

wouldn't show it."

Sansa described how she took every opportunity to redo any paper that did not

receive a 100. "I got a score in the higher 80s. So I redid the paper and turned it in. My

score went into the 90s, but not to a 100. I said OK, because I don't know how many

times you can redo a paper."

Jeff also agreed that grades were very important and said, "I want to get perfect

grades." But later, when discussing his feelings about achieving honor roll status, he

replied, "It's not worth thinking about anymore. I am going to do the best that I can, but I

am not going to try extra hard to get honor roll just because of getting a bumper sticker at

the end of the year. It just doesn't seem to be worth the effort anymore." When asked to

clarify, he explained that he didn't need a bumper sticker to declare that he had been successful. "None of the stuff we do counts toward college. I know it is preparing you for high school and that counts towards college, but if I get a 76 in Spanish and don't get on the honor roll, no college person is not going to let me in because I got one bad grade." Jeff's approach to concerns about his performance appeared to discount the long-term impact of his grade results. In that view, he varies from the other participants in his negativity, but it is representative of the other adaptive perfectionists in that they also describe attitudes that show a developing resiliency and rationalizations about grade outcomes that do not meet their high standards.

The four adaptive perfectionists were able to describe a growing sense of understanding of the importance of the learning growth over the grade outcomes. They described a reconciliation of feelings about a grade that was not what they had hoped for, their sense of a strong learning outcome and the pride of accomplishment. A description of those feelings can be found in all four of the participants who are adaptive perfectionists, and is briefly alluded to by two out of the five maladaptive perfectionists. Arya, an adaptive perfectionist, said:

> Actually, grades are very important to me. Because I know personally, that
> when I am learning these things I am happy. But I want to get good grades too,
> to show that I understand and am learning. I've made high honors three
> quarters, and honors one last year, and because I was one point off and I was
> kind of upset about that. But, then, the fourth quarter, things were kinda
> slowing down. Grades are important to me, but as long as I am learning it and
> understand it, that piece where I have to show it is like starting to partially go

away as long as I understand and am learning it. Yeah, I would be pretty upset if I didn't make honor roll. I get pretty upset when I don't make high honors. Honor roll is kinda like, it's OK, but I usually like to go above and beyond. It is pretty important to me. (Arya)

For Arya, there is a growing sense of the importance of understanding and knowing that is taking precedence over "the grade." Her awareness of the change and maturity of her thinking is one of the hallmarks of the adaptive perfectionist. It also contributes to the resiliency of adaptive perfectionists when, for example, a grade outcome may not be quite as hoped, but evidence of achievement and progress are strong. For Arya, the rewards are becoming more intrinsic. Jon added his further thoughts on effort, which he regarded as equally critical:

It's not just what your grades are, it is how hard you tried, too. If you really worked hard on it and if you get like a 70 on the test, you say you did your best because you didn't know how to do it before this and you showed yourself you could do it. (Jon)

Kate, also an adaptive perfectionist, agreed that grades were stressful, but she described her perspective as one of reasoning that it was all part of being a student, and viewed her concerns about grades as normal and manageable, drawing upon her many assets to keep her busy life in balance:

I don't stress about myself because I am comfortable in my skin and I am confident in myself, a lot. I know that I have a lot of good things going, like I

am very athletic. Um, I am very talented and I have a good brain. And, I know

that it's good for yourself to know that you are doing good. But, I do get

stressed about my grades, still. (Kate)

Arya echoed Kate's thought process and demonstrated her own strong abilities to reflect

upon herself as a learner and come to positive conclusions:

In science at the end of the quarter, I had a 79. I said, OK, I am just not going to

make high honors, I'm not going to do well in this class. And I shouldn't have felt

that way. I was being totally negative. Instead, I should have said, oh yeah, I can

do this. Instead I was like, no way, there's no way I can bring it up. But I did

bring it up, and got on the honor roll. (Arya)

Again, Arya demonstrates her growing awareness of metacognitive thinking and her

ability to use this skill to persevere as a learner.

Among the maladaptive perfectionists, one student stood out in his analysis of

others who were focused upon grades versus learning when working collaboratively on a

project. Last spring, as sixth graders, the students were asked to design and race solar

cars. The teacher assigned students to groups of four. The groups were graded upon the

successful completion and function of their solar car, but were also asked to self-assess

and to rate their fellow group members on their responsibility and ability to contribute to

the success of the group. Ned's observations are significant because they indicated a

growing awareness that one's perceptions and attitudes, particularly competitive

concerns, can indeed affect learning outcomes, as illustrated in the following excerpt:

The groups were rated by their classmates on whether everyone was involved

or just sitting off to the side. And their group got all 100s. It wasn't just about

who had the fastest car, but how well the groups worked together. And that is

one of the things that is harder for people who are focused on the grading and

want to be the image of success. Other groups, smart groups, I noticed, were

turning on each other. When the grading process was going on and they were

grading classmates on how well they worked. They'd usually say stuff like

blaming their classmates for cars (that had problems). Like, " I did all the work

and they did nothing. Or, they didn't let me do any work." But, the group that

was having fun with their project was getting good grades and they were giving

each other good grades. So I think it was an experiment on the teacher's part to

see which groups would work better. Because our group seemed very happy

with the grade they had gotten because they felt they were with a group that

would help them achieve what they wanted. Everyone did their part and worked

together. (Ned)

Ned's ability to analyze group behaviors demonstrates growing skill with

metacognitive thinking just as Arya showed earlier. He identified the focus of grades as

more important than the learning in his classmates as well as himself and noted the

primacy of grades when students work collaboratively and hold one another responsible

for outcomes.

Sansa, who said that she always seeks to revise and improve any grade below 100,

said of a revision that was in the 90s, but not the top score she wanted, "But I understand

what I did wrong and that is the important thing." Her claim, still, may be more of a

consolation rather than a conviction since she rarely discussed her pride in the 95 percent

of work that she got right. She later admitted, "I feel I need to do a great job on

everything. I need to get A+ on everything." Or, as Sam summed it up, "I am good about grades and I pay attention. That's all I think about."

Finding B: Participants scoring highly for perfectionism reported strong levels of concern, stress or anxiety about their achievement.

Conceptual Framework:

Intrapersonal Domain: Self-Oriented Perfectionism is identified in this finding due to the high levels of concern the participants exhibited about their achievements. The adaptive group described being energized by their positive results. The maladaptive group, appeared to be focused upon concerns about their level of achievement compared to that of others. Their survey responses for statements such as "I often worry about not measuring up to my own expectations," were also either agree or strongly agree.

Interpersonal Domain: Socially Prescribed Perfectionism was identified by remarks students made about parental expectations, and the level of stress described as occurring in connection with expectations. Perfectionistic Self-Presentation was exhibited by the participants who described feelings of stress relative to their need to "measure up" to the high levels of performance of peers, or of comparisons to peers' level of popularity or appearance. The maladaptive group appeared to be particularly highly susceptible to validating their level of success by comparisons with peers. In so doing, their perfectionism was identified as perfectionistic self-promotion due to their drive to meet the highest standard and nondisplay of imperfection when their high levels of worry about disclosure was typified by fear and anxiety that their results might not be "the best."

All the participants made at least one reference to feeling stressed or anxious, and many of them repeated that theme multiple times. However, the contexts under which the students described being stressed are different. For example, when discussing the situations that caused the participants to feel anxiety or stress, it was the maladaptive group that included comparisons about their performance relative to others in their discussions. When discussing their stress, four out of five maladaptive perfectionists described worries about what others thought of them, of their performance being as good as others, of competition and wanting to exceed or go beyond what others could do. Robb said: "When I am doing something and I try my best, but I don't think it's good enough, maybe for what other people did, what I wanted to do [sic]." Often, it was difficult to determine whether "going beyond" meant self-improvement or going beyond what others could accomplish. Brienne, however was very clear when she described looking at others and seeing that they were "prettier" or "skinnier." She said:

> I do sometimes feel stressed about how I look and I'm not anorexic, but I think a lot of popular people are skinnier. I wish I was more like that, prettier. My mom told me that there is always someone who is going to be smarter or prettier than you. I have worked hard to have that opinion and it has helped me a lot.

> (Brienne)

Table 4.2 displays the number of times participants reported being stressed or anxious and the contexts or topics being discussed during which these feelings were reported.

Table 4.2: Participant Self-Report of Stress or Anxiety

Participant	Context: Event, Task or Activity	Number of References Made to Feeling Stress or Anxiety
Adaptive Participants (Total References 32)		
Arya	Conflict with friend Project Busy schedule Athletic Competition	12
Jon	Classroom Tests and homework	13
Kate	Life Tests	1
Jeff	Schoolwork Test score	6
Maladaptive Participants (Total References 29)		
Ned	Comparisons with peers Anger Schoolwork	4
Sam	Comparison with peers	1
Robb	Schoolwork Comparison with peers	3
Brienne	Appearance Comparison with peers	11
Sansa	Competition Comparisons with peers Taking Tests	10

As table 4.2 reveals, the maladaptive perfectionists express repeatedly their concerns about schoolwork and tests, but referenced them in comparisons with the outcomes of their peers. The adaptive group also discussed tests and schoolwork, but avoided making the comparisons to others and focused upon their own performances.

When stress is examined among the participants by looking at their abilities and achievement scores, another picture emerges. There seems to be a connection, with the participants of this study, between their ability and achievement outcomes and their reported anxiety and stress levels. Table 4.3 displays student achievement for the

participants as follows: GPA scores for participants' sixth grade year, NWEA (Northwest

Evaluation Association) achievement scores for math and reading in spring of their sixth

grade year, and OLSAT SAI total scores (Otis-Lennon norm-referenced school ability

index of cognitive ability) completed in the spring of their fifth grade year. The purpose

of this report is to analyze any possible connections between the students' perspectives on

their achievement, and the school's recorded progress records. The participant numbers

are too low to generate broad valid or reliable conclusions about the relationships

between the participants' abilities and their achievements, relative to their APS-R scores,

as have been made in the larger studies that also include results for non-perfectionists

(Gilman & Ashby, 2003). But, when viewed through the lens of their achievement scores,

the participants' perspectives about stress point to a possible connection.

Table 4.3 reveals that four out of the five maladaptive perfectionists scored at the

91 percentile or higher on their NWEA's for both math and reading. Ned and Robb's

OLSAT scores, 129 and 130 respectively, place their abilities in the gifted range

intellectually.

Table 4.3 Participant APS-R and Academic Achievement Results

Participant	APS-R Standards	APS-R Discrepancies	OLSAT SAI	NWEA Math %	NWEA-Reading %	GPA
Adaptive Perfectionists						
Kate	49	15	118	78	82	93.24
Jon	48	17	122	78	87	96.27
Jeff	48	27	111	95	87	94.80
Arya	49	34	131	85	77	94.77
Maladaptive Perfectionists						
Ned	46	55	129	94	90	93.33
Sam	47	53	91	70	54	93.84
Robb	46	52	130	98	91	98.17
Sansa	48	49	111	91	95	97.88
Brienne	48	49	*N/A	94	95	97.23

*No score available. Student hospitalized for several months during academic year.

Brienne did not take the OLSAT during her fifth grade year because she was hospitalized with an anxiety disorder for several months. Sansa's parents have requested that she be re-tested due to her relatively average score of 111, which disqualified her for the school's gifted and talented classes. On a recent occasion where Sansa was scheduled for retesting, she became very anxious and was unable to complete the test. Brienne and Sansa's GPA scores are 97.23 and 97.88 respectively, two of the top three averages of all the participants. None of the adaptive perfectionists' NWEA scores rose into the 90s, except for Jeff's NWEA math score of 95. And although they are all strong in their OLSAT SAI's 111-122, only Arya's score of 131, stands out. If the interview outcomes of the students whose OLSAT SAI scores are highest, Ned, Robb and Arya, also include Sansa and Brienne, with the possibility that accurate scores for them were also available, and because they too scored in the 90s percentile on their NWEA test, there is an emerging picture of stress and anxiety reported by those five participants that exceeds those of the four others.

All five of the students, (four of the five being maladaptive) have very strong achievement outcomes both in comparison to the other participants and also among the members of their class. Those outcomes, however, appear to have come at a significant cost for the students. They reported feeling anxious or stressed in 40 of the 61 total instances; those feelings were mentioned among all nine participants. They also report dissatisfaction because other scores were higher. Ned and Robb, both extremely quiet and shy, reported becoming very anxious when they were expected to participate in class or present research to their classmates. Ned reported that as a particular concern that he hoped to change. Both he and Robb volunteered very little of their opinions when the

students met as a group, although they reported, when asked, that they enjoyed them and were happy to be included. Brienne and Arya both received medication and counseling for anxiety disorders. Brienne was hospitalized for several months of her fifth grade year and more recently, Arya has twice been transported by ambulance to the hospital for evaluation due to panic attacks and the resulting fainting spells. Sansa's perfectionism and dissatisfaction with any but the very highest achievable grade on her schoolwork was, she acknowledged, intensifying as she approaches high school. Furthermore, Sansa reported increasing levels of anxiety that were almost overwhelming when she competed at swimming meets.

Ned appeared to have been having some success with grappling with his stress over workload and assignment expectations, as he explained, "Being stressed is no excuse. Usually what makes me feel better is to do the assignment." Or on another occasion when he said, "Mistakes make me work that much harder." Brienne described the opposite of this. She shared the stress she felt during a math test. For her, there was no bright side, no sense of seeing mistakes as an opportunity for improvement. She explained:

> When I am doing the problem, I think I am doing it right. I think that maybe I get nervous during the math tests. I just felt very upset when I got a bad grade… I started crying. I thought I was smart and I guess maybe I'm not. I know that a lot of people got 100s and I got a 90. And it was a big hit. I don't cry often.
>
> (Brienne)

Finding C: All of the participants report a variety of coping strategies to address their stress and anxiety.

Conceptual Framework:

Intrapersonal Domain: Self-Oriented Perfectionism is demonstrated here in a broad range of behaviors the participants engaged in to mitigate anxiousness and stress over academic or athletic performance. Their comments indicate that they devoted a great deal of thought to how they approach stress, and for almost every participant, it was a very familiar and very frequent experience to which they applied well-honed strategies. Three of the four adaptive perfectionists reported that self-talk and a positive, open-mindset were critical to their success, and to lower feelings of anxiety or stress. They described a strongly positive inner voice that is there when they take tests or compete on the athletic field. For the maladaptive perfectionists, the voice was mired in self-doubt and there was a persistent mindset that they must work hard to achieve as others do and that, perhaps, no matter what, their best may be disappointing, most of all, to themselves.

Only one of the four adaptive perfectionists, Kate, made no mention of problems with stress and described a mindset of optimism as very important. Kate said, "I am really optimistic, my parents say. They are like, 'Kate, you see the glass half full.' I am like, I don't know what you mean. We talked about it the other day. I'm like, this is so cool. But, if there's something really bad, I don't make a big deal out of it. I will say, 'Oh, whatever'."

With the participants, self-talk included forgiveness, imagining cares and "flicking them away," and repeating a "never fail," mantra. One of the four adaptive perfectionists admitted to taking prescription medications for anxiety and seeking the support of a counselor. Another of the adaptive perfectionists, Jeff, described an attitude of dismissal, letting go of the concern in favor of a decision to settle for less, or, "the bare

minimum to get a good grade." Jeff said, " Well, sometimes, my best is not good enough, like I do the best I could, but sometimes it is not enough, or I will try my hardest, but I still get a bad grade. When you work hard on a project and you don't get a good grade, I say, well, I just wasted my time." Jeff's relief came from placing the blame or responsibility for an undesirable outcome on the teacher as his comment about "failing to educate me," implies. But, Jeff also revealed that when asked to rank his stress about schoolwork using a one to ten scale, his reply was "10."

From the descriptions given about encountering stressful situations, the adaptive perfectionists described what appears to be well-established patterns of talk or self-encouragement for braving the storm, whether it is an overload of homework, tests to prepare for or athletic challenges. As Jon said, "When I have a storm in my head, I cannot think. I can just think of doing horribly and failing. I put my pencil down and I close my eyes for a minute. I feel then, like your thoughts are just cleared and then there is no more pressure there anymore." Jon also described a strong sense of focus. He likes to have fun, saw it as a stress reliever, but when it was time for work, he emphasized that he was not distracted and was very focused on "getting the job done." He said:

> I describe myself as a kid who likes to have fun, but does his best in everything that he can do. I think I do this because I like to fool around with my friends and relax and unwind. But when it comes down to doing something, I just put my entire effort into it and do my very best on it unless I'm distracted. I get frustrated when I get distracted so I try not to get distracted. (Jon)

The five maladaptive perfectionists' explanations reveal varying levels of success in coping with the stress that they felt related to academic or athletic challenges. While

they have provided evidence that they recognized a problem that frequently caused them discomfort, three out of the five chose to work through it, accept it as a given and to continue to strive to accomplish that which would meet their high standards, rather than to develop actions or habits that could mitigate their stress or level of anxiousness. Ned demonstrated this when he said, "I'm not usually one to give up on things, but it is usually my downfall. I just never stop working no matter how much there is. And if it is something I want to get right, I keep working on it and not asking questions until I come up with something. I don't like to take breaks." Robb reported that he stopped his work, went outside to run around or play a sport and then resumed his work.

Brienne said that she absolutely had to take breaks or else her level of anxiety becomes unbearable. When asked what a very bad day looked like to her, she replied, "When I don't get a rest time or a quiet time, that is a bad day. I need time to myself. It helps. I need time to myself or it can get too overwhelming for me." Only once during her three interview sessions did Brienne allude to her hospitalization. She mentioned it briefly as the reason she was not placed in a more advanced math class. It was a very significant medical event in her life, causing deep concern over the state of her future mental health as it came as the result of serious struggles with anxiety and an emotional breakdown. Brienne also took medication to keep her anxiety in check.

Sansa talked about being stressed on 10 occasions during her interviews. She understood that addressing it and trying to relax was important to her level of success, but admitted it was a challenging and a constant battle of inner will.

> I get anxiety and then I get my head into it and say, OK we have spent time doing
> this, I know what I am doing and I just have to remember this because otherwise

I worry and the worry just freezes my mind. And I can't think properly. I

reassure myself by thinking, I KNOW how to do this. I can do it. (Sansa)

Sansa also talked about strategic thinking in reference to improving her time

during swimming practices and competitions. She reported some feelings of success with

that coping strategy that helped her stay focused upon her performance, and not worried

about comparing it to others. Sansa explained:

In sports, it is strategic thinking. You need to understand what you are doing and

try to come up with a strategy. I get anxious to the point of ridiculous and I try

to turn the anxiety into adrenaline. But, I can't let that fuel me, I need to focus

and think about what I am doing. (Sansa)

Of the nine participants, two take medication for anxiety. One is adaptive the other

maladaptive. The adaptive perfectionist also takes medication for ADHD and has

reported experiencing panic attacks. The maladaptive perfectionist taking anxiety

medication was also hospitalized for serious issues stemming from her anxiety. Both of

those students also receive counseling for their anxiety. None of the other students see

counselors; neither do they take prescription medications for anxiety, depression or

ADHD.

Finding D: All of the participants described a strong need to be perceived as

smart, successful and hardworking by their peers.

Conceptual Framework:

Intrapersonal Domain Self-Oriented Perfectionism is strongly connected to the

perceptions that all of the participants held about their strong desire to be seen, accepted,

and recognized as smart and successful. It was the interpersonal expression of that need that predominated for the maladaptive group. And while there was an acknowledgement among the adaptive participants that it was important to them, they did not speak to the need to have their abilities seen by others, or that they were driven to make such comparisons.

Interpersonal Domain: For the maladaptive group, Socially Prescribed Perfectionism and facets of Perfectionistic Self-Presentation were more predominant. Their comments revealed that they felt smart and successful when it was acknowledged by others, or that they saw that they had achieved beyond what others had accomplished. They also expressed far more concern about whether their efforts met their parents' expectations. That behavior is identified in the conceptual framework as socially prescribed perfectionism.

