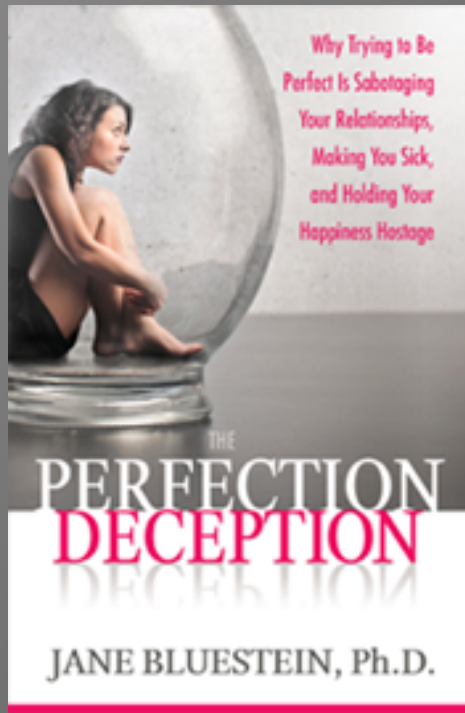




The Perfection Deception

by Dr. Jane Bluestein

Why Trying to Be Perfect is
Sabotaging Your Relationships,
Making You Sick, and Holding Your
Happiness Hostage

Perfectionism vs. Pursuit of Excellence

Perfectionism:

A quest for flawlessness motivated by fear of embarrassment, rejection, abandonment, intimacy, or some other negative reaction from others, or by a need for status or superiority.

Pursuit of excellence:

A quest for growth, learning, improvement, and doing (looking or being) our best; motivated by curiosity, a love of learning, or the enjoyment of the process or journey.

Perfectionism vs. Pursuit of Excellence

Perfectionism:

Negative impact on physical health, mental health, self-concept, achievement, advancement, and relationships, as well as the willingness to take risks and make mistakes.

Pursuit of excellence:

Identity and sense of worth are not tied to achievement or appearance, or need for control. Far less likely to have negative impact or associated risk factors.

Origins of Perfectionism

May include:

- Poor or inconsistent attachment to parents or caregivers (or OVER-attachment)
- Lack of safety or predictability in environment
- Frequent negative feedback or criticism (or inconsistent, conditional positive feedback)
- Emphasis on importance of cultural fads or status (“shoulds,” external or superficial definition of worth)
- Media messages and advertising

Negative Impact

May include:

- Stinkin' Thinkin': cognitive distortions such as generalizations, contradictions, rigidity, negativity, catastrophizing, assumptions, competitive comparisons, and all-or-nothing thinking
- Anxiety and stress (bids for approval or conditional acceptance, pressure of unrealistic expectations)
- Regrets, rumination and trouble staying in present

Negative Impact

Also:

- Panic, self-doubt
- Decrease in learning or work performance
- Procrastination, underachieving, giving up
- Increased stress on relationships (personal and professional)
- Increased risk for self-harm, addiction, and suicide

Getting Real, Getting Well

- Living with imperfection (cultural examples)
- Being our best selves (self-acceptance)
- Developing psychological strength (dealing with media images, cultural messages, negative feedback)
- Connecting with others in healthy ways
- Taking care of self (body and mind)

Getting Help

- Intellectual decision to “stop being a perfectionist” is rarely adequate to change deep-seated, long-held beliefs
- Involves admitting to not being perfect (*not* self-shaming, self-deprecating, or self-loathing)
- Find a trusted resource who can help create a safe environment for creating change
- Think “kaizen”: incremental improvements