Perfection and Her Sisters: Exploring the Voices of

Southland University's Female Undergraduates

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A Dissertation

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by

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ABSTRACT

This study used a mixed-method design to address how an academically high-achieving group of undergraduate women experienced pressures for perfectionism, perfectionistic self-presentation, and effortless perfection during their college careers. Effortless perfection, identified by a campus climate study, revealed that women were feeling pressure to appear perfect without having to put any effort into achieving perfection. Perfectionistic self-presentation (PSP) and effortless behaviors, as well anxiety, depression, and risky eating behaviors, all psychological reactions with existing research links to female perfectionists, were measured via an online survey of 296 women. Since little qualitative research was available regarding PSP and effortless perfection, interview data were gathered from a purposefully selected sub-sample of 20 women representing four distinct profiles of effortless perfection (high PSP-high effortlessness, high PSP-low effortlessness, low PSP-high-effortlessness, low PSP-low effortlessness). Interview questions focused on a variety of issues regarding perfectionism and effortlessness, including the influence of environmental and cultural factors and the coping mechanisms these undergraduate women employed in response to daily stresses.

This study identifies the overall prevalence of depression, anxiety, reduced emotional expression, and difficulty forming relationships within the research sample. Behaviors associated with attempts to appear effortless were twice as likely to be present

in women with PSP than women with low to no measurable PSP. Women with PSP were not found to have an increased propensity for risky eating behaviors compared to women with low or no levels of PSP. Interview data pertaining to self-image and self-presentation, resulted in the relabeling of "effortless perfection" as "effortless perfectionistic self-presentation." Qualitative data reflected a diversity of stress responses, although women with high PSP-low effortlessness were the most likely to exhibit unhealthy coping responses. Implications of these findings regarding the study of perfectionism and addressing the needs of high-achieving female college students are discussed, and support services including intergenerational female mentoring and female-focused campus counseling centers are proposed.

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APPROVAL OF THE DISSERTATION

This dissertation, "Perfection and Her Sisters: Exploring the Voices of Southland University's Female Undergraduates," has been approved by the Graduate Faculty of the Curry School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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DEDICATION

For my parents, Gary and Linda Andres,
who gave me my first "A"

and for my sister, Lauren,
who always knew how to help.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Over the past 25 years, the notion of perfectionism has taken root as a construct of

interest not only in the scholarly field of psychology, but also in American culture and

media. Defined as a personality characteristic emphasizing "the striving for

flawlessness," several of the most prolific perfectionism researchers have linked

perfectionist attitudes and behaviors with the development of psychological

maladjustments (Flett & Hewitt, 2002, p. 5). Numerous studies reveal perfectionism's

increasing association with a vast array of psychological disorders including anorexia

nervosa, anxiety, depression, and suicide (Alden, Bieling, & Wallace, 1994; Ashby &

Rice, 2002; Blankenstein, Flett, Hewitt, & Eng, 1993; Blatt, 1995; Castro et al., 2004;

Cockell, et al., 2002; Flett, 1998; Flett, Hewitt, Blankstein, & O'Brien, 1991; Hewitt,

Flett, & Ediger, 1996; Hewitt & Flett, 1991a).

In the past decade, several studies have focused on the role of perfectionism in the

psychopathology of college student populations (Chang, 1998; Chang & Rand, 2000;

Chang, Banks, & Watkins, 2004; Flett, Hewitt, Blankstein, & Gray, 1998; Hewitt &

Genest, 1990; Sherry, Hewitt, Flett, & Harvey, 2003). The collegiate student population

is a logical context for perfectionism research, given the ever-expanding body of

literature chronicling the rise of distressed and psychologically impaired postsecondary

students (Astin, 1993; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Vrendberg, Flett, & Krames, 1993;

Chang, 1998). Past studies concerned with college students have also revealed the power

of students' academic achievement standards and the standards of significant others in influencing their academic success and psychological health (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Carine & Janssens, 1998; Chodorow, 1978; Hewitt, et al., 1996; Hewitt & Flett, 1990, 1991a, 1991b).

In a 2002 campus climate study examining the status of women at Duke University (Duke) in Durham, North Carolina, one woman described her experience as striving for "effortless perfection" (Roth, 2003, p. 12). Within the study's focus groups, and then across campus, the term grew to symbolize female struggles with projecting images of academic and social perfection, without revealing to others the effort they exerted to project those perfect images. The stress of the participants who identified with feelings of effortless perfection was exacerbated by the women's perceptions that other female and male peers were excelling easily. This perceived deficiency resulted in decisions by women to stifle their expression of stress and inadequacy, which resulted whenever they were unable to reach their goals for perfection. The pressures to achieve effortless perfection existed, Duke steering committee members found, even if a woman had to conceal her effort and emotions – in essence conceal herself – to achieve this end.

The outcomes from Duke's holistic look at the experience of the Duke University female (alumnae, undergraduates, graduates, staff, and faculty) appeared to align with existing research indicating that females avoid expressing their negative thoughts and emotions and minimize the value and meaning of their personal experiences (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Brown & Jasper, 1993; Gellar, Cockell, & Goldner, 2000; Gilligan, 1982; Jack, 1991; Taylor, Gilligan, & Sullivan, 1995). Women have long been socialized to refrain from expressing negative feelings such as anger or

sadness, because such behavior is not considered ladylike and because such behaviors disrupt deeply rooted mores requiring women's agreement and complacency (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Brody & Hall, 1993; MacGeorge, 2003; Wood, 1997). American society expects women to balance the multifaceted nature of their lives (work, school, children, and spouses) even at the expense of their own happiness or desires (Hochschild & Machung, 2003).

Studies concerning gender and perfectionism have also found that female perfectionists are more likely to experience depression, guilt, and increased procrastination than their male perfectionist peers (Azzi, 2007; Fankhauser & Landphair, 2006). Research within the past five years on perfectionism has included the identification of perfectionistic self-presentation (PSP), or the presentation of one's self as perfect, as separate from trait perfectionism, or acting perfect, the latter of which has been the basis for countless studies in the psychology literature (Flett & Hewitt, 2002). I initially approached this research study without such context, relying instead on a colloquial understanding of perfectionism, as also utilized by participants in Duke University's campus climate study. My subsequent review of the scholarly literature regarding perfectionism, perfectionistic self-presentation, and effortlessness offered a highly-nuanced understanding of perfectionism that not only highlighted its maladaptive qualities, but distinguished trait perfectionism (acts of perfectionism) from perfectionistic self-presentation (presenting an image of perfectionism) (Hewitt & Flett, et al., 2003). Importantly, a focus on public image is not necessarily included in trait perfectionism. As a result, I linked the concern with public image inherent in Duke University's emergent definition of effortless perfection with PSP, rather than trait perfectionism.

When combined with the newly-identified phenomenon of effortless perfection and knowledge that today's college students are increasingly seeking treatment for a variety of psychological impairments, this scholarly examination of effortless perfection is worthwhile.

Existing perfectionism research makes a strong connection between the pressures to achieve and the adoption of perfectionistic behavior (Arthur & Haywood, 1997). Academically high-achieving students are highly susceptible to perfectionist thinking and sometimes report problems meeting the standards of achievement they obtained in high school at the postsecondary levels (Burns & Beck, 1978). As a result, females attending America's most selective colleges and universities, where admission standards require their applicants to achieve academically at the highest levels, were a likely population for a further exploration of the existence of perfectionistic self-presentation and effortless perfectionism. Student affairs professionals, campus mental health workers, and professors may be better equipped to meet the needs of their students based on an increased awareness of perfectionism and effortless perfectionism, including knowledge of the existence of these phenomena in the research population. As such, this research undertaking provided information from a population of high-achieving female students regarding: 1) the prevalence of characteristics of perfectionistic self-presentation (PSP); 2) the prevalence of outcomes associated with PSP; 3) the environmental factors shaping the manifestations of perfectionism, PSP, and effortless perfection; and 4) coping strategies used in response to life's pressures.

Research Questions

The research questions addressed in this study were formulated as follows:

(1) To what degree, if any, do academically high-achieving female students at Southland University manifest attributes of perfectionistic self-presentation?

(2) To what degree, if any, are academically high-achieving female students at Southland University concerned with effortlessness in their perfectionistic self-presentation?

(3) To what degree, if any, are psychological conditions associated with perfectionism (anxiety, depression, and risky eating behaviors) exhibited by high-achieving Southland University women?

(4) What, if any, are the environmental factors associated with perfectionistic self-presentation and effortlessness among female high-achieving Southland University undergraduates?

(5) What types of coping mechanisms, if any, do high-achieving female Southland University undergraduates use to respond to stress in their daily lives?

Cultural Phenomenon

In attempting to further an academic understanding of collegiate female experiences with perfectionism, perfectionistic self-presentation (PSP), and effortless perfection, I focused primarily on the research literature dedicated to these topics. Additionally, presenting a comprehensive perspective of these phenomena required a review of sociological theories of social reproduction and comparison as well as the feminist research paradigm. These theories provided the necessary context for identifying the societal influence on ideas of women and perfectionism, PSP, and effortless perfection. Specifically, social reproduction, social comparison, and the feminist

research paradigm serve as important frames for understanding the expectations women are subject to on their college campuses as a direct function of their membership in American society. The feminist interpretation of social reproduction provides insight into how gender expectations are perpetuated in the daily and intergenerational activities of a society; the phenomenon of social comparisons illuminates the power of these expectations in the lives of female Southland University college students.

A review of mainstream media articles was also helpful in establishing a societal awareness of pressures for perfection in females. Such examination was important given the well-substantiated central thesis of Susan Faludi's (1991) landmark work, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*. Faludi (1991) argued that the prevailing societal notion of the 1980s, that women were facing infertility and a lack of marriage partners because of their unprecedented career prioritization, was created and perpetuated by the media. While lacking the precision required of research articles, the media's representation of societal images of female perfection and effortless perfection also holds power in the American societal consciousness. After the *Duke Women's Initiative* (Roth, 2003) was released, articles about effortless perfection appeared in national news outlets including *Newsweek*, *The New York Times*, *Time*, and *USA Today* (Marklein, 2003; Quindlen, 2003; Rimer, 2003; Sachs, 2008). Notably, a 2007 *New York Times* article focusing on how academically high-achieving female high school students navigate the college admissions process included references to gaining academic and physical perfection. Said Kat, a high school senior with a perfect 2400 SAT score and a lengthy list of volunteer and leadership commitments, "It's out of style to admit it, but it is more important to be hot than smart. Effortlessly hot" (Rimer, 2007, p. 2). Kat's sentiments

were very similar to those expressed by the women at Duke, who described the social

scene there as emphasizing attractiveness and appearance over intelligence.

In 2005, Anna Quindlen authored a book entitled *Being Perfect*, which she

adapted from a commencement speech she delivered at the all-female Mount Holyoke

College. "Being perfect," said Quindlen, was akin to "carrying a backpack filled with

bricks" (p. 12). Courtney Martin (2007), who interviewed teenage and young adult

women across the United States for her 2007 book, *Perfect Girls, Starving Daughters*,

also noted the burden of perfection for women. Of her observations, she concluded: "A

perfect girl must always be a starving daughter, because there is never enough—never

enough accomplishment. Never enough control. Never enough perfection" (p. 5). In

2008, *Time* magazine interviewed Dr. Alice Domar, a Boston psychologist (Sachs, 2008).

Her comments focused on her professional experiences and observations that women

were more likely to be concerned with perfectionism than men. All of these references

suggest the presence of and concern for perfectionism and effortless perfection within

mainstream society, phenomena simultaneously shaping the lives of women and being

defined by women.

<div align="center">Purpose of the Study</div>

The purpose of this study was to contribute to the collective understanding of the

experiences of high-achieving female college students, including how they set and try to

achieve their academic and personal goals. This research explored the degree to which a

sample of high-achieving female undergraduate students at Southland University (SU)

exhibited perfectionistic self-presentation, effortlessness, and psychological conditions

linked to perfectionism in the research. Environmental factors and coping strategies

referenced by the research participants were also identified and described. With these goals, this research built upon existing literature dedicated to exploring perfectionism and PSP, female socialization, and psychological conditions linked to perfectionistic behaviors and thinking. The prevailing psychology literature and higher education frameworks suggested the vulnerability of academically high-achieving women to the pull of effortless perfection, justifying first the exploration of effortless perfection and then a focus on its exploration in a sample of high-achieving women.

Through survey administration, I assessed the frequency with which a group of high-achieving females at Southland University experienced PSP, effortlessness, and three psychological conditions commonly linked to perfectionism. Next, in qualitative interviewing, I gave voice to a subsample of the survey population, which included those who ranged in their concern for perfectionistic self-presentation (PSP) and the public demonstration of their effort. I investigated the ways self-expectations, the expectations of others, and environmental factors influenced women's responses to pressures for perfectionism and, in some cases, effortless perfection. Additionally, I identified a number of psychological reactions and coping strategies women used to respond to the stresses in their lives, which included pressures for perfectionism, PSP, and effortless perfectionistic self-presentation.

Rationale for the Study

The study intended to provide information about the behaviors of academically high-achieving female college students, with a focus on whether these individuals perceived pressures for perfectionism, perfectionistic self-presentation, and/or effortless perfection in their lives and how they reacted to such pressures, if they experienced them.

Given existing literature on perfectionism and female socialization, female college students seemed particularly susceptible to the maladaptive aspects of effortless perfectionism (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Holland & Eisenhart, 1990; Gilligan, 1982; Taylor, Gilligan, & Sullivan, 1995). As the number of female college students surpassed their male counterparts nationally at 57 percent, the study of female student experiences and behaviors remained highly relevant for collegiate administrators, professors, and student affairs professionals (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005). Research that focused on how collegiate women perceive their experiences is particularly valid, not only because women outnumber men on college campuses (Tanaka, 2002), but because relatively little focus has been placed on women's ways of "learning, knowing, and valuing that may be specific to, or at least common in, women" (Belanky, et al., 1986, p. 6). Research validating the experiences of men, particularly White men, enjoys a significantly longer history.

For most students, the college years are characterized by significant personal growth and development, shifting paradigms, experimentation and the testing of boundaries, and the rising push for independent thought (Baxter-Magolda, 1992; Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Increasingly, however, these years are also marred by episodes of depression, extreme anxiety, eating disorders, hyperactivity, and other indicators of mental distress and mental illness (Benton, Robertson, Tseng, Newton, & Benton, 2003; Silverstein & Perlick, 1995). Despite suggestions by some that U.S. society has been duped into relying on therapy and medication to solve problems that courage and self-reliance used to address (Satel & Sommers, 2005), the fact remains that reported incidences of mental impairments are on the rise (Benton, et al., 2003). Given

the legal ramifications for higher education if incidences of mental health impairments are not monitored within the student body, colleges and universities cannot afford to forgo providing preventative and supportive measures for students who may be in particular need of counseling and psychological services.

Although mainstream society makes positive associations with perfectionism, the forthcoming literature review uncovers the maladaptive nature of this construct and its association with significant psychological impairments. Since perfectionism is an achievement-based construct, evaluating an institution dedicated to admitting applicants with distinguished accomplishments was a likely place for students to feel the pressures of perfectionism. In order for institutions of higher education to best understand and support female students adopting perfectionistic behaviors in response to pressures to achieve, it is essential for administrators, student affairs professionals, and faculty members to understand how these women are making meaning from their experiences and the societal expectations they face. As a result of this data collection, colleges and universities may better understand the responsiveness of high-achieving female students to pressures for perfectionism, PSP, and effortlessness, which will contribute to the overall health of these women in the university environment.

