

“MORE PERFECT”:
TOWARDS A PHENOMENOLOGY OF PERFECTIONISM

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Abstract

This phenomenological study explored the lived meaning of perfectionism through interviews with nine first year law students who self-identified as perfectionists, with a view to uncovering new therapeutic possibilities for counsellors working with perfectionist clients. The fundamental existentialist themes of lived time, lived human relation, lived space, and lived body were used as a guide to interpreting the interview transcripts. Findings indicated that perfectionist temporality is characterized by inadequacy, limits, speed, delays, and loss; relationality by the engagement in self-comparison, -evaluation, and -management, and other -comparison and -judgment; spatiality by high expectations and ordering; and corporeality by feelings of anxiety, panic, and fear, self-critical and dichotomous thinking, and physiological discomfort. Constructivist conceptualization and treatment for perfectionist clients is recommended.

Dedication

To Lindsay, with love

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Background

Graduate school applications typically consist of several parts. For example, one of the schools I applied to when I began my pursuit of a Masters degree in counselling psychology required several things of me, including completion of a letter of intent and a multi-page standardized application form. It has been long enough since I put together these documents that the details (e.g., the page limit for the letter of intent, the number of pages to the application form) are now fuzzy, but what it was *like* for me to prepare them remains with me.

I approached the letter of intent as if it were a work of art. I spent days writing and rewriting, reading and re-reading, checking and double-checking. I laboured over every paragraph, sentence, and word. I regularly consulted a thesaurus so that the same adjective or verb did not appear more than once in a paragraph or, preferably, the document as a whole. I sought the opinion of significant others: Should I mention this? Should I mention that?

The application form required less thought and creativity, but more attention to detail. Each page contained blank boxes in which I was to list my experience or achievements. During the university's information session it was suggested that we type out the information to be included in these boxes on a separate page then cut out the typed sections, paste them onto the application form, and photocopy the form so that the pasting was not apparent since it was impossible to type directly onto the form itself. Many hours and pages were wasted as I attempted to arrange the typed inserts "just so" in the space allotted and achieve the "right" shade of black on the photocopier. Noticing even the smallest typo produced frustration and restarted the typing, cutting, pasting, and

copying process anew.

Over time I have come to describe such behaviour, expectations, and feelings as perfectionistic. The endless hours spent on a task, the need for things to look and sound a certain way, and the discomfort present until that need is met are all part of my perfectionism. But when I use that term, *perfectionism*, to what am I alluding? A concept, phenomenon, or experience? The answer depends on my perspective.

As a phenomenological researcher, my primary interest is in studying the phenomenon, the thing, of perfectionism, since “phenomenology is the science of phenomena” (van Manen, 1997, p. 183). The phenomenon of perfectionism is about a certain lived relation to the world, a particular manner of being in the world in relation to others. Phenomenologists use the term *intentionality* to describe this manner of being:

The term “intentionality” indicates the inseparable connectedness of the human being to the world. [Franz] Brentano, and later [Edmund] Husserl, argued that the fundamental structure of consciousness is intentional (Spiegelberg, 1982). And every conscious experience is bi-polar: there is an object that presents itself to a subject or ego. This means that all thinking (imagining, perceiving, remembering, etc.) is always thinking about something. . . . All human activity is always *oriented* activity, directed by that which orients it. In this way we discover a person’s world or landscape. (van Manen, pp. 181-182)

In doing phenomenology, therefore, my interest is in the intentionality of perfectionism. My aim is to explore and describe how perfectionism as a phenomenon, a way of being, presents itself in lived experience (van Manen, 1997). Specifically, I am concerned to uncover the temporal, spatial, relational, and corporeal dimensions of

perfectionism. Initial indications of these dimensions are present in my grad school anecdote. The temporal is found in the (excessive) time spent completing the task at hand, the spatial resounds in the fastidious arrangement of the text on the page, the relational is heard in the anxious seeking of others' input, and the corporeal is revealed in my emotive reaction to imperfection. In essence, my application story offers several preliminary clues to the ontological status of perfectionism. My intention is for this study to permit the full revelation of this ontological status.

Relevance of the Study

Phenomenology demands of us re-learning to look at the world as we meet it in immediate experience. . . . Phenomenology does not produce empirical or theoretical observations or accounts. Instead, it offers accounts of experienced space, time, body, and human relation as we live them. (van Manen, 1997, p. 184)

As a phenomenologist, my primary focus is the perceptual realm of experience. I am concerned with perfectionism as a *perceived* sense of being in the world, a consciousness of something (Zahavi, 2003). This perspective contrasts with the largely conceptual approach to perfectionism reflected in much of the existing psychological literature. Rather than inquire into how the phenomenon of perfectionism is meaningfully experienced, empirical researchers have theorized and hypothesized about perfectionism, tested these theories and hypotheses, and ultimately articulated a list of qualities and correlates that combined make up the construct of perfectionism. As such, the extant literature casts perfectionism more as a conceptualization of experience than a perceived sense of relation to the world.

Early anecdotal accounts conceptualized perfectionism in terms of the cognitions,

emotions, and behaviours thought to be typical of perfectionists (D. D. Burns, 1980; Hamachek, 1978; Hollender, 1965; Pacht, 1984). More recently, researchers have focused on refining these earlier conceptualizations and examined how their “refined” conceptualizations relate to various types of psychological distress. Associations between perfectionism and depression (e.g., Hewitt & Flett, 1991a), anxiety (for reviews, see Alden, Ryder, & Mellings, 2002; Frost & DiBartolo, 2002), stress (for a discussion, see Hewitt & Flett, 2002), eating disorders (for a review, see Franco-Paredes, Mancilla-Diaz, Vazquez-Arevalo, Lopez-Aguilar, & Alvarez-Rayon, 2005), personality disorders (see Habke & Flynn, 2002), and suicide ideation (e.g., Beevers & Miller, 2004) have all been identified through quantitative inquiry.

There is no question that the vast store of psychological research in the field provides a solid foundation for understanding perfectionism. From a phenomenological perspective, however, there is still much to be discovered. Although the existing perfectionism literature (both quantitative and qualitative) alludes in many respects to the perceptual realm of experience, it fails to adequately reveal the lived meaning of perfectionism. It is this that this study intends: to inquire into the meaning of perfectionism in lived experience, to explore perfectionism as a way of being in the world. These are the purposes directing the phenomenologist when s/he asks, “what is the experience [of perfectionism] like?” (van Manen, 1997).

There is also clearly a need for this study from a counselling perspective. Although the extant literature posits an association between perfectionism and psychological distress, what is not addressed in any depth is how best to reduce that distress. Despite the fact that researchers have observed a link between perfectionism and

negative treatment outcomes (for a review, see Flett & Hewitt, 2002a), limited research has been conducted on treatment options for perfectionists, and there is no “clearly articulated theoretical framework which could guide clinical decision-making in a systematic way” (Corrie, 2004, p. 4). Thus, the impressive quantitative knowledge base on perfectionism and related distress does not appear to have translated into effective solutions for dealing with that distress. Various possible reasons for this gap, such as perfectionists’ negative beliefs about treatment (D.D. Burns, 1980, p. 44) and themselves (see e.g., DiBartolo, Frost, Dixon, & Almodovar, 2001), are suggested in the literature; notably, most, if not all, of these explanations relate to the perfectionist’s character. One further explanation is possible. Perhaps mental health professionals have been limited in their ideas about how to work with clients who experience perfectionism because, thus far, little has been known about the nature of that experience. Until this knowledge gap is filled, effective therapy and treatment will remain elusive.

The premise of this study is that one of the best ways to achieve a deeper understanding of what it means to experience perfectionism, and thereby uncover effective ways of interacting therapeutically with those who do, is to speak to individuals who claim to have experienced the phenomenon and gather their perfectionism stories, to ask them, “what is the experience of perfectionism *like*?” In this way, the researcher gains direct access to the subjective meaning of a particular phenomenon from those who have lived it (Giorgi, 1975). It is anticipated that exploring perfectionism in this way will produce findings that will offer counsellors and other mental health practitioners new insight into their perfectionistic clients and therefore new ideas about how to work with them. In addition, I will benefit personally as I anticipate working with individuals who

have experienced perfectionism in my eventual practice as a counsellor.

The Researcher's Experience

My interest in this study grew out of my own experience of the phenomenon of perfectionism. In fact, I have so regularly experienced perfectionism throughout my life that I have oft-used the label perfectionistic to describe my relationship to the world. van Manen (1997) states that “to be aware of the structure of one’s own experience of a phenomenon may provide the researcher with clues for orienting oneself to the phenomenon and thus to all the other stages of phenomenological research” (p. 57). Thus, in this section, I offer stories of my own lived experience as the “ego-logical starting point” for this phenomenological study in an effort to begin to open up the question of the meaning of perfectionism (van Manen).

Personal Stories of Perfectionism

As a child, I craved order, which showed in the way I arranged and organized my possessions. All the books on my bookshelf were evenly spaced, leaned slightly to the left, and sat equidistant from the edge of the shelf. I noticed any interruption to this symmetry immediately and quickly corrected it. Each jewelry box and trinket populating my dresser had its own special place and was returned there without delay once it had been used or opened. When any item – a hairbrush, figurine, pencil box – was “out of place,” I became agitated and sometimes anxious. These feelings receded only when order was restored. In adulthood, I continue to tidy, straighten, and organize and feel uneasy and annoyed when, for example, empty boxes from recently purchased items linger too long in the front hall of our home before being taken out to our apartment complex’s recycling bins.

As I grew older, my attention to detail led me to spend inordinate amounts of time

trying to do or say things “right.” Throughout high school, university, law school, and grad school, I laboured over every word of every paper I wrote, often spending more than half an hour crafting one paragraph. I would meticulously count the number of times I had used particular words and routinely consult a thesaurus to ensure no word was used more than once in a paragraph. Even simple emails to professors (and later business associates) were long, drawn-out affairs that involved constant re-reading and revision. On one occasion, I spoke to a classmate on the phone about a three-page paper we were to write for a graduate course. I asked her how far along she was and how much longer she expected to be writing until her paper was completed. I was astounded when she advised that the total amount of time she anticipated spending was perhaps half that which I had already spent, since I was still several hours from completion. What was more astounding and upsetting was that she ultimately received a higher grade on the assignment than I did.

My approach to writing, which carried over into the various legal jobs I took after law school, often led to stress and frustration, particularly where I was subject to demanding deadlines. In one work environment I became known as the writing “expert,” the person to go to when something important needed editing or refinement. My expert status led to my fulfilling a key role in the preparation of an important and lengthy legal treatise that was ultimately published for public review. On the day before the document was set to be released, each of the eight or so lawyers who was to draft one of its chapters emailed his or work to me for inclusion in the final paper. My task was to review the chapters for consistency of style, language, and formatting as well as for typos and other errors. All this in addition to drafting my own chapter of the document. My editing work

began in earnest in the late afternoon and continued throughout the night, long after everyone else had left the office, until a co-worker called me at my desk at 6:30 in the morning to ensure I had gone home to get some rest. I had not and continued to sit at my desk revising and correcting until midday when the deadline arrived. Every minor formatting glitch (misplaced italics, changes in font size) caused me mental and physical anxiety until it was corrected. The final publication exceeded 200 pages, and surely no one (other than I) would notice such small mistakes but I relentlessly pored over the document until time ran out. I ended a 32 hour work day exhausted, in tears, and deflated because the final published work was still not perfect.

The complement to this desire to achieve perfection has been discomfort or embarrassment regarding mistakes and perceived failures and a propensity for self-criticism. A frequent joke by my parents when I would show them a 97% on a graded assignment or report card was “What happened to the other 3%?” My own thoughts echoed their words but lacked their lightheartedness. Even when I was successful, I rarely felt satisfaction or pride in my performance. If I received an A on an assignment, this meant that the test had been easy, or that the teacher was lenient, or that everyone else had done poorly and my work was only superior by comparison. These tendencies extended beyond school and into other endeavours. When the opportunity to try something new, like golf, skiing, or baseball arose, I avoided participating for fear that I would be unable to hit the ball or avoid falling. The thought of such potential gaffes was made more unpleasant by the fact that my humiliation would be witnessed by others.

During law school, my need for order, attention to detail, elevated self-expectations, laborious writing practices, loathing of mistakes, self-criticism, and fear of

failure and embarrassment became particularly problematic. I found law school, and my first year especially, to be highly stressful: The workload was excessive, the competitive environment was disconcerting, and the subject matter was dense, abstract, and confusing. But rather than acknowledge this and lower my expectations for performance accordingly, I demanded as much from myself as I ever had and therefore felt greater anxiety and dejection when my grades dipped than I had ever felt previously. When I finished my first year in the bottom third of my class with a B- average I seriously considered dropping out. It was only with the help and encouragement of my more successful classmates that I persevered and began to successfully navigate my way through this unfamiliar and stressful environment. At no time did I seek any sort of professional support as a way of dealing with the distress inherent in experiencing perfectionism in a law school setting.

Giving Structure to Story

In reflecting on these stories and attempting to give them the structure van Manen (1997) speaks of, I am struck by the presence in each anecdote of one or more of the four fundamental existential themes (the *lifeworld existentials*) phenomenologists say resonate in all human experience: *lived space* or *spatiality*, *lived time* or *temporality*, *lived body* or *corporeality*, and *lived human relation* or *relationality*. Spatiality is there in my need to organize my possessions and my words and in the discomfort which accompanied any disruptions to my personal world order; temporality resounds in the hours I spent rethinking and revising my work and in my sense that there was never enough time available to accomplish what I desired; corporeality appears in the cognitions (self-criticism), emotions (stress, fear), and behaviours (avoidance) I exhibited when

perfection was out of reach; and relationality echoes in my attempts to hide my flaws from those around me. Thus, it is with an awareness of these themes, this structure, that I orient myself to the phenomenon of perfectionism as it is revealed in the writings of perfectionism researchers and the tales of my participants.

Origins of this Study

All of the perfectionism experiences described in this chapter, and others like them, led to my interest in this study. As a self-identified perfectionist, I wished to learn what others meant when they used the language of perfectionism to label their experience. How would my experiences of the phenomenon of perfectionism differ from or converge with those of others? How had other perfectionists managed their first year of law school? It was through these and similar musings that the research questions for this study emerged.

Research Purpose and Questions

The purpose of this study is to inquire into how the phenomenon of perfectionism presents itself in lived experience: to explore perfectionism as a perceived way of being in the world for a small number of first year law students. Thus, the central research question to be answered was, “what is the lived meaning of perfectionism for first year law students?” In answering this question, the following subquestions were considered:

1. How do these students use or spend their time? For example, is perfectionist time construed as a limit or an opportunity?
2. How do these students relate to others? For example, does the perfectionist perceive the other as subject or object?
3. How do these students find or make space? For example, is perfectionist space unidimensional or fully inhabited?

4. How do these students feel and what do they think? How comfortable is the perfectionist in his body?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Before I began collecting data (lived experience descriptions) for this study, I conducted an extensive review of the existing perfectionism literature. The purpose of this review was to ascertain whether a consideration of the essential characteristics (i.e., lived space, time, body, and human relation) of perfectionism was not only warranted but also indicated by that literature.

My research revealed that there is no shortage of conceptual accounts of and quantitative research on perfectionism and its correlates and effects. In 2002, a 400+ page text (Flett and Hewitt's *Perfectionism: Theory, Research, and Treatment*) containing several reviews of the extant perfectionism literature was published. The vast majority of the studies mentioned in that text appear to have used quantitative methods; in the years since its publication, numerous additional quantitative studies have been published. Qualitative research on perfectionism is much more limited. A perusal of several psychological and other academic electronic databases identified few more than a handful of qualitative studies and none of these followed a phenomenological method of inquiry and analysis like the one chosen for this study.

On completing my review, I concluded that there was a need for a study like the one described in the following pages. Although the breadth and volume of perfectionism literature was certainly impressive, there were still substantive gaps to be filled; those which informed this study relate primarily to treatment options for perfectionistic individuals. Even more important from my perspective as a phenomenological researcher, of course, were the gaps which exist with respect to exploring how perfectionism is experienced perceptually. While there is no question that previous descriptions and studies facilitate an understanding of the concept of perfectionism, the literature does not

(explicitly) explore perfectionism as a manner of being in the world in relation to others. This is not to suggest, however, that allusions to the perceptual realm are nowhere to be found. In fact, perfectionism conceptualizations, measures, and correlates not only allude to the perceptual realm of experience, they in some cases offer a rudimentary articulation of it. That is, the extant perfectionism literature contains a number of indications of the importance of addressing the four lifeworld existentials of perfectionism and therefore the roots of my research.

Given the scope and design of this study, a detailed treatment of the existing literature is neither feasible nor appropriate. What is necessary and worthwhile is to provide a general overview of past perfectionism research because it may be seen as a preview to my work, as the beginning of a “hermeneutic spiral” of understanding what it means to experience the phenomenon of perfectionism. By hermeneutic spiral, I mean a bringing to bear of my autobiography of perfectionism on a reading of the extant research and an understanding of others’ experiences. This hermeneutic (interpretive) act spirals as I move from autobiography to an existential rendering of first the literature, then my participants’ stories, to a further interpretation of the literature and what is said about perfectionism. In other words, I view the continued references to and deepening understanding of the space, time, relation, and body existentials of perfectionism throughout this text as conforming to an interpretive spiral.

As a means of laying the foundation for the experiential inquiry at the heart of this study, I use this chapter to highlight and briefly summarize those areas of the literature that offer initial insight into perfectionist intentionality. I begin by introducing the various conceptualizations of perfectionism that have been offered over time. Next, I offer a high

level review of some of the correlational research that has been done on perfectionism. I then consider the existing qualitative studies in the area. After that, I discuss the research that has been done on treating perfectionism and associated difficulties. In each of these four sections, I critique briefly the extent to which the literature approaches perfectionist intentionality. In the final section of this chapter, I outline the psychological research done on law students as further justification for my central research question and my choice of sample group.

Conceptualizing Perfectionism

In the next section, I provide an overview of several conceptualizations of perfectionism. I begin with a brief look at early anecdotal accounts and follow this with a discussion of the so-called multidimensional nature of perfectionism, the debates as to whether perfectionism is adaptive or maladaptive, the research regarding the dispositional and situational nature of perfectionism, and the different scales that have been created to measure perfectionism. Finally, I offer a brief critique of how successful these various conceptualizations are in revealing perfectionist intentionality.

Anecdotal

The authors most often cited in the empirical literature for their anecdotal conceptualizations of perfectionism are Hollender (1965), D. D. Burns (1980), Pacht (1984), and Hamachek (1978). Although their views of perfectionism were not identical, several commonalities existed among them. Specifically, the following tendencies, characteristics, or behaviors were identified by two or more of these men as being perfectionistic: the setting of high (often unreasonably, unrealistically, or impossibly so) personal standards, relentless striving for perfection, so-called “distorted” thinking, self-criticism, an inability to appreciate success or accept (perceived) failure, and a fear of

failure or the appearance of failure. In addition, all four authors noted an association between perfectionism and psychological distress, typically in the form of anxiety or depression.