All the participants talked about their grades when asked about being or feeling successful. Those students who participated in sports also referenced team and individual successes. Being smart or intelligent was referenced most frequently when students were comparing their achievement to that of others, or to being perceived as "smart" by classmates or teachers. Frequency of that theme, and contrasts in perspectives among the participants, adaptive or maladaptive, were more easily identified by examining the students' discussions around topics such as their mindset, achievement, competition and academic recognition. For example, Sansa said, "I actually feel most smart when I am recognized for one of my achievements academically because then everyone knows how you did and what it was that you achieved. And then you know that your teacher knows it too." The academic recognition was important for Sansa to feel successful and "smart."

She also viewed it as important because others, especially her teachers, would see that too.   Table 4.4 displays the instances, across all participants, where feelings of intelligence, being smart or feeling successful are discussed.

Table 4.4 specifically notes where: (1) success is measured by personal growth, self-oriented perfectionism; (2) performance is compared with that of others or required by others, self-oriented and socially prescribed perfectionism; and (3) recognition or approval by others is mentioned, the socially prescribed perspective. The table also reveals that the maladaptive perfectionists referenced comparisons of outcomes with their peers when describing their personal feelings of success in 23 out of 25 occurrences. The adaptive perfectionists made comparisons in 2 out of 25 instances across all of the participants. Two of the four adaptive perfectionists did not make those comparisons at all. But Jeff did, and he summed it up succinctly, "I feel smart when I get a good grade and everyone else got a bad grade."

All of the participants described or portrayed themselves as hard-working. They supported the theme of "always doing your best," and "going above and beyond." They used words like "driven," "perseverance," "hard worker," "overachiever," "ambitious" and "determined." If they did not specifically use those words, their stories were replete with discussions about re-doing work, and spending hours studying for tests or preparing for presentations. Jon explained the importance of that for him when he talked about homework:

> To me, it means that you show you care about it and you show you can do your
>
> best. You never give up, you show that you are determined. You show everyone
>
> that you know how to do it. Even if you get like a 70 on it, you say you did your

best because you didn't know how to do it before this and you showed yourself

you could do it. (Jon)

Kate talked about this when she described herself as a student.

I would describe myself as someone who works hard. I do not like to fail, at all. I

am one of those people who is always trying to get the best grade, or finish the

test first. I am very competitive and I know some other people, teachers too,

who would say that. (Kate)

Table 4.4 Participant Perceptions of Performance and "Feeling Smart"

Participant	Comparing performance with that of others Framework: Self-Oriented and Socially Prescribed Perfectionism	Viewing Recognition or approval by others as important measure of success Framework: Socially Prescribed Perfectionism	Measuring success in terms of previous performance or personal growth Framework: Self-Oriented Perfectionism
Adaptive Perfectionist			
Jon	0	5	6
Kate	1	4	7
Jeff	1	0	3
Arya	0	0	8
Maladaptive Perfectionist			
Robb	4	2	0
Brienne	6	2	1
Ned	3	3	7
Sam	3	4	2
Sansa	7	4	1

Finding E: All of the participants believe that success and high achievement

outcomes for them are important to their parents.

Conceptual Framework:

Interpersonal Domain: Concern about the expectations, opinions, and the need of others that one is required to achieve "perfection," rests within the realm of interpersonal relationships and is identified as socially prescribed perfectionism in the conceptual framework. For adolescents in particular, researchers view that as a very strong influence upon their behaviors including stress levels and the degree to which they need to appear as perfect. , ~~perfectionistic self-promotion or avoidance of imperfection.~~ They are driven to please others, they avoid or are sensitive in situations where there is any risk of failure to excel. All the participants appear to thrive on their parents' pride, and viewed them as supportive. Teacher and peer validation were also important, but for the maladaptive group there was a theme of worry about not living up to expectations of parents, and shyness about performance in front of peers. Only one of the participants specifically spoke negatively about parents, and on only one occasion. There were more instances, however, of frustration about peers and that seemed to be equally divided among the two groups, adaptive and maladaptive. One adaptive participant, for example, spoke of teammates who weren't putting their best efforts toward practices. Other participants spoke of peers who didn't put in their best efforts in school. That observation was common to both groups.

Although none of the participants described being overly stressed relative to parental pressure to succeed or excel academically, all nine described very subtle but significant parental actions that signified to them the importance of school and strong academic performances. Parental expectations, both subtle and overt have been described extensively in literature about perfectionism in adolescents. In particular, that "pressure"

is seen as a significant factor that may lead to the development of maladaptive perfectionism in some children. The participants were specifically asked about their parents' attitudes about their performance in school, but most of the story about how the parents influenced their children was revealed while the students were talking about their own feelings about their grades and their performance both in school and in their athletics. Jon said:

> My grades are incredibly important. My entire family pushes me to do better. Like my grandmother, her father came from Italy. In Italy, they didn't really push education. So he realized, in America, he had to push my grandmother and my grandmother pushed my mom. My other grandfather was a math teacher and my grandmother was an English teacher and so they pushed my dad, so my family is pretty much teachers who push my brother and me. They put pressure on you to get good grades, just enough so that we do well, and not so much that we hate it. (Jon)

Kate talked about rewards at the end of the quarter and the end of the year if she made honor roll all four quarters. For Kate, rewards were food. She said, "They take me out to dinner at the end of the quarter. After I got honor roll all four quarters, they took me out to a bakery and said, pick a cake. I was so proud of myself."

For Arya, there was the expectation that she will attend a private school in high school. She and her family were already visiting several possibilities and her parents hired a tutor to help her improve her scores on the required entrance exams. Arya divided her time each week between the two households of her divorced parents. "Even though they are divorced, I always get a call from the other parent and they ask, 'How was your

day? How are you doing.' " Arya's schedule was heavy with multiple sports, summer

camps and competitions, all of which, she said, would make her a good candidate on her

high school applications. Robb said of his parents, "I am trying really hard to please them

and make them feel good about it. They think my grades are important and they say, 'You

should do well at this.' They say that I should do my best. They usually do it in positive

ways that are not going to stress me out. It helps me more than it hurts me."

Brienne said that her grades were very important to her, especially when she

prepares to enter high school because she wanted to get into medical school, like her

parents. She said:

> My parents would be worried if I didn't make honor roll. They just want me to
>
> do the best that I can. They would say, well you have to do your homework
>
> before you can watch TV. They wouldn't get mad if I didn't make high honors,
>
> but they would say, "let's talk about this." They would get frustrated if I didn't
>
> try, but not if I am trying to do well. (Brienne)

Brienne's brother and sister were also in her grade, however, and she made

several comparisons of her grades and achievement scores with theirs. According to

Brienne, they were always stressed.

Ned described his father who moved to Maine to help manage the family

business. "It is very stressful for him," Ned said. Ned also said that he knew his family

cared about his grades, "and that I am doing well, but I don't get awards for good work. I

just feel glad that I did good work. That's enough for me."

Sansa's response is perhaps the most poignant example of the students'

perspectives about how their parents felt about them and their achievements. Sansa

reported being exhausted by the time she sat down to do her homework, which was frequently at the dinner table with hair still damp from swimming. She reported that her dad claimed he did not, but that he really was pushing her in sports, because, unlike her friends who often got a day off each week from practice, she did not. She said,

> My dad says he's not, but he pushes me in sports. I am going swimming every day and I am exhausted. My friends get a break from swimming occasionally, and I am like 'Oh my God, you are so lucky,' because I am going to bed later because of homework and the time I get home from swimming. It is a half hour drive and then dinner and then shower. I am just zonked out. So, I wish that he would just get in the pool and do a set with us and see what that is like. He was a basketball star. I am sure basketball was pretty hard, like the suicide sprints. So, I wish he would swim a practice and then he would really know how much I would love a break. So, it's like they know that I try to work hard, but I would like a break. (Sansa)

It should also be noted that all of the participants' parents were highly successful both academically and career wise in that they all attended college and sought challenging career paths. Two of the participants, Sansa and Brienne, for example, have mothers and fathers who are both physicians. Some of the other participants' parents excelled athletically as well. Sansa's parents were both athletes and excelled in different sports. Sansa described her own feelings about wanting to excel at swimming competitions and also pleasing her parents:

> I am like seven minutes and some seconds and others are 5 or 6. That is a lot in swimming. My parents say try your best. That is what they say, but it isn't easy.

It is very bothersome, until your time is better than the others. I have to

improve so that I am reaching their ability, to feel satisfied. (Sansa)

When asked to clarify whether she meant the ability of the other swimmers or her parents'

expectations, Sansa paused for a moment and then replied. "Both, I guess."

Findings for Students Scoring High for Adaptive Perfectionism

**Finding A. The participants scoring highly for adaptive perfectionism
describe and display great self-confidence both socially and academically.**
Conceptual Framework:

Intrapersonal Domain: Self-Oriented Perfectionism was exhibited throughout the

study by the adaptive perfectionists who appeared to enjoy talking about themselves, and

described strong inner voices, mantras and self-talk that they used to encourage strong

performance. They also described having great self-confidence. The Interpersonal

Domain of the framework labels more specific motivations for their behavior, which is

exhibited by a drive to appear to others as perfect, called perfectionistic self-promotion.

While the adaptive perfectionists are not particularly concerned about comparisons of

their performance with others, they do appear to thrive on their own successes and

recognition of their successes. It is a strong motivator for them.

All four of the adaptive perfectionists reported strong feelings of self-confidence

which they described in several contexts including their friendships, social status,

leadership skills in sports and in collaborative group work and strong levels of comfort in

the classroom during discussions, or when conducting presentations before their

classmates. During their personal interviews, that was apparent in their almost immediate willingness to open up and share their perspectives, their talkativeness and their seeming ease with which they shared their thoughts.

Even in the face of challenges, the adaptive participants preferred to step forward and welcome the risk-taking. Kate said, "Things do scare me a little bit, but overcoming fears is probably better than staying in a hole and not trying." Jon described being easily frustrated when he began school, and how he has learned to calm himself and approach challenges calmly. He has been pleased to discover that this approach worked well and frequently resulted in successful outcomes. Jon said:

> In kindergarten, I really didn't have a way that was established. When we had to do things that got me frustrated, I couldn't hear myself. Then I figured out that if I kept this up, I would just get madder and madder. So, I realized, what the heck am I doing? Why don't I just stop for a minute, rethink the question, calm myself down and go back into it. Most times, I find I get it right when I do that. My thoughts come clearly and I am not distracted. (Jon)

For Jon, as with the other adaptive perfectionists, academic self-confidence and social self-confidence have gone hand in hand as developing strengths.

Self-confidence is a theme among the adaptive group that they spoke of frequently and with pride. All nine participants measured their popularity or social standing in terms of numbers of friends, and who they sat with during their lunch time, a very common concern in adolescents. The 20-minute lunch period is the only extended period of time that students have to socialize during their school day with their friends, and it is important and precious to them for that reason. Who sits where and with whom

appears to send very powerful messages to the students about their social status. That is reflected in several comments made by the students, and not just about their social life at lunch. Jon said, "I have a lot of people." Jeff responded, "I hang out with a lot of people. And when there is group work, I am the leader." Arya said, "I definitely have a lot of friends, I am very outgoing." She later said, "I've been called one of the most athletic people and one of the most popular people. I've never been shy." Athleticism appears to be an important quality for social popularity, being a part of the team, or one of the group. Jon and Jeff reported that they had many different groups that they sat with at lunch, some who were teammates and others from their classes. Even though Arya described herself as being "popular," she later admitted that she was upset about what being popular meant when she overheard a girl say that Arya probably wouldn't want to sit next to her on the bus since "she wasn't popular" like Arya.

Finding B. Adaptive perfectionists are highly focused upon their achievement and self-improvement.

Conceptual Framework:

Intrapersonal Domain: Self-Oriented Perfectionism is strongly identified with adaptive perfectionists' focus upon their achievement and drive to excel. Although there may be some interpersonal aspects of that focus, such as pride gained by the support of parents, coaches and peers, the far more predominant domain for the participants was their focus on personal growth, and strong academic and athletic outcomes for their efforts.

Self- improvement, growth as a learner, and evidence of success both in school and in athletics were a high priority for adaptive perfectionists. As Jon said, "Grades and

honor roll are incredibly important. My entire family pushes me to do better, just enough to know that school comes first and everything else is second." On another occasion, Jon said, "I like getting recognized. Mainly, it is knowing that I got higher than I would have if I hadn't worked at it, which I pretty much work for everything. So when I get that certificate, I know I actually did what I could." Kate said, "I kept on thinking, "I can do so much better. I can do so much better. I kept pushing myself. The compliments kept motivating me to continue, when other people are complimenting me. That is when I feel smart." The adaptive perfectionists were focused on their own intrinsic sense of accomplishment and desire for personal growth. Arya said, "When I set standards or a goal for myself, being able to meet it, that is average. But, being or doing my best is when I go above and beyond. I've definitely been trying to go above and beyond. I never really feel that it is enough to do just OK."

Jeff also appeared to be highly focused upon his improvement as a learner and described his need for more feedback about his learning from his teachers. "I would just prefer the feedback. I would rather that they talk to me about it and talk about what I should do other than just, well, not. Because, that doesn't help you improve." Arya agreed with Jeff when the topic came up in the focus group session. "With feedback, you can improve." Arya also liked it when teachers provided opportunities for students to gain extra points, to challenge them, and as she said on multiple occasions, "to go beyond." She added, "Like on a test when I get a 100, but I didn't do the bonus, I feel like I just did OK. Even if it is just like 2 points, I feel like, yeah, I could have done better."

Finding C. Adaptive perfectionists are highly focused upon their teachers' instructional and assessment strategies and the relationship of these to their academic success.

Conceptual Framework:

Intrapersonal Domain: The finding aligns with both intrapersonal and interpersonal domains of perfectionism because the adaptive perfectionists' focused upon personal growth and academic/athletic excellence and required that their teachers, coaches and peers provide them with the appropriate support and circumstances where excellent outcomes were possible. Self-Oriented Perfectionism is as identified in the previous finding, whereby the adaptive perfectionists were specifically focused upon personal needs and drives to excel.

Interpersonal Domain: The interpersonal domain features the adaptive participants' attention to both the requirements that others expected them to "do their best," as identified with socially prescribed perfectionism. They also expected teachers and coaches to devote equal effort and skill in providing the instruction, attention and feedback they needed to produce strong outcomes. The participants also expected support, and held expectations for excellence in collaborative learning experiences with their peers.

The adaptive perfectionists maintained a consistently high focus upon their achievement and the various factors that supported that achievement. One of those factors, discussed on numerous occasions, was the instructional and assessment strategies adopted by their teachers. The students had a clear sense of what teacher-related practices were working for them academically, and what were not. They referenced specific

teacher practices far more frequently than concerns about what their teachers thought of them.

Eight of the nine participants discussed teacher personality traits on multiple occasions and emphasized that they enjoyed and were most successful in classes that were fun, where the teacher was patient and caring, gave students personal attention, and recognized or praised them for their efforts. Although the adaptive perfectionists discussed several teachers that they liked or thought were fun and "energetic," they never specifically described a need to have their teachers "like them" or worried about their relationships with their teachers.

The teacher's personality and the amount of personal attention the teacher devoted to the participants were mentioned as key to the adaptive perfectionists' success by three out of four members of the adaptive group. The fourth member of the adaptive group, Jon, never mentioned those qualities as essential to his achievement. The adaptive perfectionists described teacher instructional and assessment strategies that they either identified as being successful for them, or hoped that teachers would adopt on multiple occasions during their interviews.

Kate liked teachers who were energetic and excited about their teaching because this helped her to be motivated, excited and focused as well. Kate described how she responded to this energy by comparing two of her teachers. She said,

> I like teachers who have a lot of energy. I like Mrs. White. She has a lot of
> energy and she is always joking. I pay attention when it is energetic. I know Mrs.
> Day is a good teacher, but I don't pay attention to her and respond as much. I
> respond to teachers that say enough to keep you entertained while they are

teaching, but let the students get involved. She teaches by talking and map

work. I can't respond to it well because I need energy. (Kate)

Jeff described the special boost he got from a coach and the increased effort he

put into his game as a result of his coach taking a moment to compliment his dedication

and effort on the team. "My coach said I would be a valued part of the team and that was

important to me. I know he cared and I put out my best effort, " Jeff said. Arya wanted

teachers who had a great sense of humor because that also helped her to stay engaged

with the learning. She said,

I just wanted a teacher who was nice and funny, but would definitely get me to

push myself. I wanted a teacher that I knew I could go to for anything, if I had a

problem, and was like my friend. But, they have to be funny. I just wanted

someone who was full of energy and always happy, a great shining personality.

That was Mrs. White. I really did my best in her LA class. (Arya)

Several of the participants valued the time that, as Arya said, "teachers take to talk

to you individually." While some of the students valued it as special attention to their

work and feedback in the classroom, others appreciated the time teacher took to

acknowledge them personally. For Arya, it was, "How did your ski race go on Saturday."

Arya emphasized that it was important for her to know that her teacher cared about her

personally as well as academically. That appeared to increase her motivation to excel in

that class. The students saw teacher engagement with them, both personally and in

relation to their academics, as very important to their achievements.

Jeff was very intent upon sharing his views about his teachers and their teaching styles. One of the areas that he focused upon when discussing teacher behaviors was giving feedback to students. Jeff discussed this in great detail by explaining that feedback was critical to his progress as a learner. Jeff said:

In LA there is more feedback, but there is none in math, Spanish or global studies. There is just the grade. I would prefer the feedback, because if I get a 60 and no feedback, I don't know what I am supposed to do better. And then I haven't learned anything. I just don't like tests. Teachers just plug the grade in and that is the end of it. I don't think teachers go back and see that you have a bad grade and then think about how to give you the extra help on it. Tests would have a use if teachers could see what we don't know and help us to understand it better. They just test us on what they think we should know and then don't acknowledge our results or anything. I think that it would help if someone came over and said, "you should try to do this instead or try doing it like this." That happens a lot that students get a bad grade and the teacher won't talk to you about it. That just doesn't help. (Jeff)

Participants talked about their appreciation for teacher feedback that they received, or the hope that consistent feedback would be adopted by more of their teachers. Feedback, as Jeff said, was more important to improving his learning than the grade, which by itself, "doesn't help." Although praise was important, many of the students agreed, during the second focus group session, that knowing how to improve their work was more important for them.

A challenging curriculum was viewed as important and desirable by two of the four adaptive perfectionists. Arya related that challenge to her sports idol. She said:

> In school, success is when I am really struggling with something and then I understand it and I can show that I understand it. I keep saying that, but really, it is very important to me. Mikaela Shiffrin is my idol. Honestly, she is 17 or 18 and Olympic gold. I was watching her on TV and almost crying. I was like, wow, to be able to do that. Obviously, she had to work for it and there had to be mistakes along the way. But that is what is important, being challenged. (Arya)

Jeff also discussed the positive effect that challenge had upon him when describing his sixth grade switch to a more challenging math class. "I tried more. I did better. I was in a harder class. My grades did not improve, but I did. I was in a whole new thing with a whole new challenge and stuff. And that is what I really liked."