The goal of this study was to first identify whether PSP and effortless perfection existed in the research sample. If identified, the focus was then to provide rich descriptions of the phenomena in question, including the maladaptive psychological conditions associated with them in the literature, the interplay between these phenomena and the participants' environment, the nature of their academic goal setting, expression of effort and psychological well-being. Furthermore, this data collection was designed to

highlight commonalities across the female college student experience, reinforcing for women that their experiences are shared and that they are not isolated in their thinking or experiences (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). As a result, female students may want to model similar behavior, sharing with other women as a way of destressing and normalizing feelings of frustration, anger, guilt, or embarrassment. Such an outcome would lend credence to data gathering techniques requiring the verbalization of experiences previously internalized, as research suggests women's experiences are likely to be. This study also bears relevance for the families of academically high-achieving female perfectionists, as learned responses to the pressures of perfectionism in college are often a continuation of behavior learned in the home (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Carine & Janssens, 1998; Chodorow, 1978).

Overview of Methodology

This was a two-part study. Data collection began with the administration of an online survey to assess the existence of perfectionistic self-presentation (PSP) and effortlessness within a group of Southland University female college students, in addition to noting the frequency of the women's psychological impairments. The Perfectionistic Self-Presentation Scale (PSPS), designed by Hewitt, et al. (2003), was combined with the Harvard Department of Psychiatry National Screening Day Scale (HANDS) depression screening instrument (Baer, et al., 2000), the Carroll-Davidson Generalized Anxiety Disorder (CD-GAD) scale (Carroll & Davidson, 2000), a brief segment of the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (National Center for Health Statistics, 1993), and 16 additional questions regarding effortlessness were constructed by the researcher to make up the survey instrument. The remaining three questions pertained to biographical information.

The pre-existing scales selected for inclusion in the survey were chosen because of their measurement of maladaptive behaviors with established links to perfectionism.

With the appropriate permission, in the fall of 2007 I obtained a list of 514 women in their senior year of study from Southland University's registrar. These women received "Dean's List" honors during the fall 2005 and spring 2006 semesters of their junior year of college. The Dean's List distinction meant the women had maintained a semester grade point average of a 3.4 based on a 4.0 grade point scale. Via electronic mail, these 514 female students were invited to participate in the electronic survey; 296 ultimately chose to do so. To ensure protection of student identities, Southland University, a fictitious name, was adopted and pseudonyms were utilized for the interviewees.

To select the interview sample, the PSP scores of the survey respondents who agreed to be interviewed were plotted in relationship to their scores on the survey's questions attempting to measure effortlessness. I purposefully sampled women from the four quadrants, which were defined as follows: high PSP and high willingness to disclose effort; high PSP and low willingness to disclose effort; low PSP and high willingness to disclose effort; and low PSP and low willingness to disclose effort. I also chose women in the effort to gather a population from a diverse range of racial and academic backgrounds. (Detailed additional information about the sampling strategy is provided in Chapter 3.)

To ensure confidentiality and the possibility for follow-up within the group of initial survey respondents, only subjects who were interested in an additional interviewing were instructed to submit their electronic mail contact information.

Identifying information for those respondents who did indicate an interest in further interviewing was kept strictly confidential. A copy of the survey including the researcher's biographical and effortless questions, Perfectionistic Self-Presentation Scale, the HANDS tool, CD-GAD screening instrument, and Youth Risk Behavior Survey questions is included as Appendix B; a copy of the interview topic guide is included as Appendix E. A copy of available Southland University resources, provided to both survey respondents and interviewees, is available in Appendix F.

<div align="center">Definition of Terms</div>

Included below is a brief definition of terms important to this study.

<u>Academically High-Achieving</u> describes the women in this study whose academic accomplishments in secondary school earned them admission at SU and a collegiate grade point average of a 3.4 based on a 4.0 scale in the two semesters preceding their participation in this research study.

<u>Adaptive perfectionism</u> refers to certain aspects of perfectionism, particularly high personal standards and high levels of motivation, which are perceived as positive components of striving for flawlessness. There is disagreement among researchers that perfectionism can be adaptive, but the most recent and most prolific researchers argue that it cannot (Hamacheck, 1978).

<u>Anorexia nervosa</u> is a dangerous and often chronic eating disorder characterized by an intense fear of consuming calories and gaining weight. Females are more commonly afflicted with this disorder than men and its most common onset is pre- or post-puberty. It can, however, occur during any significant life change (National Eating Disorders Association, 2006).

Conscientiousness is action that is organized, purposeful, and achievement-oriented, specifically in reference to academic and occupational achievement (Costa & McCrae, 1992).

Coping strategies are the behavioral and psychological efforts used by people to ameliorate stressful events (Dunkley, et al., 2000). They can have either negative or positive effects on the person employing them.

Effortless perfection is the term coined in a Duke University campus climate study as "the expectation that one would be smart, accomplished, fit, beautiful, and popular, and all of this would happen without visible effort" (Roth, 2003, p. 12). This is not a term assigned by an academic researcher operating under the stringent criteria of data collection and analysis.

Maladaptive perfectionism refers to dimensions of perfectionism such as a heightened concern for mistakes or a preoccupation with others' ideas of perfectionism, which are perceived as negative components of striving for flawlessness. The most contemporary and prolific perfectionism researchers understand all components of perfectionism as maladaptive (Bieling, Israeli, & Antony, 2004).

Neuroticism is the experience of psychological distress and maladjustment (Costa & McCrae, 1992).

Perfectionism is striving for "flawlessness" (Flett & Hewitt, 2002, p. 5). It does not, by psychological definition, include the absence of effort.

Perfectionistic self-presentation (PSP) is a style involving "the need to appear perfect or avoid appearing imperfect to others" (Flett & Hewitt, 2002, p. 14).

Personal Standards refer to the aims and goals an individual sets as a measure of achievement for himself/herself.

Psychopathology is the manifestation of a behavior or mental disorder.

Self-awareness is the consciousness one possesses about his or her strengths, weaknesses, and reception by others.

Self-conscious emotions are feelings of self-evaluation that include shame, guilt, embarrassment, and pride.

Self-efficacy are individuals' beliefs about their capacities to act in ways that are influential in their lives. Self-efficacy beliefs determine how people think, feel, inspire themselves, and behave (Bandura, 1989).

Self-oriented perfectionism is an internal desire to be perfect (Hewitt & Flett, 1991b).

Self-esteem is how an individual feels about herself/himself.

Social expectations are external demands that create pressure on individual(s) to act, think, or feel in ways that respond to social mores.

Socially prescribed perfectionism is the thinking that an individual's worth to other people is dependent on his/her ability to achieve perfection (Mills & Blankstein, 2000).

Stress is any situation that endangers or appears to endanger an individual's well-being, compromising the individual's coping ability (Whitehead, 1994).

Stylistic perfectionism is a facet of perfectionism concerned with presenting images of perfectionism rather than endeavoring to achieve perfection (Buss & Finn, 1987).

Trait perfectionism refers to personal and interpersonal dimensions of perfectionism, such as other-oriented, self-oriented, and socially-prescribed perfectionism (Hewitt & Flett, 1991b).

Limitations

The collected data provided additional information about female college students' experiences with pressures for perfectionistic self-presentation (PSP), perfectionism, and effortless perfection, which during the course of the study I came to understand as effortless perfectionistic self-presentation. Due to the small interview sample size and the academically selective nature of Southland University, the data's generalizability to the female population at Southland University (SU) and to institutions with less selective entrance standards is not immediately advisable. The results are useful in providing previously lacking qualitative descriptive detail regarding PSP and perfectionistic self-presentation. These data will serve as the basis for further study.

Additionally, there were potential selection bias issues with this study because the sample of potential interviewees was self-selected; interviewees were selected only from the group of women surveyed who agreed to be contacted for follow-up interviewing. Also, the ultimate interview sample was purposively chosen; one cannot assume that the sample will have the same characteristics of the population from which it was selected. Purposeful sampling was employed in order to obtain an interview sample that was racially diverse and included students from a wide variety of academic majors. Oversampling from the quadrant of women who were high in perfectionistic self-presentation and low in their willingness to disclose their effort allows for a heightened focus on the women suggested by Duke University as particularly vulnerable. Given the qualitative intention of this study, essentially unpacking perfectionistic self-presentation and effortless perfection by providing thick descriptions of these phenomena as they are experienced by my population of interest, this oversampling strategy was reinforced.

Thus, while I did not proportionately sample from each of my four groups of students (high PSP and high willingness to disclose effort; high PSP and low willingness to disclose effort; low PSP and high willingness to disclose effort; and low PSP and low willingness to disclose effort), I did interview women from each of the four groups of interest.

Interpreting the research findings across a racially and ethnically diverse population may be a likely next step at the present study's conclusion. Given the White majority at Southland University, the sample population was largely comprised of Caucasian young adults, a similar population utilized by many preceding perfectionism studies focusing on the experiences of college students. In one study Asians were likelier to report greater perfectionistic tendencies than Caucasians, but more information on the degree to which ethnic or racial backgrounds might correlate with perfectionism's influence on academic motivation, and academic and psychological adjustment is needed (Chang, 1998). Links between effortless perfectionism/effortless perfectionistic self-presentation and class might also emerge as variables worth isolating. People with the financial means to maintain an image of perfection might be more likely to strive to meet effortless perfection's demands versus other students for whom the material image of perfection is unattainable. Furthermore, since the data was self-reported, there is always concern about the degree of congruence between people's reports of their experiences and the details of the actual events, although many qualitative researchers have argued that perception is reality and, thus, important data (Becker, 1996; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Denizin & Lincoln, 1998; Merriam, 2002).

Summary

Given the limited research on perfectionistic self-presentation and existing information about female socialization, perfectionism, and college-life stresses, more information was needed on whether academically high-achieving women in a highly-selective collegiate environment were susceptible to the pulls for perfectionistic self-presentation. Furthermore, the collection of data pertaining to effortless perfection was also deemed appropriate as a means of providing an academic understanding of this phenomenon. One way to obtain these data was to survey women on their experiences with perfectionistic self-presentation and related behaviors, conduct in-depth interviews with women in a sample population who exhibited various perfectionistic behaviors, psychological symptoms, and concern for effortlessness in their self-presentation. By applying the results, collegiate administrators, faculty, and students may become increasingly aware of how perfectionistic self-presentation and effortlessness can influence the female student's college experience. In turn, the potential is for these data to educate undergraduate women to harness their own power in shaping their experiences in positive ways.

CHAPTER 2

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

"There is a crack, a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in." ~Leonard Cohen

Introduction

In the past 20 years, perfectionism, an achievement-based construct marked by

the relentless pursuit of personal goals, has been investigated in a variety of ways (Hewitt

& Flett, 1993). In the 1980s Flett and Hewitt (2002)'s PsychLit search of *perfectionism*

revealed 102 publications, in the 1990s the same search revealed 336 publications. A

similar query I conducted in 2008 yielded 1,530 matches. While American society links

perfectionism with strong work-ethics, efficiency, and achievement, the psychological

research conducted to date is much less favorable. As expressed by Chang (2002),

perfectionism is commonly conceived as "an individual differences variable that includes

excessive self-criticism associated with high personal standards, doubts about the

effectiveness of one's actions, and concerns about meeting social expectations" (p. 581).

As a result, a majority of the existing perfectionism research focuses on connection

between perfectionism and a plethora of negative psychological outcomes (Blatt, 1995;

Chang & Rand, 2000; Frost, Marten, Lahart, & Rosenblate, 1990; Hamacheck, 1978;

Pacht, 1984; Rice, Ashby, & Slaney, 1998).

To date, research studies have demonstrated perfectionism's role in predisposing

and heightening the maladaptive effect of stress and anxiety (Chang & Rand, 2000; Flett,

Greene, & Hewitt, 2004), depression (Flett, Hewitt, Blankstein, & Mosher, 1991; Hewitt & Flett, 1993; Hewitt, Flett, & Ediger, 1996; Kilbert, Langhinrichsen-Rohling, & Saito, 2005; Vrendenberg, Flett, & Krames, 1993), eating disorders (Bastiani, Rao, Weltzin, & Kaye, 1995; Bers & Quinlan, 1992; Brunch, 1977; Cockell, et al., 2002; Davis, 1997; Fairburn & Cooper, 1993; Gellar, et al., 2000; Halmi, et al., 2000; Hewitt, Flett, & Ediger, 1995; Pratt, Telch, Labouvie, Wilson, & Agras, 2001; Srinivasagam, et al., 1995; Strober, 1991; Vitousek & Manke, 1994), irrational fears (Blankstein, et al., 1993), and suicide (Chang, 1998) among university students. A Duke University steering committee report (Roth, 2003) issued at Duke University after a 2002 campus climate study focused on the experiences of Duke women (including undergraduates, graduate students, alumnae, staff, and faculty) suggested the existence of pervasive pressures to achieve perfection within their undergraduate student population. The existence of these pressures has already been reflected in the literature (Chang & Rand, 2000; Dunkley, Blankstein, Halsall, Williams, & Winkworth, 2000; D'Zurilla & Sheedy, 1991; Gadzella, 1994; Dunkel-Schetter & Lobel, 1990; Hirsch & Ellis, 1996; Rice, Ashby, Slaney, 1998; Ross, Neibling, & Heckert, 1999; Stevens & Pfost, 1984; Towbes & Cohen, 1996). According to the steering committee's report, high levels of stress in the lives of female college students has created a unique set of expectations for female students (Roth, 2003). Specifically, women undergraduates at Duke are feeling the need to reach effortless perfection, "the expectation that one would be smart, accomplished, fit, beautiful, and popular, and all this would happen without visible effort" (Roth, 2003, p. 12).

Named in 2002 at Duke, the term "effortless perfection" originated in a campus climate study focus group, one of 20 such groups where data was gathered. Despite its powerful appeal and presence in the climate study, there existed a lack of academic knowledge about this phenomenon: whether it existed and, if so, in what iterations and manifestations, in addition to identifying the context in which "effortless perfection" was likeliest to grow. One student said, "I don't think that it is completely inherent in the personality types that go to Duke…But I also think that there is something particular about the Duke atmosphere that drives people a little too far," indicating the importance of understanding the context of such pressures (Wyler, 2003, p. 31). Upon review of the literature linking perfectionism and negative psychological outcomes, the effects of gender on the collegiate experience, as well as evidence that the needs of female students are distinct from male students, an academic examination of effortless perfection, including the environment in which it is cultivated, is worthwhile in advancing the collective understanding of contemporary female undergraduates (Josselson, 1996).

To put this research into context, it was important to first offer an overview of the literature that deconstructs perfectionism and its psychological effects, including its prevalence in college student populations, its most psychologically maladaptive components, and its assessment. Given the dearth of academic research regarding effortless perfection, beginning the literature review with established data on the related phenomenon of perfectionism provided a logical approach to this research. Reviewing the literature pertaining to perfectionistic self-presentation and the concern with public image integral to PSP was a necessary next step in building an academic understanding of effortless perfection. The construction of an understanding of effortless perfection, to

fortify the understanding provided by the Duke University campus climate study, was predicated on a review of two larger, existing bodies of literature focused on trait perfectionism and PSP.

Additionally, an overview of social comparison and social reproduction theories provides the necessary bridge for understanding how the manifestation of pressures for perfectionism and effortless perfection on college campuses is connected to the presences of those pressures in American society. Finally, reviewing data related to the study of women and gender, and the current higher education milieu for female students, is highly relevant given the Duke University campus climate study suggestion that "effortless perfection" was of primary concern to female undergraduates. The literature review begins by building a conceptual understanding of existing literature regarding perfectionism.