Multidimensional

The conceptualizations of perfectionism outlined above are largely unidimensional in that they focused only on self-directed cognitions (Hewitt & Flett, 1991b). Today, empiricists generally agree that perfectionism is multidimensional. According to Flett and Hewitt (2002a), one of the most significant developments in the field of perfectionism research “is the discovery that the perfectionism construct is multidimensional; that is, it has both personal and interpersonal aspects” (p. 10). Different groups of researchers have conceived of this multidimensionality in different ways. Hewitt and Flett identified three perfectionism dimensions: socially prescribed, self-oriented, and other-oriented. Socially prescribed perfectionism involves one’s belief that he or she is subject to significant others’ unrealistic standards and expectations and stringent evaluation (Hewitt & Flett), self-oriented perfectionism entails “setting exacting standards for oneself and stringently evaluating and censuring one’s own behavior” (p. 457), and other-oriented perfectionism involves holding unrealistic standards and expectations of others (Hewitt & Flett). All three of these dimensions are reflected in Hewitt and Flett’s Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS-H; 1990, 1991b), which I discuss in more detail below.

Frost, Marten, Lahart, & Rosenblate (1990) have also conceived of perfectionism as multi-dimensional, although their view differs somewhat from that of Hewitt and Flett (1991b). On reviewing the extant perfectionism literature, Frost et al. identified several

dimensions of perfectionism: high personal standards, concern over mistakes, doubts about performance, parental expectations, parental evaluation, and an overemphasis on precision, order, and organization. This led them to develop a perfectionism measure that reflected all of these dimensions. The result was their Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS-F; Frost et al.), also discussed below.

Thus, there has been some movement away from earlier conceptualizations insofar as both Hewitt and Flett (1991b) and Frost et al. (1990) acknowledged an interpersonal aspect to perfectionism. However, there is clearly continuity between initial and subsequent views, as the so-called perfectionism “hallmark” (Gilman & Ashby, 2003, p. 218) of setting high standards or expectations has been noted by all. Furthermore, the MPS-F contains several other echoes of the writings of Hollender (1965), Hamachek (1978), D. D. Burns (1980), and Pacht (1984) as these authors’ views inspired the dimensions identified by Frost et al.

Adaptive or Maladaptive

In conceptualizing perfectionism, some researchers have questioned whether perfectionism is entirely maladaptive or whether it may also, at times, be adaptive. Early on, Hamachek (1978) categorized perfectionists as normal (adaptive) or neurotic (maladaptive). Some researchers believe that his was the first conceptualization to identify these two perfectionism subtypes (Gilman & Ashby, 2003); however, many others since Hamachek have found evidence to support the distinction between positive/adaptive and negative/maladaptive perfectionism (e.g., Ashby & Rice, 2002; L. R. Burns & Fedewa, 2005; Grzegorek, Slaney, Franze, & Rice, 2004; Terry-Short, Owens, Slade, & Dewey, 1995).

Slaney and colleagues (Slaney & Ashby, 1996; Slaney, Ashby, & Trippi, 1995), inspired by Hamachek's (1978) example and the negative bias they perceived in both the MPS-H and the MPS-F, also explored the potential for adaptive or positive perfectionism. In a qualitative interview study, Slaney and Ashby found that many participants were "quite positive in their evaluations of their perfectionism" (p. 397) and of those asked none agreed that they would give up their perfectionism. According to Slaney, Rice, and Ashby (2002), these results supported the view that there are positive aspects to perfectionism. The work of Slaney and colleagues ultimately led to the development of the Almost Perfect Scale (APS; Slaney & Johnson, as cited in Slaney et al., 2002), which was later revised to produce the Almost Perfect Scale-Revised (APS-R; Slaney, Rice, Mobley, Trippi, & Ashby, 2001).

Others are less convinced that perfectionism can be adaptive. Flett and Hewitt (2002a), in particular, seem skeptical of claims to the existence of an adaptive perfectionism subtype. As Slaney et al. (1995) noted after a review of Hewitt and Flett's research with the MPS-H, it was "quite clear" that these two researchers view all three perfectionism dimensions (i.e., socially prescribed, self-oriented, and other-oriented) as "essentially problematic" (p. 281). Flett and Hewitt themselves argued that until several outstanding issues are addressed, such as whether adaptive perfectionism is actually just conscientiousness, the debate over whether positive perfectionism exists remains unresolved.

Dispositional or Situational

Another burgeoning debate in the effort to conceptualize perfectionism is whether perfectionism is part of one's disposition or arises only in certain situations. Some

authors have claimed that perfectionism is typically viewed as a dispositional construct with trait-like qualities or as a general attribute of one's personality (Chang, 2000; Slaney et al., 2002). According to Flett and Hewitt (2002a), researchers who focus on trait perfectionism have implicitly assumed "that extreme perfectionists are those who pursue extreme standards across a variety of life domains" (p. 16). However, this assumption has yet to be tested through empirical research (Flett & Hewitt).

Others argue that perfectionism may be situational. For example, Slaney et al. (2002) claimed that their past qualitative research indicated that perfectionism is typically most relevant in the context of academic and career pursuits. Saboonchi and Lundh (1999) found support for the notion that perfectionistic thinking is subject to changes in the context of certain situational conditions or factors, such as being observed by someone. And Borynack (2003), after investigating whether perfectionism and anxiety levels differed depending on one's exposure to different scenarios (i.e., academic and non-academic), asserted that "individuals in particular situations have different attitudes along the dimension of perfectionism as compared to their attitudes in general" (p. 45).

Measurable

Another way in which perfectionism has been conceptualized is through the various instruments that empiricists have developed to assess an individual's level of perfectionism. In the following section, I briefly review the three perfectionism scales most commonly used to assess perfectionism in order to help complete the current picture of perfectionism and mention two additional scales recently developed by Hewitt, Flett, and colleagues.

The Multidimensional Perfectionism Scales

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, two different groups of researchers have each developed a perfectionism measure known as the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (Frost et al., 1990; Hewitt & Flett, 1991b). Hewitt and Flett's MPS-H, comprising 45 items, assesses three dimensions of perfectionism: (a) socially prescribed (e.g., "The people around me expect me to succeed at everything I do."), (b) self-oriented (e.g., "One of my goals is to be perfect in everything I do."), and (c) other-oriented (e.g., "I have high expectations for the people who are important to me."). Frost et al.'s MPS-F consists of 35 items spread across six subscales: (a) Concern Over Mistakes (e.g., "I should be upset if I make a mistake."), (b) Personal Standards (e.g., "If I do not set the highest standards for myself, I am likely to end up a second-rate person."), (c) Parental Expectations (e.g., "My parents set very high standards for me."), (d) Parental Criticism (e.g., "As a child, I was punished for doing things less than perfect."), (e) Doubts About Actions (e.g., "Even when I do something very carefully, I often feel that it is not quite right."), and (f) Organization (e.g., "I am a neat person.").

Almost Perfect Scale-Revised

A third measurement that appears regularly in the perfectionism literature is the APS-R (Slaney et al., 2001), a revised version of the APS. The original APS was developed out of a desire to explore perfectionism "from as unbiased a perspective as possible" (Slaney et al., 1995), i.e., one that did not presuppose that perfectionism was negative or pathological. Revisions to the APS were motivated primarily by research done by Slaney and colleagues which caused them to conclude that *discrepancy* (i.e., the perception that one consistently fails to meet one's own high standards) was basic to

perfectionism and captured the essential negative aspect of the construct (Slaney et al., 2002). New items to measure discrepancy were developed, other subscales were eliminated, and the result was the APS-R, a 23 item inventory comprising 3 subscales: (a) Standards (e.g., “I set very high standards for myself.”), (b) Order (e.g., “Neatness is important to me.”), and (c) Discrepancy (e.g., “I am hardly every satisfied with my performance.”).

According to Slaney et al. (2002), what distinguishes the APS-R from other perfectionism measures is that it “appears to tap unique dimensions of perfectionism and predict relevant healthy as well as maladaptive psychological and achievement outcomes” (p. 71). Enns and Cox (2002) agree that this perfectionism measure differs from others in that it “attempts to discriminate between adaptive and maladaptive aspects of the perfectionism construct” (p. 49), which they attribute to its development from a counselling perspective. Despite these alleged differences, the emphasis on high expectations or standards and order is clearly consistent with the views of perfectionism reflected in the two MPS’.

Other measures

Hewitt, Flett and colleagues have recently developed two further perfectionism measures. The first is the Perfectionism Cognitions Inventory (PCI; Flett, Hewitt, Blankstein, & Gray, 1998), which assesses perfectionism from a “unique, cognitive perspective” (Enns & Cox, 2002). The PCI is a 25-item instrument that requires respondents to indicate how frequently they have certain perfectionistic thoughts such as “I can’t stand to make mistakes.” and “My work should be flawless.” (Enns & Cox, p. 50). The second measure is the Perfectionistic Self-Presentation Scale (PSPS; Hewitt,

Flett, Sherry, Habke, Parkin, Lam, McMurtry, Ediger, Fairlie, & Stein, 2003), which consists of 27 items that measure three dimensions of perfectionistic self-presentation: (a) Perfectionistic Self-Promotion (which involves actively promoting and displaying one's perfection), (b) Nondisplay of Imperfection (which involves concealing and avoiding demonstrations of one's imperfections), and (c) Nondisclosure of Imperfection (which involves avoiding verbal disclosure of one's imperfections; Hewitt et al., 2003).

According to Flett and Hewitt (2002a), the PSPS is “based on the belief that a specific neurotic form of perfectionism involves the need to publicly portray a flawless image to others” (p. 13).

Critique

How have existing conceptualizations contributed to our understanding of the intentionality of the phenomenon of perfectionism? In some respects, they begin to provide us a window into perfectionism as a mode of being in the world, as they suggest what a perfectionist may think, feel or do (corporeality, temporality, relationality, and spatiality). However, their contribution to our understanding of the lived meaning of perfectionism is simply that: a beginning. They do not reveal “the essential nature of [the] lived experience” of the phenomenon (van Manen, 1997, p. 39). Rather than disclose the nature of a perfectionist's immediate experience of the world, existing descriptions of perfectionism are largely theoretical and abstract, distanced from “a direct and primitive contact with the world” which phenomenological inquiry aims to re-achieve (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. vii). Assessment tools such as the MPS-H, MPS-F, and APS-R reduce perfectionism to a set of facts and figures and the individual to a nameless, faceless object of investigation, while labels such as “maladaptive” and distorted pathologize him and

his experience.

van Manen's explanation of how the essence of the reading experience of children might be uncovered illustrates how this segment of the current perfectionism research misses the perceptual experiential mark:

A phenomenological concern always has this twofold character: a preoccupation with both the concreteness (the ontic) as well as the essential nature (the onotological) of a lived experience. Phenomenology is not concerned primarily with the nomological or factual aspects of some state of affairs; rather, it always asks, what is the nature of the phenomenon as meaningfully experienced? For example, a phenomenological interest in the reading experience of children would be unlikely to involve experimentation with some hypothetical variable(s) or testable skills by comparing the reading experiences of children from this group, class, or school with that group, class or school. Instead, phenomenology asks, what is the reading experience itself like for children? What is it like for a young child to read? (p. 39-40)

Questions like these about perfectionism have not been asked or answered to date.

Instead, perfectionism theorists have focused on creating a "laundry list" of traits they view as typically perfectionistic and developing instruments designed to measure these traits. Until such questions are explored it will be unclear how accurately past researchers have foretold the experience of perfectionism.

"Connecting" Perfectionism

The vast majority of the quantitative work regarding perfectionism has taken the form of correlational studies wherein quantitative researchers have identified connections between perfectionism and a wide range of psychological difficulties. As noted earlier,

the weight of evidence linking perfectionism to various forms of psychological distress and disorders is one of the primary impetuses for this study. Despite the fact that perfectionists are often cast in the empirical literature as troubled individuals in need of professional or personal assistance or support, the treatment options for such individuals appear limited or, at least, poorly researched.

One premise of this study is that effective treatment for perfectionism-related distress depends on adequate understanding of the lived experience of perfectionism. Although ideally the interviews conducted for this study will begin to facilitate such an understanding, I have argued throughout this chapter that consideration of the existing literature is also an important initial step in orienting oneself to the perfectionism phenomenon. For the purposes of my own inquiry, findings regarding the mental and emotional correlates of perfectionism are significant insofar as they allude to or indicate the embodied (perceptual) experience which we call perfectionism. Thus, to further establish the foundation for the phenomenological exploration that follows, I describe briefly in the next section the thoughts and emotions that empiricists have linked to perfectionism. I again conclude the section with a brief critique, this time of the extent to which researchers' correlational findings help us understand the phenomenon of perfectionism.

Thoughts

Anecdotal writers and empiricists both have identified certain cognitions as being perfectionistic. So-called distorted or "irrational" thoughts or beliefs that have been attributed to perfectionism include dichotomous or all-or-nothing thinking, overgeneralizations, "should statements," fortune telling, minimizing and magnification,

emotional reasoning, moralizing, labeling, personalizing, self-blame, failure perseverance, and rumination (D. D. Burns, 1980; Ferguson & Rodway, 1994; Hewitt & Flett, 2002). Perfectionists have also been found to be “highly sensitive and reactive to the perceived importance of their performance” (Besser, Flett, & Hewitt, 2004, p. 306).

Another more troubling cognitive pattern that has been connected to perfectionism is thoughts of suicide. A number of studies have identified a positive relationship between perfectionism and suicide ideation (e.g., Beevers & Miller, 2004). Several of these have found that perfectionism contributes to thoughts of suicide even after controlling for hopelessness (Hewitt, Flett, & Turnbull-Donovan, 1992; Hewitt, Flett, & Weber, 1994; Hewitt, Newton, Flett, & Callander, 1997), and at least one has found a unique relationship between perfectionism and suicide after controlling for depression (Hewitt et al., 1992). As for a connection between perfectionism and actual suicide attempts, fewer studies appear to have investigated this link.

Emotions

The two emotions or emotional disorders most commonly linked to perfectionism in the empirical literature are anxiety (see Frost & DiBartolo, 2002) and depression (for a discussion, see Enns & Cox, 1999; see also Enns & Cox, 2002). Findings regarding anxiety and perfectionism include associations between perfectionism and each of worry, social anxiety, panic disorder, and obsessive-compulsive disorder (Flett, Greene, & Hewitt, 2004; Frost & DiBartolo). Examples of the work done in the field of depression and perfectionism are found in studies by Hewitt and colleagues identifying a relationship between certain perfectionism dimensions and depression (Hewitt & Flett, 1991a, 1993; Hewitt, Flett, & Ediger, 1996) and examining the role that stress plays in these

relationships (Flett, Hewitt, Blankstein, & Mosher, 1995; Hewitt & Flett, 1993; Hewitt et al., 1996).

Stress is a third emotion of interest to perfectionism researchers. It has been studied beyond its role in predicting depression and has been found to be associated with several perfectionism dimensions (Chang, Watkins, & Banks, 2004; Frost & DiBartolo; see also Hewitt & Flett, 2002).

Critique

What do findings regarding the cognitive or emotional correlates of perfectionism indicate about “the nature or essence of the experience” (van Manen, 1997, p. 10)? In other words, what does the correlational literature tell us about perfectionism as a certain way of being in the world and how that way of being is meaningfully experienced?

Quantitative studies using the various available perfectionism measures may be seen as the next stage in the empiricists’ attempts to describe the essence or nature of the experience of perfectionism. To return to the metaphor introduced earlier in this paper, they inhabit the next step on the hermeneutic spiral toward understanding that experience. For example, the so-called perfectionistic cognitive patterns (including suicidal ideation), styles, and distortions identified and studied by both anecdotal and empirical researchers allude to the perceptual experience of perfectionism. Similarly, the emotions and moods that researchers have linked to perfectionism, such as depression, anxiety, and stress, are suggestive of an embodied consciousness; they are not just emotions but significations of ways of being in the world, moods of world relation. In the language of the lifeworld existentials, the perfectionistic thoughts and emotions identified by quantitative researchers evoke the lived body of perfectionism.

However, by casting perfectionism as a dimension or construct, and by focusing on correlational, mediated, and moderated relationships, quantitative research remains at a clinical, analytical level removed from the perceptual realm of experience. In other words, the correlational literature fails to reveal perfectionism as a consciousness *of* something (Zahavi, 2003). From reading quantitative studies, we learn that perfectionism can involve dichotomous thinking or depressed or anxious feelings, but we do not learn to what these thoughts or feelings are directed. As Zahavi explained,

regardless of whether we are talking of a perception, thought, judgment, fantasy, doubt, expectation, or recollection, all of these diverse forms of consciousness are characterized by intending objects and cannot be analyzed properly without a look at their objective correlate, that is, the perceived, doubted, expected object. (p. 14)

The research methods followed in the studies described above do not permit such a look and therefore preclude a “proper analysis.”

The Need for Qualitative Research

In 2003, Rice, Bair, Castro, Cohen, and Hood noted that “few investigators have solicited the defining features of perfectionism from clients or research participants” (p. 41). In fact, they identified only two other qualitative studies of perfectionism (both done by Slaney and colleagues) in addition to their own (Rice et al.). The fact that in their review of existing perfectionism measures Enns and Cox (2002) were able to find only pencil and paper report instruments, i.e., no interview measures appear to exist, is further indication that the study of perfectionism has been largely quantitative.

The next section provides a review of the qualitative research on perfectionism in North American adult populations that has been done to date. In a study like this one, such a review serves several purposes. First, it indicates what, if any, quantitative gaps

have been filled by qualitative researchers. Second, it reveals whether further qualitative inquiry in the area is called for. And finally, following from this second purpose and related to the central purpose of this chapter as a whole, it illustrates the extent to which qualitative studies attend any more successfully than quantitative ones to the nature of perfectionist intentionality; that is, from a phenomenological perspective, the literature discussed in this section may be seen as part of the hermeneutic spiral of understanding perfectionism described earlier. I conclude the section with a brief critique of how much closer the qualitative work on perfectionism brings us to such an understanding.

Qualitative Studies

My literature review revealed four individual or groups of researchers who have studied perfectionism among adults from a qualitative perspective: (a) Slaney & Ashby (1996), (b) Sloat (2002), (c) Rice et al. (2003), and (d) Speirs Neumeister (2004a, 2004b, 2004c). In each case, data was gathered in whole or in part through the use of structured or semi-structured interviews. Sample sizes for the qualitative portions of these studies ranged from 6 to 37 participants. The scope of the researchers' inquiry ranged from a general study of the characteristics of perfectionism for purposes of comparison with the anecdotal literature (Slaney & Ashby), to a grounded theory analysis involving the development of a framework for evaluating conceptualizations of perfectionism (Sloat), to a so-called "phenomenological" investigation (Rice et al.), to consideration of how perfectionism develops (Speirs Neumeister, 2004a), affects one's interpretive style (Speirs Neumeister, 2004b), and affects perception of achievement motivation (Speirs Neumeister, 2004c). Perfectionist themes, tendencies, or characteristics which arose out of these researchers' work included the following: high self-standards for achievement

and performance, order and control, fear of failure, interference with personal relationships, and procrastination (Slaney & Ashby); forming ideals of perfectionism, striving for perfection, and evaluating for perfection (Sloat); distress, desire to perform well, industriousness, and distorted thought processes (Rice et al.); and fear of disappointing others and high self-standards (Speirs Neumeister, 2004a).