Three of the four adaptive perfectionists either appreciated classes where there was extensive group discussion, or criticized teachers who did not include enough discussion and student participation in their classes. Kate and Jeff were very disappointed by teachers who did not involve the class in rich, shared discussions rather than a teacher-dominated lecture style. Kate said:

> Something I would like my teachers to know is that I can learn by listening, but if they blabber on and on, I will zone out and start drawing on my hand or on my binders or start fooling around. No blabbing please. Sometimes listening is enough, but not always. I have something to say too and I need hands on activities with a group to comprehend it more. (Kate)

Jeff recalled one incident where he was particularly frustrated because students were not given time to discuss their point of view. Jeff said:

> In Social Studies, one thing that I would like more is less facts and more of people giving their opinions. Like, there is this one thing that really got me annoyed. We were watching this video that the teacher thought was about racial discrimination, but I thought it was more about bullying. I disagreed with the teacher, but he never let me explain my opinion. Mrs. Ryder will let me say something and then she will let other people give their opinions, which I like. Then you get what three other people think. But in Mr. Black's classroom, he will tell you what he thinks. His class is mostly what he thinks rather than our thoughts. (Jeff)

Arya was very disappointed by one of her teacher's lack of giving students shared discussion time. That teaching style was not working for her, as she stated:

> I understand that I talk a lot, but when I am in her class, she's always talking. She says, 'Arya, put down your pen and just listen. Are you doodling?' And I say,' I have a question and I am just writing it down.' And she says, 'No, you don't have to, just listen.' Then I would wait, probably a half hour 'til she was done talking and then she would say, 'OK, Arya, you had a question.' And I said, 'Well, I don't remember it.' I would have if I had written it down. (Arya)

The students complained about their homework load. "I would encourage teachers to give less homework. It is just adding stress, more and more onto the top of the pile," said Jon. In particular, the students asked why it was that teachers didn't seem to know

that they were all assigning heavy amounts of work on the same nights or projects with the same due dates rather than spreading the work out and coordinating it better. That became a particularly heated topic during the focus group session. Jeff said:

> What I really hate is that teachers aren't aware of what we have to do in our other classes. Mr. Black gives me ten pages of homework and then Mrs. Slater gives us all this math, but sometimes she will give us less when we tell her that we have assignments in other classes. We might have homework in LA, but still our Spanish teacher will give us three quizzes the next day. I don't think you need a lot of homework to be learning stuff. (Jeff)

Arya agreed with Jeff and hoped that teachers could change that. She said:

> What I like least about school is when all of the teachers give us homework, give us major projects at the same time. I wish that they could divide it up and decide who is doing what and when. I know that there have been times when I have had no homework in any class and times when I have had three huge projects in three classes due at the same time. That is the most stressful. It is really stressful to have homework in every class at the same time. That happened a lot during soccer and it was just awful. I wish they would spread it out more. I know that they have their meetings together and everything. I wish they would find some time to talk about that. (Arya)

Other suggestions from the students included hoping for more pre-tests and study guides, more response time allowed, and revisions to the grading system, an issue that Ned spoke about at great length. Although Ned is identified as a maladaptive

perfectionist, he also exhibits a developing growth mindset and movement toward developing more adaptive perspectives. First he spoke about averaging:

> I have a couple of complaints about the system. It's not always an accurate representation. There are some people who really understand the subject and they get one bad grade and it drags down their entire average for the rest of the year. Like they could have a bunch of 90s and then a 75 and it could pull their final grade down into the 80s and mess up their goal of high honors. (Ned)

Later, Ned spoke about the way individual assignments were scored.

> I read an argument on the Internet that some people were saying that it [the grade] shouldn't be based on how many questions there are and a certain percent for each of those. There should be a set amount of points, more or less, for each question. Like, if you have six homework questions and you miss one of them, you are out of luck. Why not break each item down or just take a certain number of points for each question?

Ned also discussed the issue of how homework should be scored relative to other grades:

> You need homework for the practice, but it could be graded for effort. You could do every question and get every answer wrong, but still get 100 for effort because you attempted to do every question. The argument is that you should learn from your homework, and it could be corrected, but not averaged with your test grades. A grade for effort and a grade for how much you have been learning is good. You could also get a grade for how much you are paying attention and participating, even if you don't do well on your tests. (Ned)

Table 4.5 indicates the student-described teacher behaviors that they believe are important to their achievement, and the frequency with which those factors were mentioned. The table shows the greater frequency with which the adaptive perfectionists noted teacher instructional and assessment strategies as important. Those included teacher feedback, more classroom discussion (particularly the kind that is student-led), personalized attention from the teacher, and more care in coordinating the timing and nature of assignments across all subjects.

Students frequently reported that they were stressed and overloaded with homework and that it was hard to produce quality with so much quantity. They wanted their teachers to work together to create balance. As Arya said, "They have team time every week to plan, don't they?

Table 4.5: Frequency and Nature of Student-Described Teacher Behaviors Supporting Academic Success
Clear columns = Instructional and assessment strategies /   Shaded columns = Teacher personality and personal attention/relationships

Participant	Study Skills	Teacher Feedback	Challenge	Patience Kindness	More Discussion Student-Led	Recognition	Less Homework/ Coordinating Assignments Among teachers	More Response Time	Personality: Fun, Energetic	Motivating Prizes	Personalized attention	Formative Assessments: Pre-tests and Study	Change Grading Sys.	Opportunity to re-take tests	Develop Relationships
Adaptive Perfectionists															
Jon	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kate	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	2	1	1	1	0	1	0
Jeff	0	3	1	1	2	1	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
Arya	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	0
Totals	1	3	2	1	4	3	4	1	3	1	4	1	0	2	0
Maladaptive Perfectionists															
Robb	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Brienne	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	2
Ned	0	1	1	2	0	1	0	0	2	0	1	0	1	0	2
Sam	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2
Sansa	1	1	0	1	0	2	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	4
Totals	1	2	1	3	0	6	2	0	4	1	4	0	1	1	12

Finding D. Adaptive perfectionists self-describe as competitive and intelligent. The adaptive perfectionists all describe themselves as athletic, driven, competitive, and extroverted.

Conceptual Framework:

Intrapersonal Domain: The adaptive participants identified several personality traits that they value in themselves and others, traits they see as crucial to academic and athletic success. Although their public image as being "smart," "outgoing" and "hard-working" is important to them, they appear to cope relatively well with challenges, and also appear to stay focused upon personal improvements rather than comparisons with

peer outcomes. Table 4.6 summarizes words used by adaptive participants to describe themselves.

Interpersonal Domain: Perfectionistic Self-Presentation does exist to some degree for the adaptive perfectionists, but those facets, such as perfectionistic self-promotion, the need to appear to others as perfect, are not seen as the driving force behind their behavior. Perfectionistic self-presentation is more strongly identified with the maladaptive perfectionists because, for them, that perspective is more powerful and prone to producing anxiety, self-handicapping behaviors such as work or presentation avoidance as they fear failure.

Table 4.6: Adaptive Participant Self-Described Characteristics

Question: What are five words that describe you?	
Adaptive Group	
Jon	Positive, athletic, smart , driven (no 5th word)
Kate	Outgoing, competitive, hard-worker, athlete, thinker
Jeff	Athletic, hard worker, problem solver, good speaker, people person
Arya	Athletic, outgoing, competitive, social

Three of the four adaptive perfectionists acknowledged that they work very hard at whatever they do. Only one of the four, Jon, thought to describe his cognitive ability, and used the word "smart." Jon, Kate, Jeff and Arya were very proud of their accomplishments on the athletic field and in the classroom and, as Arya frequently said, she wanted to be seen as "going above and beyond."

Jeff said, "I'm a little mean when it comes to school sports. I don't try to be. But, I sorta [sic] have to because I want everyone to do good [sic]. So, I try to be assertive and say, 'Come on guys, you gotta do this,' and not have that person over there fooling around and talking to others and not focusing." Jon said, "Well sometimes others don't want to

put a lot of effort into something. You should always push to do something and sometimes others don't really understand that."

Arya displays the same drive toward excellence in the classroom when she explained the difference between trying to do well just to make high honors for the recognition, and trying to put forth one's best effort for improvement and to learn. Arya said:

> For some people it is a title. And if they don't get it they say, "Well, OK, I'm stupid. I didn't make high honors, I'm so dumb." You can tell that some people do care more about the learning and say, "OK, how am I going to improve and make that next quarter?" Like you can definitely see who really does care about their learning and who just got high honors and says, "I'm all set, I'm smart." So there is that whole, yeah I made high honors and I'm one of the smart kids. (Arya)

At the beginning of his very first interview, Jon described himself as a perfectionist who came from a family of very competitive people who always strived to do their best. He described his brother when making that point, comparing his brother's level of success to his own, again displaying the tendency of perfectionists to judge their own high standards in terms of others. Jon said:

> My brother is nine and in the fourth grade; he does his very best on everything. He is a perfectionist. He is more of a perfectionist than me. He is incredibly organized. He knows where everything is, like sometimes when he wants to wear something for a baseball game, like three days before, he will already have his stuff out and on his floor, ready to put on. (Jon)

Findings for Students Scoring High For Maladaptive Perfectionism

   Finding A. Maladaptive perfectionists indicate struggles with developing their self-confidence both socially and academically.

Conceptual Framework:

   Intrapersonal Domain: While maladaptive perfectionists described the need and expectations for the same high standards as the adaptive group, according to survey results, their Self-Oriented Perfectionism is more highly influenced by the interpersonal domain of the conceptual framework. Their need for perfection and fear of failure appeared to produce far more anxiety for them than the adaptive group, and it is the interpersonal aspects of their perfectionism that appeared to produce that anxiety.

   Interpersonal Domain: Socially Prescribed Perfectionism and Perfectionistic Self-Presentation predominated for the maladaptive perfectionists due to their many references to comparisons with the work of their peers, the expectation of parents and teachers that they produce strong outcomes, and their persistent shyness and struggles with self-confidence in participating in class discussions and presentations.

   Four out of the five members of the maladaptive group were very candid and up front about their lack of social confidence and shyness. One of the five, Robb, stood out in particular for the brevity of his responses and readily admitted that he was very shy, and that teachers were often telling him he needed to speak up more frequently. "I have two friends," "I didn't really want to go to school," "I'm not really social," "I am really quiet," Robb said. Brienne said, "I am definitely not in the popular group." Ned said, " I usually sit by myself," "I don't have any best friends." "I don't usually raise my hand. I doubt myself."

Robb recalled that he disliked his first year of school until "the end of the year," when he spoke of meeting a new friend and from then on, it "got easier" to go to school. Robb was very aware that others perceive him to be very quiet, but did not describe or explain his perceived shyness as being the result of stress or worry over what others thought of him or fears about his performance. He said:

I think I am a mixture of an athlete and a scholar because I really try to do well in school and spend a lot of time with that, and I also do athletics. I'm not really social. I don't talk a lot, I am really quiet. My friends are always saying, 'You are so quiet. You need to be more social with other people.' (Robb)

Ned specifically stated that he doesn't like teachers always trying to urge him to participate more often. He said,

I don't like the social aspect. The whole making new friends thing. I don't like it on PowerSchool (the school's web-based grading and progress reporting system) where it says that I need to get out of my shell and get more involved. I really don't like changes. (Ned)

That played out in a different way for Sam. His lack of self-confidence meant that he was frequently unable to advocate for himself and seek out the support of his teachers when he needed to do so. Last year, Sam received high honors for the very first time. He described great pride in that accomplishment, and said his parents seemed very proud as well. He said that he put his certificate on his bulletin board and looked at it every day with the goal of working hard and trying to repeat the accomplishment. Sam's first interview fell just after the ranking quarter had ended. He said that he did not make high honors and received an 89 in social studies (the cut off for high honors is 90 or above in

every subject). As Sam continued to refer to his grades and achievement throughout his interviews, it became apparent that he held a strong conviction that his final grade would reflect his level of effort, and that his teachers would observe that. He said, "It's not just what your grades are, it is how hard you tried too. I really worked hard on it." But, when Sam was asked if he had discussed his grade or gone to his teacher to ask about his progress, or discuss specific assignments at any time, Sam offered various excuses as to how he forgot and then said, "There is not really anything that I can do. It is what it averaged out to and stuff." His teacher was very concerned by the fact that Sam had multiple opportunities to finish the one assignment that negatively impacted his grade. He was given as much as two weeks of extended time to complete it, and despite multiple reminders and urgings, Sam never handed it in, and never asked for help or even indicated that he needed it.

Finding B. Maladaptive perfectionists frequently compare and gauge their level of success in relation to that of their peers.

Conceptual Framework:

Interpersonal Domain: The strong level of focus displayed by the maladaptive participants on gauging feeling successful by comparisons of their outcomes with that of others sits squarely in the framework's interpersonal domain. Perfectionistic Self-Presentation or the need to appear to others as perfect accounts for their great sensitivity and self-consciousness about measuring up to the success they saw in their peers. They appeared to be dissatisfied with outcomes that did not measure up, even if evidence of quality work or personal growth was apparent. Furthermore, at least two members of the maladaptive group failed to complete or turn in work on certain occasions, and avoided

asking their teacher for help. One participant admitted that he turns his paper around so that others can see his results when they are good.

The participants scoring high for maladaptive perfectionism displayed a tendency to gauge their level of success and satisfaction with their work based upon the outcomes of their peers.   All members of the maladaptive group referenced the importance of recognition, or the approval of others when discussing their feelings of being successful. Ned was the only member of that group who discussed personal growth at the level of the adaptive group. The other four relied heavily on extrinsic indicators of success, specifically the approval or recognition of others. Robb said, " I feel smart during classes when I am with people, just in general, who are smart, because I feel like I fit in and I know what I am doing." Brienne stated, "When I got the 78 on the test, I felt very unsuccessful. I thought I was very smart and I just thought, then, that maybe I'm not. Other people around me were getting 100's and 105's. I just felt very sad." On another occasion, Brienne said:

> I know I set high goals for myself. Very high. And some people think they are
>
> too high. I set a goal of 97s in all my classes and I achieved that except for math,
>
> which was a 95. And so I felt bummed out about that. I think I need to work on
>
> being happy with that. A lot of people had 87s. I think I need to work on being
>
> OK with a 95. But, I do feel at my lowest point when I get a bad grade, when I
>
> get below a 90. (Brienne)

Sansa's view also echoed the other group members and stands out because she called this behavior, "a problem." She said, "I have this problem. I always compare my scores or times with someone else who is a lot better. I have to improve so that I am

getting to their ability to feel satisfied." When asked at the focus group about the school's honor recognition ceremonies and her thoughts, Sansa said:

> I feel most smart when I am recognized for one of my achievements academically because then everyone knows how you did and what it was that you achieved. It's a nice thing to have. It's nice to let everyone know. It makes the person feel good about themselves. (Sansa)

Of the maladaptive perfectionists, one student of the five stood out due to the frequency of instances in which he specifically discussed an evolution in his attitude about his performance: away from one reliant on comparisons to his peers and on the recognition or approval of others. Ned explained, "I used to be really concerned about what other people thought about me. And I guess I still sort of do, but not as much as before. I prefer to think that it doesn't matter what other people think of me. " While the other four participants mentioned personal growth and satisfaction with their performance in terms of personal growth once or twice, Ned's responses indicated that perspective in eight instances, aligning him strongly with the perspectives frequently mentioned by the adaptive group. Ned later added, "I feel smart when I get a test back and get a good grade or that I did something well today. Feeling smart is your own personal feeling, not somebody else's." When questioned further as to how he came to feel this way Ned responded:

> I used to think that I was not smart because others finished more quickly. My teachers told me that I was in the top percent in my class and that they had other children who thought that they were not smart because they were slower when really they were at the top of their class. (Ned)

While Ned's remarks show strong evidence of a changing perspective about himself as a learner, he was not totally free of the attitudes that are mentioned by all of the other students when discussing their grade performance.

That's one problem I feel people have. The numbers, on paper, are more important than how successful they feel. But, I would feel very upset with a bad grade also. I would feel not successful. And I do believe that is a problem that even I experience. (Ned)

Finding C. Maladaptive perfectionists are highly concerned with their relationships with their teachers and their perceptions about their teachers' feelings for them, as those students view this as integral to their academic success.

Conceptual Framework:

Interpersonal Domain: Socially Prescribed Perfectionism is strongly aligned with the finding because the maladaptive participants expressed a strong need for teacher approval, and evidence that their teacher liked and cared about them. They also expressed a strong need to appear as smart and outstanding students, and needed teacher validations of that. Equally important to them was the need for teachers to recognize other personality traits in them such as kindness. Other-oriented perfectionism was also indicated by references to the need that their teachers also display those characteristics.

The five maladaptive perfectionists frequently mentioned the importance of a teacher's getting to know a student and establishing a personal relationship.   The teachers' personalities and the amount of personal attention they devoted to the participants were mentioned more than twice as frequently by the maladaptive

perfectionists than all of the participants combined. Those students believe that attention is essential to their achievements.

Sansa discussed her relationship with her teachers on numerous occasions. In one example, she said:

> I would like them to know that I get very stressed so they would know not to really push due dates with me. I don't need to hear that over and over. Just put it on the board. I want them to know me and know that I am kinda [sic] sensitive so if they change their tone and it is firm, I am really sensitive and I would just walk out of the room with my face really red. (Sansa)

Brienne said, "Last year my math teacher helped me a lot. She gave me lots of extra help and I felt very comfortable with her. She understood me and I did well in her class."

Ned makes the point that he felt more confident when he learned that his teacher understood that he was very smart even though he worked very slowly. "It felt good to know that. Even though my brain works slower than others, it is still more accurate." Sam said that he did very well last year because, "all the teachers on my team were very nice and could understand me. They really got to know me."

Ned recalled his second grade teacher as a particular favorite because she made writing fun, and helped him to enjoy writing stories, a pastime that was still important to him. Making Ned feel special and successful as a student, however, was the real gift of her teaching, enough so that Ned felt, five years later, the effect that teacher had upon him. Ned said:

Although she was strict and made you do a lot of work, her goal was that we

would have fun with the work instead of just doing it and learning stuff. Before, I

didn't know why I was doing the work. I just did it. She made the work fun and

she taught me about writing and how to improve. I remember that I had written

a piece that I didn't think was that good, but she said that it was good and she

wanted to use it as an example for classes in the future. I asked why, and she

said I was one of her best writers. Before then, I was writing things that were

true and now writing seemed fun to me. She didn't just teach me to try hard, she

taught me to have fun with what I am doing. She is probably one of the reasons I

am trying hard today. (Ned)

The maladaptive perfectionists desire teacher feedback that validates their work,

and the knowledge that their teachers approve not only of their work, but of them.

Although they also need feedback that will help their learning, they need to know that

their teacher is personally invested in them.

Finding D. **Maladaptive perfectionists display a strong need to be seen as**

empathetic and caring, the more emotionally based non-cognitive traits.

Conceptual Framework:

Interpersonal Domain: Perfectionistic Self-Presentation is highly aligned to the

finding due to the maladaptive perfectionists' high level of focus upon the nature of the

opinions that others held of them. They exhibited a strong need to be liked, and to be

recognized as "nice," "kind" and "friendly." Four of the five also described their

cognitive abilities using the words "smart," "intelligent" and "overachiever." Although

those perceptions were an important intrapersonal aspect for them, their satisfaction or

validation that those qualities existed within them came from recognition of the traits by others.

The maladaptive participants said that they were nice, kind, caring and empathetic. But much as they strive to be seen as caring and friendly, their shyness is a frequent barrier to interaction with their peers. As Brienne said, "I wish that people would know that I am a caring person. I like being caring. It makes me sad not to be called out for that award." Rob said, "I want my classmates to know that I am able to help if they are having trouble with things that I understand really well."

As Brienne, Ned and Sansa have all described, they are very uncomfortable with presentations and speaking before their classmates, and Robb describes himself as very quiet and shy. Sansa said, "I don't like presenting, but I like making the presentations." Ned, who self describes as very shy, said "I am incredibly nervous when I am doing presentations in front of classmates. I usually always slip up when I am doing them. What is being shown on the screen is perfectly fine. But the way I am wording it and being way too quiet is what always happens. I am just nervous talking in front of people."

