

SUMMARY

"Documented Breakdown". A Comic Dealing with Perfectionism

The aim of my thesis is to make a comic focusing on perfectionism and what effect it may have on a person's psyche. I researched how perfectionism is classified, including its symptoms and the kinds of physical and mental impact they may cause.

Perfectionism is most commonly defined as having unrealistic goals and standards for oneself, leading one to strive for perfection that might not be achievable. This perfectionism can be directed towards oneself, towards others, or can be caused by societal expectations. While perfectionism has been categorised differently by many researchers, the main classification is "normal" or "adaptive" perfectionism, and "neurotic" or "maladaptive" perfectionism.

Adaptive perfectionism harbours positive effects on a person: an adaptive perfectionist might be open to new experiences, have realistic standards that change depending on the task, and will be likely to take failures as encouragement to improve next time. They strive to get good feedback to boost their mood. Whereas maladaptive perfectionists are afraid of mistakes, failure, and new situations. They become doubtful of their own skills and thus incredibly self-critical of themselves. Maladaptive perfectionists perform to avoid critique and negative feedback.

Even though adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism are considered two different concepts, they have overlapping characteristics, which means a single person can exhibit traits of both adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism.

Maladaptive perfectionists feel the constant need to be perfect, to fulfill tasks ideally without any mistakes. Even those who achieve "perfection" do not acknowledge it as such and will not feel joy from any achievements, turning even the greatest success into a failure. This can result in feelings of hopelessness. Extremely self-critical perfectionists are most susceptible to health issues, due to exhaustion caused by stress and overthinking

Stress caused by perfectionism can cause both mental and physical issues, such as: anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, low self-worth, dizziness, chest pains, head and stomach aches, eating disorders, sleeplessness, digestion problems, and weakening of the immune system.

Creativity is defined as finding new ways of problem solving. Whilst adaptive perfectionism can lead to better creativity, maladaptive perfectionism does not. It rather influences the motivational aspect of creating. Perfectionism can lead to low levels of creativity through self-doubt, overly high standards, fear of making mistakes, fear of new experiences, and depleted energy levels from constant stress. This makes perfectionism a negative influence on creativity.

The reason why perfectionism is so difficult to overcome is that it usually has underlying issues that need to be dealt with beforehand such as depression, anxiety, or trauma. Over time, perfectionism also tends to become a core part of a person's identity. This makes it difficult to let go of it. One may think: if they're not perfectionists, then who are they? Plenty of perfectionists also yearn for control, and fear that letting go of it might make their life fall apart. They may also feel that they won't be able to succeed at all without it.

For the practical part of the thesis, I created a comic called „The Documented Breakdown“, that focuses on perfectionism through five short chapters which explore the relationship of an artist and a vampire: the main character, Laura, is held back in her pursuits by perfectionism and the anxiety it causes. Her neuroticism manifests as a vampire that gradually drives her to a breaking point.

In this comic, the vampire is the embodiment of perfectionism. They both share similar features such as: they're charming, they both deplete your energy and are great at mental manipulation. The original copy of the comic was drawn traditionally on paper with ink pens, greyscale markers and graphite pencils. I chose this as opposed to the digital alternative to combat my personal issue of overworking my projects. On paper, I do not have the ability to change my drawings forever. I found this process to be quite therapeutic.

After I had scanned in the drawings, I compiled everything in InDesign. The final version of the comic was printed in offset print by Paar OÜ, with 25 copies, and in black and white. I achieved my goal of learning more about perfectionism and combated my fears of taking on large projects in fear of failing to complete them.