Critique

Although these studies begin to fill the qualitative gaps in the extant perfectionism literature, each has its flaws or limitations. One limitation of the Slaney and Ashby (1996) study flows from its structured interview format which may have precluded an in-depth exploration of the meaning of perfectionism for their participants. The authors' use of leading questions was particularly problematic as this likely forestalled participants from offering alternative descriptions of their experience.

In my view, Sloat's (2002) principal limitation was her self-professed negative view of perfectionism. Although Sloat is to be commended for making explicit her biases and preconceptions regarding perfectionism, her efforts at *bracketing* (i.e., setting aside) these are suspect. From the outset, she appeared intent on substantiating her negative perspective, as her goal of expanding existing perfectionism measures suggests that perfectionism is inherently maladaptive and therefore something to be assessed and (hopefully) eliminated.

Rice et al. (2003) entered the qualitative portion of their study from a comparatively unbiased position. However, their study had other limitations. Most notably, its design likely complicated their attempts at phenomenology. The interview questions as drafted may not have invited the types of rich, deep lived experience

descriptions sought in phenomenological inquiry, unless participants were encouraged to provide personal examples to elaborate on their responses, which is not clear from the study write-up. In addition, Rice et al.'s sample selection method is not ideal from a phenomenological perspective. The researchers explained that they chose participants based on their MPS-F scores in order to "circumvent participants' *a priori* expectations regarding perfectionism" (p. 41). However, it seems that just the opposite would occur by exposing participants to an existing conceptualization of perfectionism (i.e., a measure) before inviting them to offer their own lived experience descriptions.

Of all the methodologies used in published qualitative perfectionism studies, that of Speirs Neumeister (2004a, 2004b, 2004c) is the most similar to that used in this study. However, qualitative gaps remain to be filled. Her research questions were more narrowly focused than those posed here: She investigated certain specific correlates, variables, or aspects of perfectionism, rather than the essence of perfectionism *per se*. And as in the Rice et al. (2003) study, her use of an external measure (i.e., definition) of perfectionism may have shaped her participants' answers to the interview questions.

Despite their limitations and gaps, do these qualitative studies attend any more closely to the substantive features of the intentionality to the phenomenon of perfectionism? It appears the answer is yes. By the very nature of their (interview) methods, qualitative researchers were able to uncover richer understandings of what it means to be a perfectionist. As such, their study findings and their inclusion of participant transcript samples in their published work add to and support the extant quantitative literature which offers a circumscribed understanding of perfectionism at best (due to its data collection, analysis, and reporting practices).

However, qualitative researchers of perfectionism still fall short of accomplishing the goal of phenomenological inquiry: namely, to explore the experience of a particular phenomenon as a certain lived relation to the world. More specifically, they fail to explicitly consider how the lifeworld existentials privileged by phenomenologists (van Manen, 1997) resound in the stories shared by study participants. That is, they do not offer “accounts of experienced space, time, body, and human relation as we live them” (p. 184). Although examples of these existential themes are found throughout these qualitative studies (space in the discussion of high standards and order, time in the notion of procrastination, body in the discussion of psychological distress, and human relation in researchers’ findings regarding interpersonal difficulties and parent-child relations), qualitative researchers to date have yet to address their place in perfectionist intentionality directly. Instead, they have identified and discussed themes which largely parallel those already treated widely throughout the extant quantitative literature. Although such an approach is clearly valid, as it provides further support for past theories and findings, it leaves room for further inquiry. It is this (phenomenological) gap which this study purports to fill, through its approach to investigation (data collection) and reflection (analysis).

Treating Perfectionism

As noted earlier in this paper, various studies have suggested that perfectionism is associated with poor treatment outcomes (for a review, see Flett & Hewitt, 2002a). Researchers have also found that perfectionism interferes with the development of a strong therapeutic alliance (Blatt, Zuroff, Quinlan, & Pilkonis, 1996). Posited reasons behind the negative association between perfectionism and treatment have included perfectionists’ beliefs about the inadequacy of “traditional treatment methods” (D. D.

Burns, 1980, p. 44), perfectionists' tendencies to be self-critical and to set unrealistic goals (DiBartolo et al., 2001), and perfectionists' reluctance to discuss personal issues (Nielsen, Hewitt, Han, Habke, Cockell, Stager, & Flett, as cited in Habke & Flynn, 2002). The high standards and expectations for the self which anecdotal (e.g., Hollender, 1965) and empirical (e.g., Hewitt & Flett, 1991b) reports alike attribute to perfectionism, as well as the elevated expectations that some perfectionists have for others (e.g., Hewitt & Flett), may also contribute to these treatment difficulties.

Interestingly, the studies to date on perfectionism and treatment appear to have focused primarily on how perfectionism affects one's response to treatment for psychological problems such as depression. Little research seems to have been done on the treatment of perfectionism per se. A review of this limited treatment literature is clearly relevant to the counselling purpose of this study. Before hypothesizing about new treatment solutions for those experiencing perfectionism-related distress, one must first be mindful of preexisting solutions that have (or have not) proved effective. Thus, in the following section, I provide a brief overview of the studies done regarding the relationship between perfectionism and treatment for depression; I then outline the extant research on treating perfectionism. As I have done elsewhere in this chapter, I consider what these studies' findings indicate to us about perfectionist intentionality.

Depression

According to Flett and Hewitt (2002a), other than that done by Sidney J. Blatt, David C. Zuroff, and colleagues, there has been "little systematic research on the role of perfectionism in treatment" (p. 19). Blatt and colleagues conducted a number of analyses of data from the Treatment of Depression Collaborative Research Project (Blatt & Zuroff,

2002). Through two of these, they concluded that perfectionism significantly predicted negative treatment outcome at termination (Blatt, Quinlan, Pilkonis, & Shea, 1995) and 18 months later (Blatt, Zuroff, Bondi, Sanislow III, & Pilkonis, 1998). Through two others, they found that for those with either high or low levels of perfectionism, therapeutic change was marginally related to the perceived quality of the therapeutic relationship (Blatt et al., 1996), that it was those with moderate perfectionism scores for whom the quality of the relationship was most central (Blatt et al., 1996), and that perfectionism interfered with participants' ability to contribute to the therapeutic alliance (Zuroff, Blatt, Sotsky, Krupnick, Martin, Sanislow III, & Simmens, 2000). Zuroff et al. offered some interesting hypotheses with respect to this last finding: a limited capacity on the part of perfectionists to develop an open and collaborative relationship, a need for more time to develop such a relationship, and an inability to respond constructively to ruptures in the alliance were all posited as potential explanations.

Blatt and colleagues are not the only ones who have examined the role of perfectionism in the treatment of depression. Scott (as cited in Flett & Hewitt, 2002a) found that perfectionism predicted nonadherence to medication for depression, and Rector, Zuroff, and Segal (1999) found that "patients with overly perfectionistic standards for performance and/or excessive needs for approval appear to have greater difficulty in forming a trusting [therapeutic] relationship" (p. 326).

Like the research discussed earlier, these studies are located along the hermeneutic spiral of understanding the perfectionism phenomenon. Specifically, perfectionists' challenges with respect to forming a therapeutic alliance address the lifeworld existentials of relationality and temporality, providing further motive for a

phenomenology of perfectionism.

Perfectionism

The research on the treatment of perfectionism per se appears limited at best. There is some preliminary evidence to indicate that cognitive/cognitive-behavioural strategies may be effective in treating or reducing perfectionism (DiBartolo et al., 2001; Ferguson & Rodway, 1994; see also Corrie, 2004). There is also research to suggest that “long-term, intensive, psychodynamically oriented, inpatient treatment” (Blatt & Zuroff, 2002, p. 396) may be effective for perfectionistic individuals (for a discussion, see Blatt & Zuroff).

The Law School Experience: Distress (and Perfectionism?)

Although there is relatively little empirical literature regarding the law school experience (Dammeyer & Nunez, 1999; Murdoch, 2002), what literature does exist indicates that “legal education is often stressful and overwhelming” (Dammeyer & Nunez, p. 58). Both anecdotal reports and empirical research have indicated that law students experience distress in a variety of forms (e.g., anxiety, depression, and stress; for a review, see Dammeyer & Nunez; see also Murdoch). A more recent study found that law students’ depression levels were similar to those of individuals who had experienced traumatic events such as death or marital separation (Reifman, McIntosh, & Ellsworth, 2000). Notably, law students have reported higher levels of anxiety, stress, and depression than comparison groups, including medical students (Dammeyer, 1999; Dammeyer & Nunez).

Some of the literature on law students has also posited a link between perfectionism and law student distress. For example, Dammeyer and Nunez (1999) hypothesized that “certain qualities associated with anxiety and depression (e.g.,

perfectionism, need for achievement) may even be positively related to getting into and succeeding at law school” (p. 70-71). A connection between law and perfectionism has also been suggested in the anecdotal literature. In treating and studying a small group of law students suffering from depression and anxiety, D. D. Burns (1980) observed

an entrenched, perfectionistic thinking pattern [among a majority of them]. The law school. . .[had] highly competitive entrance requirements, so these students had been used to perceiving themselves at or near the top of their class during high school and college. In spite of their rational understanding that law school lumped them together with the cream of the crop, they nevertheless had great difficulty in accepting any personal role that meant being less than No. 1. When such students begin to realize that their performance will place them somewhere in the middle of the pack, they react with frustration, anger, depression, and panic. Because their previous experiences have left them psychologically unprepared for an “average” role, they are prone to perceive themselves, unrealistically, as second-rate losers. (p. 37; see also P. W. Beck & D. D. Burns, 1979)

To date, however, researchers have not specifically investigated perfectionism in law student populations. Research in the academic context has focused primarily on undergraduate students. Some limited research on students in the health professions, including medical and dental students, has also been done (Enns, Cox, Sareen, & Freeman, 2001; Henning, Ey, & Shaw, 1998). Enns et al. undertook a comparative study, comparing levels and dimensions of perfectionism in medical students and undergraduate arts students, while Henning et al. looked at the imposter phenomenon, psychological adjustment, and perfectionism in medical, dental, nursing, and pharmacy students. The

only study that appears to have considered perfectionism in law students involved a comparison of perfectionism types among five populations, including law students (Albanese-Kotar, 2001).

This gap in the extant research is somewhat surprising as law students appear to be an ideal population in which to study perfectionism. To paraphrase Enns et al. (2001), perfectionism may be a particularly relevant personality characteristic to study in . . . [law] students. Faultless performance, meticulous attention to detail and high levels of competency generally represent desirable characteristics of . . . [law students and lawyers], yet students with excessively high standards may have difficulty completing assignments and may experience extra self-imposed pressure. (p. 1035)

Support for this view is found in Albanese-Kotar's (2001) justification for choosing to study perfectionism among law students and lawyers. She explained that medicine and law were selected as exemplars of occupational environments which might favor conscientious perfectionism and self-promoting perfectionism, respectively. . . . Personal feedback from members of these professions and their spouses confirmed that perfectionism is widespread within these occupations for both students and practicing professionals. (p. 74)

A related research gap that has important implications for the proposed research has been noted by Flett, Hewitt, Oliver, and Macdonald (2002): To date, "virtually no research has been conducted on the role of specific environmental contexts in promoting perfectionism, including competitive school environments and demanding job environments" (p. 113). Frost and DiBartolo (2002) echoed this need to study whether or

how perfectionism changes depending on the circumstances. A related open question is under which conditions adaptive perfectionism is associated with distress (e.g., achievement related stress or academic failure; Enns et al., 2001). As law school is well recognized as demanding and competitive (Dammeyer & Nunez, 1999; Pritchard & McIntosh, 2003; Reifman et al., 2000) and provides myriad opportunities for achievement related stress and academic failure, it offers an optimal setting in which to explore the interaction of perfectionism and environment.

Summary

To date, no researcher has inquired into the essential characteristics (i.e., temporality, relationality, spatiality, and corporeality) of perfectionism. Despite this, the extant perfectionism literature contains several clues about perfectionist intentionality. Theories and findings regarding perfectionists' procrastination and delays in developing a therapeutic alliance (lived time), interpersonal (e.g., parent-child, therapist-client) difficulties (lived human relation), high personal standards and a need for order (spatiality), and thoughts and feelings (lived body) all allude to the lived experience of the phenomenon of perfectionism. This latent presence of the four lifeworld existentials in the extant research not only previews an explicit investigation into the phenomenology of perfectionism such as the one undertaken for this study, it demands it.

Chapter 3: Method

This chapter outlines the method I used to investigate the lived experience of perfectionism in first year law school. The sections in this chapter address my chosen methodology, how I identified participants, the ethical safeguards I adopted, the data collection and analysis process and experience, the writing process, my assumptions and pre-understandings regarding the phenomenon under investigation, and the trustworthiness and limitations of the study design.

Methodology

The chosen methodology for this study is a phenomenological research approach. In this section, I provide a brief introduction to the principles of phenomenological inquiry and set out the rationale for applying a phenomenological perspective to the research questions posed.

Phenomenological Inquiry

The starting point for phenomenological research is the lifeworld (Giorgi, 1975; van Manen, 1997). Phenomenology “differs from almost every other science in that it attempts to gain insightful descriptions of the way we experience the world pre-reflectively, without taxonomizing, classifying, or abstracting it” (van Manen, p. 9). Put another way, phenomenologists are interested in the lived experience of a particular phenomenon. “From a phenomenological point of view, to do research is always to question the way we experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings” (van Manen, p. 5).

Thus, the phenomenological researcher is involved in a search for meaning (Giorgi, 1975; van Manen, 1997). What does it *mean*, what is it *like*, to have a certain

experience? These are the questions which are asked by phenomenology. To answer them, the researcher focuses on individuals' subjective perceptions and understandings of the phenomenon being studied (Giorgi) and, in so doing, ultimately emerges with a deeper insight into that phenomenon.

The design of this study was guided by the hermeneutic phenomenological research approach articulated by van Manen (1997). Giorgi's (1975) more structured approach to data analysis also served as inspiration. However, in keeping with the emergent nature of phenomenological inquiry, neither van Manen's nor Giorgi's proposed models were followed slavishly. And throughout, these cautionary words of van Manen were kept in mind:

To *do* hermeneutic phenomenology is to attempt to accomplish the impossible: to construct a full interpretive description of some aspect of the lifeworld, and yet to remain aware that lived life is always more complex than any explication of meaning can reveal. The phenomenological reduction teaches us that complete reduction is impossible, that full or final descriptions are unattainable. (p. 18)

Rationale for Using a Phenomenological Approach

A phenomenological approach was appropriate for this study for several reasons. First, it was well-suited to the stated research goal, which was to explore and understand the experience of perfectionism for first year law students, with a view to providing counsellors deeper insight into their perfectionist clients' experience. Through gathering my participants' perfectionism experiences and uncovering their meaning, I obtained a better understanding of the deeper meaning of perfectionism as an aspect of human experience (van Manen, 1997). This insight will help me and other counsellors make

better therapeutic choices with our perfectionistic clients.

Second, the phenomenological method has much in common with counselling practice (Osborne, 1990). This similarity is relevant given my status as a counsellor-in-training and my expectation that I will work with members of the population sampled for this study, i.e., law students and perfectionists, in my counselling practice. The counselling skills I hold and am continually developing are the same as those needed for phenomenological research. As Osborne explained,

personal qualities such as warmth, caring, openness, positive regard for others, ethical integrity and responsibility are important requisites for both counsellors and phenomenological researchers. Both are primarily interested in understanding the life-world of another, unless the counsellor uses an arms-length technique which avoids an intimate relationship with the client. (p. 89)

van Manen's (1997) characterization of phenomenology further supports this comparison:

Indeed, if there is one word that most aptly characterizes phenomenology itself, then this word is "thoughtfulness." In the works of the great phenomenologists, thoughtfulness is described as a minding, a heeding, a caring attunement (Heidegger, 1962) – a heedful, mindful wondering about the project of life, of living, of what it means to live a life. (p. 12)

And finally, the phenomenological method was appropriate given my own concern for the topic and my willingness to live the question of my research. As van Manen (1997) advocated, I am "deeply interested" (p. 43) in the question of what it means to be a perfectionist during law school, due to my own lived experience of

perfectionism.

Participants

Sampling

Purposeful sampling which involves “selecting *information-rich cases* for study in depth” (Patton, 2002, p. 230) was used to identify participants. The specific purposeful strategy used is known as intensity sampling. “An intensity sample consists of information-rich cases that manifest the phenomenon of interest intensely (but not extremely). . . . Using the logic of intensity sampling, one seeks excellent or rich examples of the phenomenon of interest, but not highly unusual ones” (Patton, p. 234).

Participants were required to satisfy two principal criteria for selection. First, the participant had to be a self-identified perfectionist. Support for this approach as a promising method of selection is found in other qualitative investigations of perfectionism (Slaney & Ashby, 1996). There is some evidence that self-identified perfectionists (or those labeled as such by others) score higher on certain perfectionism scales than those who are not self- or other- identified perfectionists (see Slaney et al., 1995). Furthermore, self-identification, as opposed to identification through the use of one of the available perfectionism scales, offered the opportunity for a new or deeper understanding than that reflected in the extant literature. This is not to suggest that existing conceptualizations and measures of perfectionism were or should have been disregarded in this study. Rather, as I explained in chapter 2, they are meaningful to the extent that they provide a theoretical overview of perfectionism, thereby alluding to its lived meaning, and therefore provide important points of comparison to the self-definitions offered by the participants in this study.

The second criterion was that the participant be in his or her first year of law

school. Researchers have found that first year is a source of psychological and physical distress for law students (Benjamin, Kaszniak, Sales, & Shanfield, 1986; Pritchard & McIntosh, 2003; Reifman et al., 2000). In addition, several early studies identified the first year of law school as the most challenging (for a discussion, see Gutierrez, 1985). Murdoch's (2002) recent study of distress among law students also suggested that "first year law students experienced the greatest level of distress, both in terms of the greatest increase in distress and in the highest year-end rate" (p. 91-92).

It should be noted that there is some evidence that levels of law student distress are as high as or higher in third year than in first (for a review, see Dammeyer & Nunez, 1999; see also Reifman et al., 2000). However, it is likely that the distress experienced in third year is due to different factors, such as the anticipation and uncertainty surrounding graduation and entry into the legal profession (Benjamin et al., 1986; Shanfield & Benjamin, 1985).

Recruitment

I recruited participants for this study through electronic mail postings made through the law faculty of the participants' university. These brief announcements invited first year law students who considered themselves to be perfectionists and who were interested in participating in a study of law students' experiences with perfectionism to contact me by email. Participants were promised and given a \$15 gift certificate in return for their participation. My intention was to interview between ten and 12 people and to choose participants on a "first come, first served" basis. The sample size was appropriate given the stated purpose of the research inquiry (Patton, 2002): to explore in-depth the meaning of a particular phenomenon for a particular population.