Brienne commented on the attitudes of others about her on eleven occasions during her interviews, more than any other participant. One of her comments stood out because in an earlier interview she had described her feelings about her own appearance. Brienne is very slender, almost frail in appearance, however she had described herself as "not one of the thinnest and not one of the prettiest." Brienne was the only participant to discuss her self-image and compare her appearance and popularity with that of others. She said:

A lot of the popular girls are dating the popular boys. And then there's also the group I feel very bad about. They aren't the smartest and they are a little heavier than other people. I think they are left out a lot of the time and a lot of people will snigger at them if they make a mistake or they will say, 'Look at what she's wearing.' I try hard not to, I haven't always been my nicest with them or with other people, but recently I have tried hard to include them and to be nice. I don't mean pity, or so it's noticeable, but I try to go out of my way to be extra nice to them, to include them. (Brienne)

Table 4.7 displays words that the maladaptive perfectionists used to self-describe. Being nice, caring, friendly and empathetic, were characteristics that they valued in others, and in particular in themselves. They expressed a strong desire for others to appreciate these qualities in them as well.

Table 4.7: Maladaptive Participant Self-Described Characteristics

Question: What are five words that describe you?	
Maladaptive Group	
Robb	Smart, nice, enthusiastic, cooperative, fun, friendly, happy
Brienne	Caring, kind, intelligent, reader, animal lover
Ned	Hard working, nice, perfectionist, overachiever, perseverer
Sam	Considerate, responsible, athletic, caring, passionate
Sansa	Ambitious, athletic, empathetic, friendly, intelligent, sensitive

Summary

The findings of this study were grouped into three categories: findings for all participants, findings for adaptive participants and findings for maladaptive participants. Each of the findings is regarded as significant in its contribution to answering the

research questions of this study that follow from the overarching question: What is the nature of perfectionism, both adaptive and maladaptive, as experienced by middle school students and their concomitant perceptions about their academic achievement? More specifically, what are the traits of middle school students who are identified as demonstrating adaptive perfectionism and maladaptive perfectionism? How do middle school students who are identified as demonstrating adaptive or maladaptive perfectionism view their academic achievement? How do middle school students who are identified as demonstrating adaptive or maladaptive perfectionism perceive the impact of parents, teachers and peers on their academic achievement? The first two findings provide a broad swath of understanding about the perfectionistic perceptions and behaviors reported by the participants, which is further substantiated and nuanced by the other findings.

   The first finding was that all of the participants' views of their academic success were highly connected to grade outcomes, regardless of their perceived level of effort or learning. The second finding was that the maladaptive perfectionists indicated higher levels of distress for results that did not meet their high expectations than did the adaptive perfectionists. Another finding was that adaptive participants were highly focused upon their own achievements and self-improvement. Conversely, it was also found that maladaptive perfectionists focused upon comparisons of their achievements with those of others, and gauged their success based upon that of others. In convergence, those two findings emerged as the most significant for this study. They capture the essential distinction between the adaptive and maladaptive perfectionists.

This study found that eight out of nine participants who scored highly for perfectionism reported strong levels of concern, stress and anxiety about their achievements and displayed varying levels of successful management or struggles with coping skills. Only one participant did not refer to being stressed or anxious about grades or achievement, and emphasized that optimism and positive energy and attitude were very important to her. The other participants described, in findings regarding coping skills, using a broad variety of coping skills from self-talk, exercise, comparisons to others, taking breaks, letting go, breathing, and medication to relieve their stress. Some of those coping mechanisms were seen as adaptive, such as a focus on self-improvement and others, were maladaptive, such as comparisons to others and avoidance of asking for help when needed. Those behaviors were also accompanied by, or appear to be causes of, elevated levels of anxiety.

This study found that participants with higher achievement-test scores, particularly those who identified for maladaptive perfectionism, reported feeling anxious or stressed more frequently than other participants. Another finding was that the APS-R scores in the population for this study were proportionally similar to surveys in other studies administered to gifted populations.

This study also found that the beliefs the participants held about their parents' expectations for their achievements were high. Although the participants did not specifically say that they were feeling stress related to their parents, they described the importance parents held for their achievements, the expectations that they "do their best," and various parental actions such as rewards given for high achievement.

Two findings related to the students' teachers emerged. One was that adaptive perfectionists were strongly focused upon the nature and quality of their teachers' instructional and assessment strategies as necessary to their growth as learners. Maladaptive perfectionists were concerned about their relationships with their teachers, and with their teachers' feelings about them as students.

Findings related to non-cognitive traits and the adaptive and maladaptive participants indicated that all of the participants thought of themselves as intelligent, and displayed a strong need to be recognized as such by their teachers and peers. Levels of self-confidence, self-efficacy, motivation and resilience appeared to differ among the participants, and appeared to align with their perceived levels of stress.

This study was developed upon the foundation of prior studies. Based upon the findings of this study which have emerged from the data analysis, attention is now turned to interpretation of the findings, and on the data from which they emerged, using the conceptual framework to develop conclusions and identify implications. In addition, recommendations are proposed to provide positive benefits for students' current and future performances at an earlier age than had been explored in a majority of prior studies.

Chapter Five

An Exploration of the Findings as Guided by

The Conceptual Framework for Perfectionism
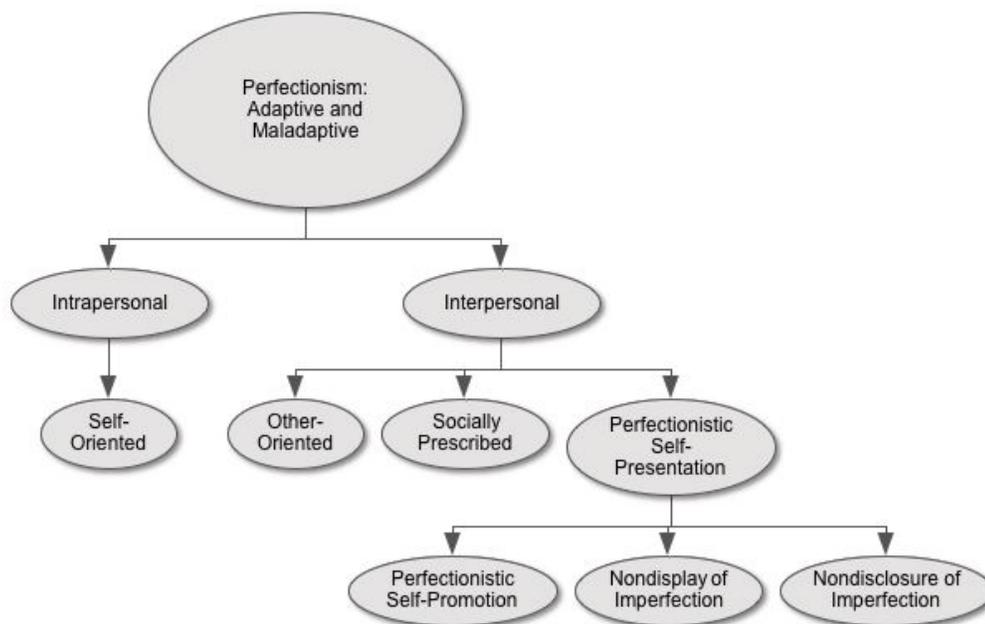
Figure 5.1 (Adapted from the research of Slaney et al., 1991; Hewitt & Flett, 1991; and Hewitt et al. 2011.)

In order to develop as full and rich an understanding and set of conclusions about the nature of perfectionism as it relates to middle school students identified as either maladaptive or adaptive perfectionists, this chapter is devoted to the analysis of the findings using the conceptual framework (Figure 5.1) designed for this study. The purpose of this study is to identify the traits of students who are identified as adaptive and maladaptive perfectionists, to understand how they view their academic achievements, and how they perceive the impact of parents, teachers and peers on their achievements.

The conceptual framework for understanding perfectionism was created to facilitate the analysis of patterns, relationships, comparability, and distinctions across the nine participant interviews and resulting findings.

The conceptual framework is particularly helpful to the understanding of perfectionism because of its multi-dimensional nature and the need to understand aspects of perfectionism shared by both adaptive and maladaptive groups, as well as behaviors or beliefs that separate the two groups. The framework is divided into expressions of perfectionism that are intrapersonal, perceived within the self, or interpersonal, perceived through or related to interactions with others. Through that lens, all of the participants exhibit some level of intrapersonal self-oriented perfectionism and also of perfectionistic self-presentation, the construct's interpersonal expression. Each of the findings of this study will be considered through the lens of that framework.

Intrapersonal Perfectionism: Self-Oriented

Self-oriented perfectionism, as described by Hewitt and Flett (1991), includes setting both high and exacting standards for oneself. It also entails the motivational aspect of avoidance of failure: when failure or the potential for failure arises, the perfectionist frequently experiences high levels of stress and anxiety. The more severe manifestations requiring clinical intervention include depression, anorexia nervosa, and sustained anxiety including panic attacks. All of the participants of this study held perceptions that displayed varying levels of self-oriented perfectionism, validating their survey-based identification. All of the participants held very high expectations for their achievements, which were most often expressed in terms of grade outcomes. The adaptive group, Jeff,

John, Kate and Arya, expressed those more frequently in terms of learning growth and applauded their high levels of effort and striving to "do their best." They demonstrate a strong internal locus of control in those strivings. The maladaptive group, Ned, Sam, Robb, Brienne and Sansa, also expressed expectations that were very high, but focused upon describing the levels of stress and anxiousness they experienced, as well as their progress, relative to that of their peers, a demonstration of eroding internal locus of control given over to more external aspects which are represented in the dimension of perfectionism referred to as perfectionist self-presentation (Periansamy & Ashby, 2002). While the adaptive participants described several healthy coping mechanisms such as physical activity, asking for their teachers' support, and "letting go," the maladaptive group was more likely to engage in behaviors that occurred because of their inability to cope. Brienne was hospitalized for anxiety. Sansa dreads swim meets because of her anxiety, and describes doing papers and projects over and over again, striving for the highest possible grade. Sansa's teacher described a recent achievement test that Sansa took in reading. The test typically takes between 45 minutes and one hour to complete. Sansa took four and a half hours to complete the test.

Not all of the striving to excel was discussed in terms of grades or excelling academically. The participants also described it when referencing behaviors such as organization and preparedness. Brienne claimed that she saw such behavior in her siblings and other students in the "gifted class." Jon, who is adaptive, admired it in his younger brother. At the beginning of his very first interview, Jon described himself as a perfectionist who came from a family of very competitive people that always strived to do its best. He described his brother when talking about success, comparing his brother's

level of success to his own, again displaying the self-oriented tendency of perfectionists to establish their own high standards in terms of others. Jon had also described his brother as more of a perfectionist than he was, one who often laid out his clothes for a sporting event days before it was to take place.

The participants, although quite similar in their desire to achieve outstanding academic and athletic outcomes, and admiring those qualities in others, display more diversity in the dimensions of their perfectionism when the interpersonal aspects of the framework, other-orientation, socially prescribed perfectionism and perfectionistic self-presentation, are considered.

Interpersonal Perfectionism: Other-Oriented

Other-oriented perfectionism is conceptualized as an interpersonal dimension of perfectionism. The behavior is indicated when a perfectionist expresses views about the expectations and capabilities of others. In other words, other-oriented perfectionists expect very high, and perhaps unrealistic, standards of others, just as they do of themselves. Criticism, blame and frustration with others' performance all stem from that perspective (Hewitt & Flett, 1991). When achievement outcomes are not as expected or required by the perfectionist, other-oriented perspectives can be a convenient coping mechanism.

The adaptive group never expressed concerns about how their peers perceived them. They did not make comparisons of their abilities to those of peers. They did, however, have opinions, some quite strong, about the work ethic or attitudes of peers, a perspective that falls into the category of other-oriented perfectionism. For example, Jeff said, "I'm a little mean when it comes to school sports. I don't try to be. But, I sorta have

to because I want everyone to do good. So, I try to be assertive and say, 'Come on guys, you gotta do this,' and not have that person over there fooling around and talking to others and not focusing." Jon said, "Well sometimes others don't want to put a lot of effort into something. You should always push to do something and sometimes others don't really understand that." And Rob, who is maladaptive, said, "I want my classmates to know that I am able to help if they are having trouble with things that I understand really well. I want them to know that they are not dumb and that really good students cannot understand things sometimes and not do well sometimes. I'm good at showing people how to do things."

Arya, who is adaptive, described the other-oriented focus she saw in peers when describing the difference between trying to do well simply to make high honors for the recognition from others, and trying to put forth one's best effort to improve and to learn. Arya said:

> For some people it is a title. And if they don't get it they say, "Well, OK, I'm stupid. I didn't make high honors, I'm so dumb." You can tell that some people do care more about the learning and say, "OK, how am I going to improve and make that next quarter?" Like you can definitely see who really does care about their learning and who just got high honors and says, "I'm all set, I'm smart." So there is that whole, yeah I made high honors and I'm one of the smart kids. (Arya)

Arya also recognized the more adaptive perspective when she described the downfalls of other-oriented perfectionism in terms of mindset, declaring that a more self-

oriented perspective is more personally productive than focusing on the progress of others.

The adaptive perfectionists made several statements about teacher behaviors that they felt were conducive to positive academic outcomes. For some, Arya and Jeff in particular, the more other-oriented aspects of their perfectionism were revealed when their performances did not excel. Arya criticized one of her teachers for insisting that she listen and "stop doodling" when Arya wanted to take notes, which meant she missed recording information that was on a later test. She also blamed stress over her homework load on her teachers' inability to organize and balance student work expectations evenly across the curriculum. Jeff remarked that if his foreign language teacher asked him about his disappointing grade on a test he would reply, "That's because you failed to teach me." The other adaptive perfectionists, Kate, did not exhibit other-oriented perspectives, and except for the one occasion when Jon expressed views about the academic efforts of his peers, both he and Kate appeared to be strongly focused upon their own achievements. Although Kate admitted to some self-consciousness in the past over her height, she primarily applauded her current status of optimism, and took great pride in her achievement. Overall, the adaptive perfectionists maintain a strong internal locus of control.

The maladaptive perfectionists did not appear to engage in other-oriented perfectionism to the extent that some of the adaptive perfectionists did because they appeared to be primarily focused upon fitting in, upon measuring up to the level of others, and of needing the approval of their teachers. Those behaviors are identified as related to perfectionistic self-presentation and more outward, or external locus of control

features, in which they need the approval or validation by others in order to feel successful and capable.

Interpersonal Perfectionism: Socially Prescribed

Socially prescribed perfectionism involves the perceived need to attain standards and expectations prescribed by significant others, and includes the perception that others have unrealistic standards for them, may evaluate them stringently and may be exerting pressure on them to be perfect (Hewitt & Flett, 1991). Although more subtle than overtly stated, all of the participants described situations with parents, teachers, coaches or their peers where they believed that their best performance and outstanding outcomes were expected. Arya and Jeff, adaptive perfectionists, described the praise and attention that they received from coaches when they achieved an outstanding outcome in a race or scored in a game. They did not mention recognition for their efforts on other occasions. Arya, for example, described beating her race time and fainting after the race because she had put so much of herself into it. She remembered that it was the first time her coach praised her accomplishment by saying that he was proud of her. There is no evidence that their coaches were criticizing their other performances, it was that those students perceived that only outstanding outcomes got attention above the effort they exerted on any number of other occasions.

Sansa, a maladaptive perfectionist, believed that her father expected her to excel at swimming because of his refusal to allow her to "take a night off" like her friends were allowed to do. Sansa became highly anxious at her swim meets because of her own expectations for herself, as well as those of her father who also excelled athletically.

The participants all came from homes where a college education leading to a successful career was the expectation. On the surface, there is nothing wrong with such an expectation, but for many of the participants, the maladaptive group in particular, there was very significant concern and anxiety about failing to reach the best possible outcomes. Successful parents may unwittingly relay the message to their children that success is expected of them as well. Arya's parents were already taking steps to prepare her for acceptance to an elite college by planning to send her to an elite private high school. She was being tutored, during the time of this study, so that she could get "the best scores" on the entrance exams required by such schools. Brienne and Sansa come from homes where both parents are physicians with highly successful careers. By the end of their eighth grade year, Brienne, Arya and Sansa will have already taken the Johns Hopkins Talent Search SAT twice. Their parents pay for that testing, which is affiliated with the Johns Hopkins Center for Talented Youth Program.

The shyness and lack of social confidence seen in all of the maladaptive perfectionists in this study may be rooted in part by fear of not performing up to the standards of others. At school, that means teachers and peers. The students talked about not participating in discussions unless they were absolutely certain that their answer was correct. For Sam and Robb, both maladaptive perfectionists, it meant presenting a quiet façade of understanding and of being what they believed was the "perfect" student. It also meant great hesitancy about presenting any indication that such was not the case. For Sam, going to his teachers to ask for help when he was confused was unacceptable. According to the definition of socially prescribed perfectionism, that behavior would show him to be less than the "honor roll student" that teachers expected him to be.

The finding that maladaptive perfectionists are highly concerned with their relationships with their teachers, and their declared need for their teachers to have positive and approving feelings for them, aligns strongly with socially prescribed perfectionism. Those students said that it was important to their success, that indeed they were more successful in classes where they perceived that their teacher was kind, friendly, and made efforts to build a warm relationship with them. They placed far more importance upon receiving that approval, and of feelings that their teacher "liked them," than did the adaptive perfectionists. Conversely, therefore, they responded in the classroom, according to the definition of socially prescribed perfectionism, in ways that would avoid the disapproval of teachers and peers whom they perceived to hold high expectations of them, just as they did of themselves. That dimension of perfectionism would also explain why those students were socially uncomfortable and felt great anxiety about performing and presenting to a group, participating in class discussions, and leading or contributing to group collaborations. They feared that they would make mistakes, as Ned admitted, and also feared the resulting disapproval, real or imagined, that they anticipated from others.

Interpersonal Perfectionism: Perfectionistic Self-Presentation

Perfectionistic self-presentation represents a very powerful interpersonal expression of perfection strongly directed by an external locus of control (Periasamy & Ashby, 2002). Hewitt et al. (2011) explain the difference between socially prescribed perfectionism and perfectionistic self-presentation by describing people who identify for high levels of socially prescribed perfectionism as rejecting or rebelling against those expectations, whereas people who identify for perfectionistic self-presentation are driven

to appear to others as if perfect. The extreme of that is unrealistically presenting oneself as perfect, and possessing strong motivations to having others see only the perfect self. That is called perfectionistic self-promotion. Two further types of perfectionistic self-presentation include nondisplay of imperfection, which is the need to avoid showing a perceived shortcoming, not making mistakes in public, or hiding mistakes from others. A nondisclosure of imperfection identifies the need to avoid any mention or admission of mistakes, or of not speaking of, or revealing, problems or shortcomings to others.

The need to appear to be successful and of not revealing problems, as described by nondisclosure of imperfection, may be particularly confusing for parents and teachers. Arya's teachers, for example, were becoming increasingly concerned about Arya, an adaptive perfectionist. Arya recently incurred yet another concussion while ski racing. Her teachers had given her the time that she needed to recuperate, but were concerned because she was getting further and further behind on her homework, and her test scores had fallen significantly. Teachers found that behavior puzzling, unlike the Arya that they had known. She was not coming to them for help, and furthermore, she said she had it all "under control" and would get the work to them soon. Yet she failed to do so, and despite several modifications to the workload designed to quell her anxiety, she was falling even further behind, and her grades plummeted from As to Cs and Ds. While Arya and her teachers were focused upon her ski accident and concussion as the event leading to that situation, a review of her grades revealed that her dive began in late October, well before the first snowflake had fallen. Arya outwardly displayed all of the confidence of the adaptive perfectionist. She described herself as driven, but her most recent academic records looked more like Arya was drowning. Viewed through the lens of the conceptual

framework, her behavior as reported by her teachers, may best be characterized by a nondisplay of imperfection and nondisclosure of imperfection. Concerns had already been voiced by her teachers over the course of two years that the injuries seemed to be a troublingly convenient break from the anxiety and pressure to excel, a struggle that appeared to be at odds with Arya's need to project the image of success.