<div align="center">Conceptualizing Perfectionism</div>

Traditionally, perfectionism has been viewed in the literature as either a unidimensional or multidimensional personality construct. Those researchers who support a unidimensional conceptualization of perfectionism have traditionally narrowed in on dysfunctional attitudes (Burns, 1980; Pirot, 1986) or irrational beliefs (Ellis, 1962) in identifying the cognitive elements supporting perfectionism. However, this research perspective has been updated within the past 20 years to reflect an understanding of perfection as multidimensional in nature (Frost, et al., 1990; Hewitt & Flett, 1991b). Frost et al. (1990) identified and measured five core dimensions of perfectionism and one related dimension: high personal standards, perceived parental expectations, perceived parental criticism, doubting of actions, concern over mistakes, and organization as the

one related dimension. Several specific dimensions were linked to the frequency and greatness of psychopathological behaviors, while others were related to positive achievement.

Hewitt and Flett (1991b), two of the most prolific researchers concerned with the study of perfectionism, conceived of perfectionism in three dimensions: self-oriented perfectionism, socially prescribed perfectionism, and other-oriented perfectionism. They labeled individuals who are extremely critical of themselves and who set high expectations for themselves as self-oriented perfectionists. While self-oriented perfectionism is concerned with the intrapersonal dimension of perfectionism, socially prescribed perfectionism and other-oriented perfectionism refer to the interpersonal dimensions of the behavior (Flett, Hewitt, Blankstein, & O'Brien, 1991). Individuals who attempt to please the people around them by meeting standards they believe others hold for them are labeled socially prescribed perfectionists. Finally, other-oriented perfectionists are identified by the research as those people who assign drastically high standards to others. All three of these dimensions have been proven in the literature to be reliable and valid (Kilbert, et al., 2005). Understanding the conceptual framework of perfectionism as described by Hewitt, Flett, Turnbull-Donovan, & Mikail (1991) is helpful in constructing the conceptual framework for this study.

Perfectionism as Adaptive

In approaching this literature review, it is important for researchers to suspend their preconceived notions about perfectionism. In mainstream American society, perfectionistic behaviors are frequently viewed as admirable qualities, indications of one's high motivations and standards of excellence. Perfectionists are viewed as highly

competent workers possessing painstaking attention to detail. Considerable variation does exist in the ways researchers define and interpret the nuances of perfectionism, including adaptive traits and positive outcomes and, more frequently, maladaptive traits and negative outcomes (Pacht, 1984).

Hamacheck (1978) distinguished between normal and neurotic perfectionism. Individuals with "normal" perfectionism derive satisfaction from their efforts towards perfectionism, increasing their self-esteem and sense of self-worth, while "neurotic" perfectionists are never sated, because they can never perform well enough. Terry-Short, Owens, Slade, and Dewey (1995) defined positive perfectionism as a result of positive reinforcement, the desire to move toward stimuli. The motivational aspect necessary for achieving high standards may be the adaptive facet responsible for self-efficacy and achievement according to studies conducted by Bandura (1989) and Flett, Hewitt, Blankstein, and Dynin (1994). Frost linked high personal standards and a desire for order and organization on his Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale with high achievement, adaptive work habits, and striving (Frost et al., 1990). Furthermore, researchers have demonstrated that self-oriented perfectionism is positively linked with assertiveness and conscientiousness (Hill, McIntire, & Bacharach, 1997), effective learning strategies (Flett, et al., 1994), personal control (Flett, Hewitt, Blankstein, & Mosher, 1991), positive affect (Frost, Heimberg, Holt, Mattia, & Neubauer, 1993), and self-esteem and resourcefulness (Flett, Hewitt, Blankstein, & O'Brien, 1991). While the layperson's view of perfectionism has some basis in psychology research, the most prolific and the most current scholarly research surrounding perfectionistic behaviors suggests a much more negative view of perfectionism than the one in existence in mainstream society.

Perfectionism as Maladaptive

Two of the most utilized and studied measures of perfectionism, each named the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale and originating independently from one another, were designed by Frost et al. (1990) and Hewitt, Flett, Turnball-Donovan, et al. (1991). These instruments are predicated on the research framework indicating that perfectionism is a maladaptive behavior that necessitates behavior modification. While the aforementioned research suggests the existence of positive behavioral outcomes and perfectionism, the bulk of the available literature connects perfectionism and maladaptive behaviors (Alden, et al., 1994; Ashby & Rice, 2002; Bieling, et al., 2004; Blankstein, et al., 1993; Blatt, 1995; Castro et al., 2004; Chang, 1998; Chang & Rand, 2000; Chang, et al., 2004; Cockell, et al., 2002; Flett, et al., 1998; Flett, Hewitt, Blankstein, & Gray, 1998; Flett, Hewitt, Blankstein, & O'Brien, 1991; Hewitt, Flett, & Ediger, 1996; Hewitt & Flett, 1991a; Hewitt & Genest, 1990; Sherry, et al., 2003). The likelihood of perfectionists to set high standards and work to obtain them is not behavior by itself that is identified as pathological (Frost, et al., 1990). Yet, many of the most frequently recurring themes of perfectionism are maladaptive in nature. Perfectionism is consistently associated with self-criticism and fear of failure, the inability to feel satisfied with performance, unrealistic and irrational standards for performance, the perception that performance and standards will never align (Cox, Enns, & Clara, 2002).

Hewitt and Flett (1991b), two of the most widely published researchers focusing on perfectionism, contend that all three dimensions of perfectionism – self-oriented, socially prescribed, and other-oriented – are maladaptive. Specifically, research shows that socially prescribed perfectionism is more commonly linked with negative,

maladaptive perfectionism than self-oriented perfectionism (Chang & Rand, 2000; Flett, Russo, & Hewitt, 1994; Kilbert, et al., 2005). Socially prescribed perfectionists are primarily motivated by the hope of recognition from others, while self-oriented perfectionists are much more likely to be motivated by intrinsic rewards linked to their academic performance. As a result, socially-prescribed perfectionism may cause individuals to experience feelings of hopelessness and helplessness as their attempts at achieving perfectionism cause their standards to be further elevated and out of reach (Cox, et al., 2002; Flett, et al., 1994; O'Connor & O'Connor, 2003; Sherry, et al., 2003).

Socially prescribed perfectionism is also negatively linked with adaptive metacognitive and cognitive learning strategies, as well as self-efficacy measures for learning and performance (Mills & Blankstein, 2000). Additionally, socially-prescribed perfectionism is associated with a lack of productive thinking due to low internal motivation and the presence of illogical beliefs with the potential to impact achievement (Hewitt & Flett, 1991b). Numerous data show that socially-prescribed perfectionism is connected to depression, reduced feelings of self-esteem, irrational fears, maladaptive thinking and coping mechanisms, subservient behavior, feelings of shame, shyness, and even suicide ideation (Blankstein & Dunkley, 2000; Blankstein, et al., 1993; Cox, et al., 2002). With regard to socially-prescribed perfectionism and psychological impairment, the literature reveals that the greater an individual's level of socially-prescribed perfectionism the greater the likelihood of psychological distress (Chang & Rand, 2000; Hewitt & Flett, 1991b; Hewitt, et al., 1996; Hunter & O'Connor, 2003; O'Connor, O'Connor, O'Connor, Smallwood, & Miles, 2004; Wyatt & Gilbert, 1998). Knowledge of how socially prescribed perfectionism, and responsiveness to the expectations of

others, contributes to the development of the perfectionist's standards appeared to be related to deconstructing effortless perfection. Effortless perfection, as defined by Duke University, includes a woman's sensitivity to societal expectations.

Several of the most significant perfectionism research studies have linked self-oriented perfectionism with negative outcomes such as anxiety, depressive symptoms (Chang & Sanna, 2001), distress (Dunkley, et al., 2000), hostility and guilt (Hewitt & Flett, 1991b), self-criticism, self-blame, and suicide ideation (Hewitt, Flett, & Weber, 1994). Self-oriented perfectionism is also correlated with clinical depression (Hewitt & Flett, 1991b). Although not related with the drive for the approval of others or fear of a negative assessment, the self-oriented perfectionism subscale is correlated with self-criticism, high standards, and some symptoms of psychopathology (Hewitt & Flett, 1990, 1991a). Hewitt and Flett argued that treating perfectionism as adaptive and positive often preempts the identification of psychological impairments; they rejected the colloquial notion that self-oriented perfectionism is the equivalent to one's drive to excel. They concluded that self-oriented perfectionism appeared to be associated with effortless perfectionism's focus on the image of easy achievement; to achieve a goal without effort was viewed as more perfect than to use effort to achieve such a goal.

In a further effort to predict the psychological distress caused by perfectionism, Hewitt and Flett (2002) developed the *Diathesis-Stress Model of Perfectionism*. This model posited that perfectionists are at an increased risk for negative psychological outcomes because perfectionism magnifies the impact of stress on those outcomes (Hewitt & Flett, 1991b; Hewitt, et al., 1996). These studies demonstrated how individuals with high levels of self-oriented perfectionism function well in low-stress settings, but are

particularly vulnerable to depression, anxiety, and even suicide when stress levels

increase. Aligned with this model, numerous research studies have demonstrated

perfectionism's role in predisposing and heightening the maladaptive effect of stress in

anxiety (Chang & Rand, 2000), depression (Flett, Hewitt, Endler, & Tassone, 1994;

Hewitt & Flett, 1993; Hewitt, et al., 1996; Kilbert, et al., 2005; Vrendenberg, et al.,

1993), and suicide (Chang, 1998) among university students.

Furthermore, O'Connor and O'Connor's (2003) research suggested that it is the

avoidance of coping and perfectionism combined, not either of these strategies alone, that

is the strongest predictor of one's hopelessness and psychological impairment.

Perfectionists exhibiting healthy coping strategies were no more likely to experience

depression than non-perfectionists, giving credence to the idea that it is the interplay

between perfectionism, life experiences, and environmental factors that lead to

psychopathology. Due to the pervasiveness of perfectionism (Chang & Rand, 2000;

Dunkley, et al., 2000; Rice, Ashby, & Slaney, 1998; Stevens & Pfost, 1984) and stress

(D'Zurilla & Sheedy, 1991; Gadzella, 1994; Dunkel-Schetter & Lobel, 1990; Hirsch &

Ellis, 1996; Ross, et al., 1999; Towbes & Cohen, 1996) in the lives of college students,

these students are a likely population to provide descriptive insight into the manifestation

of perfectionism and effortlessness. Given the severity of the psychological impairments

associated with perfectionism, further research into perfectionism seemed necessary to

protect students' physical and mental health.

Perfectionistic Self-Presentation (PSP)

In addition to self-oriented, other-oriented, and socially prescribed perfectionism,

perfectionists differ in the degree to which they need to appear perfect to others and not

disclose or display imperfections in public (Hewitt & Flett, 1991a; Hewitt, et al., 2003). Many perfectionists are highly motivated by a drive to present a public image of perfection. Identifying the extent to which individuals will aim to achieve perfectionistic self-presentation (PSP) is the root of effortless perfection, since the clinical definition of perfectionism does not include a lack of effort. Furthermore, Hewitt et al. (2003) suggest that individuals can be highly concerned with presenting a perfect image of themselves (perfectionistic self-presentation), but not with actually achieving perfection (trait perfectionism). Research pertaining to PSP was useful in explaining the varying behavior of perfectionists who appeared similar in their perfectionism trait dimensions, but acted in ways that were not uniform.

For example, individuals with high levels of self-oriented perfectionism (an internal desire to be perfect) may withdraw or cry when their ability to achieve their vision of perfection is disrupted by a work colleague. Other individuals with the same level of self-oriented perfectionism may be unwilling to express emotion that would indicate their displeasure at the course of events for fear the behavior would be judged negatively by others. This high degree of public self-consciousness and desire to meet unrealistic self- and other-imposed expectations reflects a stylistic personality trait, as defined by Buss and Finn (1987), separating this individual from the individual expressing his or her frustration (Hewitt, et al., 2003). The reluctance to express negative emotion is closely associated with effortless perfection, as the demonstration of negative feelings detracts from a presentation of control and an absence of exertion. In a study of anorexic women conducted by Geller, et al., (2000) findings indicated that the three prongs of perfectionistic self-presentation, as well as self-oriented and socially prescribed

perfectionism, were closely linked to reduced emotional expression and self-silencing. As defined in Duke's study, effortless perfection is concerned with achieving in ways that appear to happen without effort, which includes the public display of emotion; this concern with the presentation of self is therefore part of PSP.

Hewitt et al.'s (2003) research bolstered the hypothesis that PSP is three-pronged. The distinction Hewitt and his colleagues made between the drive to present oneself perfectly versus the motivation to conceal mistakes and/or to minimize shortcomings in public is a reflection of the existing research on self-regulation and self-presentation. These studies first separated one's motivation to hide the components of an individual's personality or behavior that may be negatively received from a drive to advance only the perfect aspects of the self in public (Higgins, 1998; Leary, 1993; Roth, Harris, & Snyder, 1988). Hewitt et al. (2003) presented this difference as the key to making sense of PSP and understanding it as a stable aspect of personality.

Hewitt et al.'s (2003) work demonstrated the variance in the levels of concern people feel in striving for a perfect presentation of themselves, as well as in their desires to avoid disclosing or displaying perceived imperfections (Hewitt & Genest, 1990). The ideal self is understood as the ideals and goals connected to what an individual believes he or she should be like (Brogan, 1977; Wylie, 1979); research shows people's consciousness of their public images is based on their perceptions of their ideal selves (Nasby, 1997). Hewitt et al. (2003) found PSP to have both socially related and self-related maladaptive outcomes, which are not attributable to trait levels of perfectionism alone. Though both comprise a broad, conceptualization of perfectionism, PSP differs

from trait perfectionism dimensions in a significant way. PSP is the need to appear perfect, while trait dimensions are a reflection of the need to be perfect.

Hewitt et al. (2003) alleged that PSP is "an extreme, deceptive form of self-presentation," (p. 1304) a pervasive neurotic style, and the manifestation of a detrimental form of self-presentation (Bem, 1972). While research that illustrates both the positive and negative dynamics of self-presentation exist (Arkin, 1981; Jones & Pittman, 1982; Schlenker & Wiegold, 1992), Hewitt et al. conceived of PSP as entirely negative in its manifestation. A select number of researchers have also drawn conclusions about PSP in their work. Sorotzkin's (1985) research suggests that perfectionists cloak their compulsion for social acceptance by making a socially pleasing presentation that does not draw attention to their fear of rejection. The research of Hobden and Pliner (1995) confirmed that perfectionists, particularly those with high measures of socially-prescribed perfectionism, rely on self-handicapping and face-saving strategies to insure positive social impressions.

Nondisplay of imperfections.

In 1995, the data collected by Frost et al. illustrated that perfectionists are extremely concerned with hiding mistakes in managing their self-presentation. In their study, individuals had to complete tasks that involved a low or high number of mistakes: not surprisingly, those with a high concern for mistakes were less willing to reveal those errors (Frost, et al., 1997). It seems likely that frequent perfectionistic thinking would draw attention to perceived differences between the actual self and the perfectionistic self, increasing self-focused attention and self-reflection (Flett, et al., 1998). Given that perfectionistic self-presentation (PSP) was only identified in the literature in 2003, and

PSP's apparent link with effortless perfection's concern for exhibiting effort in front of others, pursuing PSP in this study is worthwhile.