Selection

In all, 15 individuals contacted me to express interest in the study. A sixteenth emailed to ask me if I was a law student or had any connection to the law school, but did not volunteer to participate. Five of the individuals who volunteered did not ultimately participate: two because they explained that they did not in fact consider themselves to be perfectionists, two because they failed to respond to my follow up emails, and one because the location of the interview sites was inconvenient. Thus, I interviewed 10 people for this study. Unfortunately, this paper only reflects the stories of nine because I failed to turn the tape recorder on during my fourth interview. Although I prepared field notes of that encounter, I chose not to include the interview in my study because without the transcript I felt I could not be faithful to the richness of the participant's lived experience descriptions. For this reason, I describe this study as comprising nine interviews.

The final participants for the proposed study were six women and three men in their second semester of their first year at a Canadian law school. I have chosen not to provide an individual profile of each participant here, or to include demographic information for the sample as a whole. The bases for these decisions are two-fold. First, I failed to include questions regarding age, ethnicity, culture, etc., in my interview protocol and any comments I might make regarding sample demographics would be speculative at best. Following the interviews, I sent a brief demographic questionnaire to each participant along with his or her transcript summary (discussed below), but only four participants returned a completed questionnaire. Second, and more important, I wish to safeguard participants' anonymity to the greatest extent possible not least because the

number of individuals attending law school in Canada is relatively small. What I have done is describe certain aspects of my encounters with my participants in an effort to personalize them. This description is found below in my account of the interview process and includes my reflections on how I was affected by those encounters.

Ethical Safeguards

Before recruiting participants, I obtained ethical approval of this study through Simon Fraser University's Office of Research Ethics. All participants were treated according to principles one through six in Part E, Research and Publications, of the Canadian Counselling Association Code of Ethics. Each participant signed an informed consent form (see Appendix A) at the start of the research interview after reading a document describing the nature and purpose of the study.

Interview transcripts and fieldnotes contained only participants' initials, and neither full names nor initials were included on the transcript summaries sent to participants for their comments (see below under "Data Analysis" for an explanation of these summaries). Identifying data was kept in a separate folder from the transcripts, and all data was maintained in a locked filing cabinet. In writing up my analysis of the interviews, I have given each participant a pseudonym in order to protect his or her anonymity.

Data Collection

The Process

During the research process, I conducted one conversational research interview with each participant as a means of gathering personal life stories about perfectionism (van Manen, 1997). I interviewed participants during the second semester of their first year of law school to ensure that they had a time period (i.e., first semester) on which to

comment. Interviews were audiotaped and later transcribed and ranged in length from approximately 45 to 90 minutes. An open-ended, minimally structured approach, focusing on the participant's experience of perfectionism, was used; a copy of the interview protocol that I used as a guide during each interview is attached as Appendix B. I encouraged participants to provide examples or stories from their lives to expand on their answers to the protocol questions. The goal throughout was to obtain specific, uninterpreted descriptions of what the participants experienced, thought, and felt and how they acted (Kvale, 1996).

Questions 6 and 7 of the protocol were inspired by the critical incident research technique, whereby researchers collect "direct observations of human behavior in such a way as to facilitate their potential usefulness in solving practical problems and developing broad psychological principles" (Flanagan, 1954, p. 327). According to Borgen and Amundson (1984), who used a combined phenomenological / critical incident approach in their study of the unemployment experience, researchers have found this technique to be effective in identifying facilitating or hindering factors. This questioning technique, which seeks information about incidents having special significance (Flanagan), is also consistent with the phenomenological interview method used in this study, since van Manen (1997) recommended asking participants to give concrete examples of specific instances of the phenomenon. I hoped that a focus on what individuals find helpful and unhelpful in terms of dealing with perfectionism would suggest possible counselling strategies for reducing perfectionists' distress.

During any apparent lulls in my conversations with participants, I used silence or probing techniques such as paraphrasing, reflection, and clarifying questions (e.g., "Can

you give me an example?") to prompt the participant to continue (van Manen, 1997), rather than pre-planned prompts which can have the effect of directing the interview away from the participant's subjective experience. I also attempted to clarify the meaning of the participants' statements by restating and interpreting what I had heard. Testing my hypotheses and interpretations in this way during the conversation let participants know that they were heard and understood and also served as a preparatory first step for my later analysis (Kvale, 1996).

A pilot interview was conducted before the research interviews in order to identify any necessary refinements or additions to the interview guide. No significant changes to the original interview protocol were made after the pilot.

After each interview, I prepared fieldnotes of my impressions. Throughout the research process, I also made note of other insights and reflections I had regarding the interviews. These various notes were used to refine interview questions at the data collection stage and as an early aid to the analysis described in the next chapter. They also served as the primary source material, supplemented by the interview transcripts, for the description of the interview encounters I offer in the next section.

The Encounters

Thus far in this chapter, I have described the why, what, and how of the data collection conducted for this study. In this next section, to lend further transparency to the research process, I say something about the where and the who and relate some of my personal reactions to the interview encounters, which is appropriate given that the phenomenon of perfectionism is one which I share with my participants. Throughout, in keeping with Kvale's (1996) recommendation that the interviewer "be conscious of the

interpersonal dynamics within the interaction and take them into account” (p. 35) during and after the interview, I include my perceptions of the interviewer/interviewee relational power dynamic.

Setting

Each interview I conducted for this study occurred in one of four different settings: (a) a boardroom in a downtown office building, (b) a study room in a university library, (c) a participant’s home, and (d) a participant’s workplace. From my perspective, each setting played a role in the tone of the interviewer-interviewee encounter.

I sensed an air of importance to the interviews that occurred in the office boardroom with Sam, Carol, and Michael. The awkward elevator ride, the large wooden table where we sat, the view of the city out the expanse of windows, my offer of a glass of water from the nearby kitchen, and the interruption during one interview by building security to verify our legitimacy all lent an air of formality to the occasions. I felt the interviewer-interviewee power (im)balance, theoretically already tilted in my favour due to my role as investigator, shift further towards me as the participants appeared to be “out of their element.”

The feeling in the library study room, the site of my interviews with each of Allison, Trisha, Allan, and Christina was more casual but also somewhat dreary. The room was windowless and white-walled, its steel garbage bins overflowed with food waste, and its table was riddled with graffiti penned during hours of unfocused studying. We were interrupted here, too: not by a man in uniform but by sullen students wanting to use the room (which we had reserved) or borrow a chair. Here, I felt the interview power balance approach an equilibrium, perhaps because the academic setting or something

similar was familiar to interviewer and interviewee alike.

The tone of the interviews in the home and workplace settings was different yet again. In both, I felt like an intruder and as such I felt the power balance shift away from me during these encounters. Rachel's casual dress, the presence of her pet, and the ringing of her telephone kept me constantly aware that we were in *her* living room and that this was *her* Saturday morning. Although Barbara's workplace was in no way like Rachel's home, Barbara's impeccable appearance and efficient manner and the filing cabinets and piles of paper nearby evoked in me a similar reaction: I felt the urge to apologize for inconveniencing her.

Impressions

My impression of each interview encounter was as unique as the individual I spoke to. However, there were certain commonalities to how I reacted mentally and emotionally to my participants and their stories. In this section, I highlight some of these reactions and in so doing reveal not only something of myself but also of my participants.

In speaking with each of Sam, Rachel, Allan, Christina, Barbara, and Carol I felt at times self-conscious and off-kilter. On reflection, it appears that these feelings were connected to my sense of a power shift towards, and in some cases a detachment from, these participants. I felt "on the spot" as Sam and Allan questioned and challenged me: Was I a perfectionist? Why was I doing this study? When would it be published? My discomfort with Christina was more subtle. In response to her long pauses and frequent bursts of (somewhat humourless) laughter, I became nervous and defensive: If she was as critical of others as she claimed, what must she be thinking about me? Was she laughing at *me*? I experienced similar apprehension during and after my encounters with Rachel

and Barbara. When Barbara characterized my questions as “difficult” or “hard to answer,” I took this as a negative judgment of my skill as an interviewer; when Rachel described having to talk to friends about their problems as an “obligation,” I wondered whether she also viewed our time together as burdensome. Ironically, despite her friendly demeanor, Carol kept me at perhaps the greatest distance of all these participants. Her use of the pronoun *you* to describe her own experiences and her tendency to speak in generalities or philosophize about life complicated my ability to obtain the rich, detailed descriptions of her lived experience that I sought.

I experienced greater equilibrium during my encounters with Allison, Trisha, and Michael. Rather than off-balance, I felt a sense of kinship or connection with each of them. Trisha’s self-description as “uberorganized,” her self-deprecating humour, and her easy self-disclosure had a reciprocal effect as I shared more with her about my own law school experience than I did with any other participant. Michael displayed a similar ease with himself, and he too inspired me to be open, this time about my field of study and research hopes in a way that the other participants had not. Allison was perhaps the most open as she became tearful in recounting a number of difficult, anxiety-ridden events in her life. Although I appreciated and admired her authenticity, I also experienced a sense of helplessness and some confusion about my role: Was I a researcher or a counsellor? Should I probe further or offer comfort? Despite this uncertainty, I felt that, like that of Trisha and Michael, Allison’s genuineness had allowed me to connect with her at a deeper level than I had with many of the other participants.

Data Analysis

In analyzing the interview transcripts, I was guided primarily by van Manen’s (1997) ideas about theme isolation. According to van Manen, the phenomenological

researcher identifies themes by determining the meaning of a particular anecdote or story, and thereby of the lived experience being investigated. He or she reads or listens to the recounting of a particular example and asks “What is going on here? What is the point of this story? What is the meaning of this anecdote?” (van Manen). In this way, meaning informs theme and theme articulates meaning.

I then followed an analytic approach which borrowed from both van Manen’s (1997) selective reading method and Giorgi’s (1975) more detailed line-by-line analysis. To isolate themes, I began by reading through each transcript to “get the sense of the whole” (Giorgi, p. 87). I then read the text again several more times and asked myself “What statements, phrases or collections of sentences seem particularly essential or revealing about perfectionism”? I highlighted these segments of the transcript and copied them into a separate table. For each of these segments, I identified one or more themes by asking the types of meaning questions described above. Like Giorgi, “I tried to read the description provided by. . .[the participant] without prejudice and tried to thematize the protocol from [his or] her viewpoint as understood by me” (p. 95). After formulating themes for each segment, I prepared a list of themes for each interview and determined the frequency of occurrence of those themes within the interview. Theme lists for all interviews were then compared to identify common themes and other patterns among the interviews.

The theme isolation process ended with a consideration of whether the identified themes were “essential” to the phenomenon under investigation (Giorgi, 1975; van Manen, 1997). I determined whether themes were essential (as opposed to incidental) by asking “Does perfectionism without this theme lose its fundamental meaning?” (van

Manen).

Once my thematic analysis was complete, I carried out a member check process. For each participant, I prepared a written thematic summary of his or her interview and sent it to him or her by regular mail. In these summaries, I identified five to seven themes that I understood to be most prominent in the participant's interview. The following are some examples of such themes: (a) expectations / standards (for self or others), (b) organization / preparation / order, (c) time, (d) anxiety, (e) concern about mistakes, and (f) self-presentation / others' impressions. For each theme, I provided a brief description of it – one or more statements articulating what the theme appeared to tell us about the experience of perfectionism – and some sample quotations from the participant's interview transcript that reflected the particular theme. Participants were asked to consider and respond to the following questions for each theme as they read their summary: (1) Does the theme “fit” with your experience of perfectionism, that is, do you agree that the theme belongs to your experience? (2) Do the quotations reflect the theme in question? They were also invited to add something further to the summary if they wished. Participants were informed that if responses to the summaries were not received by a specified date, I would assume that they agreed with my interpretations and had no further comments they wished to share.

Four out of nine participants responded, including one after the response deadline. All four confirmed my interpretations, three explicitly, one implicitly (i.e., this participant returned the summary with no comments written on it along with her completed demographic questionnaire). Of the four, only one added a further observation; this was considered along with the transcripts in preparing the analysis contained in chapter 4.

By returning to share my interpretations with the participants, I allowed them an opportunity to determine whether the identified themes resonated for them and whether I accurately understood their experiences of perfectionism while in law school. In this way, the interviews became hermeneutic interactions whereby the participants became collaborators in the research project (van Manen, 1997).

The final stage in my analysis was also the first step in the writing process. I reviewed the themes which I had identified at the previous stage and considered whether and how they reflected the four lifeworld existentials. The results of this process are reflected in chapter 4.

Writing Process

As I compose this section, the writing of this paper is still necessarily a work in progress. As van Manen (1997) predicted, the task of writing has turned into “a complex process of rewriting (re-thinking, re-flecting, re-cognizing)” (p. 131). Because of this, I cannot yet (or perhaps ever) speak definitively about that process. What I can do is offer some interim reflections on what it has been like thus far to add my words to those of my participants.

The most striking but likely least surprising thing about the writing has been how it has revealed my experience of the perfectionism phenomenon. Examples of the presence of the lifeworld existentials in my writing process abound: in the days and weeks I have spent (re)reviewing, (re)thematizing, and (re)interpreting the stories included in chapter 4 (temporality); in the placement and re-placement, organization and re-organization, of those same stories as I attempted to put them in their “proper” order (spatiality); in the constant fear that I had failed to do justice to my participants’ experience (corporeality); and in the even more constant desire to have those participants

not just validate but value what I had created (relationality).

In explaining that the phenomenological text shows that which is hidden, van Manen (1997) claimed that “certain meaning is better expressed through *how* one writes than in *what* one writes” (p. 131). Although van Manen appears to have been speaking here about the form of a written text as opposed to its substance, his words also aptly describe my writing process. In many ways, the lived meaning of the phenomenon of perfectionism was equally (if not better) expressed in both the how and the what of this paper.

Assumptions and Pre-understandings

According to van Manen (1997), “the problem of phenomenological inquiry is not always that we know too little about the phenomenon we wish to investigate, but that we know too much” (p. 46). In other words, our own assumptions about and understanding of a particular phenomenon, coupled with existing empirical knowledge regarding that phenomenon, cause us to view that phenomenon in a particular way. Rather than deny or attempt to ignore our own “understandings, beliefs, biases, assumptions, presuppositions, and theories” (p. 47), van Manen advocated that we as researchers make them explicit. Only once we do this can we “hold them deliberately at bay” (p. 47) or bracket them.

Perfectionism is clearly a phenomenon about which (too) much empirical knowledge exists. In providing an overview of some of the extant literature, I have attempted to make explicit many of the current empirical understandings, beliefs, and theories about perfectionism as well as my familiarity with them. By revealing that I am a self-described perfectionist and former law student and sharing some of my own experiences of perfectionism, I have also acknowledged that I enter the research process with my own assumptions and pre-understandings of the phenomenon of perfectionism,

both in and out of law school. These assumptions and pre-understandings were likely further cemented as a result of my literature review, which I completed before interviewing my participants and which contained many echoes of my own beliefs and biases.

Before beginning the data gathering phase of this study, I reflected on my assumptions and pre-understandings so that I could bracket and be mindful of them throughout the research process. This reflection involved making a list of the thoughts, feelings, and behaviours I saw as characteristic of perfectionists. It also included speaking to friends and colleagues about my understanding of the meaning of perfectionism. Through the bracketing process, I identified the following assumptions and pre-understandings regarding the phenomenon of perfectionism:

1. Perfectionists hold high, often unrealistic expectations for their own performance and rarely, if ever, feel satisfied with that performance even if those expectations are met.
2. Perfectionists achieve a high degree of success in an academic environment.
3. Perfectionists doubt their abilities. They experience this self-doubt before, during, and after performing a task, particularly one that is new or challenging.
4. Before beginning and while completing a task, a perfectionist worries about making mistakes. If a perfectionist does make a mistake, s/he experiences disappointment and/or anxiety and engages in self-criticism.
5. Where possible, perfectionists avoid tasks or activities that might result in failure. This avoidance is due in part to the embarrassment or shame a

perfectionist feels as a result of performing imperfectly, especially when others might witness this imperfection.

6. Perfectionists are highly organized individuals who crave order and neatness. They also have a keen attention to detail.
7. Perfectionists spend more time than is necessary to complete tasks such as academic and work assignments.
8. One experiences perfectionism in several or all of his / her life spheres.

As part of my reflective bracketing activities, I also considered my beliefs about the experience of first year law school and how that experience affects a student's perfectionism. I identified these presuppositions:

1. The first year of law school is a stressful experience. The workload is heavy and often unmanageable. The format and content of legal texts and decisions are complicated and unfamiliar to most students entering law school. The sole source of evaluation for first year courses is generally a final exam worth 100% of the student's mark. The academic institution as a whole, the legal profession, and other students place great emphasis on a student's marks. For example, students are often ranked annually based on their grades, and these rankings may or may not be disclosed to the student body at large. Students are aware of which of their classmates are performing well and tend to regularly discuss among themselves their progress and marks.
2. Perfectionists may find law school a shocking experience. They may realize that past study habits are not appropriate or effective in a law school environment. Their grade point average may slip significantly below what

they achieved in past degrees as they no longer receive As for their work.

Trustworthiness

“Maintaining rigor in a qualitative study is of paramount concern to investigators. When planning or evaluating a qualitative study, it is appropriate to evaluate the rigor or ‘trustworthiness’ (Streubert & Carpenter, 1999) using various criteria” (Sharts-Hopko, 2002, p. 84). Trustworthiness encompasses notions of *credibility* or *dependability*, *confirmability* or *auditability*, and *transferability* or *fittingness* (Sharts-Hopko).

In phenomenological research, threats to trustworthiness are most likely to occur during the analysis phase of a study, as the researcher reads and interprets transcript material through the lens of his or her own biases regarding the phenomenon (Kvale, 1983). Giorgi’s (1975) thoughts on the issue of possible alternate interpretations of the same data, however, are instructive:

It is even conceivable that another investigator could write a different structure of style, but my experience has shown that it is never *wholly* different; rather, it is divergent because another investigator is looking at the same data slightly differently. Consequently, the control comes from the researcher’s context or perspective of the data. Once the context and intention becomes known, the divergence is usually intelligible to all even if not universally agreeable. Thus, the chief point to be remembered with this type of research is not so much whether another position with respect to the data could be adopted (this point is granted beforehand), but whether a reader, adopting the same viewpoint as articulated by the researcher, can also see what the researcher saw, whether or not he agrees with it. That is the key criterion for qualitative research. (p. 96)

Various methods exist for ensuring the trustworthiness of a phenomenological

researcher's interpretations. These include the following:

1. Bracketing the researcher's orientation to the phenomenon, and carefully describing the research procedure and data analysis. This gives the reader the opportunity to understand the researcher's interpretation. (Osborne, 1990)
2. Checking interpretations for goodness of fit with the participants, i.e. through member checks. (Osborne; Sharts-Hopko, 2002)
3. Considering study findings in light of what is currently known in the field. (Sharts-Hopko)
4. Maintaining an *audit trail*, including all raw data, field notes, summaries, and a final report. (Sharts-Hopko)
5. Presenting coherent and convincing arguments for the researcher's interpretations. (Osborne)
6. Describing participants' lived experience adequately such that readers may evaluate how the researcher's findings apply to their own circumstances. (Sharts-Hopko)
7. Having non-participants who have experienced the phenomenon confirm that the researcher's interpretations resonate with their experience. (Osborne).