Aspects of perfectionistic self-presentation that involve presenting a façade or false front of perfection reveal that both the adaptive and maladaptive perfectionists are at risk of those tendencies manifesting themselves, and producing negative achievement outcomes. In other words, just as students who present as maladaptive are recognizing those aspects of themselves, and are making attempts to develop more adaptive habits, such as Ned or Brienne, so is it possible that adaptive students are equally vulnerable to maladaptive behavior where the balance of internal locus of control is given over to the external.

All of the maladaptive perfectionists' admissions and displays of social anxiety, shyness and reluctance to take risks or avoidance of situations with uncertain outcomes for fear of appearing imperfect are all identified with the nondisplay of imperfection dimension of perfectionistic self-presentation. For example, Brienne was ashamed to admit that she sometimes had unkind thoughts about others, particularly their appearance or lack of academic efforts. Brienne was highly focused on wanting to be seen as caring and kind. Behavior contradictory to that projection was difficult for her to reveal. That is reflective of nondisclosure of imperfection. That facet, as well as perfectionistic self-promotion, may also explain why most of the maladaptive group self-described traits of

friendliness and social involvement that belied their actual behavior and level of confidence.

All of the maladaptive perfectionists described wanting to be seen by others as friendly, nice, or caring. Robb and Sam, for example, said they wanted to help others who needed support in the classroom. Those traits were believed to be very important to the participants and they hoped to be perceived that way by others even though Robb and Sam were rarely, if ever, observed actually engaging in helpful interactions with their peers. Only Sam mentioned an instance, more than two years ago, of staying inside at recess to help a classmate with his reading. Ned may have revealed the most honesty in the group when he admitted that he knew that involving himself with others was important and was something he "needed to work on." The focus of the maladaptive group on needing to be seen as caring, kind, and empathetic could also explain why they did not make statements criticizing teachers or peers as compared to members of the adaptive group. The nondisplay of imperfection facet of the perfectionistic self-presentation style would, for them, be at odds with the style of other-oriented perfectionism, where criticism or blaming of others would be involved.

The exploration of the findings of this study through the lens of the conceptual framework of perfectionism supports several conclusions that provide answers to the research questions of this study. Perfectionism is multidimensional, and as the participants have revealed, very complex, and sometimes very contradictory. Each of the participants revealed perspectives and behaviors that, according to the framework, demonstrated varying combinations of the facets of intrapersonal and interpersonal styles of perfectionism, no two just alike. Viewing the participants' perspectives and stories

through the lens of the framework also provides many possible explanations and insights

for their often confusing and contradictory behavior.

Chapter Six

Conclusions and Implications

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore perfectionism, both adaptive and maladaptive with a small group of adolescents in one middle school setting. Its design was guided by the constructivist paradigm (Creswell, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), which was to uncover as much as is possible about the participants' view of their school life through semi-structured interview questions to further understand the nature and impact of perfectionism on learning for those who indicate aspects of the trait as either strongly adaptive or maladaptive. This study supports more contemporary perspectives on student learning outcomes as being the result of both cognitive ability and an important array of non-cognitive skills and traits that many researchers are describing as equal, perhaps even more essential to student academic success (Brunello & Schlotter, 2011).

The overarching question, "What is the nature of perfectionism, both adaptive and maladaptive, as experienced by middle school students and their concomitant perceptions about their academic achievement?" is approached in this study by asking more specifically:

1. What are the traits of middle school students who are identified as demonstrating adaptive perfectionism and maladaptive perfectionism?

2. How do middle school students who are identified as demonstrating adaptive or maladaptive perfectionism view their academic achievements?

3. How do middle school students who are identified as demonstrating adaptive or

maladaptive perfectionism perceive the impact of parents, teachers and peers on their academic achievements?

In this chapter, each of these questions will be answered and conclusions drawn based upon prior consideration of the associated findings. Conclusions are followed by a discussion of implications for educational practice, policymaking and further research.

Research Question #1: Traits of Middle School Students Demonstrating Adaptive and Maladaptive Perfectionism

Many characteristics of perfectionism have already been referenced throughout the discussion of adolescent perfectionists' views about their achievements. With care to discuss what this study has uncovered about the personality traits of perfectionists, it is important to clarify the distinction between what it was that students self-declared as traits or characteristics of their personality and what traits appeared to be demonstrated by what the students said as they discussed their achievements and told their stories. Attention to that distinction separates what actually exists for the participants as opposed to what they would like others to see. That distinction is the focus of more recent studies such as that of Hewitt et al. (2011), which explored the traits emerging from the styles of perfectionism. The research of Hewitt et al. (2011) extends these understandings about perfectionism by insisting that *needing to be perfect,* as it has been broadly viewed and identified as self-oriented perfectionism, is different from *needing to appear to others as perfect*. In their research, needing to appear to others as perfect is called perfectionistic self-presentation. In 2003, those researchers developed and tested the Perfectionistic Self-Presentation Scale or PSPS to measure that distinction in children from eight to 17 years of age. Their findings support the contention that "perfectionistic self-presentation is a maladaptive personality or interpersonal style that is associated with negative or

maladaptive outcomes" (Hewitt et al., 2011, p. 128). Furthermore, those outcomes, left unchecked, can lead to eating, anxiety and/or depression disorders, suicidal behaviors, or achievement and relationship difficulties (Flett & Hewitt, 2002).

Peterson (2003) also supports the specific and special care necessary in studying perfectionism in adolescents as opposed to adults because of their investment in creating and maintaining the ideal public image which Peterson calls a "a façade of invulnerability" that is quite common among intellectually gifted youths and, indeed, is seen as one of the many hallmarks of adolescence. "It is not easy for them to reveal doubts, embarrassments, shame and feelings of awkwardness" (Peterson, 2003, p. 63). Although difficult, the students who participated in this research study frequently disclosed their feelings of stress, anxiety and vulnerability. For example, the adaptive group referenced stress on 32 occasions and the maladaptive group 29 times over the course of their interviews. Some of the contexts for those feelings were: friendships, busy schedules, tests, homework load, peers' opinions, making mistakes, personal appearance, their grades and comparisons to peers' grades, athletic competitions, presentations in front of others, pleasing their parents and teachers' instructional styles. Respect and trust built during the interview process is credited for many revelations made by the participants, particularly the maladaptive participants who were far more guarded and shy during the group sessions when they met with peers. Furthermore, although the maladaptive perfectionists self-described as friendly and caring, and only two of those five described being shy or said that others described them as shy, all five members of the group were observed on multiple occasions to be serious of demeanor, quiet, and nervous or ill at ease in front of others. They all admitted that they were nervous during

presentations, one admitting to being "incredibly nervous," and saying that their discomfort affected their performance during presentations. One student noted that his voice became almost "a mumble."

When viewed collectively, several findings emerged from the data related to the traits of adaptive and maladaptive perfectionists. First, all of the participants described a strong need to be perceived as intelligent or "smart" by their peers and or teachers. That is, some of the participants specifically used the word, "smart," while others self-described as "intelligent" or "overachiever." Regardless of those self-declared beliefs about their cognitive ability, it was their stories that revealed their true perspectives, views that have already had an impact on their achievements, and have the potential of making further, long-lasting impact upon their academic outcomes. The adaptive perfectionists, who also described themselves as hard-working and driven, revealed themselves to be strongly focused upon mastery, on growth as a learner, and upon a strong belief that effort equals strong outcomes and improvement. The maladaptive perfectionists also wanted to be seen as "smart," yet they were focused upon grades as proof, and believed that a low grade proved, as Brienne stated, that perhaps, they were not smart. They failed to take risks, because if the outcome was not as hoped, or necessary to maintain the highest average, then they believed that "failure" showed then as not as "smart" as others. They were focused on their performance, and mistakes threatened their self-confidence because they believed that failures equaled lack of ability. Ned explained how he felt when other students finished before he did: that he had less ability. Although he understood that belief was not "accurate," he knew that he still struggled to escape its power to eat away at his confidence. He "holds back."

Many of the students, particularly the maladaptive perfectionists also appeared to have slightly misrepresented their levels of social confidence when gathering with their peers during breaks or at lunch. They called themselves "friendly" and "out-going," however, those same individuals appeared to be more quiet, slightly nervous and reserved during the discussions at the forum sessions, than portrayed in their interviews. When observed with their friends and in classes, they were similarly reserved. That misalignment of self-presentation with their descriptions during the interview sessions also aligns with theories of perfectionistic self-presentation as presented by Hewitt et al. (2011) and identified in the conceptual framework. In other words, the self-confident images that those students believed they projected to others were not in accord with the researcher's observations of their behaviors.

All of the participants either self-described traits related to perseverance or being a hard-worker, or revealed those characteristics through their stories. Such traits as perseverance, resilience, grit, self-discipline and self-efficacy -- also frequently referred to as non-cognitive traits when discussed in the context of educational achievement -- were both highly regarded and demonstrated by the participants. The importance of those traits to student success is strongly supported by researchers, including Duckworth and Seligman (2005), Dweck (2006), Heckman and Rubenstein (2001) and Tough (2012). Duckworth and Seligman, in a longitudinal study of 140 eighth graders, for instance, "found that self-discipline predicted academic performance more robustly than did IQ. Self-discipline also predicted which students would improve their grades over the course of the school year, whereas IQ did not" (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005, p. 942).

When confronted with mistakes, the adaptive perfectionists were seen to focus their attention on understanding and improvement. Arya, for example, described needing to understand concepts in a different way, and sought out her teacher's help on more than one occasion to understand her errors. She also requested test re-takes or the opportunity to show her new understanding. The maladaptive perfectionists, on the other hand, appeared to be predominantly focused upon their disappointment when grades were not as expected, and on the anxiety they experienced on a daily basis, as they strove to make top grades. They believed, as Ned, Brienne, Sam, Robb and Sansa all described, that bad grades were a sign of a lack of ability, that they worked very hard, and believed that taking longer than others or having lower results, showed that they were less "smart," an opinion that was very painful for them. Those views were observed and reported in the research of Carol Dweck (2008) whose theory of mindset explains the different perspectives of students. Dweck's research findings indicate that an open mindset, a mastery-oriented view that is embraced by adaptive perfectionists where challenges are energizing rather than intimidating, leads to stronger academic outcomes that are continuous. It also follows, that with such mindsets in place, adaptive perfectionists believe in their ability to improve, to expand their intellect. Students having open mindsets also display greater resilience, and are more willing to take risks academically and to persevere through tough problems. The maladaptive perfectionists, focused upon their presentation as "smart" and successful, are upset by failure, and fearful of engaging in challenges that might lead to such failures. They believe that their ability, their intelligence is fixed, and are therefore unwilling to embrace opportunities to improve when the work becomes challenging. To do so would represent a threat to their ego, and

thus they often miss opportunities to improve, which, ironically, also leads to a further erosion of confidence and motivation (Dweck, 2008; Mangels, Butterfield, Lamb, Good & Dweck, 2006).

Paul Tough (2012) theorizes that non-cognitive character traits are more important to success, or at the very least, as important as cognitive abilities. The students in this study all believed that those traits were important characteristics for them to have, however, the maladaptive participants appeared to be more inhibited in their ability to fully embrace and reap the benefits of those non-cognitive traits. For example, Robb, Ned, and Charlie reported that their lack of confidence lead to difficulties and hesitancy in participating in class discussions, taking active roles in collaborative group work, approaching their teachers when they had questions, and seeking help when they needed it. Behaviors that stem from self-confidence such as self-advocacy, effort and participation are viewed as important to academic success and are frequently part of academic assessments of learning. Traits such as self-confidence also have important implications for the achievement outcomes for those students, as research indicates that students who are perceived to seek help more frequently from their teachers achieve higher grades (Hattie & Yates, 2014; Ryan, Gheen & Midgely, 1997). It could be argued that those students have made good to strong progress academically in their educations. But can they sustain that progress when the rigor and load of the work increase in high school and college? Furthermore, how much further could maladaptive perfectionistic students progress if their beliefs about themselves as learners, and their non-cognitive characteristics, were more like the adaptive perfectionists?

Another finding was that adaptive perfectionists not only self-described as confident socially and academically, but also displayed those behaviors in their interpersonal relationships. Observations of their actual interactions with their peers and teachers showed that their perceptions, although strongly declared, were somewhat less evident in action by three out of the four adaptive perfectionists. The Peterson study (2003) noted that distinction as well: the façade of wanting to be perceived as confident as opposed to the reality of being less so. By comparison, the finding that maladaptive perfectionists are less-confident in social and academic settings, is more honestly shared because the participants described situations in which they felt uncomfortable and described being told they needed to participate more and "speak up" more. And yet none of the maladaptive group self-described as being shy or nervous or self-conscious.

Maladaptive perfectionists have a tendency toward other-oriented and socially prescribed perfectionism, are approval seeking, and describe themselves as empathetic and caring, the more emotionally based non-cognitive traits. That finding emerged both as self-declared traits that the participants identified, and also as traits that they identified as essential in their teachers for them to achieve and feel successful in their classes. Traits such as patience, kindness, caring, praise, fun and energy were mentioned by the maladaptive group on twenty-four occasions. The adaptive group identified those traits as important only seven times, in comparison. Also, the adaptive group never self-declared traits of kindness, caring, friendliness or being nice, whereas every member of the maladaptive group used at least one of those terms to describe themselves. That drive to be accepted, to be seen as having attractive or admirable qualities is also supported by the theory of perfectionistic self-presentation as viewed by Hewitt et al. (2011).

One trait that was observed in all of the participants was self-discipline. Many of the students described themselves as hard working, driven and responsible. All of them made schoolwork a top priority, did their homework, and strove to be well organized (or admired that quality in others). Those behaviors, representative of self-discipline, appeared to have counteracted many of the struggles that most of the students had encountered with anxiety and lack of self-confidence. There are strong correlations, as presented by Duckworth and Seligman (2005) that lead them to conclude:

> Highly self-disciplined adolescents outperformed their more impulsive peers on every academic-performance variable, including report card grades, standardized achievement test scores and attendance. Self-discipline measures predicted more variance in each of these outcomes than did IQ, and unlike IQ, self-discipline predicted gains in academic performance over the school year. (p. 941)

Therefore, if students with maladaptive perfectionist tendencies can be helped to develop their levels of confidence, to develop open mindsets, and to develop strategies to cope with stress and anxiety, seen as more adaptive traits, their future achievement in school and career development may also be enhanced.

Research Questions #2: Middle School Adaptive and Maladaptive Perfectionists' Views of Their Academic Achievement

Throughout the interview process, one of most striking impressions that developed of the nine, twelve-year-old participants was the intensity of their focus upon

their grades. Granted, in most schools, grades are an important process by which assessment of learning is communicated. However, time, effort, and the perceived level of learning appeared to be secondary to the grade outcome and its impact upon the students' quarterly average, and their need to achieve high honors along with all of the concomitant awards, rewards and recognition that would follow.

Along with that focus came hours of testimony to the anxiety and stress that students were experiencing in their efforts to achieve the very highest results possible. Some of the participants described coping and stress management skills that they were developing, and felt were proving to be successful in moderating their levels of anxiousness, while others identified it as a problem that they were not coping well with currently. One of the participants had adopted a "letting go" approach, and was attempting to discount and criticize the importance of grades and honor roll.

That finding has been noted in several other studies that have observed the overwhelming premise of success as defined by grades, test scores and references to student comparisons of results with that of their peers. Those researchers hypothesized that today's students place too much of their focus on the comparative markers that are indicative of success instead of viewing their education as a means to enhance their knowledge base, skills or level of learning (Hanchon, 2011; Harackiewicz et al., 1998; Shim & Ryan, 2005). Ames (1992) and Harackiewicz et al. (1998) also noted that the emphasis on grading and other performance outcomes means that there is a sacrifice of student awareness and ability to develop more intrinsically motivated achievements such as recognition of personal growth or improving upon the quality of their learning. Shim and Ryan (2005) state:

Students' responses to such information have implications for their subsequent learning and achievement. Performance feedback results in changes in students' motivation for, and engagement in future tasks. Generally, positive feedback boosts students' motivation, whereas negative feedback diminishes motivation. Although it is not surprising that motivation would decline when one receives negative feedback, this pattern is concerning. Losing confidence or interest and avoiding challenge when one does poorly undermine future learning and achievement. p. 333-334)

This study examined the responses of both adaptive and maladaptive perfectionists to questions about their views of their achievement. Their responses showed intriguing contrasts in their perspectives about their success as learners and their responses to the challenges involved in their demanding requirements for superior grading outcomes. Adaptive perfectionists reported that they were stressed about their grades, but they described great self-confidence that with strong effort and perseverance, they would continue to have great outcomes. They also expressed a strong desire to focus on their growth as learners, and when met by disappointing outcomes, they described their efforts to understand their mistakes, discussed their concerns with their teachers, and requested their teachers' time in helping them with alternative paths to understanding to improve their performance. Arya's explanation, for example, represented that attitude when she described approaching her science teacher when her test grade was lower than she had hoped, and asking him to explain certain material in another way so that she could understand it better. She reported being highly satisfied by the time and care her teacher took to help her and the success she felt in really understanding the material. She

then requested the opportunity to show her teacher her new understanding of the concepts. She said that she now repeated that tactic on a regular basis.

When they felt pressure with heavy workloads or tests, the adaptive perfectionists described healthy methods of creating balance and of lessening that pressure. Jon's explanation of his growing ability to calmly reassure himself that he was capable of finding good solutions when problem solving captured that perspective when he described his strategy of calming down, taking a deep breath, and approaching the challenge with a positive attitude. Those conversations showed a distinct contrast to those of the maladaptive perfectionists, who centered their discussions around feelings of pain when outcomes were not as hoped, and of anxiety, which then led to a variety of reactions, from the inability to participate effectively in groups or class discussions, or to conduct presentations successfully before an audience.

Maladaptive perfectionists also shared several instances of judging their own performance based upon the outcomes or comparisons with that of their peers. Brienne's comments about test results were very representative of these. She said,

> I feel successful when I get a good grade. I'm taking extra tests, STB, SAT and SCAT as part of the Johns Hopkins Talented Youths Program too. I feel great when I get a good grade or I hear that I got the highest grade on the test, I am very happy. I do feel at my lowest point when I get a bad grade. I think it's the grades when I get below a 90. I know some people are very smart and just don't get good grades on a test, like 87s. Also, that isn't all there is about it. One thing is being organized. I am getting better at that. A lot of people in the gifted

>program are very organized. My locker isn't really messy, but I do have a lot of
>
>papers. (Brienne)

While that urge to compare performance with that of others also occurred among the adaptive perfectionists, the instances were far fewer in number, and there were many indications that the adaptive group discussed performance comparisons in reference to their own prior performance rather than focusing on that of others. Those same distinctions have been noted in several other studies. In Hanchon's (2011) study using participants from The Citadel, the APS-R (Slaney et al., 2002) was also used to identify adaptive or maladaptive perfectionists, and then study the difference between the two groups related to their achievement goal orientation. Although the students were predominantly male, and the mean age of the participant was 20, eight years older than the participants in this study, some interesting parallels emerged. "Adaptive perfectionists showed a relatively healthy profile of functioning, characterized by the lowest depression, anxiety and self-esteem problem scores. Conversely, the maladaptive group reported significantly higher scores on these measures" (Hanchon, 2011, p. 484). Those findings corroborated other prior studies with adaptive and maladaptive perfectionists that used middle school participants. These include Accordino et al. (2000), Gilman and Ashby (2002) and Nounopoulos, Ashby and Gilman (2006). The Hanchon study also indicated that the adaptive perfectionists reported experiencing a higher confidence in their ability to complete academic work effectively. That group also reported fewer academic problems than the maladaptive group. Also noted, was a lesser desire among the adaptive group to engage in "face saving" behaviors.