PSP includes high levels of anxiety and worry over the presentation of imperfections as well as defensive behavior. Keeping others from witnessing one's imperfections is a primary motivation. Goffman (1973) called such behavior a performance because an individual's attempt at "ideal standards" means he or she "will have to forgo or conceal action which is inconsistent with these standards" (p. 41). Harris and Snyder (1986) identified such behaviors as defensive or protective, but also as likely to play out negatively in social interactions (Ichiyama et al., 1993). Not surprisingly, Horney (1950) found that people who constantly strive to make their performance a presentation of perfection often do not respond well to criticism and need frequent reassurance from others of their achievement of social acceptance. As a result, people try to compensate for mistakes before others are aware of them, but are frequently unable to function appropriately if imperfections are revealed. Given these negative behaviors and the connections between PSP and Duke University's definition of effortless perfection, further investigation into PSP seems warranted. The inability to function in light of mistakes is connected to those individuals experiencing effortless perfection, primarily because the demonstration of effort is viewed as a mistake to be avoided.

Nondisclosure of imperfections.

The second dimension of Hewitt et al.'s (2003) conceptualization of perfectionistic self-presentation (PSP) is restraint from ever referring to one's imperfections. This is consistent with Flett, Hewitt, & DeRosa's (1996) research illustrating perfectionists' reluctance to talk in social settings when they fear or face an

intimidating situation (Frost et al., 1995). The work of Flett, Hewitt, Endler, & Tassone (1994) found a perfectionist's concern for such judgment correlates directly with his or her anxiety level. The fear held by perfectionists that the disclosure of imperfections will lead to social rejection was confirmed by the research of Weisinger and Lobsenz (1981).

Individuals who are committed to a perfectionistic portrayal of themselves are reluctant to seek help when they need it for fear that others will view them as failures; such a perception is a significant threat to their sense of self-worth (Nadler, 1983). The private dimensions of one's personality synthesize the covert information about the self that others are not privy to, such as feelings, judgments, motives, and values (Nasby 1997). In contrast, public self-consciousness is concerned with the impression(s) that others form of the self based on those aspects of the self that are readily observable, such as physical appearance, overt behaviors and expressions of emotion (Fenigstein, 1984). In this way, an individual's public self-consciousness includes an individual's perfectionistic self-presentation and is of interest to the researcher. Naturally, in a clinical situation such reluctance to discuss the personal details of one's life has the potential to jeopardize the treatment process (Hewitt, et al., 2003). In focusing on effortless perfection, the researcher is interested in how a similar reluctance or inability to share life experiences influences female students' levels of perfectionistic self-presentation, their feelings of self worth, and ability to seek support when needed. Numerous research studies have identified disconnections between individuals' private and public selves (Baumeister, 1986; Breckler & Greenwald, 1986; Carver & Scheier, 1987; Froming & Carver, 1981; Froming, Walker, & Lopyan, 1982; Nasby, 1997; Scheier & Carver, 1983; Sedikides & Skowronski, 1997). Again, the degree to which one's self-presentation

aligns with one's private self-consciousness contributes to the understanding of effortless perfectionism's effects. Additionally, the research intends for such data to identify how women with high levels of perfectionistic behaviors, including self-presentation, might be best served by the administrators and faculty of their collegiate institution.

Perfectionistic self-promotion.

Jones and Pittman (1982) described a "self-promotion" presentation style nearly identical to the definition adopted by Hewitt et al. (2003). According to Jones and Pittman (1982), in order to promote one's perfectionism one is always endeavoring to showcase competence to gain acceptance, respect, and care. Displaying competence is often achieved by demonstrating goal achievement. The favorable impression self-promoting perfectionists make by portraying their most socially pleasing selves will supposedly lead not only to respect and admiration, but a reputation of perfection. Hewitt et al. (2003) label this self-presentation as "pathologically driven and interpersonally aversive" (p. 1305). People focused on a perfect presentation of self "appear to engage in excuse-making or active concealment of self-related information" (Hewitt, et al., 2003). A reputation of perfectionism is extremely important to those striving for effortless perfection; when combined with societal expectations for women (discussed in the upcoming section), the creation of such a reputation is further magnified. In these ways, perfectionistic self-presentation is highly connected to examining effortless perfection in female undergraduate students.

Emotional expression.

In 2003, researchers first linked perfectionistic self-presentation (PSP) with personal and interpersonal psychological distress (Hewitt et al., 2003). In a 2007 study,

the first comprehensive study of perfectionism as a multidimensional construct and emotional expression, PSP was specifically linked to all of the following: decreased emotional expression, expressive reduction of feelings, increased ambivalence and discomfort about emotional expression, repression of anger, and decreased ability to identify and communicate feelings (Azzi, 2007). The connection between PSP and these potentially harmful psychological effects and behaviors may be particularly relevant to this research given the reduction of emotional expression and PSP inherent in effortless perfection. If PSP exists at Southland University, then it is hypothesized that research participants may demonstrate any or all of the following: a reluctance and/or difficulty in expressing emotion, depressive behaviors, anxiety, and body image issues. In the same study, PSP and decreased emotional expressivity were correlated at significantly higher rates for men than for women (Azzi, 2007).

As a result of the established connection between perfectionism and maladaptive behaviors, feelings, and emotions, exploration into the existence of effortless perfection is necessary. In addition to the potentially harmful psychological effects of perfectionism, projecting an image of effortlessness — as the act is presented by Duke University — may require an added layer of concealment of emotions and behaviors to project a positive image. Given the negative health implications of obscuring one's emotions and the relationship between the reduction of emotional expression with an individual's increased risk for health problems of all magnitudes, a commitment to effortlessness seems particularly problematic and worthy of further investigation through this study (Berry & Pennebaker, 1993).

Social Comparison

Inherent in a perfectionist's quest for perfectionism is the element of comparison: both to internal standards, developed from self-motivations and external influences (self-oriented perfectionism), as well as external standards, derived from community and family associations, and societal messages (socially prescribed perfectionism) (Hewitt & Flett, 1991b). Festinger first articulated the social comparison process in 1954, postulating that people acquire knowledge of self by comparing themselves to other people. Social comparison is rooted in the study of social psychology, specifically how individual behavior and cognition are influenced by social context. Research post-Festinger has reinforced the assertions that (a) individuals compare themselves to others of lower standing (downward comparison) and higher standing (upward comparison), (b) individuals compare themselves to others in regard to physical attractiveness (Wheeler & Miyake, 1992), and (c) social comparison has the power to influence mood and self-evaluations (Brown, Novick, Lord, & Richards, 1992; Wood, 1989).

Social comparison can have a positive or a negative impact, depending on whether social comparison results in contrast or assimilation. Contrast effects occur when individuals identify a comparison person or image and use it as a standard for self-assessment or as a standard of perfection (Mussweiler & Strack, 2000; Stapel & Koomen, 2000). In a contrast situation, self-image is increased by downward comparisons and decreased by upward comparisons, which, for the purpose of this research, includes comparison to an individual's perception of perfection (Jones & Buckingham, 2005). As a result, contrast effects, the comparison to high standards with a subsequent decrease in self-esteem, provides additional insight into the origin of the research linking

perfectionism and low self-esteem (Hewitt & Flett, 1990, 1991a, 1991b; Hewitt, et al., 1994). Meanwhile, assimilation effects result (a) when individuals believe their personal qualities are mutable enough that they could rise or fall to the level of the comparison person or image (Lockwood & Kunda, 1997; Stapel & Koomen, 2000), (b) when individuals share community membership or a close bond with the comparison person or image (Brewer & Weber, 1994; Brown et al., 1992; Stapel & Koomen, 2001; Tesser, 1988) and (c) when individuals do not purposely and deliberately evaluate the comparison person or image. In an assimilation context self-image is decreased by downward comparisons and increased by upward comparisons (Jones & Buckingham, 2005); actions moving toward community membership or actions without the element of comparison are more important than competitive actions reflecting one's individuality.

Although the psychology literature has established that social comparison is a universal characteristic of human beings, studies have found that people are generally reluctant to admit to engaging in social comparison (Helgeson & Taylor, 1993; Hemphill & Lehman, 1991; Schoeneman, 1981). Brickman and Bulman (1977) suggested that comparisons are so automatic in humans that people are frequently oblivious that they have made or make comparisons. The comparisons to perfectionistic standards made by people who are engaged in perfectionistic behaviors and PSP are likely to be equally routine and automatic, which may serve as insight to the behavior studied in this current research undertaking.

Competition

Competition is inherent to self-orientated perfectionism and socially-prescribed perfection, whether the competition is in comparison to one's own standards or the

standards of others. Yet, existing literature devoted to the study of competition suggest that women are generally perceived as less competitive than men (Garza & Borchert, 1990; Jones, Swain, & Cale, 1991; Sutherland & Veroff, 1985) and have attitudes about competition that are less positive than those of their male peers (Carli, 1989; Coutts, 1987; Garza & Borchert, 1990; Keller & Moglen, 1987; Offerman & Beil, 1992). Importantly, these research studies should not be taken as evidence that women are not competitive, but rather as a reflection of a socially constructed gender role stereotype regarding women and competition (Hearne, 1997). While research has suggested the existence of internal pressure to conform to gender stereotypes, the anticipation of real or perceived social reactions may be linked with competitiveness for females (Alagna, 1982; Brady, Trafimow, Eisler, & Southard 1996; Eagly, 1992; Fiske, 1991; McAninch, Milich, Crumbo, & Funtowicz, 1996). For example, Alagna (1982) found that women in her study, when given feedback that their peers disapproved of their competitiveness, expressed a decrease in their positive affect. When the same peer feedback was given to men, their affect was not impacted.

Holland and Eisenhardt (1990) concluded that peer comparison was linked to how the collegiate women they studied viewed low grades and other negative experiences. In their ethnographic study of two colleges, Holland and Eisenhart (1990) found female students to be actively concerned with the opinions of their peer groups, especially regarding their sexual attractiveness to men. The frequency of these judgments and the rewards provided to the women deemed attractive to men caused many women to strive to elevate their status in such a culture of romance and attractiveness, even at the sacrifice of their academic and career concerns. For gender, at least while enrolled in school,

behavior of female peers determined if individual women would "oppose and resist" gender oppression or proceed willingly into the culture of attractiveness assigned to them by their peer group (Holland & Eisenhardt, 1990, p. 21). The experiences of female college students were even more significant when contrasted with those of male college students at the same institutions. Men were able to gain esteem enhancement and prestige not only as a result of positive female reactions to their physical appearance, but also as a result of athletic, political, and academic achievements. These latter avenues remained unopened to women.

In their examination of collegiate women, competition, and achievement styles, Beardsley, Stewart, and Wilmes (1987) and Offerman and Beil (1992) found females less likely to endorse the competitive, direct style of achievement than men. Offerman and Beil (1992) also found that female student leaders were significantly less likely to gain satisfaction from competitive achievement than their male peers. However, while women were found to utilize various achievement-oriented leadership styles, with the exception of the competitive style, it is important to consider the possible effects of internal striving for perfectionism, PSP, and effortless perfectionism. Existing research on competition has failed to consider how female perfectionists may be no less intense in their competition than their peers, just less public in their competition. This current research undertaking explores this theme.

<center>Social Reproduction and the Feminist Research Paradigm</center>

A discussion of social reproduction is relevant to the current research undertaking, given my suggestion that women experience perfectionism, PSP, and effortless perfection as cultural phenomena—simultaneously shaping society and being shaped by it.

Historically, social reproduction has held various meanings. Social reproduction has been understood as the social processes supporting procreation in a population but, more commonly, social reproduction is known as a part of the Marxist theory perpetuating a capitalist system (Laslett & Brenner, 1989). Using Marxist theory, gender inequalities within a society are ensured because class reproduction, the structuring of the means of production and class inequalities within society, are supported by social stratification (Brenner & Laslett, 1986).

The feminist understanding of social reproduction, the lens I used for this research, argues that social reproduction is more than procreation and more than production (Laslett & Brenner, 1989). Feminist theorists define social reproduction as a reflection of "the activities and attitudes, behaviors and emotions, responsibilities and relationships directly involved in the maintenance of life on a daily basis and intergenerationally" (Laslett & Brenner, 1989, p. 382). The feminist standpoint regards social reproduction as the social relationships people rely on to perpetuate society; diverse relationships that have directly influenced "the organization of gender relations and gender inequality" (Laslett & Brenner, 1989, p. 383). This feminist understanding of social reproduction is directly related to Bourdieu's ideas about cultural reproduction and cultural capital, or knowledge and familiarity with dominant cultural mores and practices (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) that are "actively deployed in making hierarchical distinctions and in reproducing social inequalities" (Aschaffenburg & Maas, 1997, p. 573). In order to understand the power of perfectionism, PSP, and effortless perfection for women, one simultaneously must understand social reproduction (and its origins in cultural reproduction theory). Theories of social reproduction highlight how gender

inequities and societal expectations for women, including expectations for females regarding perfection and effortless perfection, endure and wield power in the collegiate environment under consideration in this study.

The Role of Gender

Gender is institutionalized through a variety of modes including families (Brenner & Laslett, 1986); politics (Nelson, 1989); the workplace (Baron, 1990; Groneman & Norton, 1987; John, 1986; Rose, 1988); culture and ideology (Douglas, 1977; Scott, 1987); and schools (Dyer & Tiggemann, 1996). These entities maintain and perpetuate existing societal structures such as gender through direct verbal messages and indirect behavioral reinforcement (Spindler, 1997). My research on collegiate women includes an inherent focus on the social reproduction of gender in college and families, which is also shaped by cultural and ideological influences. Researchers concerned with the role of gender in schools have identified a number of areas where female students are disadvantaged when it comes to their male peers: gender biases in subject material, inequities in the treatment of female students and male students, as well as educational practices that reward aptitudes, practices, and meaning-making associated with males over females (Dyer & Tiggemann, 1996).

Silverstein and Perlik (1995) argue that feelings of gender ambivalence that result for women when they encounter gender bias are particularly insidious. These researchers contend that gender ambivalence incorporates societal prejudices that discount femininity. "Observation, imitation, and identification with adults," are the means through which a female forms an understanding of herself, argued Silverstein and Perlik (p. 92). A girl's mother is the "model of what it means to be an adult woman," with

males, particularly her father, serving as the judge of that adult woman (p. 102). Nancy Chodorow (1978) also emphasizes the importance of one's mother in a child's gender identity development. Since mothers and daughters share the same gender, Chodorow asserts that daughters seek to reproduce the care-taking, empathetic roles of their mothers, while boys reject their mothers' roles in their efforts to be the opposite of what is female. Societal messages reinforce male instincts to reject femininity and maintain emotional distance in relationships, allowing for gender inequality to develop (Chodorow, 1978). The opinions of others, allege Silverstein and Perlik (1995), combine to form social standards about success as well as gender appropriate behavior, that are not frequently or easily overcome. Social reproduction theory encapsulates the perpetuity of these standards, including those regarding perfection and effortless perfection.