The first six of these methods were utilized in this study. Methods 2 and 3 contribute to credibility/dependability, method 4 allows for confirmability/auditability, and method 6 facilitates transferability/fittingness (Sharts-Hopko).

Limitation?

From a natural science perspective, the primary limitation of phenomenological research is that it does not produce empirically generalizable data. However, because phenomenology takes a *human* science approach to research, it is misleading to

characterize this inability to obtain empirical generalizations as a failing of this methodology.

Furthermore, it is in fact possible to speak of generalizability in a study of this kind. As Osborne (1990) explained, “phenomenological research methodology is based upon different metatheoretical assumptions to those used in natural science. . . . Natural science methodology looks for statistical generalizability, while phenomenological research strives for empathic generalizability” (p. 86). Phenomenology is a method and a tradition of searching for the essences (van Manen, 1997): the essential meanings, general characteristics, and existential structures of particular modes of consciousness. It is a study of the universal in the particular. Therefore, although it is not possible to generalize this study’s findings in terms of empirical indices of perfectionism, it *is* possible to generalize them to the experiences of others.

Chapter 4: Perfectionism and the Lifeworld Existentials

What is a first year law student's experience of the phenomenon of perfectionism as a way of being in the world? In this chapter, I endeavor to answer that phenomenological question as I explicate the data gathered during this study. In the pages that follow, I use the four fundamental existentialist themes (the lifeworld existentials) that phenomenologists believe resonate in all human experience (van Manen, 1997) as a guide to interpreting the lived experience descriptions offered during the interviews I conducted with my participants (van Manen, 1997). That is, I explore the temporal, relational, spatial, and corporeal dimensions of perfectionist intentionality for first year law students. Accordingly, I have divided the chapter into four main sections: Lived Time, Lived Human Relation, Lived Space, and Lived Body.

Lived Time

Phenomenology distinguishes between objective time and subjective time (van Manen, 1997; Zahavi, 2003). Objective time is “datable, measurable, historical, and cosmic” (Zahavi, p. 81) time; it is the time we speak of when we refer to hours, days, months, and years, the time we use to schedule our appointments and to structure our lives. Lived time, on the other hand,

is subjective time as opposed to clock time or objective time. Lived time is the time that appears to speed up when we enjoy ourselves, or slow down when we feel bored during an uninteresting lecture or when we are anxious, as in the dentist's chair. Lived time is also our temporal way of being in the world – as a young person oriented to an open and beckoning future, or as an elderly person recollecting the past, etc. . . . The temporal dimensions of past, present, and future constitute the horizons of a person's temporal landscape. (van Manen, p.

104)

It is this subjective, lived time that concerns phenomenologists. From a phenomenological perspective, the question of interest is: what is the nature of lived time in the context of a particular experience (Zahavi)?

The theme of lived time resonated throughout the interviews conducted for this study. In the first year law student's experience of perfectionism, there is the sense of lived time in how they prepare for court appearances, study, and write papers and exams. For the perfectionist, temporality is characterized alternatively by its inadequacy, limits (in the form of deadlines), speed, delays (occurring through procrastination), and loss.

The Inadequacy of Time

I know that with each one [task I put on a "to do" list], I'm going to need a little bit more time, because it's never quite enough. So if I say this is going to be done by Saturday night, I'll aim for that, and maybe it'll be done by Sunday afternoon or something like that. A long time ago, actually, I knew that I would never make my deadline, that no matter how much I think I'm going to be able to get done by that time, if I say it'll be done by that time, I always need a little bit more.

Who among us has never felt that there is "not enough time" to accomplish all that we intend? This sense of the inadequacy of time is reflected in our lament that "There just aren't enough hours in the day" or when we hurry from the breakfast table to our morning meeting, to our lunch date, to our child's after-school activities and fail to acknowledge or even see our spouses as we kiss them goodbye, our co-workers as we pass them in the hall, or the emerging cherry blossoms as we scurry along the sidewalk to our cars.

For the first year law student perfectionist, this sense of the insufficiency of time is particularly pronounced. It is impossible to complete a task perfectly within the limits of objective, clock time. Aware of this, the perfectionist law student may attempt to increase or extend time. Sam, realizing he was not perfectly prepared for his first volunteer court appearance asked his supervisor “how to buy more time”:

I said, “I can’t do this. I can’t comfortably go in and be ready to go ahead and do this.” And it wasn’t so much just preparedness, because I’m pretty good at improvising. But it just wasn’t, for lack of a better word, perfect.

In keeping with his legal environment, Sam viewed negotiation as his best strategy for dealing with a lack of time. He looked to others to give him the time he felt he needed. Other participants looked inwards and attempted to “find” or “make” more time in the hours and days that were already available to them. Rachel told the following story:

Whereas other people can say, “Okay. Well, I’ll be done by midnight, and I know it’ll be done. I’m not going to do anything else,” in my head, it’s like, “No, no, no. I know I can do more. I need to make sure that in the next few days I have all the time that I possibly can to just do it.” So you’re getting up early and just working through it solid, you just don’t even realize the time going by. It’s like you’ve got a checklist in your head, and there’s things that you know you have to do, and that if you have time, you’ll do the other things. But you know that you’re going to make time to do those other things.

“Other people” (non-perfectionists) are able to accede to the constraints of objective time; because they know that nothing can be perfect, they can accept the “good enough” product given the circumstances, i.e., the finite nature of time. The perfectionist, on the

other hand, is unable to accept the finiteness of time as she endeavours to extend time through any means available: negotiation, bargaining, reduced sleep, or sacrifice of personal relationships, to name a few. For the non-perfectionist, time, coupled with the awareness that her work does not define her, dictates the quality of her product or performance; for the perfectionist first year law student, the converse is true.

Deadlines

The constraints or limits on time which lead to the sense that there is never enough time are often manifested in the form of deadlines. One's first encounter with such time boundaries typically occurs in elementary school. The first grader makes weekly visits to the school library, checking out books on the understanding that his time to read them is limited, that they must be returned within a week. Of course, the repercussions for failure to meet such a deadline are negligible if not non-existent, especially if that failure can be blamed on a forgetful parent (who is actually the person subject to the deadline, given a six year old's inability to comprehend concepts like weeks, days, or hours). Deadlines or due dates become more stringent as we grow older and advance through school and out into the workforce, and missed deadlines result in academic or financial penalties. Although some deadlines may be flexible (depending on the environment and the person setting the deadline), many of us experience this aspect of objective time as stressful and anxiety producing.

The first year law student perfectionist, by comparison, experiences a *need* for deadlines. Without them, the search for perfection would continue indefinitely. With them comes the symbolic death of the perfectionist's impossible quest and the attendant stress and anxiety. A sense of relief or release accompanies the arrival of a due date, as

the perfectionist is finally able to “let go,” literally and figuratively, of whatever task he has been working on. Allison, Michael, and Trisha shared their experiences with deadlines:

If I turn something in early – I don’t even think I’ve ever done that. Because if I turn something in early, I would feel so guilty that I hadn’t spent the extra time looking for mistakes. And if I had made a mistake, having turned it in early, it would almost kill me. I would just think about it so much: “Why didn’t I keep looking? What was wrong with me?” And so when a deadline is there, I have to let go. . .

I stopped [working on the assignment] when I had to stop to check my footnotes to hand it in. [Participant laughs.] It was deadline-based. I mean, I did as much, absolutely as much, research as I could without handing it in late.

For me, [deciding when a task is complete is] totally when a deadline comes – “Okay, it’s done.” I can’t hold on to it anymore. . . . It’s an external factor that’s making me realize I can’t keep changing it, and it just has to be done by the deadline, and [pause] you move on.

These perfectionists’ experience deadlines as an arbitrary (but welcome) ending. For other perfectionists, like Christina, the need for deadlines is inverted: Without them, a task might never get started.

Sometimes I’ll start writing [an assignment] before the deadline, but I won’t make any substantial progress before the deadline. It’s more of an ongoing thing that

starts before, while I'm thinking about it and not writing it, and then eventually I'll start writing it.

In fact, as an undergraduate student, Christina “would routinely hand in things *months* late.” Thus, despite the different role that deadlines play for these law students, i.e., an ending or a beginning, they are clearly vital to their completion of a task. In either case, the deadline is in fact a lifeline because it ensures psychological and academic survival. Because the perfectionist's experience of time involves an inability to set her own boundaries or limits, the need for an external time structure is essential.

The Race Against Time

Modern language is full of phrases designed to capture the subjective speed of lived time: We speak of time “flying,” “dragging,” “running out,” and “catching up with us.” As van Manen (1997) pointed out, our sense of the pace of time is often related to how interested or involved we are in the task at hand. It is not only time which speeds up or slows down, however. Often an individual's experience of lived time causes him to alter his own pace; this is what we mean when we refer to a “race” against time or the clock.

In the first year of law school, the perfectionist may find himself in such a race. The increased demands of legal education, manifest not only in the volume but also in the content of the material that the student must learn, reveal the (subjective) inefficiencies of the student's past study habits. For Allison, the attention to detail and thoroughness which led to past success now serve as a hindrance as she attempts to do more in the same or less (objective) time as previously:

I almost think it's [being a perfectionist in law school] a disadvantage sometimes,

because of how much time things take me. For instance, in my exams: All my friends had red marks all over their. . . exams and I didn't have a single red mark on it. But when I went to see the prof, she said, "You have to work faster, because there's not enough here."

For Allison, the mismatch between the lived (laborious) time of perfectionism and the objective (limited) time of law school leads to confusion and disillusionment: "Coming here, suddenly, it's just a shock. It's almost like something I've relied on so much to help me is now harming me."

For others, the perfectionism-time race is exhilarating. Perfectionists who are able to adjust their pace and accommodate the objective time demands of law school describe feeling something akin to a runner's high. While winning isn't everything, it helps. Allan explained:

It's that rush of finishing on time, and it's the rush to be perfect, I guess, with the time that you're given. So, like I said, you put in as much effort as you can. . . with the time that you're allotted. . . . And if I actually did well on it [an assignment], then that just added to my satisfaction of being a perfectionist.

Procrastination

When faced with a difficult or unpleasant task, one's instinct is often to delay or avoid beginning it. The thought of cleaning out the garage, writing a term paper, drafting a report for work, exercising after months of inactivity – any or all of these might inspire a sense of inertia, or more perversely, motivate one to start and finish any other task which has been avoided for months but which now looks desirable by comparison. The myriad of books and courses on the topic suggest that procrastination is a common

human experience.

It is perhaps not surprising, then, that a number of participants in this study expressed a tendency to procrastinate. Does this mean that the perfectionist's experience of lived time is not unique? Not necessarily. Rather, it appears that the procrastination that forms part of the lived experience of perfectionism is distinguished from the procrastination experience of non-perfectionists by what lies beneath it. That is, the perfectionist avoids a task not simply because the task itself is challenging or distasteful. Instead, avoidance stems from an awareness of the difficulty or even impossibility of completing that task perfectly. Michael, Christina, and Allison described their procrastination experience in such terms:

I've found that it [my perfectionism] draws out my tendency to procrastinate, knowing that I'm not going to be able to get something perfect. I've found especially in second semester, I've just tended to procrastinate more, to think, "Oh, you know what? I'm only going to be able to get through half the readings anyway for tomorrow's class, so I'm just not going to do it. I'll catch up perfectly next weekend, when I can go through everything, and, you know, catch up then."

With the really harsh penalties for late work, I recognize that I can't spend days and weeks and months not working on something because it's not going to be up to whatever my standard is, but rather, I just have to suck it up and do it. So, it's been good in that respect, but it's still stressful, those experiences of having to get that work done. When I talk about the days and weeks and months spent not working on something, it's because it's hard for me to, I guess, see how I'm going

to reach that final product.

It's just the fear of getting started [studying]. Because I know it's going to be stressful. I know I'm going to be thinking, "Have I done it properly? Have I identified the legal principle properly? Is there anything I've missed?" And then, "Am I even going to be able to remember this or understand it?" And just putting off that involvement and that stress is something that the procrastination does for me.

For the perfectionist, procrastination serves as a temporary delay or extension of subjective time. Since he generally experiences time as something negative, i.e., inadequate, limited, and difficult to keep pace with, is it any wonder that the perfectionist prolongs his engagement with it for as long as possible?

Lost in Thought

van Manen (1997) described how an examination of idiomatic phrases may play a role in understanding the phenomenon under investigation. In discussing the reading experience, he suggests that expressions such as being "lost" or "absorbed" in a book illustrate how "ordinary language is in some sense a huge reservoir in which the incredible variety of richness of human experience is deposited" (p. 61). Such phrases offer clues about what it means to read and cause us to consider the temporal, spatial, and corporeal dimensions of the reading experience.

A similar phrase used in common parlance is "lost in thought." We use this expression when a person becomes focused on her own thoughts or internal dialogue and ceases participating in the human interaction that surrounds her. Although it is debatable

whether it is the thinker or her companion who is truly lost in these instances (van Manen, 1997), it is possible to say that one who becomes absorbed in thought (as in a book) has lost her sense of time.

The time experience for first year law student perfectionists can include this feeling of loss. The need or desire to find the perfect word when writing a paper, or understand a concept perfectly when reading a legal treatise, can cause a perfectionist to become so absorbed in the text at hand that he loses track and all sense of time (until later when he reflects on that experience). Allan explained that he may spend five to 10 minutes reading a sentence he doesn't understand, asking himself repeatedly "What does this mean? What does this mean?" The time loss experience may also occur when the perfectionist is creating something, as it does for Christina:

When I'm writing and I'm trying to write a sentence, and I'm trying to get that sentence to express *exactly* what I want it to express, I'll sit there for five minutes – I'm not kidding you, for five minutes – trying to – I guess I'm not thinking about that single word for five minutes, but about that sentence – think of different words that express exactly what I wanted to say.

For some perfectionists, the loss is not only of time but of perspective (space). The focus on achieving perfection in the task at hand can cause the law student to attend to the minutiae of that task at the expense of the "bigger picture." This describes Michael's experience:

I think even when I used to write without outlines, with just starting to write, I would spend time or spend effort making sure that each sentence was worded the way I wanted it to, and paragraph-wise as well. And I think that does stem from

being a perfectionist, wanting to make sure that each sentence is perfect, and maybe losing the big picture, or not putting as much – I don't want to say not putting as much effort into that – but not having that be your focus. The big picture: Overall, how does my argument sound, or how does my paper sound, as opposed to this great collection of really nice sentences.

Lived Human Relation

In describing the relationality existential, van Manen (1997) explained, *lived other (relationality)* is the lived relation we maintain with others in the interpersonal space that we share with them. As we meet the other, we approach the other in a corporeal way: through a handshake or by gaining an impression of the other in the way that he or she is physically present to us. . . . As we meet the other we are able to develop a conversational relation which allows us to transcend our *selves*. (pp. 104-105)

The lived relations explored by van Manen, such as those of parent-child and teacher-child, are “highly personal and charged with interpersonal significance” (p. 106). As such, it seems that unlike lived time, lived human relation is not easily defined by comparing it to an objective dimension of relationality.

Lived human relation or relationality is the second fundamental existential theme discussed in this chapter. This theme was reflected in the interviews conducted for this study through participants' anecdotes regarding the perfectionist-classmate and perfectionist-significant other relations. In describing these lived relations, first year law students discussed the self in relation to the other and the other in relation to the self. Essential to the perfectionist's experience of relationality is the engagement in self - comparison, -evaluation, and -management; and other -comparison and -judgment. In

contrast with van Manen's (1997) depiction of certain lived relations, several of these aspects of relationality move toward an objectification of the other, suggesting that a relational equivalent to objective time is in fact present in perfectionist intentionality.

The Self

Comparison and evaluation

Competition is a part of modern life. For many of us, the emphasis on winning and success that pervades Western culture leads to an interest in others' accomplishments and possessions. Popular magazines in diverse fields (business, entertainment, etc.) publish annual assessments of who among us is the wealthiest, most powerful, or most beautiful. In reading these articles, some of us inevitably respond by considering our own achievements and how we "stack up" against these "others." This process of self-comparison and -evaluation can also occur on a smaller scale; for those of us who struggle with feelings of low self-worth in particular, the achievements of our family members, friends, and neighbours can be reminders of our own "failure" to "measure up."

An awareness of the other and the resultant self-comparison and -evaluation is part of the perfectionist law student's experience of the self-classmate relation. The point of comparison is how perfect the law student perfectionist is in relation to her classmates. For Trisha, the process of self-comparison leads to an assessment of herself as "normal."

I've seen also other people are perfectionists and are doing equally the same amount of work as I am, and the sort of nitpicky stuff. And so, in a weird way, I feel like that sort of takes the pressure off me. I'm like, "Okay, everyone's at the same level. It's no longer out of the norm." You're just doing it, and that's how

you function.

Rachel, on the other hand, concluded that, compared to her peers, she was “superior”:

If everyone else had answered their questions [during the moot court presentation] really well, I might have felt poorly, but in the end I realized that I actually answered my questions better than everyone else, still. So, in my head I knew, again, I didn’t do perfect, or even close to perfect, but it was better than everyone else.

These two perfectionists were generally (or at least relatively) satisfied with their performance after measuring themselves against the other. The same comparative-evaluative process may cause other perfectionists to deem themselves as “coming up short” and to adjust their behaviour accordingly, as was the case with Allan and Barbara:

I think it’s [law school] actually caused me to be more perfect than before. . . . In undergrad, I didn’t really care too much. And then, now, law school has led me to just try harder. . . . I guess in law school, there are so many more people that are smart and people that you see are doing really well that you want to be able to get to that point too.

I think it makes you more of a perfectionist, being around other people who are so organized and perfectionist in their own way, and then you’re competing with those people too. And it always looks like someone else has a better [study] system.

For all of these respondents, measurement plays an important role in their lived relations with their peers. Their almost mathematical appraisal of their classmates and

themselves suggests an objectification of the other. The other is not someone to engage with, but rather someone to hold up a mirror for the perfectionist to better observe himself. Notably, this depersonalization of the other echoes the image of the impartial, impersonal judge who some of these respondents will face in their later legal practice.

Some perfectionists, like Sam, refuse to evaluate themselves in relation to their classmates. They are apparently aware of others' performance but do not measure their own achievements against this external yardstick. This resistance follows from these perfectionists' experience of the self-classmate relation as one characterized by mistrust and self-reliance.

[When I talk to other students about their assignments], it's mostly to see what stage everyone else is at. In terms of content, I don't put very much weight in what other people say. I don't trust other people. Yeah, that's the way to put it. Trust. I don't trust what a lot of other people are doing in terms of their assignment, and their version of perfect isn't going to be mine. I never held myself up to the standards that other people would have had. For all I know they could be lower; they could be ridiculously higher.

Thus, in assessing himself, Sam does not account for the other. In this way, his experience of the perfectionist-peer lived relation is impersonal to the extreme. However, the fact that he has rejected his peers as appropriate points of comparison implicitly suggests that he too has engaged in self-other scrutiny but, unlike some of his perfectionist classmates, has dismissed the practice as futile.