The maladaptive group also reported the higher level of psychological symptoms. In other words, the maladaptive perfectionists' tendency toward comparisons and their concerns about their performance with respect to that of others had significant negative effects upon their academic outcomes (Hanchon, 2022). That tendency toward a focus on the performances of others relative to one's own or of feeling pressured to produce or being judged by others is also what Hewitt and Flett (1991) refer to as either Socially Prescribed or Other-Oriented Perfectionism. Their research indicates that perspective engenders behavior that result in less successful achievement outcomes than those of the adaptive perfectionists. Although the maladaptive perfectionists in this study indicated very strong academic GPA results, the crystal ball, as indicated by research study with the two groups, predicts a stronger possibility for less than optimal educational results for the maladaptive group than for the adaptive perfectionists. "Extant research among children has found that the discrepancy between high personal standards and perceived performance is a significant contributor to psychological distress (including depression and anxiety) and poor psychosocial functioning" (Nounopoulos, Ashby & Gilman, 2006, p. 614).

Patricia Schuler (2000) also reported the following themes emerging from her mixed-methods study of 112 gifted adolescents: Adaptive perfectionists use phrases such as "organized," "personal best," and "trying your hardest." They avoid stress by developing order and organization in their lives, remaining focused on improvement, and striving for that personal best. Schuler saw the following themes emerging from the identified maladaptive group which she labeled "neurotic," a label that was commonly used among researchers fifteen years ago: high concerns for making mistakes; a need to

re-do work; seeing mistakes as failures (not opportunities to learn); avoiding

embarrassment or humiliation by not taking risks; sensitivity to others' reactions; and a

high focus upon levels of stress or anxiety. In this study, all five members of the

maladaptive group expressed those concerns multiple times, including revelations of their

focus upon the outcomes or reactions of other students. The adaptive group, in contrast,

was focused upon their own performances and did not exhibit patterns of thinking about

or comparing their outcomes to those of their peers, which also aligns with Schuler's

findings.

Like the Schuler (2000) study, this study used a survey for the purpose of

identification of adaptive and maladaptive perfectionists for an interview study. (Schuler

used an adaptation of the Frost (1990) scale.) While Schuler's study involved gifted

adolescents, the participants of this study were taken from survey results of the entire

class. It is interesting to note that very similar proportions of students show adaptive,

maladaptive and non-adaptive outcomes between the participants in this study and the

students identified as gifted in the Schuler study. It was not the purpose of this study to

compare populations of perfectionism, e.g., perfectionism in the gifted vs. non-gifted

students. Neither did the study compare the results of using different scales to measure

perfectionism. Therefore that finding did not emerge in the analysis of interview data. It

appeared only when the findings had been identified, and the literature revisited for

corroborating, conflicting, or new insights. It is important because it supports that the

student perspectives, both adaptive and maladaptive, as revealed in the Schuler study, are

particularly aligned and confirmed by the interview transcripts of four members of this

study, the students with OLSAT SAI scores of 130 or higher. It is also important to note

that, whether gifted or non-gifted, adolescents from each group in both studies have similarly aligned perspectives. Table 6.1 reports the scoring outcomes in both studies.

Table 6.1: Perfectionism in Adolescents from Surveys of a Gifted Student Population and a General Population

Group	Adaptive	Maladaptive	Non-Adaptive
*Gifted Students N=112 (Schuler study, 2000)	65 (58.%)	33 (29.5%)	14 (12.5%)
General Population Study N=115 (This study)	64 (55.7%)	33 (28.7%)	18 (15.7%)

*Schuler (2000)

The findings for this study indicate that both the adaptive and maladaptive perfectionist participants reported high stress and anxiety in several instances throughout their interviews. That was noted multiple times for both the adaptive group and for the maladaptive groups. Individually, the reports ranged from one participant referencing stress on one occasion to another participant referencing stress on thirteen occasions. What is also indicated was the difference between the two groups as to how they viewed stress, and how they managed it with a variety of coping skills. For some, it was seen as an asset. As Ned had said, being stressed was no excuse and he felt better just buckling down and doing the assignment. For Brienne, however, the stress became so difficult, that when she got a test back with a grade lower than what she had hoped for, she left her classroom in tears. She described the pain as worse than when she broke her arm.

While the maladaptive perfectionists were focused upon their distress with grading outcomes that did not meet their expectations and of comparing their results with others, members of the adaptive group described tackling their stress and using that

energy to stay focused on the task, enjoying the challenges, and of letting go of stress when there was nothing to be done about it. Those findings are consistent with several studies such as Blankstein, Dunkley and Wilson (2008), Chan (2009), Chang (2006), Eum and Rice (2011), Mills and Blankstein (2000), Pescheck and Otto (2008), Stoeber, Feast and Hayward (2009), Stoeber, Stoll, Bieling, Israeli and Anthony (2004). Eum and Rice (2011) state:

> Adaptively perfectionistic students endorsed approach goals over avoidance goals and emphasized mastery over performance. Adaptive perfectionists were more likely to endorse intrinsic than extrinsic motivation for learning and to express interest in making the most they can out of achievement situations. In contrast, maladaptive perfectionistic students tended to endorse goal orientations consistent with fearing failure and concerns regarding their adequacy in mastering material…Perfectionistic students emphasize different approaches to learning. Adaptive perfectionists appear interested in learning for learning's sake and, although they may desire a positive outcome, that does not appear to be their primary goal. Maladaptive perfectionists appear to be more concerned with making good impressions, not betraying their inadequacies and fearing failure. Also, although they may desire high grades, it is likely they will be dissatisfied regardless of performance outcome. (p. 174-5)

Research Question #3: Middle School Adaptive and Maladaptive Perfectionists' Perceptions of the Impact of Parents, Teachers and Peers on their Academic Achievement

Parents. The participants in this study all spoke of their parents as being highly supportive, involved and interested in their education and in their educational outcomes.

As they described their views about their achievements, all of the participants shared accounts showing sometimes very subtle, yet significant parental actions or behaviors that signified the importance of school and strong academic performance to their children. That emerged as a finding of this study, and is approached here as its own distinct analytic category.

The only discrepancy seen between the two groups was that the maladaptive participants mentioned their parents' reactions to their performances more frequently than the adaptive group. Those reactions were not revealed to be negative, and were described in terms of encouragement or concern and not criticism. Four out of five maladaptive students also mentioned trying to please their parents with strong achievement outcomes. Sam talked about his father's pride as Sam witnessed him talking to others about Sam's high honors certificate. Brienne talked about her parents always saying she should "just do her best." Sansa complained that her father never let her take a night off of swim practice. And Robb explained that he wanted his parents to know that he was "really trying hard to please them."

The adaptive participants described achievement and parental interactions in a slightly different way. They did not talk about trying to please their parents, but they did talk about challenges, competitions and rewards. Jon said that whenever his family got together they were all high-energy and their competitions were intense, but playful. Kate spoke of family dinners out and trips to the bakery when she got high honors. Jeff and Arya mentioned their parents as being involved and supportive, but they never mentioned their striving for high achievement as something they did to please their parents.

The literature on the effects of parental attitudes and control on their perfectionistic children and their achievement primarily involve quantitative study with surveys and questionnaires. Ablard and Parker (1997) studied those relationships in academically gifted students who were eligible for the Johns Hopkins Talent Search along with their parents. McArdle and Duda's study (2004) examined whether talented young athletes could be differentiated with respect to their perceptions about their parents' values, attitudes and practices, and, if distinguished, did students differ in their perfectionistic tendencies, goal orientation and motivation? Soenens et al. (2008) conducted a longitudinal study of 10th through 12th grade students in Belgium, administering parent surveys and student questionnaires over a period of three years. Findings in those studies report connections between maladaptive tendencies and depression in students whose parents exerted psychological control. In the Soenens study, the maladaptive tendencies appeared to grow in students whose parents continued to promote a controlling environment. That finding was modified when interventions, such as counseling, were introduced. The finding supported the malleability of the trait of perfectionism, that it is a personality feature that can be affected by social-contextual influences, rather than existing as a fixed trait. That also suggests implications for this study in terms of school and home interventions that can help maladaptive perfectionists become more adaptive. All three of the studies support the conclusion as described by Soenens et al. (2008), "Adolescents from psychologically controlling homes become increasingly self-critical, doubting, and concerned with failure. Such a maladaptive perfectionist orientation, in turn, makes them vulnerable to increasing experiences of depression" (p. 473).

All the adaptive perfectionists and one of the five maladaptive perfectionists in this study did not report concerns, or indeed even mention that their parents were worried about their achievements. Their desire to excel appears to be intrinsic, and they reported being challenged and enjoying challenge in their learning. Both of those perspectives are supported by Ablard and Parker (1997) in their research, and are consistent with other research that has followed (McArdle & Duda, 2004; Soenens et al., 2008) stating that many parents of the academically talented support their children's challenge-seeking and intellectual development, but do not typically pressure their children to excel. Thus it follows that many adaptive perfectionists are highly motivated to succeed and have strong achievement outcomes that are fueled by their own motivation and willingness to be challenged, to see failure as opportunity, and to focus on their growth as learners. That outcome is, at least in part, the result of having parents who have similar attitudes and who are learning oriented and not performance oriented, a finding also supported by Neumeister et al. (2009).

Teachers and teaching practices. Adaptive perfectionists are highly focused upon the relationship between their teachers' instructional and assessment strategies and their academic success. That finding resulted from identifying 67 references to teacher behaviors when all participants were talking about their achievement outcomes. While the maladaptive group referenced instructional and assessment strategies on thirteen occasions, the adaptive group mentioned those issues 23 times, almost twice as frequently. The maladaptive group was focused upon their teachers' level of kindness, praise for their efforts, their level of fun, energy and the efforts the teacher put forth to develop a relationship, or really get to know their students on a personal level. They

mentioned such behaviors 24 times, while the adaptive group mentioned them on only seven occasions. The difference in the way the two groups gave importance to the relationship issue was particularly striking. The maladaptive group mentioned it 12 times while the adaptive group did not mention it at all. That finding is well aligned with previously discussed findings and research indicating that maladaptive perfectionists are deeply concerned about the opinions that others hold of them, of their need for approval, and of their desire that they be understood as learners. That finding also aligns with prior studies that have shown adaptive perfectionists to be very mastery-goal oriented, and interested in the quality and depth of their learning. Thus they are very attuned to all of the classroom effects that lead to their success as learners.

The participants shared multiple stories about teachers who motivated and inspired them as learners. They described specific skills and teaching practices they liked, and how those helped them to succeed as learners. Studies support that when students are asked about their expectations for their teachers, they are very clear and specific about what works best for them (Sullivan, Clark & O'Shea, 2010). They were also very honest about what didn't work. Jeff, for example, discussed the need for teacher feedback several times, but he also made clear that the feedback should be non-critical and that it should be supportive, and focused upon specific actions that will help students to improve their understanding. He said:

> Some teachers will say, "No that's not right. Why aren't you doing this?"' I don't like mean teachers. That just doesn't help. Why do you go through twelve years of school and twelve years of college to come here and be mean to people? There's other things to be. Be a drill sergeant. (Jeff)

Tables 6.2 and 6.3 further support those conclusions by representing the evidence of teacher behaviors reported by students as influencing their success as learners reported earlier in Table 4.5. Table 6.2 displays mean scores for frequency of response by both adaptive and maladaptive perfectionists, and Table 6.3 shows discrepancies in mean scores in order of magnitude indicating which teacher behaviors are reported *most* frequently by each group.

Table 6.2 Frequency and Nature of Student Described Teacher Behaviors Supporting Academic Success with Mean Scores

Participant	Note taking Study Skills	Teacher Feedback	Challenge	Patience Kindness or Caring	More Discussion Student Led	Recognition and/or Praise	Less Homework/ Coordinating Assignments	More Response Time	Personality: Fun, Energetic	Motivating	Personalized attention	Formative Assessments: Pre-tests and	Change Grading Sys.	Opportunity to re-take tests	Develop Relationships
							Adaptive Perfectionists								
Jon	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kate	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	2	1	1	1	0	1	0
Jeff	0	3	1	1	2	1	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
Arya	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	0
Totals	1	3	2	1	4	3	4	1	3	1	4	1	0	2	0
Mean A	.25	.75	.50	.25	1.0	.75	1.0	.25	.75	.25	1.0	1.0	0.0	.50	0.0
							Maladaptive Perfectionists								
Robb	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Brienne	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	2
Ned	0	1	1	2	0	1	0	0	2	0	1	0	1	0	2
Sam	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2
Sansa	1	1	0	1	0	2	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	4
Totals	1	2	1	3	0	6	2	0	4	1	4	0	1	1	12
Mean M	.20	.40	.20	.60	0.0	1.2	.40	0.0	.80	.20	.80	0.0	.20	.20	2.4

Clear columns = Instructional and assessment strategies / Shaded columns = Teacher personality and personal attention/relationships

Table 6.3 Order of Magnitude for Discrepancy between adaptive and maladaptive perfectionist student reported teacher behaviors supporting their academic success

Teacher Behavior	Discrepancy: Mean A-Mean M In order of Magnitude	Group with greater mean frequency of comments
Developing Relationships	-2.40	*M
Recognition and/or Praise	-0.45	*M
Patience, Kindness or Caring	-0.35	*M
Change of Grading System	-0.20	M
Personality: Fun, Energetic	-0.05	M
Note-taking, Study Skills and Presentations	0.05	A
Motivating Prizes	0.05	A
Personalized Attention	0.20	A
More Response Time	0.25	A
Formative Assessments: Pre-tests and Study Guides	0.25	A
Challenge	0.30	A
Opportunity to Re-take test	0.30	A
Teacher Feedback	0.35	*A
Less Homework/Coordinating assignments among teachers	0.60	*A
More Discussion, Student-Led or Centered	1.00	*A

*M: Represents the student described behaviors supporting academic success reported substantially more frequently by the participants who are maladaptive perfectionists than the adaptive perfectionists.

*A: Represents the student described behaviors supporting academic success reported substantially more frequently by the participants who are adaptive perfectionists than the maladaptive perfectionists.

Kate, on the other hand, remembered her second grade teacher, Miss Mills. Kate described how she entered her classroom as a new student in the mid-fall of that year. Kate recalled that her teacher already had a desk ready for her with books and new supplies waiting. She described her teacher as follows, "She gave me books. She got me

into reading. She learned about what I was interested in and found books on those things. She had reading contests and I was reading, like, three books a week. It was motivation."

Arya described how a teacher's engagement and motivation were important to her, as well as having the ability to make choices about what she would learn in her language arts class:

> Mrs. Craig is the definition of the perfect teacher for me. I just wanted someone who was nice and funny, but she definitely got me to push myself, to go above and beyond as much as I could. I loved the iSearch project, where I got to pick my topic and really get into researching something I was really interested in.
>
> (Arya)

Other teacher behaviors mentioned by the participants that supported their achievement (in no particular order) were: teaching students note taking and study skills; providing them with detailed and specific feedback that would help them improve (not just get better grades); providing students with choice and challenges; including more student involved discussions in classes; coordinating assignments and projects across teaching teams so that there would be consistency and balance; allowing more response time; providing motivating topics of study; giving motivating reasons to learn; providing more formative assessment, pre-tests and study guides; changing the grading system; and allowing opportunities to re-take tests to show improvement. Eight of the nine participants mentioned that they hoped their teachers would be kind and caring, would recognize their efforts and outcomes, would be fun and energetic and would develop strong relationships with them. And of course, they hoped for less homework.

For the participants, as Table 6.3 indicates, developing relationships, recognition and praise by their teacher and patience, kindness and caring were substantially more frequently reported as important for academic success by the maladaptive perfectionists. Teacher feedback, coordination of assignments, less homework and more student-led class discussions were seen as more important by the adaptive perfectionists than the maladaptive perfectionists.

In 2009, John Hattie (2012) first published his study of the impact of specific teaching strategies on student achievement. His research was "based on more than 800 meta-analyses of 50,000 research articles, about 150,000 effect sizes and 240 million students" (Hattie, 2012, p. 2). Three years later he increased this list to over 900 meta-analyses. He describes an effect size "hinge-point" of 0.40 as the point at which he believes a specific strategy or teacher behavior becomes significant and impacts outcomes for students and their learning. In looking at the influences mentioned by students participating in this study, all of the desired behaviors fell above the hinge-point of .40 in Hattie's study. Student expectations about their learning ranked as number one, with an effect size of 1.44 (Hattie, 2012, p. 266).

Hattie and Yates (2014) highly support the importance of student perspectives about what they need to be successful learners. They say the following about student expectations of their teachers:

> Students are well aware of the world beyond the classroom, and of the role played by their schooling in preparing for the future. Students value being helped to achieve independence and autonomy, and appreciate teachers who can connect the new with the familiar, can convey complex notions in simple terms, who

actively recognize that students learn at different rates, and need varying levels of guidance, feedback, and instruction. Such teaching has to take place in a climate of trust, affection, and fairness…the classroom represents both a place of mutual trust and a bridge to a successful future (Hattie & Yates, 2014, p. 31).

Hattie and Yates also recognized the distinction between mastery orientation and performance orientation in students, and emphasized the importance of teachers also recognizing that distinction. The study is supported by prior research, also endorsed by Hattie and Yates (2014), finding that students with a mastery goal orientation are more oriented toward learning new skills and becoming involved in tasks for reasons that involve understanding and acquiring knowledge, as is the case with adaptive perfectionists. Researchers, including Hattie and Yates (2014), also concur that orientation lies in direct contrast for students with a performance orientation, which is the goal to perform, look good, or otherwise outperform one's peer group. It is the orientation most frequently associated with maladaptive perfectionists. Thus one group is motivated to learn in order to gain deep understanding, and the other sees it as a means to prove their ability to others.

Peers. The participants of this study, although they leaned strongly toward one or the other of the adaptive or maladaptive orientations, did not always voice perspectives that were mastery-oriented or performance-oriented. For example, there are 11 instances by two out of four adaptive perfectionists for making socially prescribed or other-oriented remarks about comparing performance with that of others, or of viewing recognition or approval by others as important measures of success, in addition to their 24 instances of

focusing upon previous performance and personal learning growth. Conversely, while five out of five maladaptive perfectionists made 15 references to the importance or need for approval by their peers, four out of the five also spoke of personal growth in 11 instances. Hattie and Yates (2014) also support that finding, and caution that it is "simplistic to think of these as different types of students since the two orientations co-exist in all students. Since students are human, there is always an inevitable level of ego-based motivation" (Hattie & Yates, 2014, p. 30). There is also evidence among the participants of this study of change or evolution from a maladaptive orientation to a more adaptive one. Ned, in particular, noticed that he was in the midst of that issue, which for him could almost be characterized as a tug-of war. He saw the need and the value of a changed perspective. He credited teachers who had helped him to see himself as a successful and capable learner, and yet he said:

> My standards for myself are very high. I need to keep up my grades. I feel very unsuccessful when I don't [achieve above a 95]. Even though I have tried to let go of all that, from experiences with teachers in 2nd, 4th grade and Kieve [The Leadership School at Kieve, in Nobleboro, Maine], up to now, even though I have tried, it is very hard to stray away from that goal…Even though your friends feel that you have achieved, unless you feel it for yourself, then it doesn't matter at all. (Ned)

While the adaptive group reported that it was "nice" to be recognized in awards ceremonies in front of teachers and their peers, they didn't really need it, and it wasn't an important motivating factor driving their performance. For the members of the maladaptive group, recognition was critical. Equally critical however, was that they not

be seen as failing to excel. Hewitt et al. (2011) described that aspect of perfectionistic self-presentation as non-disclosure of imperfection. As Sam described, if he got a good grade, he turned his test paper around so that his classmates could see it. If he didn't understand directions in class, he hesitated to ask for help, even after class, and didn't turn in an important paper because he was unable to seek out his teacher's help. It was important for Sam to not be seen as someone who "didn't get it." Brienne was devastated and left the room when her emotions became strong in reaction to a score that was less than that of her peers on a math placement test. It was also important to "save face" and not been seen as upset by a disappointing outcome. For Brienne, her peers also included her twin brother and sister. All of her accomplishments were automatically compared to those of her siblings who set the bar for Brienne "because they are gifted." For Brienne, comparisons with classmates did not end with the dismissal bell, as they did with the other participants.