Gender's influence on behavior and perception originates in societal expectations present long before undergraduates matriculate to Southland University, communicated through family and community memberships, elementary and secondary school experiences, as well as popular culture (Spindler, 1997). The resulting mores for collegiate social, leadership, and academic performance are distinct for each gender (Roth, 2003). Studies reveal that pressures for perfectionism in women come from a woman's upbringing, available female role models, personality, and exposure to the foci of the media (Jones & Buckingham, 2005; Martin, 2007). According to Roth (2003), male undergraduates also experience these pressures, but feel "more freedom to resist these pressures without consequences" (p. 12). Steiner-Adair (1989) and Hart & Kenny (1997) argue that societal pressures for female success require women to be nurturing and self-sacrificing, while simultaneously achieving in a "masculine" world that emphasizes

independence and autonomy. Females focusing on accomplishing at the same high levels as their male peers, but who do not acknowledge sexism in Western society, are more likely to encounter psychological distress than females who recognize gender as a power differential in society (Steiner-Adair, 1989).These women are more likely to view their obstacles to achievement as personal failures while women with a feminist lens recognize gender discrimination in society as a collective dilemma, not an individual failure (Silverstein & Perlick, 1995).

In order to intellectualize why traditionally aged female college students are particularly prone to the pressures of perfectionism, it is important to understand substantiated theories of female adolescent development. Gilligan, Lyons, & Hammer (1990) and Lytle, Bakken, & Romig (1997) developed a feminist paradigm for explaining how American culture's focus on self-reliance and separateness discredits girls' understanding of themselves. In their first years of life, gender roles and identity are reinforced by the way parents dress their children and the toys they give them to play with (Silverstein & Perlick, 1995). In their infancy, girls do not need to break from their mothers to establish their identities; their identity development happens within the sphere of their connection to their mother or maternal figure. Boys, meanwhile, must disassociate from their mothers at an earlier age than girls to form their distinct male identities. As girls grow, they are taught that womanhood means focusing on others' needs and emotions, and assuming responsibility for relationships (Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, et al., 1990). In essence, females develop their identities through their connections to others, whereas male identity development is characterized by separation and autonomy (Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, 1982; Gilligan, et al., 1990; Lytle, et al., 1997;

Taylor, et al., 1995). As a result, female socialization's emphasis on interdependence and

relationship-building makes it more difficult for women than men to achieve the

independence and self-reliance typically marking adult male maturity as defined by

Western-European and American societies. Female adolescents frequently struggle with

responding to pressures to remain connected to others while developing their own

identities (Gilligan, et al., 1990; Lytle, Bakken, & Romig, 1997).

By the nature of their upbringing, adolescent boys are more likely than female

adolescents to receive positive reinforcement for making decisions outside of the sphere

of the family (Chodorow, 1978; Steiner-Adair, 1986). Despite the propensity for conflict

within the family unit as a result of these independent decisions, such an event is

typically identity-confirming for males. However, when female adolescents make life

decisions resulting in discord within the family unit or its immediate outer circles, they

receive negative feedback for exhibiting behavior perceived as incongruent with their

womanhood (Chodorow, 1978; Steiner-Adair, 1986).

For many females, adolescence is the time when they are most likely to discount

their voices and forgo their capacity to communicate what they understand about

relationships (Gilligan, et al., 1990). As adolescence progresses and developmental foci

move toward autonomy and independence from relationship building, girls feel pressure

to act in ways contrary to how they have been taught to understand the world. As females

reach adulthood in Western societies they are subjected to cultural messages that

deemphasize what they have internalized as femininity: the expression of emotion, the

importance of relationship building, the value of care. Instead, traditionally male values

are held up as the ideal: individualism, autonomy, and self-reliance. Adolescent girls'

skills in securing and maintaining relationships are not viewed as reflective of maturity in the way that autonomy and separateness are. Female adolescents must then wrestle with the role of relationship formation in their development as women and as individuals, making them susceptible to psychological distress. For boys, coming of age in a society with an inherent emphasis on their natural ways of knowing means they are much less likely than girls to develop symptoms of psychological distress during adolescence (Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, et al., 1990; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986; Werner & Smith, 1982). In this paradigm, disadvantages for women who oppose these cultural expectations are highlighted, as are advantages for females who strive to meet those expectations. Research based on female adolescent development shows that the degree of acceptance females possess for cultural paragons of femininity and their reactions to conflict influence their development of psychological impairments such as eating disorders, depression, and anxiety (Goldner, Cockell, & Srikameswaran, 2002; Jack, 1991; Silverstein & Perlick, 1995). As a result, scales in this study will include screening measures for depression, anxiety, risky eating behaviors, and perfectionistic self-presentation.

According to studies examining depression and gender, women are twice as likely as men to be depressed (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1990; Weissman & Klerman, 1985). The American Psychological Association's Task Force on Women and Depression (McGrath, Keita, Strickland, & Russo, 1990) completed a review of the medical research pertaining to depression and concluded that the increased likelihood of women to seek help and report depression symptoms cannot alone account for the increased likelihood of women to experience depression (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1987; Weissman & Klerman, 1985).

Differences in incidences of depression were found even when income, education, ethnicity, and occupation were controlled.

Emotional Expression

"Suppressed anger is widely held to be a factor in the greater prevalence of depression in women" (Thomas, 1989, p. 391). Bernardez-Bonesatti, (1978) and Bernardez (1988) argued that society is generally not accepting of the female expression of anger and that women are reluctant to express anger for fear of damaging those they love, losing affiliation with those individuals, or abandoning their identities as nurturers (Stiver & Miller, 1988). The suppression of anger over extended periods of time may lead to self-dislike and self-directed anger, both reactions which are detrimental to a healthy sense of self-esteem (Sperberg, 1996).

Taylor, et al. (1995) theorized that there are two ways female adolescents typically cope with societal pressures that undermine their understanding of self and existence in the world. One way of coping is through silence, when women repress their emotions and feelings in an effort to demonstrate an outward acceptance of society's expectations. The research of Brown and Gilligan (1992) indicated that as adolescent females matured cognitively and emotionally and note others' reactions to their behaviors, they are increasingly unable to voice their experiences and emotions. According to Brown and Gilligan (1992), as females move beyond adolescence, their behavior shifts from sharing their experiences to concerns about the desires and needs of others. Preliminary research shows that women experiencing effortless perfection are characterized by a repression of feelings in an effort to demonstrate perfectionism (Roth, 2003). Such silence becomes increasingly problematic if a woman lacks family members

or friends with whom she can discuss her frustration of society's expectations for females. The diminishing female self-expression has not only led many feminist theorists to equate such behavior with a loss of power in relationships, but research also shows that this silencing has a significant impact on feelings of self-worth (Brown & Jasper, 1993; Roth, 2003). Additionally, the research linking health problems and the failure to discuss psychological trauma continues to grow, while research demonstrating how communicating one's difficult emotional ordeals can lead to better physical health, improved immune system operation, and fewer doctors' visits also is supported by research (Chang, 1998).

Additionally, several models of female socialization and moral development show that while females are open in their communication styles, they are taught that close bonds and connections are made when they discount their own needs and repress negative feelings (Gilligan, Rogers, & Tolman, 1991). These researchers suggest that females place a greater value on the needs of others than on their own needs, that they hinder a true expression of themselves by avoiding the expression of negative thoughts and emotions, and that they fail to see the value and meaning of their personal experiences. Jack and Dill (1992) theorize that as a result of this socialization women may adopt four cognitive schemas: solidifying attachments by placing their own needs last; holding themselves to outside standards; denying their emotions and feelings to avoid conflict; and "presenting an outer compliant self while the inner self grows angry and hostile" (Gellar, et al., 2000, p. 9). These schemas have also been shown to correlate in statistically significant ways with rates of depression in women, suggesting that the inability to express negative feelings may be more likely in women than men, making

them more prone to the health problems associated with such repression. Kilbert, et al. (2005) found that college females were more likely than their male peers to feel heightened levels of shame with heightened levels of self-oriented perfectionism. Since effortless perfection includes the repression of emotion in order to maintain a perfect facade, the study of effortless perfection will increase knowledge about the detrimental effects of such repression.

Female adolescents who encounter societal mores contrary to their previous socialization may also react with active resistance. By speaking up and acting out against cultural expectations that discount their experiences and their voices, they resist the notion that adult maturity can only be associated with autonomy and distinguishing themselves from others. Of course, women then risk punitive responses from people and institutions threatened by their resistance. Such responses can lead to alienation, which jeopardizes an adolescent girl's ability to develop a sense of herself because she depends on her relationships to provide external affirmation (Carr, Gilroy, & Sherman, 1996). For college women susceptible to effortless perfection, the risk of losing external affirmation may not seem worth taking. Research suggests that male adolescents are less likely to encounter societal messages and norms that discount who and how they are; they are also less likely than females to seek external validation for their identities (Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, 1982; Steiner-Adair, 1990).

<center>Current Higher Education Climate</center>

Currently, women represent 58 percent of the national undergraduate population; the same percentage of women comprise the class of 2010 at Southland University (Southland University Assessment Office, 2006). Like Duke, Southland University (SU)

has extremely selective admission criteria (Bowen, Kurzweil, & Tobin, 2005). To determine the current climate for undergraduate women at SU, it was helpful to examine their presence in a demographic cross-section of Southland University. In 2005, the most recent year data are available, 47 percent of students in Southland University's largest school for graduate students, the Graduate College of Arts and Letters, were female (Southland University Assessment Office, 2005). Meanwhile, 20 percent of the SU's tenured faculty is female (Southland University Assessment Office, 2005). Forty-three percent of all contactable alumni/ae is female with a greater percentage in the most recent graduating classes, which was similar to the trend at Duke University (Alumni Office, personal communication, September 12, 2006). Senior female administrators at Southland University including vice presidents, executive vice presidents, senior vice presidents, vice provosts and deans, comprise 34 percent of the total number of administrators currently employed at SU. Twenty percent of the governing board members active during the 2006-2007 school year were women (Southland University Governing Board, 2006). Clearly, women hold some positions of power at Southland University and continue to hold positions of power as their numbers increase: the results of this study suggest that some of SU undergraduate women also feel empowered and confident in this setting.

Nannerl Keohane (2003), president of Duke University when effortless perfection was coined in the campus climate study, described her female students as experiencing "problems [that] have evolved in small steps, accumulating over time, cutting away at a woman's motivation, or confidence, or ability to imagine herself doing those things she could do very well, without having to make impossible choices, and without having to

prove herself" (p. 2). The chair of the executive committee for the Women's Initiative at Duke University observed students citing perfectionism as a function of femininity; "do[ing] hard things without even trying, it makes you look all the better. It's one step up" (Wyler, 2003, 16). Whether the Duke study is an accurate portrayal of the behaviors and priorities of women at SU or not, remains to be seen. Creating a dual-presentation does not come easily, with conflicting standards damaging the ability of female students not only to view themselves as complicated, multi-faceted individuals, but to recognize their own worth and gain meaningful social acceptance. Research suggests that these contradictory demands, mixed with existing hindrances for achievement based on gender, and the notion that personal success is better obtained through an individual's will rather than collective, structural change provides a basis for further investigation (Chodorow, 1978; Jack & Dill, 1992; Gilligan, et al., 1990; Lytle, et al., 1997; Silverstein & Perlick, 1995; Stein-Adair, 1989).

Theoretical Framework

The following diagram encompasses a review of the literature concerning trait perfectionism and perfectionistic self-presentation (PSP). Figure 2.2 summarizes the overlap in the literature between these phenomena: one can be concerned with trait perfectionism and PSP, but there are also people who exhibit only PSP and those who exhibit only trait perfectionism. Additionally, effortless perfection, as I conceived of it from a colloquial understanding of perfectionism and the Duke University campus climate study, was initially hypothesized as intersecting with both trait perfectionism and PSP. This hypothesis was based on findings by Geller, et al., (2000) indicating that the three prongs of perfectionistic self-presentation, as well as self-oriented and socially

prescribed perfectionism, were closely linked to reduced emotional expression. Given the suggestion by Duke University's campus climate study that effortless perfection includes reduced emotional expression (Roth, 2003), I theorized that effortless perfection would overlap with self and socially-oriented aspects of trait perfection, as well as perfectionistic self-presentation. For the purposes of this study, acting with effortlessness was proposed as a way of being that was separate from trait perfectionism and perfectionistic self-presentation, but might potentially include both trait perfectionism (self and socially prescribed trait perfectionism) and perfectionistic self-presentation.

Figure 2.1

Theoretical Relationship between Trait Perfection, Perfectionistic Self-presentation, and

Effortless Perfection
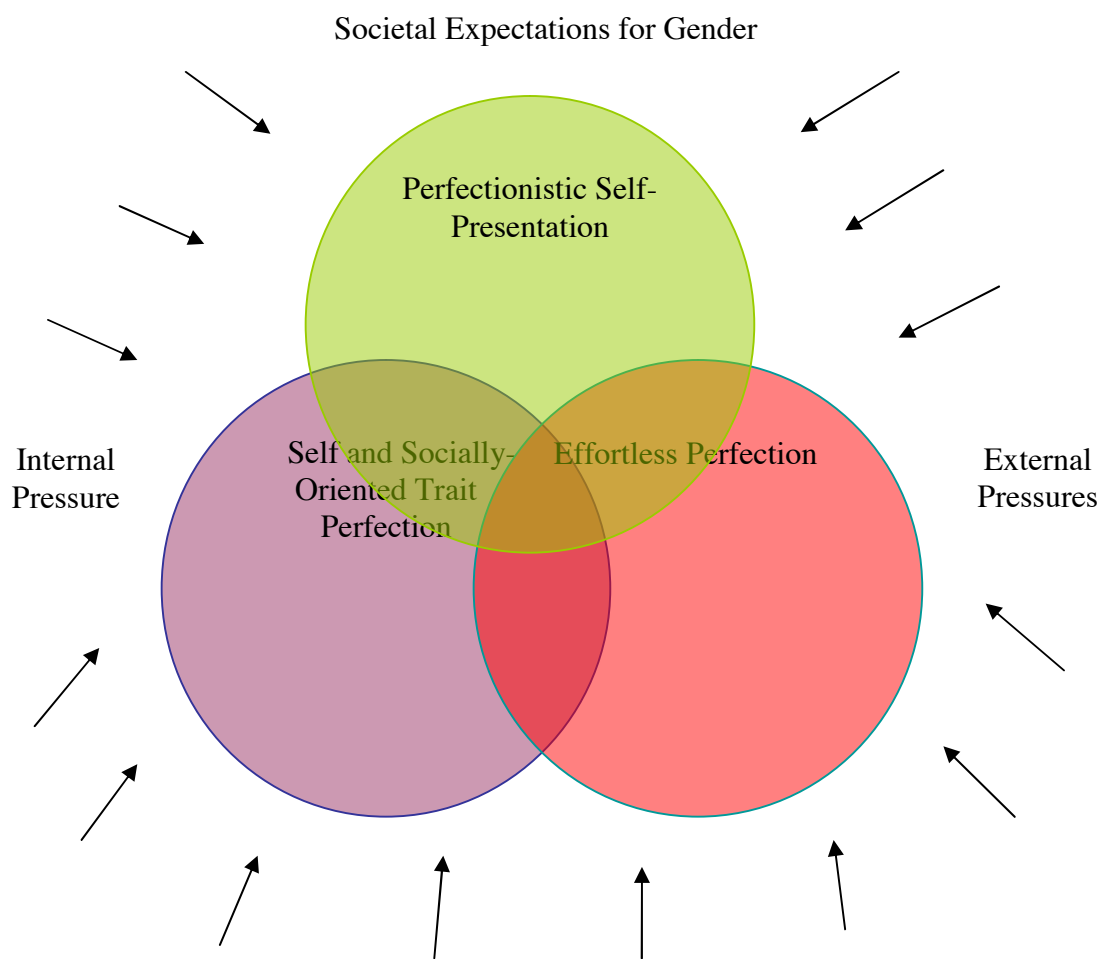
Summary

The review of past perfectionism research, including its adaptive and maladaptive properties, perfectionistic self-presentation (PSP), and trait perfectionism, provides a contextual framework for identifying perfectionism and effortless perfection. Combined with past research on female identity development, female socialization, and current data on female participation in undergraduate education, a foundation for further insight into the experiences of high-achieving women is set. While the existing literature supplies informed lenses for viewing the phenomenon of effortless perfection, there still exists a gap in the literature about the actual effects of effortless perfection, the level of its integration into the college experiences of high-achieving women, and the strategies that are likely to provide support for the women most affected by it. Goldner, et al., (2002) found that "attempts to appear capable, competent, and successful arise from a need for respect and admiration from others," but they did not cull any qualitative data from high-achieving women about their specific experiences with needing to be perfect—whether they exhibited perfectionistic behaviors, submitted to effortless perfection's pressures, or remained insulated from them. Similarly, Hewitt et al., (2003) conducted several studies representing PSP as a valid and reliable construct, as well as an enduring variable in personal and interpersonal psychological maladaptive outcomes, but they did not contribute any qualitative data on how individuals experience PSP.