Management

The flipside of an interest in others' behaviour, achievements, and acquisitions is

the preoccupation with how one is viewed by others. It is this concern that lies behind our mothers' admonitions to "put on clean underwear" before we go out (in case we are in an accident and the ambulance paramedics or ER doctors have occasion to see our drawers) and expressions like "for appearance' sake." In certain situations, many of us make choices about what we do, say, or wear mindful of how those choices will affect others' impressions of us. When preparing for a job interview, for example, we put on our best clothes and rehearse our best answers aware that our resume will only get us so far and that our interviewer will be sizing us up "on the spot."

This sensitivity to others' impressions is particularly pronounced for the perfectionist in first year law school. For Carol and Allison, the essence of their experience of the self-classmate relation combined a concern for how they appear with efforts to manage that appearance.

[In law school], you want to show the best of you. For me, sometimes, I tend not to speak up when I don't know if I'm saying the right thing because, I think at law school, you don't want other people to think you're stupid. Sometimes you try to hide yourself, feeling that's better than saying something wrong. . . . You have high expectations of yourself, but you also have high expectations of others. So, when other people ask stupid questions in class, and everyone's like "Ugh. Just shut up," then you don't want to put yourself in that position.

I think there's a standard that I set for myself of not saying anything that's completely ridiculous, and I don't want others to see me as imperfect. So, it's a really public setting when you're answering something in class or when you're

asking a question, and that's why it's a lot more difficult when you do make a mistake because, really, everyone's watching. Of course, when you make a mistake in an exam or something, everyone's also watching because anyone who looks at your transcript is going to see it, but I'm thinking in class it's almost an immediate feeling of being looked at as flawed.

Rachel shared a similar anecdote regarding her reticence to speak in class lest she make a mistake. She explained that she does not want to "say something that just isn't bang on" and therefore will rehearse things in her head before she speaks: "I think most people don't seem to have a problem just putting up their hand and saying whatever is on their mind. I can't do that. I have to really think about it." Rachel's motivation for keeping silent is subtly different from that of Carol and Allison. Whereas Carol and Allison's silence appears based on a belief that others place as much importance on perfection as they themselves do and that they will therefore be judged harshly if they make a mistake, Rachel keeps quiet out of the concern that she will not satisfy her *own* standards. Rachel's lack of interest in others' views is consistent with her sense of self as superior.

The Other

Comparison and judgment

As described above, the human experience of comparison to or competition with celebrities, family, friends, and colleagues typically results in an assessment of how the self measures up against the other. However, this comparative process may also be inverted as many of us evaluate others' performance in relation to our own. We can be particularly attentive to the perceived flaws or failures of others in instances where our

self-esteem levels are low. Feeling out of shape or unattractive, we may take pleasure in running into an old acquaintance who has gained weight and later recount to friends how the acquaintance has really “let himself go.”

The perfectionist first year law student also engages in an outward-directed appraisal practice characterized by negative judgment. Despite her critical stance, however, the perfectionist is not motivated by a desire to feel better about herself. Rather, the reproach she expresses regarding her peers is closely tied to her privileging of perfection. As such, her experience of the lived relation of self-classmate is characterized by confusion and dissatisfaction. As Rachel and Christina explain, it is inconceivable that others would not perform perfectly, particularly when they believe that perfection is clearly within reach.

I realized that these people, the work that they were giving me was, in my mind, so sub-par. Spelling mistakes everywhere, typos. Just things like, when you write a [legal] case [name], it's “Something v. Something.” The “v” is supposed to be a small “v” with a dot after it, period after it. People were having big V's, no period. I'm like, “People, come on, this is not that hard to do!” . . . Case names would be spelt wrong, or there'd be a period missing, or something missing. And something like that to me is just not acceptable. When it comes to things like that, there's, to me, no excuse for not being perfect, in terms of grammar and punctuation and spelling – just formatting. There's no excuse in my mind not to have that perfect. So, I thought everyone else would just be like that, too. Have a good attention to detail. I thought everybody would be like that. Boy, was I wrong, because not only was my partner just horrible in terms of that, but I found

out other people were, too.

I'm very critical of other people and their work. I read stuff, and I'm like, "Is that really the best way to write that sentence?" Or, "You've made a mistake there." . . . I think I should be a copy editor. It never occurred to me until I saw a job listing for being a copy editor. I'm like, "Wow. I would be *so* good at that."

The perfectionist's scathing scrutiny of her peers once again suggests that the other is seen as an impersonal object to be measured against.

The judgment that some law student perfectionists express regarding their colleagues is also found in the perfectionist-significant other lived relation. The perfectionist expects those close to her to behave in a particular way and when her expectations go unmet she may feel exasperated, annoyed, or impatient. Christina and Rachel both describe feelings of frustration when others let them down:

In terms of household examples, I don't understand why my roommate leaves the sponge in the sink. Or when she finishes cleaning up, she doesn't put the cleaning stuff away. And it drives me crazy. . . . Because if you're going to clean, why not just finish the whole job and put stuff away, so that it's not messy when you're done? She also doesn't always clean up to my standards.

I push a lot of people away. You know, a lot of people can't handle my standards because, like I said, I hold myself to a really high standard, and sometimes it leaks out onto the way I view other people too. Some people can't handle it, and that's fine. The people who do handle it, appreciate it, but every once in a while, when I

get really in that zone, they can't handle it. They can't handle how irritable I get, and how I start getting on their cases, I guess.

For both these perfectionists, the annoyance they feel seems to follow from others' inability to behave as they themselves behave. Similar to the experience of the perfectionist-peer relationship, the underlying feeling may be one of confusion: If *I* can do it this way, why can't *they*? Because they view their own standards as reasonable, or at least achievable, they are baffled as to why others can't live up to them.

As for the impact of their outward-directed standards on others, only Rachel hinted at this. In describing the irritation she can feel towards others when she is "in that zone," she explained that "everything that people do just becomes so annoying. . . . And it's unfortunate because people get really upset and they take it personally, but it's not personal at all. I just don't want to talk to anybody." Ironically, behaviour that the perfectionist sees as *nonpersonal* is likely seen by his significant others as *impersonal*. The effect of such behaviour on the longevity of the perfectionist-other relationship remains an open question.

Lived Space

The third lifeworld existential of interest to phenomenologists is lived space. van Manen (1997) described lived space as "felt space" and explained,

the space in which we find ourselves affects the way we feel. The huge spaces of a modern bank building may make us feel small, the wide-open space of a landscape may make us feel exposed but also possibly free, and just the opposite from the feeling we get in a crowded elevator. (p. 102)

To understand any lived experience phenomenologically requires a consideration of the spatial qualities and aspects of that experience (van Manen).

What is the nature of the lived space that makes the experience of perfectionism meaningful? Put another way, how is the phenomenon of perfectionism experienced spatially? The lived space existential is revealed in two main aspects of the perfectionism experience for first year law students. It is present in the level of expectations and standards (high) expressed by perfectionists and in how the perfectionist orders and arranges her possessions and her life.

High Expectations or Standards

Be it the best, the worst, or something in between, we all expect something. Typically, expectations are grounded in what we already know to be (generally) true: The sun will rise in the morning, the bus will arrive at our stop on time, and our work day will end at 5:00 pm. Whether our expectations regarding these events are actually met often depends on the influence of external factors beyond our control, such as a traffic accident or late-day demands by our boss (the certainty of the rising sun being a given). Regardless whether they are met, however, we tend to view as reasonable expectations that are based on past performance (ours or others').

When are expectations "high"? When they are based on hope for the future rather than knowledge of the past? When they are "out of reach" (and therefore *unreasonable*)? Or if a person is capable of "holding" high expectations, does this mean that what she is expecting can never elude her grasp? The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary (2005) offers several definitions of the term. Of particular note are the entries which define high as being something above, beyond, or more than the "average," "normal," "usual," or "expected," suggesting that it is desirable, not unreasonable, to aim high.

Essential to the intentionality of perfectionism is the lived space experience of

holding high expectations or high standards. The majority of those interviewed for this study explained that they set high expectations or standards for how they perform and for what they produce. The setting of elevated goals is reflected in comments like Michael's: "Any time I'm doing something, especially handing something in in relation to school work, I don't like to hand it in unless I know that it's perfect." Or as Christina explained, "I guess certain things should be done right, according to me," and "If I can do something better, why not do it better?"

Better than what? Christina's goal of doing things right suggests that she seeks to surpass not just the average, normal, usual, or expected, but the possible. Because the perfectionist believes that she can do better, i.e., the impossible, she experiences unreasonably high standards as being within reach. It is this belief that the unrealistic is in fact attainable that likely distinguishes the high expectations and standards of perfectionists from those of non-perfectionists.

The perfectionist perceives the space that is available above for reaching these expectations and standards as unlimited. Using the language of objective space to describe her lived space experience, Rachel noted that "there's always, always room for improvement. There's always more that can be done. . . . I think that's the main gist of it though, is nothing's ever quite, quite perfect."

This sense of having room, this feeling of expandability or flexibility, is also reflected in some perfectionists' experience of high expectations and standards as movable. In environments such as law school, the lived space experience of elevated expectations may be one of stress, anxiety, or frustration (see discussion of these emotions in the following section, "Lived Body"). To reduce these distressful emotions

the perfectionist must first lower expectations or standards that approach the impossible as Carol and Christina did:

If, say, I set a goal that I want to be the best student in law school, I'd change that when I realize it's next to impossible. I'd change that to "I want to be top 10%." It's still a very high goal, but it's not going to make you so stressed that you want to kill yourself in the morning.

I don't set my standards impossibly high. I know I'm not going to be an A student in law school because that is a very difficult thing to be in law school. . . . But I will not be a C student. I know that. Because I know that I shouldn't be. . . . In the work that I produce, I expect it to be of a certain standard. And still, I don't expect it to be absolutely perfect. . .

This downward movement of the perfectionist's expectations or standards may be intended to match the parallel motion of one's performance (according to external evaluators) during law school. As Trisha shared, "I think I came into law school having that general knowledge that everyone's grades go down in law school and you can't expect to be perfect. I was totally fine with that."

Notably, respondents' focus on the height of their expectations indicates a unidimensionality to perfectionist spatiality. There is no hint of depth or breadth to the lived space of perfectionistic standards. Although some participants mentioned a "going down," this was related only to their grades and did not suggest any sort of grounded depth, only a reduced height.

Order

In describing the lived space existential, phenomenological writers have identified the human need to have a sense of order in our personal space. As Baldursson (n.d., Home is Where We Have Our Things section, ¶ 4), in his investigation of the experience of “at-homeness,” asked,

Who does not recognize the feeling when coming home and the kids, your own or others, have been messing around in your room and left things out of place? Or in earlier times when your mother just put the things in your room “in order” but that just wasn't the right order? This book belongs on the bookshelf while that one is supposed to be on the desk.

This notion of arranging or organizing of space is also reflected in Heidegger’s (1962) notion of *einräumen*, which he used to describe the act of giving space or making room (Baldursson).

Perfectionists’ lived experience of spatiality includes a sense of ordering. All of those interviewed for this study described ordering or organizing something: their thoughts, words, tasks, files, or personal belongings. Michael, Allan, Rachel, and Christina all spoke of their attention to detail, primarily when reading or writing law school-related materials; Sam and Barbara identified a need to approach their schoolwork with a “plan”; Carol, Trisha, and Rachel described organizing their class notes, files, lists, email inboxes, receipts, and apartment possessions; and finally, Allison and Trisha shared a dislike for “mess” or disorder, and a practice of keeping their rooms or apartments “clean.”

For Rachel, the process of ordering her day and putting things in their proper

place begins upon waking:

When I wake up in the morning, usually I stand up at the counter while I eat, and I've got the lap top up there with me, and I'm sort of writing down a couple of things. At first I write down all the things that I'd like to get done in the day, and usually I've got stickee notes on my computer. . .and they're divided into stuff I want to get done for school, stuff I want to get done around the house, and stuff I have to get done above and beyond that, like errands and stuff like that. And, so I'll start by writing those three lists, or adjusting them from the day before, and then I'll have another one with just a couple things that I absolutely *have* to get done that day, so that if I don't get them done, I'll be really upset with myself.

An example of a task subject to Rachel's ordering is the preparation of her class notes:

I'm quite perfect about my notes. I'll go through and I'll waste hours, actually, sometimes. . . making my notes between classes consistent in terms of the formatting when, really, it doesn't matter at all. The words are still there. I'll be going through and making things bold and certain titles bold. It has no bearing on what I'm learning. It's just, in my mind, I have to do it.

For Rachel, the space of perfectionism is confining: She has no choice but to arrange her notes perfectly.

What, if anything, is unique to the first year law student perfectionist's experience of arranging space? The answer appears to lie in the feelings (of distress) that accompany any disruption to a perfectionist's sense of order. For Rachel, order is necessary; if it is absent, she is disappointed, "upset." Trisha described her emotional reaction to disorder in this way:

My laptop files are all really organized and they're all filed away, and all my research from grad school is all filed away into my filing cabinet at home. And then basic stuff, like I like having the apartment clean, and I like having everything in its own little place so I know where it is and I totally freak out if I lose something.

Both Rachel's and Trisha's stories suggest that their belongings indeed belong in a specific space. Another commonality is their depiction of home as a space to be ordered. Although home is theoretically a place of depth in living, as a site of family, love, connection, comfort, and safety, the dimension of depth is again conspicuously absent from these respondents' description of perfectionist spatiality. For the perfectionist, home is a space to be arranged, not a space to be felt (van Manen, 1997).

The perfectionist's ordering is not limited to the sphere of home. Sam experiences a feeling of "drowning" until he is able to organize his thoughts regarding a new law school assignment and find the proper place (space) for those thoughts on paper. The presence of a plan – a device that organizes the perfectionist's mental space – serves to lessen the feelings of stress and anxiety that arise at the prospect of conquering an unfamiliar task. As Barbara explained, "I've had a game plan for the past few months, so before I go into an exam I actually feel really calm."

A further aspect of the law student perfectionist's experience of spatiality which adds to its peculiarity is her persistence in having things be "just so." In describing her experience of writing, Haase (2002) expressed a desire to have her paper be "just right." However, she suggested that despite this desire, unlike those who experience obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD, i.e., the phenomenon she investigated), "most of us live

comfortably with that knowledge of uncertainty” (p. 81).

The perfectionist is unlike “most of us” in that, while he may be able to accept uncertainty (distinguishing him from persons with OCD), he does not do so “comfortably.” The resistance or uneasiness that some perfectionists experience when they are forced to live with disorder is reflected in the following anecdote shared by Christina:

[In one class, a particular legal principle] had been mentioned, and for some reason, it kept coming up, and so I wanted to know what it was, because we hadn’t actually dealt with it yet. And the teacher’s like, “No. It’s just simpler not to deal with it now. We’ll get to it in a couple weeks.” But, I don’t know, for some reason, it just kept popping into my head . . . It wasn’t a big deal because I’d ask him, “Oh, is that an example of [the principle]?” and he’d be like, “No! We’re not talking about that now.” [Participant laughs.] . . . I didn’t see it as being that weird, and maybe we could have just dealt with it then, but apparently, it was easier to deal with it later.

Like high standards, order appears achievable, and perfectionists like Christina are confounded when others do not share their drive to achieve.

With perfectionistic ordering comes a further dimension to the spatiality of perfectionism. There is a sense of breadth in the variety of items and contexts which the perfectionist endeavours to organize. Perfectionist lived space, although apparently lacking depth, appears multidimensional when the height of expectations and breadth of ordering are accounted for.

Lived Body

The final of the four lifeworld existentials explored in phenomenology is that of

lived body. van Manen (1997) explained the lived body existential in this way:

Lived body (corporeality) refers to the phenomenological fact that we are always bodily in the world. When we meet another person in his or her landscape or world we meet that person first of all through his or her body. In our physical or bodily presence we both reveal something about ourselves and we always conceal something at the same time – not necessarily consciously or deliberately, but rather in spite of ourselves. (p. 103)

The lived body was of particular interest to phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty (1962). He described the body as “our general medium for having a world” (p. 146) and our “point of view upon the world” (p. 80). That is, it is through our body that we gain access to the world. Furthermore, we not only have a body, we *are* our body: “The body affects the way in which we are in the world and the body may become the conscious object of our attention” (Bleeker & Mulderij, n.d., *Corporeality according to Merleau-Ponty* section, ¶ 2).

What characterizes the perfectionist’s lived bodily encounter with the world? For those I spoke with for this study, the essence of the lived body experience of perfectionism is primarily emotional and mental and is often distressing. Participants spoke of feelings of anxiety, panic, and fear, as well as self-critical and dichotomous thinking patterns, in describing their bodily point of view upon the world. As a result, their bodily consciousness is often one of discomfort or distress. I explore each of these aspects of perfectionist corporeality in the following section and touch on how the mental, emotional, and physical are related.

Emotional Experiencing: Anxiety, Panic, and Fear

Who has not felt nervous when confronted with doing something new and different? One universally nerve-wracking situation is the first day of a new job. We arrive at the office with a fluttery stomach, clammy hands, accelerated heart beat. What will they expect of me? What if I can't handle it? What if my coworkers don't invite me out to lunch? Such future-oriented doubts and worries are consistent with the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary (2005) definition of anxiety as "painful or apprehensive uneasiness of mind usually over an impending or anticipated ill." It is our fear of the unknown and our doubt about our abilities to cope with that unknown that are at the heart of the human anxiety experience.

The majority of those I interviewed for this study shared stories of anxiety, panic, or fear, although not all participants used these words to label their emotions. Allison, Sam, Trisha, Rachel, Christina, and Allan all described anticipatory or apprehensive distress regarding impending tasks or the prospect of performing below their or others' standards.

Given the commonality of these feelings beyond those who experience the phenomenon of perfectionism, is it possible to view the anxiety and related emotions that are a part of the perfectionist's lived bodily experience as unique? How does the perfectionist's experience of anxiety set him apart from his non-perfectionist peers? First and foremost, it is the source of anxiety for the perfectionist that makes his emotional experience unusual. The perfectionist does not simply worry about what the future will look like: He worries that the future will not match up with his image of perfection. For Allison, whose fear connected with studying is described above in the "Lived Time"

section of this chapter, this perfection end-goal intensifies her feelings of anxiety to the point of a panic that includes a tight chest and troubled breathing: “I’ll start reading [an exam] and I’ll have this sort of sense of panic because I’m thinking, ‘Can I even address all of this? Oh my God, there’s so much. Am I going to make a mistake?’”

The anxiety that is part of the lived experience of perfectionism can even result in a sense of psychological paralysis as one considers the challenge (i.e., impossibility) of achieving perfection. Sam described his bodily reaction to the prospect of starting a new law school assignment in this way:

I’m pacing up and down my apartment, pulling my hair out, not doing stuff like shaving, doing proper groceries, working out, like I would normally do. Taking time for friends, like I would normally do. Sleeping properly. It’s just, “What am I going to do?” And it’s just immobilizing for however long it is until I’ve gotten myself together, put together a plan.

Thus, from the point of view of the lived body, the perfectionist’s experience of anxiety is not only intense but also contradictory as it combines a sense of restless, unceasing motion with a feeling of inertia.