Summary of Conclusions

   Traits of Middle School Students Demonstrating Adaptive and Maladaptive Perfectionism. Based upon this study's findings related to the traits of middle school students identified as demonstrating adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism, the following conclusions have been drawn:

- Student attitudes and beliefs about their efficacy as learners and their ability to participate in a learning community are deep-seated and appear to influence their achievement outcomes and potential.

- Adaptive perfectionists display traits of perseverance, resilience and grit.

- Maladaptive perfectionists also believe in perseverance, resilience and grit, but their competing tendencies toward perfectionistic self-presentation including lack of self-confidence, may undermine their level of achievement.

- Adaptive perfectionists appear to be more confident than maladaptive perfectionists about self-advocacy, including asking for teacher help when they need it.

- Adaptive perfectionists frequently assume leadership roles in class discussion and collaborative activities with their classmates, whereas maladaptive perfectionists do not.

- Adaptive perfectionists are more confident and comfortable with presentations before their classmates.

- Maladaptive perfectionists are uncomfortable and lack confidence when conducting presentations before their classmates.

- Adaptive perfectionists present and self-describe as confident, social and extroverted and comfortable with taking academic risks.

- Maladaptive perfectionists are shy and lack social confidence and willingness to take academic risks, a behavior many researchers believe is motivated by their fear of being judged or perceived by others to be unsuccessful or lacking (perfectionistic self-presentation).

Middle School Adaptive and Maladaptive Perfectionists' Views of Their Academic Achievement. Based upon this study's findings relative to the views of middle school adaptive and maladaptive perfectionist and their achievement, the following conclusions have been drawn:

- Both adaptive and maladaptive perfectionists hold very high expectations for their achievement.

- Maladaptive perfectionists frequently have unrealistic expectations about their achievement.

- A school's culture supports grades and grading as an important signal to students of their ability and success as learners.

- Maladaptive perfectionist students' self-confidence and willingness to take risks is diminished because they are unwilling to take actions with uncertain outcomes that could negatively impact them, their grades, or other achievement outcomes.

- Many students, those with perfectionistic tendencies, maladaptive, in particular, judge their own performance in relation to their peers because grading outcomes are consistently made public by teachers, peers, and school honor assemblies.

- Adaptive and maladaptive perfectionists possess similar views about their achievement whether or not they are identified as gifted.

- Adaptive perfectionists focus on personal learning growth and challenge as a motivating factor while maladaptive perfectionists view their achievement in relation to that of their peers, and experience struggles to find successful coping skills for their anxiety and stress.

- Even though the participants were only 12 years old, they had already developed strong coping or avoidance habits. Stress and anxiety were beginning to have negative impacts upon some of the students, both adaptive and maladaptive, that left unchecked, may significantly impact their achievements in the future.

Middle School Adaptive and Maladaptive Perfectionists' Perceptions of the Impact of Parents, Teachers and Peers on their Academic Achievement. The following conclusions have been drawn from this study of middle school adaptive and maladaptive perfectionists' views about parental, teacher and peer impact relative to their achievement:

- Perfectionists' expectations for high achievement outcomes frequently appear to emerge from similar attitudes in their parents.

- Parents who are focused on supporting their children, encouraging them to seek challenge, take risks and remain uncritical about outcomes, are more likely to produce adaptive perfectionists.

- Maladaptive perfectionists frequently appear to worry about how others, particularly their parents, perceive their achievements.

- Students, when asked, articulate clear and specific beliefs about what they expect from their teachers.

- Adaptive perfectionists, seen as predominantly mastery goal oriented, focus strongly upon teacher effects that will help them to become more successful as learners.

- Maladaptive perfectionists, seen as predominantly performance goal oriented, focus strongly upon their need for teacher approval, recognition, relationship and understanding of them both personally and as learners.

- Although one orientation, either master or performance, predominates in students who are identified as adaptive or maladaptive perfectionists, both groups occasionally indicate both perspectives when discussing parents, teachers or peers.

- There is evidence in this study, corroborated by prior research, that malleability in students, and transition from maladaptive tendencies to more adaptive perfectionism is possible with appropriate support and intervention by teachers and parents.

- There is evidence in this study that just as maladaptive perfectionists may be supported in developing more adaptive behaviors, some perfectionists, when encountering stressful situations are vulnerable to the development of maladaptive behaviors.

Limitations of the Study

- *Generalizability* of the findings of this qualitative interview study beyond the setting of this middle school and the students in this sample is a limitation. Nevertheless, the perceptions of the students who were identified by the survey as either adaptive or maladaptive were highly consistent with those who were similarly identified in prior studies.

- *Age of the participants* selected for interview, from the APS-R (Almost Perfect Scale-Revised) (Slaney, Mobley, Trippi, Ashby, & Johnson, 1996), may impact their ability to fully and accurately articulate all of their perceptions about their perfectionism. Further concerns about age have been voiced in other empirical studies involving the use of the APS-R with younger participants since the scale was originally analyzed for reliability with college students. The conclusions of other studies indicate that although "the APS-R appears to be a very reliable measuring instrument" (Accordino et al., 2000, p. 544), further factor analysis with use of the APS-R scale with adolescents will provide support for delimitation. Other researchers have expressed a similar concern with this limitation in younger adolescents, but the focus is more to

the degree or the value of the APS-R cut scores in determining levels of maladaptive perfectionism and non-perfectionism. That concern may be sufficiently ameliorated by the methodology for this study because the APS-R is intended only as an identification feature leading to selection of candidates for interview study rather than factor analysis of the standards on the APS-R compared with other measures of perfectionism. "Although the psychometric results derived from several samples of adolescent APS-R data are quite strong in terms of reliability and validity, the downward extension of the measure to younger samples should be undertaken with caution" (Rice, Ashby & Gilman, 2011, p. 574-575). The APS-R is a 7-point Likert scale questionnaire designed to measure attitudes people have toward themselves, their performance and others (See Appendix B).

- *The demographics of the seventh grade class of 12 and 13 year old students in this study* are not typical of the student population of Maine. Except for the counties in the south coastal area of the state, Maine is among the most rural in the United States with 68.6 percent of its students enrolled in schools of fewer than 500 students (Maine Dept. of Education, 2014). The location of this study, however, is more typical of the suburban school populations in the United States. The Status of Education in Rural America Report (2007) indicates that over half of all the school districts in this country are rural, yet only 20 percent of all public school students are enrolled in schools classified as rural. The town where this middle school is located is within a thirty minute commute of two metropolitan centers that offer a plethora of opportunities for growth in education and recreation, along with labor markets for students and families. Additionally, the area's population almost doubles in the

warmer months due to its attractiveness as a coastal tourist destination. While the state has a student population that is 44.8 percent eligible for free and reduced lunch, the students in this study come from a school that reports a 19.4 percent eligibility (Maine Dept. of Education, 2014). While state graduation rates for the 2012-2013 year are 86.4 percent, the high school in the study's community reports a 92.2 percent rate, with strong post-secondary enrollment rates.

Implications

Based upon the conclusions of this study, the following implications for practice, policy and further research are indicated.

Implications for Practice

Schools can change students' beliefs about their ability to learn. Longitudinal studies such as Blackwell, Trzesniewski and Dweck (2007) suggest future negative academic impacts for maladaptive perfectionists if root causes for their anxiety are not addressed, and their performance-based perceptions about themselves as learners do not change. Recent studies inquiring into achievement motivation and the effects of supporting the growth of some of the variables that may positively influence academic outcomes such as student beliefs about their intelligence and self-efficacy show great promise. There is research confirming that students in their adolescent years who believe that their intelligence is malleable, hold more positive beliefs about effort, have less of a sense of helplessness, and respond to failure with specific efforts and strategies to improve. They show stronger academic outcomes that are sustained over time, vs. students who do not hold those beliefs (Blackwell, Trzesniewski & Dweck, 2007; Dweck, 2002; Mangels, Butterfield, Lamb, Good & Dweck, 2006; Tough, 2012). There

are strong findings reported by researchers that students can be taught brain theory and encouraged to believe in their self-efficacy, to notice results and gains, and thus to continue to build and benefit from a positive change momentum.

There are also strong indications that middle school is the perfect time and opportunity for students to become more adaptive, effective learners, just as it is also the perfect time for them to fall victim to maladaptive behaviors. Left unchecked, those negative tendencies can become habitual, and have long-lasting deficits. Adolescence, along with the tremendous changes and challenges that impact students at that time, is a turning point for them. Faced with more academic challenges and expectations for their future than they have previously experienced, they are also experiencing challenges to their abilities to cope, and for many, their first experiences with failure. Teaching students that intelligence is malleable, that it is not fixed and that it can be developed, is a step toward success in building those non-cognitive traits and beliefs that will help students to develop their self-confidence and abilities to persevere when faced with challenges.

 Paul Tough (2012) argues that teachers, parents and communities can intervene, and can improve outcomes for students by addressing non-cognitive characteristics in youth. He states that character traits, such as self-efficacy, resilience, self-confidence, and perseverance, for example, are not genetically programmed into humans, and that those traits, along with the belief about the malleability of intelligence, can be influenced. He states:

> The character strengths that matter so much to young people's success are not
>
> innate; they don't appear in us magically, as a result of good luck or good genes.

And they are not simply a choice. They are rooted in brain chemistry, and they are molded, in measurable and predictable ways, by the environment in which children grow up. That means that the rest of us - society as a whole- can do an enormous amount to influence their development in children. (p.196)

Parents also play a strong role in influencing the development of non-cognitive traits in their children, but they may not always know best how to accomplish that, or have access to the information or a support system for developing those traits in their children. Here is where communities and schools can build partnerships with parents by offering educational opportunities for parenting, just as they constantly strive to improve professional development for teachers. How and who will pay for parenting education programs may be debatable, but their benefits are not.

Schools should consider developing grading and reporting systems that report measures of student growth, provide detailed information about how students are meeting learning standards for their classes, and define learning targets. Such systems should be complemented by classroom practices that support mastery-based achievement and discontinue performance-based approaches to assessment. School-wide cultures should also celebrate individual learning growth and student non-cognitive trait development that supports their achievements. They should discontinue awards for students based only on grading, as well as honor roll systems that recognize only high performance outcomes.

If schools and parents continue to promote superior performance using externally motivating factors such as grades, honors certificates, trophies, newspaper honor rolls, money and other gifts, students will continue to strive to attain extrinsic rewards. Such

"support" is in direct opposition to the type of strategy that produces long-term adaptive behavior. Internal motivation that is not tied to material rewards leads to the pursuit of excellence in activities that are motivated by personal interest and passions. Those produce, according to Levine (2006) healthy and long-term satisfactions. "When external measures of success are all that kids can think about, their ability to find meaning in their work is diminished" (Levine, 2006, p. 56). Levine tells the story of Matt Stone, one of the creators of *South Park*. Matt described his anxiety when he took a math test in sixth grade:

> Everyone said don't screw up because if you screw up then you won't get into honors math in the seventh grade then you won't get into it in the eighth grade or ninth or tenth or eleventh and you'll die poor and lonely. (p. 56)

Parents and teachers need to assure their students that they will not die poor and lonely if they don't get into a gifted class or go to an elite college. Because children live in a world where performance is glorified at home, at school, and in the media, it is difficult to see beyond such messages. What children really need is an education in the value of resilience and perseverance, and to understand that learning and performance are not always the same (Dweck, 2006; Grolnick, 2003; Levine, 2006; Tough, 2012). As Levine states:

> The point is not to stop valuing high grades or outstanding performance but to help our children internalize for themselves a desire to be capable and interested in learning. We do this by valuing the process more than the end result. Studies show that children who are internally motivated not only learn more and perform better, but, perhaps most important, they enjoy their work more, making it more

likely that they will be willing and eager to try their hand at increasingly difficult

challenges. (p.57)

As schools and teachers continuously evaluate and work to improve their

instructional and assessment practices, and use research-based methods to increase

student achievement, they should include input from a broad variety of sources including

parents, teacher leaders in the field, and perhaps most important of all, the voices of the

students. Students should be given regular opportunities to provide feedback to teachers

about their learning experience through discussion, writings or surveys.

Practices that support student mental health are critical to improving academic

and life outcomes for significant numbers of students. The number of students who report

feeling anxious or depressed in studies of college students' mental health ranges from 30

percent to 50%. The problem is serious, and is a major contributor to college attrition.

That outcome is both discouraging and alarming when considering the enormous loss of

talent to the future labor pool in our country. Many of those students demonstrate the

intellectual ability to do college level work, but do not receive the support for their social-

emotional health, and/or and the nurturance of non-cognitive traits that educational

experts argue are just as necessary for achievement. In this study, 28.7 percent of a group

of 115 twelve-year olds showed maladaptive perfectionist tendencies. The adaptive

participants of this study, drawn from a pool of 55.7 percent of the 115 respondents

willing to be interviewed, also described feeling stressed. Those numbers were shown to

parallel those found in other studies of middle, high school and college students, in

students from general populations as well as the gifted (Schuler, 2000).

There is more about students than their abilities to ace a test that schools need to tend to in order to increase academic and career outcomes for their students. Schools must provide strong support for their students' mental health. Middle school students, the focus of this study, have stated that strong connections and relationships with their teachers are important. They reported learning more and being more successful academically in classes where those relationships existed. For middle schools, that can be provided in academic advisory programs, clubs, and special student activity groups where their teachers can serve as advisors. In that way, teachers and students can know one another better. Teachers can serve as coaches for special school and community service projects with their students, or they can share a common interest with students in a club.

The students in this study reported that they enjoyed the focus group sessions and the ability to share their common concerns about academics, their teachers, their busy schedules, and everything else that was "stressing them out." They reported, that "we should do this all the time." They felt the discussions were very helpful to them because they could spend time talking about how they learned and how they felt about school, and not just the content topics in their classes. There is strong empirical support for the value of group therapy for helping students with perfectionistic thinking understand their perspectives, and develop healthy coping skills and more adaptive approaches in their academic endeavors (Barrow & Moore, 1983; Nugent, 2000). As was observed in this study, students identified with similar beliefs in their peers, and were able to discuss and consider other possible, and perhaps more effective and healthy, responses to situations that they were encountering such as stress over workloads, presentation anxiety, organizational and time management issues and disappointment.

Implications for Policy

Progress in the development of proficiency-based high-school diploma systems and standards-based reporting systems in the United States, which has grown as a result of the adoption of the Common Core Standards in 46 states, provides a promising vehicle for creating momentum for schools to divest themselves of out-of-date grading systems that do not align with standards-based progress reporting. If nearly one third of every class of middle school students in this country reported maladaptive tendencies, as in this study, a very significant number of futures could be potentially and positively affected by assessment and progress reporting that is more narrative and rubric-based in nature than a numerical or letter grade system. That is not to say that report cards and honor roll systems based upon performance outcomes or grades are the only stressors in their lives, but it figured large in the lives of the participants in this study in terms of the negative effects of comparison of self to others, a behavior common to maladaptive perfectionists.

While guidance counselors are found in many public schools, they are not in all schools. They should be. Additionally, social workers are provided through special education funding in many schools, but there are not nearly enough funds to support needed social-emotional support for all of the students who need it. States should consider legislation that requires adequate funding to provide social work and counseling services to all students. Those services should operate to address student needs before they become critical and require outside counseling or mental health interventions. Researchers contend that late childhood and early adolescence are a "prime period for acquisition of the perfectionistic mindset" (Nugent, 2000, p. 216). Therefore, it is

important to counsel children presenting that mindset as early as possible to avert the negative aspects of maladaptive perfectionism.

Policy should be enacted that requires teacher education programs and teacher professional development programs to include a strong component of study that guides teachers to develop non-cognitive assets in students. It is time for non-cognitive skills to be treated as being as equally relevant to students' education as cognitive development. Such a shift could significantly change the way students view their progress, experience learning, and as research indicates, also experience greater learning outcomes. Those policies should include strong financial support to help districts provide equally for the professional development of their staff. Teacher learning should be focused upon instructional methods that challenge students, engage them as partners in learning, and give students the self-confidence and belief that they can do better, do more, and can attain the goals that have been set for them (Hattie, 2012).

Implications for Further Research

The findings in this study support a richness of perspectives that qualitative study of adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism in the context of middle school students can reveal. Further qualitative study that examines the perspectives of individuals who interact with adolescent perfectionists can further contribute to the understanding of how perfectionism develops in children and what role others may play, either overtly or unknowingly, in its development. Those perspectives include parents, siblings, teachers, peer groups, and coaches.

Longitudinal and mixed methods studies could provide further understanding and measure how significantly maladaptive tendencies could be changed and become more

adaptive if student beliefs about their intelligence and self-efficacy are shifted. Similarly, the effects of various strategies to build the strength of other non-cognitive traits theorized to improve student outcomes could also be explored.

Research into the nature of perfectionism in grade school students could also provide valuable insight into where, how and when those tendencies emerge and begin to affect learning at different ages from kindergarten onward. "Knowing where perfectionism comes from (as well as what specific socialization experiences might contribute to perfectionistic tendencies) will make it easier to design intervention strategies that encourage adaptive perfectionism in individuals and discourage (or at least help perfectionists manage) the more maladaptive aspects of perfectionism" (Hibbard & Walton, 2012, p. 1122).

The findings of this study support that both adaptive and maladaptive perfectionistic tendencies are present in adolescents. There are several indications about the nature of the impact that those tendencies are already having on twelve-year olds and their achievements. Therefore, it is also important to expand studies of this type with students including research across socioeconomic groups, gender, and ethnicity. Research has shown that if students have a strong self-efficacy and believe that their intelligence can grow, their achievements can be positively impacted. The findings of this study encourage us to propose that a belief in the positive effects of adaptive perfectionism, with supportive coping mechanisms in place, can also produce positive achievement and healthy life outcomes. Wanting to achieve at a high level, having a "doing your best" mindset and driving to excel need not be deleterious. "If we foster a growth mindset in our homes and schools, we will give our children the tools to succeed in their pursuits

and to become productive workers and citizens" (Dweck, 2015, p.6). Further examination of how the beliefs and behaviors of adaptive perfectionists develop, will contribute to an understanding of the best strategies for guiding all students in that direction.

The findings in this study have aligned with prior research in supporting the view that a school culture of mastery-based performance would guide students away from the development of maladaptive perfectionistic behaviors. Coupled with that are concerns about students' ability to cope with failure, and to continue to strive academically, if they have not experienced appropriately challenging curriculums and opportunities to develop resiliency in the early years of their educations. Research that examines the influences of a challenging curriculum, or lack thereof, on the development of perfectionism is needed.

Continued study of perfectionistic self-presentation in adolescents, the interpersonal dimension of the conceptual framework for this study, is highly recommended due to the strong possibility of current and future negative outcomes if these behaviors are not correctly identified and continue without appropriate intervention.

It is hoped that this work will encourage further study of non-cognitive traits in young adolescents, and join the body of study leading to greater understanding and efforts to improve adolescent mental health treatment, improvements in the development of healthy coping skills, new and improved classroom instructional and assessment practices, improved school and community-based social-emotional supports for students and educational policy reforms that will support increased student achievement.