The study of the drive for perfection, including its existence within college student populations, is well documented. However, the identification of effortless perfection within the college student population, particularly the female undergraduates whom research suggests are more vulnerable to effortless perfection's effects, is still new.

As the percentage of women pursuing college degrees is greater than the percentage of

men pursing degrees, such investigation is timely and justified. This study aims to fill

these research voids with female voices.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

"There's great beauty in accepting that we are fine just as we are, cracks and all."

~Roger Housden

This chapter details the proposed research design and methodological approach to executing the current study. The research questions, description of the population and sample for the study, research paradigms, measures, and in-depth interview protocol are reviewed.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study originated from my desire to give voice to the experiences of a group of high-achieving female undergraduates. Utilizing the effortless perfection construct that emerged in the Duke campus climate study (2003), the researcher employed quantitative techniques to validate and expand those results by calculating frequencies of perfectionistic self-presentation (PSP) and effortlessness within the sample population, as well as the presence of psychological conditions linked to perfectionistic behaviors. Through qualitative interviewing, the potential was created for rich descriptions detailing the influence environmental factors have on PSP and effortlessness. Furthermore, purposeful interviewing allowed for the examination of the daily coping skills female college students employed when responding to the pressures in

their lives, which, for some, included pressures for perfectionism, perfectionistic self-presentation, and effortlessness.

Research Questions

Although I aimed for my research to be as organic as possible, the creation of research questions was essential to provide structure to the study. These questions had to be malleable enough for the exploration of the phenomenon, but substantive enough to offer direction (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). In that spirit, the following questions were designed to explore perfectionistic self-presentation (PSP) and effortlessness, as well as their consequences for female undergraduate students.

(1) To what degree, if any, do academically high-achieving female students at Southland University manifest attributes of perfectionistic self-presentation?

(2) To what degree, if any, are academically high-achieving female students at Southland University concerned with effortlessness in their perfectionistic self-presentation?

(3) To what degree, if any, are psychological conditions (anxiety, depression, and risky eating behaviors) exhibited by high-achieving Southland University women?

(4) What, if any, are the environmental factors associated with perfectionistic self-presentation and effortlessness among high-achieving female Southland University undergraduates?

(5) What types of coping mechanisms, if any, do high-achieving female Southland University undergraduates use to respond to stress in their daily lives?

Qualitative Inquiry

The guiding intent of this study, after using quantitative methods to establish

frequencies of perfectionistic self-presentation (PSP), effortlessness, and psychological

impairments, was to give voice to women regarding their responses to pressures for PSP

and effortlessness. I also wanted to explore, in-depth, the descriptions of these constructs

as relayed by these women. Since one of the aims of qualitative research is to reveal how

meanings are socially constructed by individuals in interaction with their world, this

methodology aligned with the purpose of the investigator's research. The experiences of

individuals are continuously formed and reformed, and qualitative research is interested

in this recreation; it is a research approach that is interpretative, reflexive, and fluid, open

to the nuances of PSP, the emergence of effortlessness, and these phenomenas' impact on

the female undergraduate experience (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

According to Merriam (2002), qualitative researchers are concerned with

understanding "interpretations of reality that are in flux and that change over time," but

are set "at a particular point in time and in a particular context" (p. 4). The naturalistic

character of qualitative research with a preset design and purpose remains flexible in its

execution to respond to unexpected data. In an effort to understand how the participants'

motivations interacted with pressures for perfectionism and effortless perfection, research

methods capturing their values, feelings, ideas, emotions, and behavior were necessary

(Seale, 1998). While a researcher's presence in qualitative inquiry can influence the

format and content of participant responses, naturalistic inquiry is considered less

obtrusive than research conducted in a controlled laboratory setting (Guba, 1978; Lincoln

& Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002). Given the personal nature of this investigatory research and

established research traditions that have only recently included voices of women (Belenky, et. al, 1986; Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, 1982), the research methods needed to reflect an openness to the participants' responses not only for the integrity of the data collection, but also to respect the research participants.

Research Paradigm: Feminist Research Paradigm

One research paradigm utilized by education researchers is the feminist research paradigm. This framework aligns with qualitative research's commitment to "trusting relationships between researcher and researched, and the goal of using social research to further the interest of the people who participate in research studies" (Seale, 1998, p. 207). Not only are feminist researchers concerned with dismantling the barriers between the researcher and the researched, but they focus, too, on the barriers that exist around and among women. Feminist research perspectives are "reflexive," "woman-centered," seeking "the deconstruction of women's lived experiences," and "the transformation of patriarchy and corresponding empowerment of women" (Fonow & Cook, 1991, p. 2-6). Feminist social science perspectives validate women's lived experiences as legitimate knowledge, contributing to a collective comprehension of the social world.

While feminist researchers' epistemological assumptions are classified as emancipatory, giving voice to women who have previously been underutilized, quieted, or ignored, feminist researchers also seek to advance research with what Leslie Bloom (1998) defines as "nonunitary subjectivity"(p. 2). Nonunitary subjectivity requires an understanding of individuals' perspectives and senses of self as malleable and ever-changing, with emotions and conscious and subconscious thoughts morphing over time as positions, environment, experiences, language, and social interactions are altered (Bloom,

1998). Nonunitary subjectivity does not require a loss of self, rather an understanding of the historical context producing everyday experiences. As a result, the intricacies and complexities of the human experience are highlighted, and, thus, the female experiences are increasingly represented.

The researchers conducting focus groups at Duke University (2003) in 2002, noted that when women were asked about the pressures of femininity they faced at Duke, they were "grateful for any opportunity to discuss this crucial aspect of their daily lives" (Keohane, 2003, p. 14). The Duke respondents' willingness for candor and my desire to understand the pressures, desires, and motivations contributing to effortless perfection suggests the utilization of interview techniques for my study (Seale, 1998). This approach intends to illuminate the richness of the females' experiences rather than focus on outcomes, which directly aligns with the naturalistic, participative ontology of the feminist research paradigm.

Research Paradigm: Social Constructivist Paradigm

To understand my investigatory approach, it is helpful to understand how the social constructivist paradigm overlaps with the feminist research paradigm. Like the feminist research lens, the social constructivist understands that the world is comprised of multiple realities; social constructivist research is aimed at gathering how people make meaning of their experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Social constructivism also advocates for the use of open-ended interviews and observations to identify the differences in the perceptions of experiences. Considering one perspective more true than another interpretation goes against the constructivists' ontological assumption that world views are relativistic. Similar to the feminist research paradigm, there is a focus on the

lived experience and not an emphasis on the existence of one, absolute truth. While

subjective self-reporting is not immune from response biases as well as "social

desirability demands," (Kilbert, et al., 2005) this research realizes the importance of one's

perception of reality. Thus, when constructions of reality are presented as neither right

nor wrong, individuals' interpretations are judged on the degree they are informed and

refined. Individuals' positions are considered fluid, with the potential for constructions to

be reconceived in light of experience and education (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

The epistemological approach of the constructivist is subjective and akin to the

approach of the feminist researcher in that both the knower and the known create

knowledge during the course of the research inquiry. Race, class, gender, and culture are

the social factors shaping how perspectives are constructed and what comprises our

individual realities (Campbell & Wasco, 2000). The constructivist conceives of the

relationship between the investigator and her subject of interest as transactional, in that

knowledge is created through interpersonal and/or social communication with the

research subject. As such, the constructivist methodology is hermeneutical and

dialectical, allowing researchers to form categories and codes, as well as meanings and

groups of meanings from direct interactions with participants. Such data collection avoids

beginning the research process with an inordinate number of preconceived expectations

(Creswell, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Adherence to such methodological guidelines

also requires the investigator to constantly review the information created and

contextualize it within the participants' experiences; the participants' interpretations are

central to understanding a particular phenomenon.

Person as Instrument

Many feminist researchers stress the impact positionality can have on research. One of the tenets of qualitative research is recognizing one's subjective experience as it intersects with the experiences of the research participants. The fluidity of this relationship makes researchers and participants subjects and objects, knowers and knowns (DuBois, 1983). To the interview process I brought my own struggles with my self-identified perfectionistic and perfectionistic self-presentation (PSP) tendencies, as well as experience working with undergraduate students with perfectionistic thinking and behaviors. I also have experience working with high-achieving college students throughout the various student affairs positions I have held. Thus, I am aware of my biases stemming from my physical and emotional connection to my research population.

I designed the study so if at any point women desired to opt out of the research because they felt uncomfortable with the questions or with me, they were given multiple instances to do so, both during the quantitative data collection, post-survey, and during the interview process. At no time throughout the interviewing process did I detect that my participants were reluctant to disclose information. I sensed that my interviewees were willing to be candid because of the rapport I was able to establish with them, but also because there was a certain level of anonymity in talking to me. Interviewees knew they did not have to worry about me showing up in one of their academic or social circles.

The research process, particularly the interview process, frequently triggered my own impromptu self-evaluations. Several times during the interviews I found myself feeling a personal connection to an interviewee's story and anticipating a woman's subsequent response and reaction. At certain points interviewees made references to their

undergraduate experiences where my familiarity with the attitudes and behaviors they described detracted from my ability to remain an impartial researcher. The commonalities between my own undergraduate experience and that of some of my interviewees were impossible for me to ignore completely. In this research, I was unable to separate myself from my belief in the importance of increasing the collective knowledge about female college students and their experiences. My understanding and coding of the interview data, essentially the meaning I extract from the interviews, was undoubtedly influenced by my own value judgments and positioning (Campbell & Wasco, 2000). The theoretical positioning of post-positivist feminist researchers prevented me from claiming an objective research lens devoid of personal bias, doing so would run counter to the research methods advanced by such researchers and undermined the authenticity of my work. While I attempted to harness my experiences and biases as a way of building rapport with the participants, I also relied on an established interview topic guide and interview transcript reviews by the participants to protect the meaning of their words in my analysis. More detail about the development of the interview questions follows later in this chapter.

Additionally, I acknowledge sexism's presence in American society and in the lives of my research participants. Sexism manifests itself in discrepancies between salaries for men and women performing similar jobs, in the division of household labor between heterosexual couples, in the way women are treated in schools, public offices, work places, athletics, etc. (Hochschild & Machung, 2003). Sexism prevents women from accessing opportunities with the same ease and frequency as men. Therefore, I was highly interested in conducting educational research that combats sexism simply by

elevating the experiences and voices of women to a level of importance. Campbell and Wasco (2000) defined the intentions of feminist research as encapsulating "the ordinary and extraordinary events of women's lives;" this paradigm "legitimates women's voices as sources of knowledge" (p. 775). I adhered to the principles of feminist qualitative research in conducting this study.

Methods

Site, Population, and Sample

Regarded nationally as an academically selective institution, Southland University (SU) invited applicants to study among some of the world's most inquisitive, inspirational and original minds through its Office of Undergraduate Admission Prospectus (2006). Eighty-seven percent of the students entering SU in 2006 were in the top 10 percent of their high school graduating classes (Southland University's Office of Admission, 2006). Accepted SU students boast impressive resumes detailing academic accomplishments and extracurricular involvement akin to those of women admitted to Duke University, where the term effortless perfectionism emerged during a campus climate study. I was interested in whether the similarity between admitted students on the two campuses translated into commonalities in how female students experienced pressures for perfectionistic self-presentation (PSP) and effortlessness at these two institutions.

Research Sample

Total Participant Characteristics

A total of 514 female Southland University seniors met the criteria for Dean's List, and therefore, inclusion in the survey portion of this study: a grade point average

minimum of a 3.4 on a 4.0 scale for both the fall and the spring semesters of their junior

year of college. (At the time the survey was designed, fall 2005 and spring 2006 were the

two semesters in question). The following sections summarize the participant

characteristics, research questions, and the appropriate descriptive results from the data

utilized in the study.

The 514 women meeting my criteria were asked via electronic mail to answer my

survey concerning high-achieving women (Appendix A). The first follow-up message

was sent to the women in the sample population who did not complete the survey

instrument one week after the researcher's primary request to do so (Appendix C). A

final follow-up message was sent a week later to the remaining nonrespondents

(Appendix D). Despite scheduling interviews within the last weeks of the Spring 2007

semester, immediately prior to their graduation, 184 respondents indicated an interest in

follow-up interviewing. Of those 184 women, 20 students, purposefully chosen based on

the variance in their perfectionistic behaviors and psychological conditions, were selected

for a 45-minute interview (Appendix E). Additional information regarding the sampling

strategy is included later in this chapter. A list of Southland University resources and

support services were made available to all survey participants and, again, to the

interview participants (Appendix F).

Survey participant characteristics.

Of the 514 women eligible to participate in the survey portion of this study, 296

women responded, providing a participation rate of 58%. These individuals comprised

the survey sample. In order to provide a summary of the respondents, the racial identities

of the respondents were also collected and are listed as follows.

Table 3.1

Summary of the Survey Sample Racial Demographic versus Southland University Female Racial Demographic[1] for Fall 2007

Race	Survey Sample Percentage	Sample *n*	Southland University Percentage
African American, African, Black	3.4%	10	9.4%
Asian-American, Asian, Pacific Islander	9.1%	27	11.2%
Latino/Hispanic	.3%	1	4.0%
White	78.7%	233	62.9%
Other[2]	4.4%	13	5.0%
No Response	4.1%	12	7.5%

Interview participant characteristics.

Of the 296 survey respondents, 184 indicated their willingness to be contacted about the potential of follow-up interviewing. The racial breakdown of the group agreeing to the potential of future interviewing was as follows:

Table 3.2

Racial Demographics of Survey Sample who Indicated a Willingness to be Interviewed

Race	Percentage	*n*
African American, African, Black	3.3%	6
Asian-American, Asian, Pacific Islander	6.5%	12
Latino/Hispanic	0.0%	0
White	82.0%	151
Other	4.9%	9
No Response	3.3%	6

Of this group of 184 women, 20 students were selected for interviews. Interviews were included in the research design with the intention of providing an in-depth follow-up to the conclusions suggested by the survey data. In order to ensure that the

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[1] Information retrieved April 8, 2008, from Southland University's Assessment Office.
[2] "Other" included Native-Americans and Non-Resident Aliens.

experiences of women of color were included in the interview portion of the study, the decision was made to assume a purposeful sampling strategy and to intentionally over-sample women of color for the interviews. Because of the under-representation of women of color in the overall survey sample who indicated a willingness to be interviewed, all of the women of color who indicated such willingness were contacted before White women. Of the 27 women of color, five ultimately participated in an interview. The remaining fifteen women who agreed to be interviewed identified as White. Two African-Americans, Africans, and/or Blacks; two Asian, Asian-American, and/or Pacific Islanders; 15 Whites, and one woman who indicated "other" and later revealed as an interviewee that she was a person of mixed race, were interviewed. No Latina women were interviewed as none of the Latina survey respondents indicated interest in a follow-up interview. The 15 White women were ultimately selected with the intention of representing a diversity of academic majors—their academic major information is not included in this write-up to further protect their identities.