Another peculiarity to the anxiety that is part of the perfectionism experience is the lengths to which the perfectionist may go to avoid imperfection. Trisha’s story provides a good example:

[For] my first criminal case where I had to go to court, [I was] totally freaking out about, “Am I going to mess up procedure? Am I going to get yelled at by the judge? Am I going to not stand up when I’m supposed to stand up?” I talked to five different people about what my court experience was going to be like. I said,

“Just tell me the steps. Write down for me a 10 step list of what I’m supposed to do from the time I enter the courtroom to the time I leave.” Because for my first [time], I just didn’t want any surprises.

This hypervigilance may be due to the emotional distress that follows failure. That is, the experience of failing may be so upsetting to the perfectionist that he follows all steps necessary to avoid failing again. Allan described the effect of past failures on his mood and self-image:

I fucked up once in high school, and that’s why I didn’t get into. . .[the universities I wanted], which really hurt me, too, because it hurt my confidence level. I thought I could reach it, and I tried really hard, and that failure came, and now it’s just the fear of feeling that again.

Thus, the perfectionist’s bodily experience of anxiety and related emotions is multi-layered. Its uniqueness derives from its origins, which affect its intensity and complexity, which lead to a sense of hypervigilance, which may also result from the desire to avoid more significant emotional distress.

Cognitive Experiencing: Self-Criticism and Dichotomous Thinking

Self-criticism

The distress experience of perfectionist corporeality is manifested mentally as well as emotionally. Like most of us, perfectionists may speak harshly to themselves after doing or saying something that they wish they hadn’t done or said and that they believe could (or should) have been avoided. This internal dialogue may include (self) name calling, so-called should statements, or repetitive mental replays of the troubling event, ending each time in a figurative (or literal) cringe. How does this pattern of thinking

distinguish the perfectionist's experience of self-criticism from others' experience?

The peculiarity to perfectionistic self-criticism lies partly in the events that lead to these thought patterns. Typically, when we chastise ourselves because we “should have known better,” the basis for our mental self-lashing is the fact that we have encountered a similar problem or situation in the past and, therefore, have prior knowledge as to how to deal with that problem or situation. Perfectionists, on the other hand, expect themselves to know better even in the absence of such previous information. As Michael explained, “Especially when I was a lot younger, I got pretty frustrated if I couldn't do something right the first time. And I think that carried through more into getting down on myself if I wasn't doing things right or if I wasn't sort of winning.” In light of the (il)logic of such beliefs – how can one know better about something that he didn't know in the first place? – it is not surprising that the mental torment which the perfectionist experiences following imperfect behaviour or judgment can be especially intense. The disproportionality between the perfectionist's self-punishment and her “crime” is well-reflected in the following anecdote shared by Allison:

[In class] once, I asked whether a certain legal principle applies to people and that was a really dumb question apparently and these girls in front of me were snickering and so, yeah, I think I felt bad about it for a while. I went home and sort of went to bed and just thought “Why do I even talk in class? It's terrible. I shouldn't do that.” . . . I just was really mad at myself. I sort of hated myself for talking. . .

Thus, as with the perfectionist's anxiety experience, it is the source and intensity of perfectionistic self-criticism that makes it unusual.

Unlike some of her colleagues, Trisha appears to have silenced her self-critical “should-er”:

I used to be like, “I should have done this right, and I should have done this differently, and I should have done that”. . . . But now I’m like, “I did the best I could and. . .it’s done now and I should move on to the next project.”

Speaking kindly to herself, Trisha uses positive self-talk to counteract the types of thoughts that trouble other perfectionists.

Dichotomous thinking

Another type of thinking that is characteristic of the perfectionist lived body experience is what cognitive therapists call dichotomous or polarized thinking. This cognitive style or so-called distortion is common among those suffering from depression (A. T. Beck, Rush, Shaw, & Emery, 1979) and “involves thinking and interpreting in all-or-nothing terms, or categorizing experiences in either-or extremes” (Corey, 2001, p. 311).

First year law students use the language of “either-or” when describing the embodied experience of perfectionistic thinking (and doing). Michael said when explaining his approach to schoolwork: “It’s sort of an either-or thing. It’s either I want to do it perfectly, or I’ll set it aside to do it later, which means essentially not doing it.” He experiences similar black-or-white thoughts outside the law school context: “I just struggled with. . . playing [sports] at a sort of semi-competitive level. Either let’s play for fun and we won’t worry about anything, or let’s play and play hard. I was never really good at sort of that in-between level.”

Again, at first glance, the perfectionist’s lived body experience appears to share

something with the experience of others (in this case, those experiencing psychological distress in the form of depression). Is there something unique about how the perfectionist relates to the world in an either-or way? It is the content of the perfectionist's either-or thoughts which make them distinctive. Invariably, the perfectionist's product or performance must either be perfect or the perfectionist will stop (or fail to start) producing or performing altogether. Things must be done one way, the right way, the perfect way, or they are not worth doing at all. In writing a law school exam, Allison, unsure whether a particular issue was relevant to the question at hand, thought, "I'd rather not mention it. I'd rather not say anything about it than say it and it be wrong" because "there's a right or a wrong, there's not a 'Oh, maybe this could be either.'" Christina explained that her all-or-nothing response can occur while studying:

I'm not good at preparing flash cards. Because I will not be able to establish a system that works, and so I'll just get frustrated that I don't have a good system. . . . Six cards down the road, I would write a card. . . and I would screw it up, and so I would just never finish the whole thing because I would screw up the consistency, and so I didn't have a coherent system. And if I didn't have a coherent system, I just couldn't do it.

Thus, the dichotomous thoughts of perfectionists are particularly "extreme" as they set up a perfection-nothing duality.

Living the Body

Given that anxiety, fear, and panic are characteristic of perfectionist intentionality, how do perfectionists live their bodies? What bodily consciousness do these emotions imply? And what is the connection between the perfectionist mind and

body?

Although interviewees spoke about their bodies only in passing, interview transcripts do contain clues to the answers to these questions. For example, the tight chest and difficulty breathing which accompany Allison's anxiety indicate that perfectionists live their bodies in discomfort or even pain, that they are not at ease in their skin. Sam's drowning metaphor extends this notion, as breathing moves from difficult to nearly impossible. There is also a sense of restlessness to Sam's lived body, as his academic stress manifests itself in an inability to sleep. Both he and Rachel also suffer a loss of appetite in connection with their anxiety, while he and Michael both became sick from their efforts during first semester. Ultimately, rather than live her body, it seems that the perfectionist attempts to avoid or neglect that body until it makes itself felt through illness.

As for the mind and body connection in perfectionist corporeality, I have now argued that perfectionist distress is manifested mentally, emotionally, and physically. But how are these manifestations related? It appears that for the perfectionist, cognition is king. Thoughts of imperfection or its potential lead to emotive distress which leads to physical breakdown. Or expectations of perfection lead to physical neglect which heightens stress. Although the order of events in this "causal" chain may change, it seems it is the perfectionist's thoughts which generally spark her bodily distress. This supremacy of the cognitive realm is notable given the extremely cerebral field of study which these participants have chosen to enter.

Chapter 5: The Phenomenon and the Literature

In the previous chapter, I viewed the data gathered for this study through the lens of the phenomenological lifeworld existentials of lived time, human relation, space, and body. In so doing, I explored the temporality, relationality, spatiality, and corporeality of the perfectionism experience for first year law students by contrasting these to more widely felt lived experiences, as well as to phenomenologists' understanding of these four fundamental existentials. I now turn my attention to the existing literature on perfectionism and the relationship of that literature to my discoveries regarding the mode of being in the world that perfectionism represents.

In chapter 2, I argued that while the extant literature contained several allusions to perfectionist intentionality, it failed to fully reveal how the phenomenon is experienced as a way of being in the world, due primarily to the absence of any explicit inquiry into the essential characteristics of perfectionism. In this chapter, I extend this argument by examining where the empirical literature succeeded and erred in articulating the perfectionist intentionality documented in chapter 4. Specifically, I consider the presence or absence of lived time, human relation, space, and body in the accounts of perfectionism offered to date.

Lived Time

Of the four lifeworld existentials, that of temporality figures most prominently in the stories shared for this study. The individuals I interviewed spoke about the time they needed, had, wasted, and lost; they mentioned its pace and its constraints. Again and again during the interviews for this study, participants described their difficulties reconciling objective and lived time.

The extant literature contains a few implications of perfectionist temporality. For

example, some researchers have linked perfectionism and procrastination: The original APS (APS; Slaney & Johnson, as cited in Slaney et al., 2002) contained a Procrastination subscale and Slaney and Ashby's (1996) qualitative investigation revealed a positive connection between the two. Another hint of the lived time existential is found in the work of Zuroff et al. (2000), who hypothesized that perfectionists' poor relationships with their therapists result from a need for more time to develop a therapeutic alliance. Lived time is also suggested in those conceptualizations which refer to the perfectionist's attention to detail, since completing a task with precision typically requires a greater amount of time than is needed to do so carelessly. Thus, the time lengthening, hastening, and delay tactics described by my participants find their precursors in past perfectionism research.

However, given the prominence of the theme of lived time in this study's interviews, these empirical temporality allusions are weak. It is my participants' ascription to a particular way of living time within the overarching sense of objective time that in fact perpetuates perfectionism. The perfectionist believes that if he *just* had a *little* more time, whatever he is working on would be perfect. Because the perfectionist can always point to objective time as the main obstacle to perfection, he need never acknowledge the fact that perfection is in fact unattainable. He is able to maintain the lived time fantasy that perfect is just around the corner.

Lived Human Relation

For my participants, perfectionist relationality is multidirectional: The perfectionist relates herself to the other, and the other to herself. She is highly attentive to the behaviour of her peers and significant others, which leads to a process of comparison and evaluation of both self and other. In many respects, perfectionism is not possible

without the other. The perfectionist's peers play a role in the standards he sets for himself and his assessment of whether those standards are met. In addition, both peers and significant others serve as the object of some individuals' perfectionism. In most cases, the perfectionist-other relation is an impersonal one as the other is perceived primarily as a mirror to assist the perfectionist gain a better sense of self.

A number of allusions to the relationality existential can be found in the empirical literature. As with most perfectionism research, treatment of the perfectionist and his relationships has generally been anecdotal or quantitative (for a review, see Habke & Flynn, 2002), although certain interpersonal aspects of perfectionism have also been explored through qualitative means (e.g., Slaney & Ashby 1996; Speirs Neumeister 2004a). D. D. Burns (1980) noted that "many perfectionists are plagued by . . . disturbances in personal relationships" (p. 37) and claimed that perfectionism involves a fear of appearing inadequate. Hamachek (1978) suggested that parent-child relationships influence the development of perfectionism. The two primary scales used to assess perfectionism levels, the MPS-F (Frost et al., 1990) and the MPS-H (Hewitt & Flett, 1991b), cast perfectionism as both intra- and interpersonal, and the newer PSPS (Hewitt et al., 2003) measures individuals' efforts to present themselves to others in a particular manner. Slaney and Ashby, using a qualitative methodology, confirmed that certain perfectionists direct their expectations outward. There is also evidence of perfectionists' interpersonal difficulties in the therapeutic context (Blatt et al., 1996; Rector et al., 1999; Zuroff et al., 2000) and elsewhere (Habke & Flynn; Rice et al., 2003). Thus, certain of the relationship dynamics described by my participants, notably Christina and Rachel's frustration with and criticism of others and Carol and Allison's self-management and -

censoring efforts, are foretold by the extant literature. To a great extent, the literature sustains a certain construction of relationality that contrasts with relations that are “highly personal and charged with interpersonal significance” (van Manen, 1997, p. 106): Consistent with my findings, empiricists have characterized the perfectionist-other relation as an impersonal, self-referenced one.

Despite attempts to address relationality, however, empirical investigations fall short of a phenomenology of perfectionism. Empiricists’ failing in this regard is due in part to their use of quantitative methods of inquiry. It stands to reason that an understanding of perfectionists’ interpersonal relations is likely better achieved through the use of interpersonal investigative methods. From perfectionism measures we can know that perfectionists hold others to high standards or attempt to portray themselves to others in the most positive light possible. From correlational studies like those reviewed by Habke and Flynn (2002), we can learn about the connections between perfectionism and interpersonal personality traits or the possible effects of perfectionism on marital or other interpersonal relationships. But what is it *like* for a perfectionist to expect things of others and have those expectations go unmet? What does it *mean* to manage how one presents oneself to the outside world? These are questions that cannot be answered by administering impersonal tools such as the MPS-F, MPS-H, or PSPS, or by studying correlations between one of these scales and an interpersonal inventory. As a result, the confusion voiced by Christina and Rachel regarding others’ behaviour and Allison’s (implicit) belief that others privilege perfection to the same extent she does have heretofore not been explored. The qualitative methodologies used by Slaney and Ashby (1996), Speirs Neumeister (2004a), and Rice et al. (2003) provide little further

phenomenological insight as these researchers categorized their findings in terms similar to those used by quantitative thinkers rather than consider the lifeworld existentials.

Another shortcoming of the extant literature is its failure to address the self-comparative processes which are part of the perfectionist mode of being in the world. Although past researchers have focused extensively on the standard-setting and striving of perfectionists, it does not appear that any attention has been paid to the role that a perfectionist's perceptions of his peers play in these processes. A number of my participants indicated that their perfectionistic attitudes or behaviours changed or were connected to the perceived perfection(ism) of those around them. Their stories not only begin to fill the research gap of "the role of specific environmental contexts in promoting perfectionism" (Flett et al., 2002), they also reveal the peer influence aspect to perfectionist intentionality that bears further investigation.

As for researchers' findings regarding the perfectionist client-therapist relationship, and specifically the hypotheses that perfectionists have difficulties building open and collaborative relationships and are reluctant to discuss personal issues (Nielsen et al., as cited in Habke & Flynn, 2002; Zuroff et al., 2000), these are belied by the nature of most of my interview encounters. Rather than conceal themselves, I found that the majority of my participants were forthcoming in sharing difficult personal stories that did not always cast them in the most positive light (although it is certainly conceivable that they presented only those negative stories that they deemed "safe" to disclose).

Lived Space

The lived space of perfectionism is simultaneously elevated, movable, orderly, and confined. The perfectionist sets his standards high, potentially beyond reach, but may adjust them downwards depending on his environment. She places things in their proper

order and feels compelled to keep them there. The findings from this study regarding perfectionistic expectations draw attention to a primary, if not singular, axis of spatial experience that is preoccupied with height and reach and stretch. Although breadth is hinted at in my respondents' ordering, this appears to be a dimension of coverage, not latitude. Perfectionists organize a wide variety of things in a wide variety of contexts, however, the particular, precise manner in which their organizing occurs suggests that strict limits are placed on any attempts at expansion or indulgence.

Indications of perfectionist spatiality abound in the empirical writings on perfectionism. The setting of high personal standards was mentioned throughout the anecdotal literature (D. D. Burns, 1980; Hamachek, 1978; Hollender, 1965; Pacht, 1984), featured in the three principal perfectionism measures (Frost et al., 1990; Hewitt & Flett, 1991b; Slaney et al., 2001), and identified through qualitative inquiry (Rice et al., 2003; Slaney & Ashby, 1996; Sloat, 2002) as being perfectionistic. Allusions to perfectionistic ordering and organization of space are similarly numerous and are found in sources such as Hollender's observations regarding perfectionists' attention to detail, the MPS-F Organization subscale (Frost et al.), the APS-R Order subscale (Slaney et al.), and the qualitative work done by Slaney and Ashby and Rice et al.

Clearly, there are strong implications of the height, and to a lesser degree breadth, of the lived space of perfectionism uncovered by this study. The extant literature, however, is incapable of fully revealing perfectionist spatiality due to its failure (or perhaps inability) to address the "felt-ness" of that space. That is, empiricists have not explored or therefore discovered how the high and orderly spaces of perfectionism affect the way perfectionists *feel* (van Manen, 1997). For my participants, when expectations

are high and apparently attainable, there is an attendant feeling of possibility, (upward) expansion, and flexibility; expectations that seem unreachable or go unmet are often followed by distress in the form of stress, frustration, anxiety, or fear. When order is present, there is a sense of calm or belonging; its absence leads to disappointment, discomfort, uncertainty, confusion, or others forms of distress. Although previous studies have certainly identified the distress that accompanies imperfection for perfectionists, this study extends the field and provides a unique perspective by focusing on the embodied, felt experience of that distress. Again, without consideration of how a perfectionist feels space, a phenomenology of perfectionism is impossible.

What appears to be absent from both the empirical literature and my data is a sense of depth to the spatiality of perfectionism. As noted in chapter 4, this dimension is missing even in participants' depiction of home, a space which in theory provides depth. Can perfectionists perceive depth? Are they "deep" individuals? Such musings bring to mind the expression "depth of feeling": Might perfectionistic depth be found in the emotions that perpetuate and result from the quest for perfection? Allan's high school failure resulted in a fear so enduring it remains with him despite the arguable success of attending law school, Allison's anxiety and shame are so intense that even minor displays of imperfection result in a retreat to the safety of her bed in the middle of the day, and Sam's stress is so powerful that it pulls him down until he feels as if he is drowning. If perfectionists appear to experience depth primarily through their distress, perhaps participants' emphasis on height and to a lesser degree breadth is designed to compensate for if not reduce the pain that runs deep.

Lived Body

The lived body of perfectionism involves various forms of emotional and mental

distress. The perfectionist is troubled by feelings of anxiety, panic, and fear, and by self-critical and extremist thinking. In many respects, her bodily point of view upon the world is one of anguish. This discomfort is also reflected in how perfectionists actually live their bodies, as they avoid or neglect them until they protest.

The beginnings of a perfectionist corporeality are in evidence in the empirical literature. Researchers have identified correlations between perfectionism and each of worry, anxiety, panic disorder, and obsessive-compulsive disorder (Flett et al., 2004; Frost & DiBartolo, 2002), as well as other moods such as depression (for a discussion, see Enns & Cox, 1999). The perfectionist's fear of failure has also been noted (see e.g., Hamachek, 1978; Slaney & Ashby, 1996). The cognitive aspect to the lived body of perfectionism is also foretold by the literature, as both a dichotomous (D. D. Burns, 1980; Rice et al., 2003; Sloat, 2002) and self-critical (Blatt & Zuroff, 2002; D. D. Burns; Hamachek; Hewitt & Flett, 1991b, 2002; Hollender, 1965) thinking style have been attributed to perfectionists, along with a variety of other cognitive distortions (e.g., D. D. Burns). And the notion of bodily neglect is predicted by the literature linking perfectionism and eating disorders (see Franco-Paredes et al., 2005, for a review).

However, here again the literature fails, this time to successfully capture the essence of the perfectionist lived body experience. Although myriad studies exist regarding the emotional, mental, and physical distress that attends perfectionism, the methodology of these studies precludes an in-depth examination of the corporeality of that distress. The correlational focus of these investigations is ironically and fatally mathematical and impersonal: If the perfectionist is revealed (and concealed) through her physical or bodily presence (van Manen, 1997), how can we understand her without

coming into contact with that presence? Allison's anxiety and self-loathing take on deeper meaning when we see her tears, Christina's frustration is underscored by her humourless laughter, and Allan's fear is punctuated through his use of profanity. By using quantitative methods of inquiry, perfectionism researchers have kept their participants at a distance and precluded the insight to be achieved through bodily encounter.

