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RHET 1010 - Section 8

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Final Draft | Being a Student and Perfectionism: Can Perfectionism be a Good Thing?

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Outline

1. Introduction

1. Main Point: Perfectionism's effects: Abstract
2. Thesis Statement: Arguing the negativity of perfectionism

2. Body Paragraph 1: College Students and Perfectionism

1. Main Point: Links between perfectionism and anxiety
2. Supporting Detail: The illusion college students create
3. Supporting Detail: How Magdy's perfectionism was his own enemy

3. Body Paragraph 2: How perfectionists deal with failures

1. Main Point: How perfectionism leads to procrastination and creating illusions
2. Supporting Detail: Consequences of maladaptive perfectionism
3. Supporting Detail: How Elizabeth Holmes' high expectations destroyed her

4. Wrap-up and Conclusion

“Perfectionism”

According to Thomas Curran, a social psychologist at the London School of Economics, one of three college students in 2016 suffered from perfectionism, with an increase of about 33% when compared with 1989 (2017). However, many researchers claim that perfectionism is beneficial in some way (Stoeber and Otto, 2006). Joachim Stoeber, professor of Psychology at Kent University, explores maladaptive perfectionism in his article entitled “Positive Conceptions of Perfectionism” and says, “Across the different conceptions and the different approaches, the majority of studies have produced evidence in favor of the position that perfectionistic strivings are associated with positive characteristics.” However, Stoeber and Otto’s study mainly argues that having high standards will raise the achievement bar, so even in the case of setbacks, the perfectionist will be able to carry on and learn from any struggle. However, the idea of considering the achievement bar as a measure for the return benefit is debatable. For instance, a perfectionist achieving higher grades in a college course only proves his academic return benefit. Nonetheless, it does not consider the mental and social costs paid in return. A perfectionist college student carries the burden of tests and assignments, along with the idea of having his GPA high and consistent. While this stress pushes him to the limits and allows him to attain a perfect grade record in his courses, it costs him time that could have been used to refresh his mind and explore new worlds beyond his scope. Besides, not only does perfectionism harm the perfectionist, but it also hurts the people around him. Many researchers would claim that this is a beneficial return of perfectionism; however, perfectionism’s benefits do not outweigh its negative costs.

Desiring success is excellent, but overstressing every minor detail causes severe anxiety and may lead to serious medical conditions. Azmaira Maker, San Diego's Psychological Association representative, notes that perfectionism is always linked to depression and anxiety, which leads to general stress (2018). Numerous researches support the inadequacy of perfectionism. For instance, Brené Brown, a research professor at the University of Houston, emphasizes the core issue of perfectionism in her book "Daring Greatly"

"Perfectionism is not self-improvement. Perfectionism is, at its core, about trying to earn approval. Most perfectionists grew up being praised for achievement and performance (grades, manners, rule-following, people-pleasing, appearance, sports). Somewhere along the way, they adopted this dangerous and debilitating belief system" (2012).

Perfectionism is particularly apparent in schools and universities. College students often acquire false beliefs that they are expected to have outstanding achievements and achieve impeccable grades. Those perfectionist students suffer from severe stress that decays their social life and mental health. Students of the American University in Cairo have been most recently facing these stress issues. While many of them seek therapy, others refuse to do so and try to deal with the stress themselves, which leads to more severe issues. For instance, one of the former Ghurair scholars in the university shared his story and discussed how perfectionism did not work well in university as in high school. Magdy is an eminent student who got perfect grades in high school. Unfortunately, his grades streak did not hold well in

university. After facing many issues due to the university's different environment compared to high school, Magdy found himself in an ocean of imperfections to which he could not adapt.

“After being swarmed in depression due to multiple setbacks in the first two semesters, I could not stand studying for a single moment. My willingness to perfect each aspect did not escalate well. It ended up with me failing four courses and getting terminated from the scholarship, and thus from the university.” (2021).

While some college students seek perfectionism to satisfy their parents' desires, others think they will lose job opportunities if they do not achieve perfectionism. Both parties are affected negatively due to being subjected to continuous stress. Thus, whatever perspective you have on perfectionism, it will be evident that the cons exceed the pros.

Perfectionists tend to avoid any tiny mistakes, which creates fear from not meeting expectations which leads to killing their productivity. Margaret Hill discusses the consequences of perfectionism in her article as she says, “Individuals with unhealthy or maladaptive perfectionism are preoccupied with the discrepancy between their high, sometimes rigid standards and their performance.” (2017). When a perfectionist sets unrealistic goals, he gets anxious if he does not perform as reliably as he thought. As a result, he decides not to do anything new, fearing the eyes of the people. This type of perfectionists internalize the idea of flawlessness, so they procrastinate on their tasks because they may not perform perfectly, which will hurt their self-esteem. Besides, they may resort to hiding their mistakes with a cover of lies instead of acting to fix them. A famous example of a world-class deceptive perfectionist is Elizabeth Holmes, the former CEO and founder of the biotech

corporation Theranos. Holmes started her academic life at Stanford, which proves her intelligence. However, she had the idea of building Theranos, a device that can perform blood tests with a relatively small amount of blood rapidly and automated using technologies that the company has developed (Carreyrou, 2018). However, after working for multiple years, the results were not as well as expected. Unfortunately, since she was a severe perfectionist, she decided not to reveal her device's authentic results. Holmes decided to cheat in the company's records to hide her failure in achieving the company's initial goal. Thus, Theranos company was running on a fragile and fake base ("The Inventor: Out for Blood in Silicon Valley," 2019). She may have thought she would figure it out sometime, but she did not. After Theranos was valued at 10 billion dollars at its peak, the fraud was exposed, and Holmes faced multiple fraud and conspiracy charges (Parloff, 2014). Holmes' story reflects how perfectionism affects not only the perfectionist but can critically hurt many people if not resolved. In conclusion, perfectionists should learn how to face failures and consider them as opportunities to develop instead of setbacks.

Overall, perfectionism is not a perk. It is a forfeiture that fines perfectionists. Perfectionists must reshape how they treat failure. They should not think of it as an eternal defeat but a learning step and opportunity that leads to growth. Also, they should understand that being mistaken is normal, but faking righteousness is disastrous. In general, perfectionists must develop a growth mindset that extracts motivation from each obstruction.

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