Table 3.3

Racial Demographics of Interview Sample

Race	Percentage	n
African-American, African, Black	10%	2
Asian-American, Asian, Pacific Islander	10%	2
Latina/Hispanic	0%	0
White	75%	15
Other	5%	1
No Response	0%	0

Data Collection

Survey

From its conception, I have approached this project with a desire to validate the voices of academically high-achieving women, with a specific interest in their perceptions of perfectionistic self-presentation (PSP), related perfectionism, and effortlessness. Although achievement and perfectionism are linked in the literature (see Chapter 2 for additional details), no research exists suggesting that all high-achieving women are engaged in PSP or related trait perfectionism. In order to identify the women in the population who exhibited behaviors linked with PSP and effortlessness, and thus develop an interview sampling strategy, a number of established scales measuring perfectionistic behaviors and their correlates were utilized. The online survey consisted of the Perfectionistic Self-Presentation Scale (PSPS) (Hewitt, et al., 2003), the Harvard Department of Psychiatry National Depression Screening Day Screening (HANDS) Tool (Baer, et al., 2000), the Carroll-Davidson Generalized Anxiety Disorder Screen (Carroll & Davidson, 2000), questions from the Center for Disease Control's Youth Risk Behavior Survey concerning body image and risky eating behaviors (National Center for Health Statistics, 1992), as well as sixteen questions authored by the researcher concerning effort and biographical data (Appendix B).

The HANDS Screening Tool

Numerous research studies have demonstrated the correlation between perfectionism and depression (Flett, Hewitt, Blankstein, & Mosher, 1991; Hewitt & Flett, 1993; Hewitt, et al., 1996; Kilbert, et al., 2005; Vrendenberg, et al., 1993). Due to this connection, I utilized the Harvard Department of Psychiatry National Depression

Screening Day (HANDS) tool. This tool was the distillation of an initial depression screening instrument of 70 items (Baer, et al., 2000). The scoring of the HANDS required the summation of each respondent's scores. The cutoffs provided by the scale's authors were adjusted by one case to account for the deletion of the item regarding suicide ideation. Due to the alteration of this apparatus, a Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated, demonstrating the scale's reliability.

Responses are evaluated based on the frequency of each symptom over the past two weeks, with a score range from 0 to 30. In the development of the test, a cutpoint score of nine or higher gave sensitivity of at least 95% between each item and the diagnostic criterion in test populations, giving the scale good internal consistency and validity. The HANDS tool is as accurate of a measure as the widely-used 70-item Zung Self-Rating Depression Scale, but with a much briefer test measurement time. For use in this study, the question about suicide ideation was eliminated from the scale, given my lack of clinical training to respond to a suicidal individual. Due to the alteration of this apparatus, a Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated as .795, demonstrating the scale's reliability. The online administration of the measure further complicated the use of such a question, as there are logistical issues associated with contacting a person whose physical whereabouts are unknown.

Carroll-Davidson Generalized Anxiety Disorder Scale

Research concerned with perfectionistic behaviors has also revealed the increased propensity for anxiety in perfectionists (Chang & Rand, 2000; Flett, et al., 2004). The Carroll-Davidson Generalized Anxiety Disorder Scale (CD-GAD) is a 12-item screening tool with a yes/no format (Carroll & Davidson, 2000). The scale measures generalized

anxiety disorder symptoms experienced in the past six months, with a score range from 0 to 12. The generalized nature of the scale means its primary use is for referral to further clinical evaluation; scores of 0 to 5 do not result in recommendations for additional psychiatric evaluation, while scores of 6 to 12 do. Preliminary studies revealed patients with scores of 6 or higher who did not ultimately have generalized anxiety disorder diagnoses possessed other psychiatric problems including major depression or anxiety diagnoses of another form.

Youth Risk Behavior Survey

The methodology utilized in the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (1992) was developed in collaboration with the National Center for Health Statistics and the University of Michigan's Survey Research Center. More than 10,000 adolescents from ages 12 to 21 answered the survey's tape-recorded interview questions concerning healthy behaviors. The survey is one part of the Youth Risk Surveillance System, sponsored by the Division of Adolescent and School Health, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. Given their applicability to body image and eating behaviors, I selected six questions from the survey, three that pertain to risky eating behaviors, to ascertain the attitudes high-achieving women have regarding their bodies and eating habits. Perhaps the largest subset of the existing perfectionism literature dedicated to perfectionism concerns the incidence of eating disorders, distorted body images, and disordered eating behaviors (Bastiani, et al., 1995; Bers & Quinlan, 1992; Brunch, 1977; Cockell, et al., 2002; Davis, 1997; Fairburn & Cooper, 1993; Gellar, et al., 2000; Halmi, et al., 2000; Hewitt, Flett, & Ediger, 1995; Pratt, et al., 2001; Srinivasagam, et al., 1995; Strober, 1991; Vitousek & Manke, 1994).

Perfectionistic Self-Presentation Scale (PSPS)

Hewitt et al.'s (2003) Perfectionistic Self-Presentation Scale (PSPS) emphasizes the external expression of perfectionism as a stylistic trait. This instrument evaluates how people behave in the expression of their perfectionism, while previous measures have only measured individuals' levels of perfectionistic attitudes. The data collected from the instrument was combined with the responses from the effort scale as a way of organizing respondents with various perfectionistic profiles for purposeful sampling. This Likert scale is a 27-item measure of three aspects of perfectionistic self-presentation (PSP). Ten items are summed to calculate perfectionistic self-promotion (items 5, 7, 11, 15, 17, 18, 23, 25, 26, 27), which measures the drive to present oneself as perfect to others. Ten items are designed to measure nondisplay of imperfection (items 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 20, 22, 24) or the desire to avoid being seen as less than perfect to others. Finally, seven items are added to the nondisclosure of imperfection subscale (items 1, 9, 13, 14, 16, 19, 21), the motivation to avoid admitting imperfections to other people (Geller, et al., 2000).

Perfectionistic self-promotion is represented by statements such as, "I strive to look perfect to others." A representative item for the nondisclosure of imperfection factor is "Admitting failures to others is the worst possible thing." Lastly, the nondisplay of imperfection factor is comprised of items such as "I do not care about making mistakes in public," reverse-scored. The higher the score, the greater the level of perfectionistic self-presentation (Flett, et al., 2004).

Hewitt et al. (2003) used Hewitt and Flett's Multidimensional Personality Scale (Hewitt & Flett, 1991b) to evaluate the association between trait dimensions of perfectionism and the PSPS. All three of the multidimensional perfectionism subscales

correlate with the all three of the PSPS subscales. The Perfectionistic Self-Promotion subscale correlated at the highest level with self-oriented perfectionism, the Nondisplay of Imperfection subscale correlated at the highest levels with socially prescribed and self-oriented perfectionism, while the Nondisclosure of Imperfection subscale correlated at the highest levels with socially prescribed perfectionism. Not only does this evidence support a multidimensional understanding of PSP, it also connects concern for perfectionistic self-presentation with low self-esteem. The scale has good reliability, internal consistency, and test-retest reliability, with alpha coefficients of .86, .83, and .78, and correlations between respective PSPS subscales over three weeks of .83, .84, and .74, for perfectionistic self-promotion, nondisplay of imperfection, and nondisclosure of imperfection, respectively (Castro, et al., 2004; Cockell, et al., 2000, Hewitt, et al., 2003; Gellar, et al., 2000).

After deleting the missing data on the PSP apparatus from the survey population, an *n* of 265 resulted. Given the large standard deviation for the PSP instrument, a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was calculated, indicating the scale's reliability. Maintaining the PSP instrument's scaling ratio, the scoring range of responses for each question of the PSP was reduced from a range of 1 to 7 to a range of 0 to 2; the cutoff scores for each of these three subscales were also rescaled at the same ratio. Thus, the scoring range for the 27-item scale was reduced from a range of 27 to 189 to a range of 0 to 54. Paul Hewitt (Hewitt Lab, personal communication, September 22, 2006) the lead author of the PSPS, provided cutoff scores for females responding to the perfectionistic self-presentation scale's three prongs indicating the presence of the PSP construct. The

female cutoff scores for perfectionistic self-promotion, nondisplay of imperfection, and nondisclosure of imperfection were 45.48, 48.29, and 25.72, respectively.

Researcher's Survey Questions

An element of effortless perfection not yet captured by the established scales for this research design is the drive of the appearance of effortlessness in perfectionistic behaviors. Based on its use in Duke University's 2003 findings, the term effortlessness not only means the absence of hard work, but also the absence of negative emotion (e.g. frustration, anger, sadness, embarrassment) in accomplishing one's goals (Roth, 2003). The primary goal of projecting effortless perfection is to demonstrate high levels of proficiency, in this case with regard to academic achievement and extracurricular involvement, without looking like one exerted herself to secure those classroom-related achievements and/or competitive social involvements. Given the previously mentioned literature on presentation of self and self-image, discounting and concealing parts of one's self and one's experience can result in detrimental psychological effects. As a result, three of the researcher's additional questions specifically concern the expression of unhappy emotions, while the other three queries refer to the expression of hard work in typical college student experiences (e.g. preparing for a test, considering post-graduation opportunities, and deciding where to devote one's extracurricular time).

Any of the PSP or effort scales with missing data were deleted from the survey sample's *n* of 296, resulting in an *n* of 249. As the creator of the effort scale, I calculated the cutoff scores for the population and divided the group into two: those who had a high willingness to reveal the effort they exerted (including those who exerted no effort) and those who had a low willingness to reveal the effort they exerted. The coefficient of

reliability for this scale, calculated for first the survey sample and then interview sample are .897 and .922, respectively.

Interviews

Given an existing paucity of research focused on effortless perfection, along with a substantial body of research dedicated to perfectionism, qualitative methods gave me the necessary exploratory freedom. In their research on the multidimensional nature of perfectionism, Cox, et al. (2002) specifically cited the construction of a reliable and valid structured interview protocol as a necessary direction for additional perfectionism research. In-depth qualitative interviewing, in particular, provided an opportunity to probe participants with topics that are both informed and open-ended; it allows for a focus on individuals' lived experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

Since language represents the primary means of human communication and each interview participants' language represented her own interpretation of the social world, interviewing allowed me to focus on those representations. Arguments concerning the accuracy of the participants' in representing the "real" or "true" world were irrelevant to my ends; subjective verbal representations matter most in understanding participants' worldview and reflexivity. I utilized a topic guide to allow for consistency among interview questions and the possibility of topic exploration initiated by the participant (Kvale, 1996) (Appendix B). In this way, the interviewees' perspectives "unfold as the participant views it and not as the researcher views it," giving credence to the participants' experiences rather than my agendas (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 125).

Interview questions were developed based on previous research connections between perfectionism and levels of self-determined motivation, or the "extent to which

individuals engage in an activity out of personal choice and/or pleasure" (Blais, Sabourin, Boucher, & Vallerand, 1990; Miquelon, Vallerand, Grouzet, & Cardinal, 2005, p. 915; Ryan & Connell, 1989; Vallerand & Bissonnette, 1992; Vallerand, Fortier, & Guay, 1997). Additionally, I wanted to gain data on the non-self-determined motivation of participants, or individuals' participation in an activity because of outside pressures or reasons (Blais, et al., 1990; Vallerand & Bissonnette, 1992; Vallerand et al., 1997). This information about motivation contributes to an understanding of individuals' psychological adjustment, as self-determined motivation has been linked to positive emotions in school, enjoyment and satisfaction of academic work (Vallerand, Blais, Brière, & Pelletier, 1989; Vallerand, et al., 1993), as well as classroom enjoyment (Ryan & Connell, 1989). Meanwhile, these studies also found evidence to suggest that psychological adjustment difficulties such as anxiety, depression, the inability to cope with failure, and negative emotions about school are influenced by a non-self-determined motivational orientation (Miquelon, et al., 2005).

According to Seale (1998), interviews allow researchers "to find out about things that cannot be seen or heard, such as the interviewee's inner state—the reasoning behind their actions, and their feelings" (p. 202). Utilizing interview methods as a way to accomplish direct observation, I had a solid opportunity to collect comprehensive and meaningful responses because I was able to correct any respondent misunderstandings and follow up on incomplete answers. Additionally, I paid close attention to the word choices participants used to describe their experiences and reflect their social worlds. I also focused on the types of environmental factors and coping strategies apparent in the lives of my interviewees. In order to be as non-directive as possible, I used a topic guide

to structure the interview for openness to respondent interpretations. In this way, I was not forced to adhere to a strict protocol that would prevent follow-up of a potentially relevant experience (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

Sampling Strategy

To select the interview sample, the perfectionistic self-presentation (PSP) scores of the survey respondents who agreed to be interviewed were plotted in relationship to their scores on the survey's questions attempting to measure effortlessness ($n = 20$). I employed Patton's (1990) concept of "reasonable coverage" for justifying the number of participants, knowing that I could increase my number of interviewees if I did not notice reasonable coverage (p. 186). In this research "reasonable coverage" was achieved easily as interviewees shared copious amounts of information about their own collegiate experiences. Thus, I interviewed a total of 20 students, from across the following quadrants: high PSP and high willingness to disclose effort; high PSP and low willingness to disclose effort; low PSP and high willingness to disclose effort; and low PSP and low willingness to disclose effort.

Given the suggestion of Duke University's Women's Initiative that women high in perfectionistic tendencies and low in their willingness to demonstrate effort were a population potentially at risk for psychological distress, I did not evenly sample interviewees across quadrants. Instead, I chose my interview pool by intentionally sampling from the quadrant where respondents scored high on PSP and low on their willingness to disclose effortlessness because of the suggested relationship between these variables. In addition, I wanted to focus on those students with high degrees of PSP because of the established research connection between this construct and the potential

for psychological distress. I was most interested in understanding how the emerging concept of effortlessness might affect a population already at risk for psychological distress because of high PSP levels.

After identifying ten women to interview who scored high on PSP and low on their willingness to disclose effort, I interviewed a roughly equal number of women in the remaining three quadrants: three women whose PSP and willingness to disclose their effort was high; four women whose PSP was low and willingness to disclose their effort was high; and three women whose PSP and willingness to disclose their effort was low. Again, within each quadrant, I tried to pick a sample as diverse as possible, following up with women of color first and then pursuing a diversity of academic majors across White women. Since I opted not to include academic major information in this report to further preserve confidentiality, I did include the extracurricular and leadership activities of the women to represent the diversity of their interests.

See Figure 3.1 for the scatterplot output of the relationship between the willingness to disclose effort and PSP scores for the survey respondents who indicated a willingness to be interviewed.