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APPENDIX A
Recent Studies Framing Important Non-Cognitive Factors Leading to Academic and Labor Market Success

Study	Non-Cognitive Factors Identified for Educational and Labor Market Success
Nyhus & Pons (2005)	5-Factor Model: Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability, Autonomy, Extraversion
Muller & Plug (2006)	Agreeableness vs. Antagonism: Trust, straightforwardness, altruism, compliance, modesty, tender-mindedness. Conscientiousness vs. Lack of Direction: Competence, Order, Dutifulness, Achievement striving, self-discipline, deliberation. Neuroticism vs. Emotional Stability: Anxiety, angry hostility, depression, self-consciousness, impulsiveness, vulnerability. Extraversion: Gregariousness, Assertiveness, Activity, Excitement seeking, Positive Emotions, Warmth Openness: Ideas(curious), Fantasy (imaginative), Aesthetics (artistic), Actions (wide interest) Feelings (excitable), Values (Unconventional)
Kuhn & Weinberger (2005)	Communication skills, motivation/initiative, teamwork skills, leadership skills, academic achievement/GPA
Heckman (2008)	Motivation, socio-emotional regulation, time preference, personality factors, ability to work with others
Goleman (2000)	EQ: Emotional Intelligence Four Competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and social skills
The European Commission (2009)	European Framework for Key Competencies for Lifelong Learning: (Considered necessary for personal fulfillment, active citizenship, social inclusion and employability in a knowledge society: Communication in mother tongue,

	communication in foreign languages, mathematical competence and basic competencies in science and technology, digital competence, learning to learn, social and civic competence, sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, cultural awareness and expression.
Heckman, Sixtrud & Urzua (2006)	Study of personality traits and college completion
Duckworth & Seligman (2005)	Relationship between Self-discipline and grades
Carneiro, Crawford & Goodman (2006)	Relationship between social skills and school attainment
Deke & Heimson (2006)	Perseverance and post-secondary school completion

APPENDIX B

Almost Perfect Survey: Revised

APS-R Short Form
Instructions

The following items are designed to measure attitudes people have toward themselves, their performance, and toward others. There are no right or wrong answers. Please respond to all of the items. Use your first impression and do not spend too much time on individual items in responding.

Respond to each of the items using the scale below to describe your degree of agreement with each item. Fill in the appropriate number circle on the answer sheet that is provided.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

1. I have high standards for my performance at work or at school.

2. I am an orderly person.

3. I often feel frustrated because I can't meet my goals.

4. Neatness is important to me.

5. If you don't expect much out of yourself, you will never succeed.

6. My best just never seems to be good enough for me.

7. I think things should be put away in their place

8. I have high expectations for myself.

9. I rarely live up to my high standards.

10. I like to always be organized and disciplined.

11. Doing my best never seems to be enough.

12. I set very high standards for myself.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

13. I am never satisfied with my accomplishments.

14. I expect the best from myself.

15. I often worry about not measuring up to my own expectations.

16. My performance rarely measures up to my standards.

17. I am not satisfied even when I know I have done my best.

18. I try to do my best at everything I do.

19. I am seldom able to meet my own high standards of performance.

20. I am hardly ever satisfied with my performance.

21. I hardly ever feel that what I've done is good enough.

22. I have a strong need to strive for excellence.

23. I often feel disappointment after completing a task because I know I could

   have done better.

Note: Items for Order, (2, 4, 7, and 10), will be eliminated from the survey. Only items for Standards and Discrepancy will be used.

Standards = 1,5,8, 12, 14, 18, 22

Discrepancy = 3,6,9,11,13,15,16,17,19,20,21,23

(Slaney, Mobley, Trippi, Ashby, & Johnson, 1996). Retrieved from http://www.ed.psu.edu/educ/epcse/counseling-psychology/counseling-psychology-faculty/apsr.pdf

APPENDIX C
Summary of Empirical Research on Perfectionism as Cited in the Literature Review

Researchers	Name of Study	Purpose and/or RQ	Year Published	Participants (All approximately equal mixes of male and female subjects unless otherwise noted)	Scale(s)
Ablard and Parker	Parents' Ach. Goals and Perfectionism in Their Academically Talented Children	Examine parents' ach. Goals for children and determine whether or not extreme goals relate to parents' or children's' perfectionism	1997	127 sets of parents and their academically talented children	Frost MPS(Frost,1990)
Hewitt, Blasberg, Flett, Besser, Sherry, Caelian, Papsdorf, Cassels & Birch	Perfectionistic Self-Presentation in Children and Adolescents: Dev. and Val. of Self-Presentation Scale-Junior	Measure perfectionistic self-presentation for children and adolescents-comparison of several scales	2011	Sample 1: 244 children (8-17), Sample 2: 292 adolescents Sample 3: 65 adolescents	Perfectionistic Self-Presentation Scale-Junior (Hewitt et al., 2011); CAPS (Flett et al., 2000), YPI (Andershed, 2002) and six other scales
Hewitt & Flett	Perfectionism in the Self and Social Contexts	Develop and Measure Validity of the Multi-dimensionality of Perfectionism and the MPS-Scale to measure traits	1991	Study 1: 156 University Students. Study 2: 1,106 univ. students and 263 psychiatric patients, Study 3: 104 undergrad. Students, Study 4: 91 undergrad. Study 5: 77 Psychiatric Patients	MPS and MCMI Personality Subscales, Burns Perf. Scale, and other personality scales
Frost, Marten, Lahart, & Rosenblatt	The Dimensions of Perfectionism	Developed a multidimensional measure of perfectionism and tested its reliability and	1990	4 studies with 672 female college students	Frost Multidimensional Perfection Scale

		validity			
Marten-DiBartolo, Li & Frost	How do the Dimensions of Perfectionism relate to Mental Health?	Examine the relationship between the setting of high personal standards and psychopathology	2008	274: female college undergrads	MPS (Frost et al., 1990);Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995); Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale (Watson & Friend, 1969); Eating Diagnostic Scale (Stice, 2000); Positive and Negative Affect Scale (Watson & Clark, 1988)
Slaney, Rice, Mobley, Trippi & Ashby	The Revised Almost Perfect Scale	Development of the Revised APS, establish reliability and construct validity	2001	809: college undergrads	MPS (Hewitt & Flett, 1991);Frost MPS (Frost et al., 1990);Beck Depression Inventory (Beck, 1978);Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory (Rosenberg, 1965);Penn State Worry Questionnaire (Meyer, Miller, Metzger & Borkovec, 1990); Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960)
Slaney & Ashby	Perfectionists: Study of a Criterion Group	Will results of an interview study of perfectionists enable researchers to make coherent statements about the characteristics of perfectionists?	1996	21: graduate and undergrad students (Age 25-62)	One hour interviews (8 questions) with one of six interviewers.
Midgley & Urdan	Predictors of Middle School Students' Use of Self-Handicapping Strategies	Determine the factors that predict the use of self-handicapping strategies	1995	256: Eighth grade students	PALS-Patterns of Adaptive Learning Survey (Midgley, Maehr & Urdan, 1993); GPA
Gilman & Ashby	Multidimensional	Replicates Accordino	2003	185: middle school students	APS-R; BASC, GPA

	Perfectionism in a sample of middle school students: An exploratory investigation	(2000) study with middle school students			
Accordino, et al.	An investigation of perfectionism, mental health, achievement, and achievement motivation in adolescents	Examine relationship of perfectionism with measures of achievement, ach. Motivation and mental health in adolescents	2000	123: 10th-12th grade students	APS-R, GPA, Work and Family Orientation Questionnaire, Reynolds Adol. Depression Scale, Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, Demographic Questionnaire
Nounopoulos , Ashby & Gilman	Coping Resources, Perfectionism and Academic Performance Among Adolescents	Is the holding of high standards positively associated with specific coping resources for academic pursuits?	2006	166 students grades 6-8	APS-R (Slaney et al., 2001); Coping Resources Inventory Scales for Educational Enhancement (Curlette, et al.,1993). GPA
Rice, Ashby & Gilman	Classifying Adolescent Perfectionists	Derive cut scores on APS-R for adolescents	2011	919: 9th grade students	APS-R (Slaney, et al., 1996); Multidimensional Life Satisfaction Scale (Huebner, 1994);BASC (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2004); GPA
LoCicero & Ashby	Multidimensional Perfectionism and Self-Reported Self-Efficacy in College Students	Do perfectionists differ significantly from non-perfectionists in their level of self-efficacy? Do adaptive perfectionists differ significantly from maladaptive perfectionists in their level of self-efficacy?	2000	199: college undergrads	APS-R (Slaney et al., 1996); Self-Efficacy Scale (Sherer, Maddux,Mercandante,Prentice-Dunn, Jacobs & Rogers, 1982)
Eum & Rice	Test anxiety,	Clarify how	2011	134: Undergrad	APS-R, Cog. Test

	perfectionism, goal orientation and academic performance	cognitive test anxiety is related to personality constructs-perfectionism and goal orientation - relevant to academic performance		students	Anxiety Scale, Ach. Goal Questionnaire, GPA, Word-Recall test-RAVLT
Hanchon	Examining Perfection through the lens of Achievement Goal Theory	Demonstrate that groups of perfectionists differ in the manner by which they orient themselves in the context of their achievement related strivings	2011	180: Citadel undergrads	APS-R (Slaney et al.,2001). PALS-Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales (Midgley, Maehr &Urdan,1993); College Adjustment Scales (Anton & Reed, 1991), GPA
Gnilka, Ashby, & Noble	Multidimensional Perfectionism and Anxiety: Difference Among Individuals with Perfectionism and Tests of a Coping-Mediation Model	Examine the coping processes and levels of anxiety among identified groups of perfectionists	2012	329 undergraduates	APS-R (Slaney et al.,2001); Ways of Coping -Revised (Folkman & Lazarus, 1995); State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (Spielberger, et al.,1983)
Ashby, Dickinson, Gnilka, & Noble	Hope as a Mediator and Moderator of Multidimensional Perfectionism and Depression in Middle School Students	What is the role of hope in mediating and moderating the level of depression in adaptive and maladaptive perfectionists	2011	153 middle school students age 11-15	Children's Hope Scale (Snyder, Hoza et al., 1997); APS-R (Slaney et al, 2001);Kandel Depression Inventory (Kandel & Davies, 1986)
Soenens, Elliot, Gossens, Vansteenkiste, Luyten, & Duriez	Maladaptive Perfectionism as an Intervening Variable between Psychological Control and Adolescent	Are controlling parenting styles predictive of a child's internalizing problems? Examines the	2005	677: 10-12th grade students in Belgium in three stage study over 3 years, 78% appearing in all three stages	Psych. Control Scale (Barber, 1996); Frost Mutidimensional Perfection Scale (Frost et al., 2005); Center for Epidemiological Studies-Depression

	Depressive Symptoms: A Three Wave Longitudinal Study	intervening role of perfectionism from a longitudinal perspective			Scale (Radloff, 1977)
McArdle & Duda	Exploring Social-Contextual Correlates of Perfectionism in Adolescents: A Multivariate Perspective	Explore parental influence on motivational characteristics: Can talented young athletes be differentiated by their perceptions of parental values, attitudes and practices, and if so, do they differ in their perfectionistic tendencies, goal orientations and motivational regulations?	2004	196: athletes age 12-17.	MPS, (Frost, 1980);Family Adaptability and Cohesion Scale-FACES, (Olson, Portner, & Bell, 1982); Task and Ego Orientation in Sport Questionnaire, (Duda, 1989)
Flett et al.	Perfectionism, Type A Behavior, and Self-Efficacy in Depression and Health Symptoms among Adolescents	What is the link between perfectionism and Type A behavior in children and adolescents?	2011	73 students in grades 11 and 12	CAPS (Flett et al., 1996); Adolescent and Adult Type A Behavior Scale (Wrzesniewski et al., 1990); Perceived Self-Efficacy Scale (Cowen et al., 1991); Children's Depression Inventory (Kovacs & Beck, 1977); Psychosomatic Symptom Scale, created by these researchers.
Slaney, Chandha, Mobley, & Kennedy	Perfectionism in Asian Indians: Exploring the Meaning of the Construct in India	Mixed-methods study exploring the meaning of the construct of perfectionism in India	2000	321: Hindu college undergrads; Interview study: 5 adult graduate students or faculty	APS (Slaney & Johnson, 1992) and Demographics questions; One hour structured interviews using format designed by Slaney and Ashby (1996)
Rice & Slaney	Clusters of	Two studies,	2002	Study I: 258	APS-R (Slaney et

				undergrads; Study 2: 375 undergrad volunteers	al., 1996); CES-Depression Scale (Radloff, 1977); Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory (Rosenberg, 1965); State Trait Anxiety Inventory (Speilberger, Gorsuch, Lushene, 1970); GPA
	Perfectionists: Two studies of Emotional Adjustment and Academic Achievement	the second to parallel and confirm cluster results from the first study. Analyze sig. of various combinations of variables measured in subscales of APS-R			
Schuler	Perfectionism and Gifted Adolescents	Mixed Methods Inquiry to examine the construct of perfectionism in gifted adolescents to investigate the perceptions these students have of influences in their environment that might contribute to their perfectionism and to explore the consequences that they believe are the result of their perfectionism	2000	112: gifted 7th and 8th grade students for surveys and 20 students (scoring highly for perfectionism) for interview study	Frost MPS (Frost, 1990); Goals and Work Habits Survey (Schuler, 1994); Semi-structured interviews examining survey responses; school records, artifacts, anecdotes from teachers, peers, counselors and admin.
Huggins, Davis, Rooney, & Kane	Socially Prescribed and Self-Oriented Perfectionism as Predictors of Depressive Diagnosis in Preadolescents	Are SPP and SOP significant predictors of childhood depression?	2008	786: 10 and 11 year old children	Children's Depression Inventory (Kovacs, 1992); Diagnostic Interview for Children and Adolescents-IV (Reich, Welner & Herjanic, 1997); Child-Adolescent Perfectionism Scale (Flett et al., 2002)
Neumeister, Williams, & Cross	Gifted High School Students' Perspectives on the Development	How do gifted high school students with a high level of perfectionism as identified	2009	293 students took the MPS from which 15 were identified for study-interview	MPS (Hewitt & Flett, 1991) ; Semi-structured interviews (Seidman, 1998).

	of Perfectionism	by the MSP (Hewitt & Flett, 1991) perceive their perfectionism as developing? Mixed-methods study			
Mushquash & Sherry	Understanding the socially prescribed perfectionist's cycle of self-defeat: A 7-day, 14 occasion daily diary study	Tests a model of SPP in which Socially Prescribed perfectionists engage in behaviors that are antithetical to their perfectionistic goals, motives and expectations	2012	317 undergrads	SPP Subscale (Hewitt & Flett, 1991)

Appendix D
Mean and Standard Deviation Scores for all students (N=150) taking the APS-R
(Slaney et al., 1996)

Almost Perfect Survey-Revised Standards Items Results for all Students Surveyed					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
a. I have high standards for my performance at work or at school.	150	1.00	7.00	6.2533	1.03097
c. If you don't expect much out of yourself, you will never succeed.	150	1.00	7.00	5.3133	1.69538
e. I have high expectations for myself.	150	1.00	7.00	5.8667	1.39831
h. I set very high standards for myself.	147	1.00	7.00	5.4490	1.58410
j. I expect the best from myself.	148	1.00	7.00	5.8446	1.33866
n. I try to do my best at everything I do.	148	1.00	7.00	6.2432	1.25423
r. I have a strong need to strive for excellence.	148	1.00	7.00	5.7635	1.31636

APPENDIX D (Continued)

Almost Perfect Survey-Revised <u>Discrepancy</u> Items Results for all students (N=150) surveyed.					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
b. I often feel frustrated because I can't meet my goals.	148	1.00	7.00	3.9257	1.76547
d. My best just never seems to be good enough for me.	149	1.00	7.00	3.3557	1.80866
f. I rarely live up to my high standards.	149	1.00	7.00	2.7785	1.48345
g. Doing my best never seems to be enough.	146	1.00	7.00	3.0959	1.82824
i. I am never satisfied with my accomplishments.	146	1.00	7.00	2.4932	1.62840
k. I often worry about not measuring up to my own expectations.	145	1.00	7.00	4.0138	1.67906
l. My performance rarely measures up to my standards.	146	1.00	7.00	3.0479	1.68290
m. I am not satisfied even when I know I have done my best.	149	1.00	7.00	2.6376	1.69743
o. I am seldom able to meet my own high standards of performance.	141	1.00	7.00	3.7872	1.90791
p. I am hardly ever satisfied with my performance.	148	1.00	7.00	2.6689	1.57958
q. I hardly ever feel that what I've done is good enough.	146	1.00	7.00	3.1096	1.90869
s. I often feel disappointment after completing a task because I know I could have done better.	150	1.00	7.00	4.0533	1.84931

APPENDIX E
Survey Results for Perfection Study Participants (APS-R, Slaney et al., 1996)

Survey Item	Robb	Jon	Kate	Ned	Jeff	Sam	Sansa	Arya	Brienne
a. I have high standards for my performance at work or at school. (S)	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
b. I often feel frustrated because I can't meet my goals. (D)	6	2	1	7	2	4	2	1	7
c. If you don't expect much out of yourself, you will never succeed. (S)	5	5	7	6	6	6	6	7	7
d. My best just never seems to be good enough for me. (D)	4	1	1	6	2	5	3	5	5
e. I have high expectations for myself. (S)	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
f. I rarely live up to my high standards. (D)	2	1	1	4	2	1	2	1	2
g. Doing my best never seems to be enough. (D)	4	1	1	6	2	6	2	1	3
h. I set very high standards for myself. (S)	7	7	7	6	7	7	7	7	7
i. I am never satisfied with my accomplishments. (D)	5	1	1	3	2	4	5	2	5
j. I expect the best from myself. (S)	7	7	7	7	7	6	7	7	7
k. I often worry about not measuring up to my own expectations. (D)	6	2	1	6	3	6	7	7	7

Survey Item	Robb	Jon	Kate	Ned	Jeff	Sam	Sansa	Arya	Brienne
l. My performance rarely measures up to my standards. (D)	3	1	1	2	2	2	2	1	3
m. I am not satisfied even when I know I have done my best. (D)	4	1	1	4	2	5	4	1	5
n. I try to do my best at everything I do. (S)	7	7	7	6	7	7	7	7	7
o. I am seldom able to meet my own high standards of performance. (D)	3	1	1	4	6	7	2	7	5
p. I am hardly ever satisfied with my performance. (D)	5	1	1	3	2	3	6	1	5
q. I hardly ever feel that what I've done is good enough. (D)	3	1	1	4	1	5	7	1	5
r. I have a strong need to strive for excellence. (S)	6	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
s. I often feel disappointment after completing a task because I know I could have done better. (D)	7	4	4	6	1	5	7	5	5

Note: Shaded columns= Maladaptive Perfectionists as identified by this survey. Shaded rows= Survey Discrepancy items.

Biography of the Author

Jean M. Beaulieu is currently the assistant principal in a middle school in southern Maine, a role that she has enjoyed since 2008. Prior to that, she taught middle-level language arts for twelve years, and worked as a literacy specialist for five years. She received a certificate of advanced study in educational leadership from the University of Southern Maine in 2009, a master's degree in literacy from the University of New Hampshire in in 1978, and a bachelor's degree in education with a major in English from the University of Southern Maine in 1976. Her current professional work includes teacher mentoring, where she serves her district as the committee chairperson. She also serves on district committees involved with building positive school climate, and teacher effectiveness, and on her school's steering committee supporting its continued growth as an International Baccalaureate Middle Years Program authorized school.

Jean was born in Putnam, Connecticut, and attended Killingly High School, graduating in 1973. She moved to Maine after graduation to pursue her interest in teacher education, which has always been her passion, nurtured from childhood, as the daughter of two dedicated educators. She has been married for thirty-five years to her husband, Steven Beaulieu who has built his career at sea as an engineer in the merchant marine. They have two children who continue to be a deep source of pride as they grow into adulthood and pursue their own promising careers.

She is a member of several professional affiliations, including the Maine Principals' Association and the Maine Association for Middle Level Education. She has been nominated to the honor society Phi Kappa Phi in recognition of her academic achievements. Jean is a candidate for the degree of doctor of philosophy in public policy with a concentration in educational policy and leadership from the University of Southern Maine, and will receive the degree in May 2015.