Chapter 6: Implications and Limitations

In introducing my research, I argued that part of this study's relevance flows from its potential contribution to counselling practice. The correlations between psychological distress and perfectionism articulated in the extant literature as well as my participants' description of the corporeality of perfectionist intentionality seem to bear this out. The research linking perfectionism and negative treatment outcomes (for a review, see Flett & Hewitt, 2002a) also suggests that new ideas for interacting therapeutically with perfectionists are needed.

The bulk of this chapter is devoted to an exploration of the counselling implications of my findings regarding perfectionist intentionality. Specifically, I recommend a constructivist approach to conceptualization and treatment for perfectionist clients. That recommendation is based on the consistencies between this counselling framework and both the phenomenological methods of inquiry and analysis used in this study and my own (constructivist) theoretical orientation as a counsellor.

I conclude the chapter with three additional brief sections. The first contains some suggestions for future research, the second outlines the limitations to my research, and the third brings an end to this study.

Counselling Implications

Current Therapeutic Strategies

As I mentioned in chapter 2, the favoured strategies for working with perfectionists thus far have been cognitive or cognitive-behavioural (CBT) and psychodynamic therapies. In this section, I comment on using these two strategies when working with perfectionists.

At first blush, a CBT approach to perfectionism appears highly appropriate given

the anxiety and so-called cognitive distortions inherent in perfectionist intentionality: A major focus of CBT is on the client's cognitions, and this therapy is *the* empirically validated treatment for anxiety. Despite CBT's utility in treating perfectionism-related distress, however, there are aspects to this counselling theory that are inconsistent with both my counselling and my research orientation. Chief among these is the fact that the cognitive therapist privileges an objective reality over the phenomenological realm (Guidano, 1995). A related problem is the pathologizing process inherent in a CBT approach. Throughout this paper, I have used the adjective *distorted* to refer to certain thinking patterns connected to perfectionism. This is the term used by proponents of CBT to label thoughts that do not accord with "reality". My use of quotations marks when referring to distorted thinking or cognitive distortions signifies my discomfort with the CBT view that that there is one "accurate" objective reality and that a person's subjective reality (i.e., interpretation) will be "inaccurate" and therefore invalid if it departs from reality proper (Ford & Urban, 1998).

As for psychodynamic approaches, while these may be a viable option for those seeking treatment for perfectionism-related distress, the research of Blatt and colleagues mentioned in chapter 2 (see Blatt & Zuroff, 2002) is too narrowly circumscribed to allow for any such conclusions. The individuals being treated and studied were "seriously disturbed, treatment-resistant patients in long-term, intensive, psychodynamically oriented, inpatient treatment in an open therapeutic facility (including at least four times weekly psychoanalytically oriented psychotherapy; Blatt & Ford, 1994; Blatt et al., 1988)" (p. 396).

A Constructive/ist Approach to Perfectionism

In this section, I recommend Michael J. Mahoney's (2003) constructive psychotherapy for therapeutic work with individuals who experience perfectionism as a perceived way of being in the world. In so doing, I revisit the temporality, relationality, spatiality, and corporeality of perfectionist intentionality and consider how they accord with one or more of the five themes of constructivism identified by Mahoney (activity, order, self, relationship, and development) and therefore not only permit but invite a Mahoney-inspired counselling conceptualization.

Lived time

The echoes of time in Mahoney's (2003) theory of counselling allow for a constructive therapeutic approach to perfectionist temporality. The essence of Mahoney's constructivism is development: He viewed humans as continually and actively making meaning of themselves and their worlds and organizing their experiences and believed that this is how humans develop and evolve. In Mahoney's words, "we are always in process, always moving forward in the sense of time, anticipation, and ongoing change" (p. 46). A perfectionist client who is consumed and troubled by the restraints of objective time might achieve relief through a therapy which views human change as continual and unending. This fluid, expansive view of time is also reflected in how a constructivist counsellor like Mahoney would approach the duration of the counsellor-client relationship. Appropriately, given the hypothesis of Zuroff et al. (2000) that perfectionists need ample time to develop a therapeutic relationship, some constructivists welcome clients in and out of therapy "from time to time" (R. A. Neimeyer & Bridges, 2003, p. 289; see also G. J. Neimeyer, 1995). As for termination of that relationship, no specific

end point is suggested and Mahoney recommended ending when “the client is ready to move on” (p. 187).

Lived human relation

Distress associated with perfectionist relationality should be well-accommodated by Mahoney’s (2003) constructivism. Central to Mahoney’s view of human nature is the notion of identity: He believed that one’s sense of self (i.e., identity) is constantly in process or evolving (see also R. A. Neimeyer, 1995) and that the “emergence of a sense of self appears to be crucial to healthy human development” (p. 32). Intimately connected to this idea of identity is an emphasis on human relationships. Mahoney believed that a person’s bonds with others play a key role in her development of a sense of self. That is, our relationships shape how we construct our identity. Relationship is relevant not only at the conceptualization stage but also in terms of the type of client change that is possible. Through constructive psychotherapy, the client may experience changes in both interpersonal and self- relationships (which changes include increased self-awareness, self-acceptance, comfort with emotions, and personal agency).

The strong self-other dynamic of perfectionist intentionality indicates a good fit with constructive psychotherapy. For example, a constructivist counsellor might conceptualize the role that the other plays in the perfectionist’s self -standards, -assessment, and -management as part of the perfectionist’s self-development process. Rather than challenge the perfectionist client for her “unhealthy” patterns of relating, the constructivist could assist the client in examining and understanding these patterns. As Mahoney (2003) noted, “discovering patterns in one’s life can be an important step toward self-awareness” (p. 89), one important means by which change in one’s self-

relationships can occur.

Lived space

Mahoney's (2003) constructive psychotherapy is also well-suited to participants' lived experience of spatiality since the notion of order is central to Mahoney's view of human nature. He believed that human beings are creatures of habit who need and seek out order in their lives and who follow established patterns of experiencing. Because humans are naturally conservative creatures, they tend to stick to these patterns to protect themselves against disorder and change and thereby avoid discomfort. Both order and disorder are accompanied by the expression of emotions, which are key to human experiencing.

Thus, a constructivist might conceptualize his perfectionistic clients' standard setting and organizing as manifestations of their quest for certainty and the "freaking out" of individuals like Trisha as an example of the discomfort which accompanies the loss of order, rather than an irrational magnification (a form of cognitive distortion) of events. In this way, the constructive psychotherapist would avoid pathologizing the order-seeking behaviour of her clients and also potentially gain greater understanding of the distress that can attend obstacles to order.

Lived body

A constructivist would also respond well to the troubling thoughts and emotions of perfectionist corporeality. According to Mahoney (2003), "emotions are natural expressions of our biological nature – our quests for order (viable meanings) and our reactions to the lack, loss, or change of order in our lives" (p. 32). A constructive psychotherapist might view the feelings of anxiety, panic, and fear expressed by

participants as solutions to past pain, attempts to protect themselves and maintain a sense of order. Rather than try to immediately eradicate these emotions, he might encourage a perfectionist client to develop “a healthy relationship to the power and presence of emotions” (p. 32) due to the constructivist view that “emotional experiencing and expression are often as important as emotional control” (p. 32).

As for the types of thoughts described by my participants, although a constructivist counsellor would not label these as dysfunctional, she might target them with traditional cognitive strategies if the client’s cognitions appear to be “the most accessible dimension for an attempted change” (Mahoney, 2003, p. 83). She might also recommend the use of mindfulness meditation given recent evidence that this practice may increase the effectiveness of cognitive therapies (Mahoney). However, if the thoughts appear to be related to a pattern or patterns of experiencing, as opposed to a situational problem (which appears to be the case for at least some of the participants in this study), the constructive therapist would likely encourage the client to recognize these patterns (e.g., through journaling or life review exercises) and explore novel experiences.

Research Implications

The findings from this study suggest several avenues for future phenomenological researchers. First, while participants in this study included both men and women, no effort was made at the interpretation stage to articulate the lived experience of perfectionism from the perspective of gender. Thus, future phenomenological researchers on perfectionism may wish to include a gender component in their analysis. Second, for comparison purposes, or simply to expand our understanding of perfectionist intentionality for those involved in legal practice, phenomenologists may wish to explore how lawyers experience the phenomenon of perfectionism. Third, the perfectionist sense

of relationality as involving criticism of and frustration with others opens the door to phenomenological exploration of the lived experience of perfectionists' significant others. Finally, an ecological study examining the structures that help produce, promote, and sustain perfectionism (e.g., university/law school) would be apt as well.

Limitations

As with any study, there were certain limitations to my work that should be kept in mind. First, the relatively brief duration and one-time nature of the study interviews may have limited the extent of disclosure by interviewees. Although my participants generally offered rich, detailed lived experience descriptions, they may have engaged in self-censoring due to their lack of familiarity with the interviewer (a possibility which becomes more likely when we remember that certain participants attempt to manage or control how they appear to others). Using a multiple interview design in future phenomenological studies of perfectionism and including questions on the protocol regarding specific difficulties that have been linked to perfectionism (e.g., eating disorders) may encourage participants to be even more forthcoming about any distress that is a part of perfectionist intentionality.

A further potential limitation of this study resulted from my own familiarity with both the topic (due to my review of the extant literature) and lived experience of perfectionism. Despite my bracketing efforts and my use of other means to ensure the trustworthiness of my interpretations, the similarity between the themes present in my own stories and those which arose in participants' interviews leaves me to wonder whether or how my own experience of the perfectionism phenomenon affected the analysis process.

Finally, the effect of my perfectionism on the design and completion of my

research as a whole was a possible limitation. In chapter 1, I uncovered the lifeworld existentials in my own stories of perfectionism. I noted spatiality in my need for order, temporality in my laborious and more-than-thorough approach to academic tasks, corporeality in the distress that accompanied imperfection, and relationality in how I sometimes present myself to others. As my thesis research nears a close, I realize it offers yet one more story of my experience of the phenomenon of perfectionism. At each stage of the research process my ordering, revising, worrying, and self-consciousness came into play. For example, I approached the literature review systematically and methodically, as I categorized my electronic searches by date and topic and maintained separate, labeled paper files for each area researched (spatiality); I spent countless hours preparing transcript summaries for my participants, rewriting the explanatory introduction over and over and over until I got it right (temporality); I fretted frequently about whether my data collection practices were consistent with my university-approved ethics application and whether I had conducted sufficient trustworthiness checks (corporeality); and in meeting with my supervisors, I often endeavoured to appear knowledgeable and insightful even when I hadn't the first clue what they were talking about (relationality). At first glance, it may seem odd to describe such behaviour as a limitation: Wasn't I simply approaching my subject of inquiry thoughtfully and with care? Perhaps. But these anecdotes and others like them also indicate a rigidity and a discomfort with deviating from an established path. For example, as my research progressed, my perfectionism inhibited me from modifying my method and caused me to second-guess my interpretations. Ultimately, I am proud of how I have conducted this study and written it up. However, I believe my perfectionism served as a limit to my confidence as a researcher and, as a

result, may have affected my willingness to take too many research risks.

Conclusion

I recently became a mother. As I write this, my daughter is six months old. Even in these early days, I detect hints of perfectionist intentionality in my manner of being in the world with her. As I place photos of her as a newborn in her baby book and remark to her what a “big girl” she has become, I am conscious of how fleeting, how insufficient, our time together as mother and baby will be (temporality). When I ensure that her outfit is stylish and colour-coordinated before taking her out into the world, I am reminded of my concern for how I, and by extension she, will be viewed by others (relationality). When she does not perform as I had expected, and fusses rather than coos, I sometimes feel off-balance (spatiality). And if the time for an anticipated physiological milestone such as rolling over comes and goes with no sign that she has reached it, I detect in myself the faintest twinge of anxiety that someone (me?) has done something wrong (corporeality). Despite this evidence that the perfectionist and mother in me coexist harmoniously, however, there are stronger indications that mothering and perfectionism do not mix. As I examine my experiences as a mother more closely, I see that they threaten (promise?) to explode the constructions of the lifeworld existentials that I have gained from my participants and my own past experience and that have been validated through the literature. The perfectionist and the mother live time, relationship, space, and the body in starkly different ways.

For example, whereas the perfectionist often perceives time as a commodity – something to be used, (mis)spent, acquired, or bargained for – for the mother, time become a sense of presence with another. The when of living is dictated entirely by a being who feeds “on demand,” requires a clean diaper *now*, and wakes at a different hour

every night. Unlike the perfectionist, the mother is forced to relinquish any pretense that she can master or control time. She lives squarely in the present, moment to moment, limiting the opportunity to ruminate about the past or fixate on the future.

Perfectionist and mothering relationality are similarly incongruent. In contrast with the supremacy of self which typifies perfectionist lived relation is the near-disappearance of the self that I have experienced upon becoming a mother. As the primary caregiver to an infant, my needs have been largely displaced by the eating and sleeping demands of my daughter. Her complete dependency on me in all respects translates into a symbiotic mother-child union: Where I go, so goes she. The fact that I have chosen to nurse makes any prolonged separation, or separateness, impossible.

The mother and the perfectionist also live in vastly different spatial dimensions. The depth that is absent (or at least hidden) from perfectionist spatiality is the defining dimension of the mother-child relationship. From the moment my daughter was placed on my chest, I felt a love more intense than I ever thought possible. My deep need to protect her coexists with but also overshadows the height of my expectations for her. Mothering similarly requires breadth, as I am called upon regularly to act as housekeeper, chef, day care worker, chauffeur, and medic. As for the orderly space of perfectionism, this has largely been supplanted by chaos. Despite my best efforts to tidy, organize, and arrange, I struggle (and ultimately fail) to contain the mounds of laundry and piles of plastic toys that the baby has introduced into my life.

Finally, perfectionist and motherly corporeality also come into conflict. Although the anxiety, panic, fear, and self-criticism are all part of the lived experience of mothering, where mothering extends beyond the lived body of perfectionism is in the

fullness of emotions that attend the parenting experience. Amusement, elation, wonder, excitement, pride, and hope are all felt in equal measure, helping to quell the oft-overwhelming stress of motherhood.

Given the contradictions between these two lived experiences, can they in fact coexist? Can they be reconciled? If so, how? Will I continuously shift back and forth between perfectionism and motherhood, never fully inhabiting the time, relation, space, or body of either phenomenon? Or will mothering constitute part of the therapeutic work for this perfectionist?

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Appendixes

Appendix A: Informed Consent Form

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

Form 2 – Informed Consent By Participants In a Research Study

The University and those conducting this research study subscribe to the ethical conduct of research and to the protection at all times of the interests, comfort, and safety of participants. This research is being conducted under permission of the Simon Fraser Research Ethics Board. The chief concern of the Board is for the health, safety and psychological well-being of research participants.

Should you wish to obtain information about your rights as a participant in research, or about the responsibilities of researchers, or if you have any questions, concerns or complaints about the manner in which you were treated in this study, please contact the Director, Office of Research Ethics by email at hweinber@sfu.ca or phone at 604-268-6593.

Your signature on this form will signify that you have received a document which describes the procedures, possible risks, and benefits of this research study, that you have received an adequate opportunity to consider the information in the documents describing the study, and that you voluntarily agree to participate in the study.

Any information that is obtained during this study will be kept confidential to the full extent permitted by professional ethics. Knowledge of your identity is not required. You will not be required to write your name or any other identifying information on research materials. Materials will be maintained in a secure location. Any specific Professional Ethics that are used are described in the study information document (Form 5).

Title: **The Lived Experience of Perfectionism in First Year Law School**

Investigator Name: **Wendy Woloshyn**

Investigator Department: **Counselling Psych, Education**

Having been asked to participate in the research study named above, I certify that I have read the procedures specified in the Study Information Document describing the study. I understand the procedures to be used in this study and the personal risks to me in taking part in the study as described below:

Risks to the participant, third parties or society:

N/A

Benefits of study to the development of new knowledge:

It is hoped that the findings from the proposed study will offer counsellors and other mental health practitioners new insight into individuals who describe

themselves as perfectionists, and therefore new ideas about how to work with them.

Findings from this study may also suggest resources targeted specifically to the population being sampled, i.e., law students. Possibilities include outreach or psychoeducational interventions to be provided to students on-site at law schools, or improvements to the design of legal education.

I may also benefit personally, as I hope to work with lawyers, law students and self-described perfectionists in my later practice as a counsellor.

Procedures:

Each participant will be interviewed once separately. These interviews will be audiotaped and are expected to last between 30 and 120 minutes. Participants may also be asked to review the transcripts from their interviews and / or a written analysis of those transcripts, and to provide their comments thereon. Participants may be interviewed a second time to get their comments on the first interview and/or the analysis of the data collected during that interview. Second interviews will be audiotaped.

I understand that I may withdraw my participation at any time. I also understand that I may register any complaint with the Director of the Office of Research Ethics or the researcher named above or with the Chair, Director or Dean of the Department, School or Faculty as shown below.

Department, School or Faculty:	Chair, Director or Dean:
Counselling Psych, Education	Dr. Thomas O'Shea

8888 University Way,
Simon Fraser University,
Burnaby, British Columbia, V5A 1S6, Canada

I may obtain copies of the results of this study, upon its completion by contacting:
Wendy Woloshyn

wolosh@telus.net

I have been informed that the research will be confidential.

I understand that my supervisor or employer may require me to obtain his or her permission prior to my participation in a study of this kind.

I understand the risks and contributions of my participation in this study and agree to participate:

The participant and witness shall fill in this area. Please print legibly	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Participant Last Name:	Participant First Name:
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Participant Contact Information:	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Participant Signature:	Witness (if required by the Office of Research Ethics):
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Date (use format MM/DD/YYYY)	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Orienting question

- 1. What is it you mean when you describe yourself as a perfectionist?**
 - a. Can you give me an example/tell me more/give me a more detailed description, etc.?

Lived experience of perfectionism in law school

- 2. What is it like to be a perfectionist in law school?**
 - a. Can you give me an example/tell me more/give me a more detailed description, etc.?
- 3. What role does law school play in your experience of perfectionism?**
 - a. In what ways, if any, has law school interacted with/changed your perfectionism?
- 4. What role does perfectionism play in your experience of law school?**
 - a. In what ways, if any, has perfectionism had an impact on your experience of law school?
- 5. Can you describe in as much detail as possible a situation during the previous semester where you felt your perfectionism was at its peak?**
 - a. What part of that experience do you consider perfectionism?
 - b. How was that for you / What was that like / Tell me more / How did you feel / What was going on?
- 6. What do you find most helpful in terms of the impact that perfectionism has on your day to day living? / What is the most helpful thing about your perfectionism?**
 - a. Can you give me an example/tell me more/give me a more detailed description, etc.?
- 7. What do you find most hindering in terms of the impact that perfectionism has on your day to day living? / What is the least helpful thing about your perfectionism?**
 - a. Can you give me an example/tell me more, etc.?
- 8. Can you describe a situation during the previous semester where you felt your perfectionism was not at all present?**
- 9. What do you see as the consequences of your perfectionism?**