

The Un-Ending Pursue of Perfection

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Abstract

Background: As a society, we have become obsessed with constant and exponential improvement, this has driven us to new astonishing findings, but yet made us the critical perfectionist we strived not to become. **Objective:** Observing this phenomenon, we set out to observe why we have come as a society to this end and how we can learn from it moving forward. **Methods:** We observe this phenomenon between parents and their offspring, between colleagues, and between colleagues and their managers. **Results:** We acknowledge the existence of a type of fastidiousness in the form of high expectations from one person towards another.

Keywords: Perfection; Sustainability; Humanity

1 Introduction

To begin with, according to the Cambridge Dictionary, perfection is defined as being complete and/or correct in every possible way. [1]

This phenomenon is extremely hard to measure in society, but studies suggest that the number keeps increasing. Taking a look at the research done by the American Psychological Association and as cited by Curran (2019): "findings suggest that recent generations of college students have higher expectations of themselves and others than previous generations"[2]

Several social and psychological factors may be contributing to this increase. The rapid expansion of social media has intensified constant comparison, leading individuals to measure their worth against curated ideals of success. Moreover, academic and professional environments have become increasingly competitive, where performance metrics and external validation dominate. Parental expectations and cultural pressures to achieve perfection from an early age further reinforce these tendencies.

The reason why many people often strive towards this impossible goal is mainly due to fear.[3] Often times this fear leads to a cyclical process that starts with perfection, from perfection comes stress, and

from stress comes fear, and this fear leads to internal & constant need to improve one's-self, which ultimately leads to perfectionism.

This is extremely detrimental to one's self especially when it comes to creative problem-solving as noted by Goulet Pelletier(2025) in the article published to the National Library of Medicine. [4]

2 Discussion

A quote that I find particularly revealing comes from the film *The Menu* (2022), in which the head chef Julian Slowik, once celebrated for mastering the art of cuisine, has lost his passion to cook. He remarks:

"We strive for perfection, which of course does not exist, and that is a hard truth for me to accept. Pressure to put out the best food in the world. And even when all goes right, and the food is perfect, and the customers are happy, and the critics are, too, there is no way to avoid the mess. The mess you make of your life, of your body, of your sanity, by giving everything you have to pleasing people you will never know." [5]

This reflection encapsulates the paradox of perfectionism: the pursuit of flawlessness often leads to disillusionment rather than fulfillment. Even at the highest levels of mastery, the desire to meet every expectation can erode the very joy that fuels creativity.

To illustrate this tension, let us imagine a highly prestigious restaurant offering a five-course meal priced at 230 euros (approximately 250 USD). As guests, we arrive expecting an extraordinary experience—dishes of exceptional quality, flavor, and presentation. The first plate arrives: a beautifully prepared sweet potato garnished with care. Yet, upon tasting it, we think, "I could do this at home." The main dish follows, artfully plated but small in portion, and frustration quietly replaces anticipation. "I spent a week's salary on this," we mutter, "and this is what I get."

This vignette captures the invisible burden borne

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by those in service industries. They give everything they have to deliver excellence, only to face relentless scrutiny. In turn, the critic and the customer—perhaps even the chef—internalize their own dissatisfaction. The criticism turns inward: “Maybe I am the problem.” And so, the cycle continues—perfectionism feeding on itself.

Perfectionism is often internalized early in life through parental expectations and achievement-oriented environments. In my own upbringing, I experienced this dynamic firsthand. My father, a highly perfectionist individual, often regarded even an 18 out of 20 as insufficient. Although his intentions were rooted in motivation, this constant pursuit of flawlessness gradually led to academic burnout and a loss of intrinsic interest in studying. This personal experience reflects the mechanisms described by Curran and Hill [2], who emphasize the link between socially prescribed perfectionism and psychological distress among youth.

Ultimately, whether in haute cuisine, academia, or family life, perfectionism manifests as a double-edged sword—driving achievement while quietly eroding well-being. Recognizing this tension is the first step toward cultivating a healthier balance between excellence and self-compassion.

Then again, how to overcome perfectionism? A short article by The University of Queensland (2023) suggests celebrating small wins, and looking at others not as machines, but as people who are also trying their best. [6]

Perhaps happiness only exists when we want to feel it, or when we allow it to be felt. [7].

As Viktor remarks in the animated series *Arcane*:

“There is no prize to perfection. Only an end to pursuit.” [8]

This line captures the paradox of perfectionism: the goal is set so high that once it is (hypothetically) achieved, nothing remains to strive for—turning progress into stasis.

Perhaps next time we go to a higher end restaurant we should put in mind that this is made by a human, who is trying their best to make us happy.

Perhaps we should accept the fact that perfection is impossible to achieve. But instead let see how far we have come already and keep improving slowly together.

3 Conclusion

To wrap up, everybody wants to be perfect, but there is no prize to perfection [8]. Everybody is critical, but yet we forget that the other person

we are criticizing is also a person who is trying their best. We try our best to be the best version of ourselves, but yet everything in life is a double edged sword. Should we all pursue perfection if the disadvantage is losing our humanity? We don't have to be individually perfect, but perhaps together, we might.

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