Figure 3.1

Survey Respondents: Effort versus Perfectionistic Self-presentation
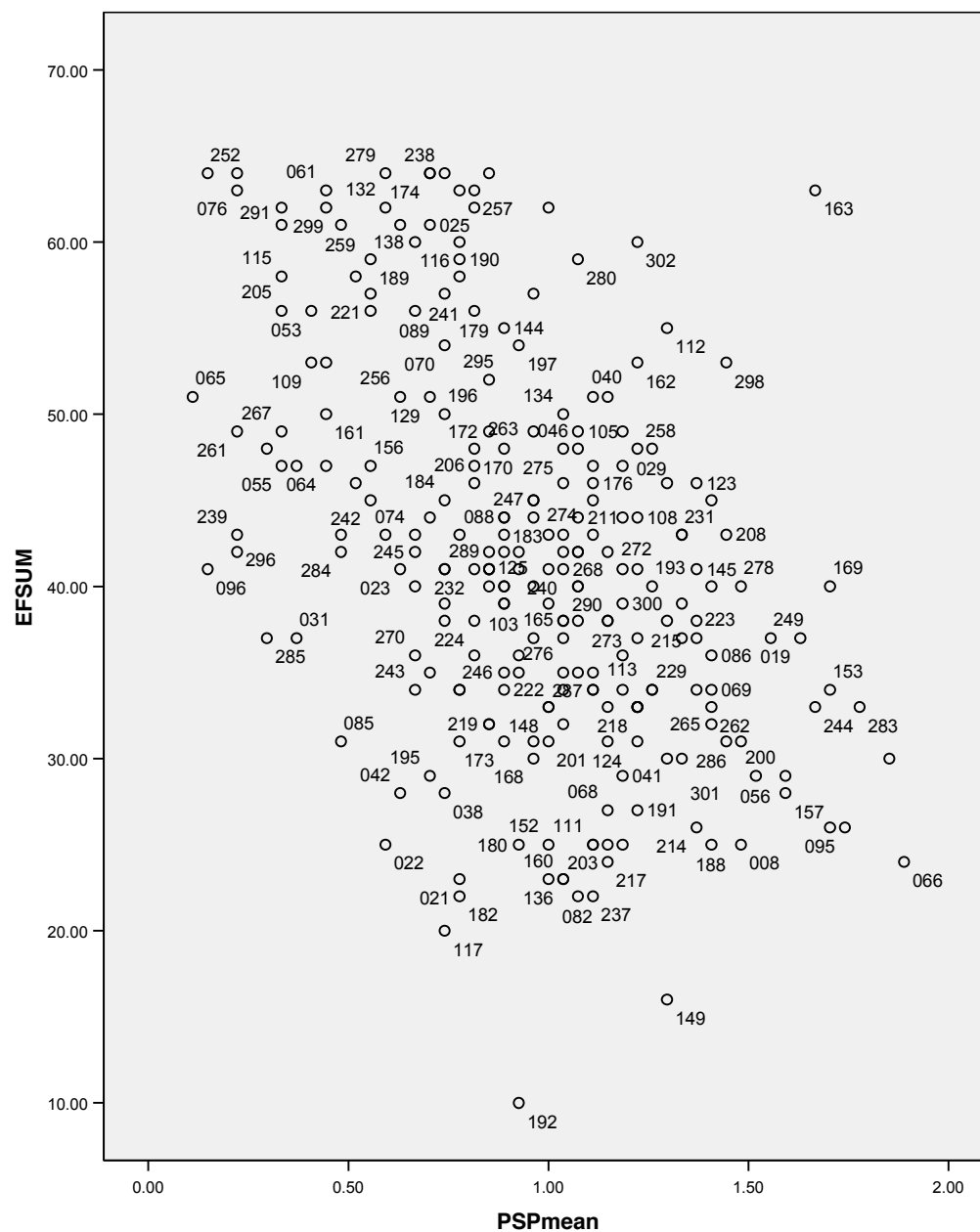
The relationship between the willingness to display effort and perfectionistic self-presentation for each of the interviewees has been extracted from the population of survey respondents. The intention of this extraction is to highlight the interviewees, who provide the qualitative data for this study.

Figure 3.2

Interviewees: Willingness to Display Effort versus Perfectionistic Self-presentation
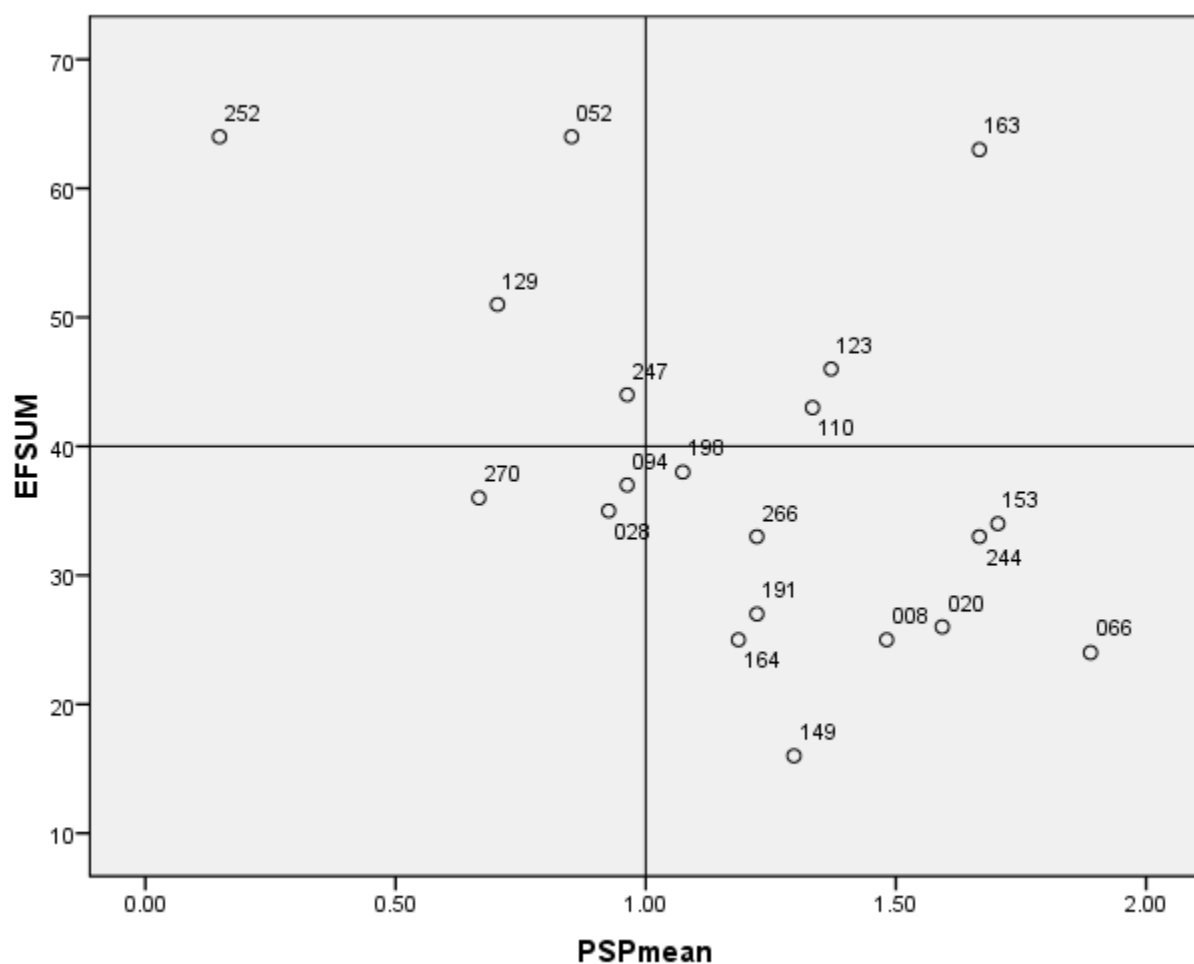
The profile of the interviewees' scores, as well as their ethnicities and a listing of their extracurricular involvements is included in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4

Profile of Interviewees

Relationship between PSP and Effortlessness	Name	Ethnicity	Collegiate Activities With Leadership Roles	Collegiate Activities
high PSP and high effort scores *n*=3	Daphne	Caucasian (International Student)	campus tour guide, freshman council, orientation leader, resident advisor, sorority philanthropy chair, student council chair	freshman actors guild costume designer and set crew, Girl Scouts
	Hannah	Caucasian	overseer of advertising class ad campaign, transfer student advisor	competitor in American Advising Federation national contest
	Nina	Caucasian		bellydance club, European Society, Polish Society
low PSP and high effort scores *n*=4	Anna	Caucasian	honors program advisory board, junior editor-in-chief for national magazine, international relations journal editor, literary magazine editor, summer director for national conference on peace	debate society, international relations organization, multi-organization community volunteer
	Crystal	African/ Jamaican	Christian fellowship, student nursing association secretary	community tutor
	Jillian	Caucasian		choir member, community volunteer, religious student organization, freshman

				actors guild
	Selma	Caucasian	Youth soccer coach	multi-organization community volunteer
low PSP and low effort scores *n*=3	Alicia	Multiracial	Art studio manager	
	Vivian	Asian		filmmakers' society, library employee
	Yvonne	Caucasian	dorm liaison, sorority scholarship chair	club sport participant, community volunteer
high PSP and low effort scores *n*=10	Anita	African-American	resident advisor, resident staff review board, senior class council community service chair, student council subcommittee chair	community volunteer, student newspaper author
	Bess	Caucasian		Admissions Office volunteer, community volunteer, sorority member, transfer student advisor
	Celeste	Caucasian		multi-organization community volunteer, psychology research lab assistant
	Eve	Caucasian		community volunteer, intern
	Helen	Caucasian	international outreach treasurer, senior class council member	
	Kylie	Caucasian	gym student employee supervisor, health educator, Women's Center intern,	

		women's leadership program mentor	
Lin	Asian	Asian cultural group, business fraternity chair, senior class council member	multi-organization community volunteer
Maeve	Caucasian	chair for university-wide fundraising event, religious community's student social committee chair, resident advisor, sorority vice-president	
Maria	Caucasian	architecture program representative, architecture program president and student senate, summer tour guide	
Paige	Caucasian	art museum docent, Catholic Student Association board member, orientation leader, summer campus tour guide	Admissions Office volunteer

Interview Topic Guide Questions

The interview guide approach allows the researcher to bring some structure to the conversation in the form of open-ended questions, but allows participants to shape their answers regarding the phenomenon in question through their eyes and not the researcher's (Rossman & Rallis, 1998). The topic guide used for the interviews in this research study is based on focus group interviews I conducted with a colleague in the spring of 2004. In an effort to learn more about the collegiate experiences of high-achieving women, we conducted purposive interviewing of 12 women with GPAs of at least 3.4 (on a 4.0 scale) in their senior year of college (Andres & Steinmetz, 2004). The researchers used research on perfectionism and female college student development to formulate their questions. Based on the respondents' feedback and a research goal of identifying personality characteristics and environmental variables related to perfectionistic behaviors, I modified the questions with the greatest response variance from the 2004 sample into topics in the attached topic guide (Appendix E). Additionally, for the present research, I worded the follow-up questions under the main topic headings to unpack effortlessness; these questions focus on who and what influences the respondent's acceptance and resistance to perfectionistic and effortless perfection behaviors. These questions also probed for situations typically associated with negative emotions such as stress and failure in attempt to understand how the respondent views the decisions to express negative reactionary emotions. Questions regarding academics were also addressed. Questions about family and sense of self were included to complement the survey questions inquiring about sharing emotions with friends and family.

Data Analysis

Survey

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was utilized to analyze the survey data. Before submitting survey responses, the respondent was asked to acknowledge the terms and conditions of an informed consent agreement, as approved by the university's IRB (protocol # 2007-0051-00; see Appendix G). All data were coded as dictated by the screening scales, manually entered and double-checked for accuracy. Descriptive statistics and frequencies of each variable (depression, anxiety, perfectionistic self-presentation, etc.) were run. Effort values were measured against the scale's distribution of scores and standard deviation in order to determine high and low effort. These quantitative data results answered the degree to which high-achieving woman manifest perfectionistic self-presentation (PSP), the degree to which they feel the need to be concerned with effortlessness and the presence of psychological conditions exhibited by these women. In sum, these data provided varying profiles of effortlessness and psychological symptoms associated with perfectionistic behavior; a commitment to this variance was reflected in the choice of interview subjects.

Interview

To form a rapport with the interview participants who were asked to share personal information in a one-time interview, I needed to establish my trustworthiness quickly. I strived to accomplish this by assuring the participants that answers would be kept confidential and by offering a statement about my own connection to the undergraduate experience at Southland University. I provided the respondents with the informed consent forms and the pertinent information about the study, in addition to

allowing the interviewee the opportunity to ask questions at any point. After the interviewees' permission was obtained, each of the twenty interviews was recorded with a digital voice recorder. The resulting voices file were transcribed professionally and e-mailed to me. Upon receipt of the files, I proofread them and emailed them to the interviewees for member checking purposes (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). While some of the interviewees offered minor revisions, none of those edits were related to the meanings of their statements; interviewees were satisfied that the transcripts accurately reflected their interviews.

Data analysis is understood as "the process of bringing order, structure, and interpretation to the mass of collected data" (Marshall and Rossman, 1999, p. 150). In this research undertaking the interview data were organized through multiple reviews of the member-checked interview transcripts, resulting ultimately in the creation of themes and subthemes that make data analysis manageable. Since qualitative data analysis occurs simultaneously with data collection to allow for flexibility in analytic thinking, I was constantly engaged in thinking and processing how these data reflected or differed from the literature (Merriam, 2002). Analyst-constructed typologies (etic codes) and indigenous typologies (emic codes) were applied to the data (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 155). The applied typology originated in the relationships suggested by the Duke University Women's Initiative between women, perfectionism, and effortless perfection, was crucial in providing initial parameters for the scope of the data analysis. The researcher generated a list of codes prior to the interviews, derived from the interview topic guide questions. Appearance, emotion, work, grades, and female were five such code words. The pre-generated codes were updated during open coding, as necessary.

Examples of code words identified in this study were control, alone, support, and exercise.

In accordance with the feminist research perspective and constructivist paradigms, indigenous typologies, emic codes, were also culled by the researcher to make sense of the data. Indigenous typologies are "those created and expressed by participants and are generated through analyses of the local use of language," which seemed the most appropriate given the emergent nature of effortless perfection (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 154). Data were narrowed after codes were reviewed for repetition and overlap. Codes were combined when conceptual overlap occurred and divided when needed to indicate distinct concepts.

Qualitative analytic coding is divided into open and axial coding (Guba, 1978). Both methods were employed in this study by noting the reoccurring ideas and language used by respondents in the data collection. The goal was for the creation of categories that were distinct from one another, but internally consistent. Open coding requires the review of raw data "line-by-line to identify and formulate any and all ideas, themes, or issues they suggest, no matter how varied and disparate" (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 143). In examining the data from as many vantage points as possible, preliminary codes are constructed that fit the data. The assumptions held by the interviewees are also coded; I was concerned not only with what participants emphasized, but with what they ignored and discounted. Axial coding requires multiple readings of each interview transcript to divide and refine general codes into smaller subgroups (Brott & Myers, 1999). In this way, axial coding puts "the data back together in new ways by making

connections between a category and its subcategories to develop several main categories"
(qtd. in Brott & Myers, 1999, p. 342).

The use of memos further exposed repetition and overlap within the data. Memos
"tie together pieces of data into a recognizable cluster," and represent the analyst's
thoughts about the relationship between the codes and the data they represent (Miles &
Huberman, 1994, p.72). In order to further what Lincoln and Guba (1985) deem the
"confirmability" of the study, I shared my codes and transcripts, without identifying
information, with a fellow doctoral student trained in qualitative research methods (p.
318). The sharing of such coding is an attempt to make the codes a function of the data
above the researcher's inherent subjectivity (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). All of these
methods eased the process of comparison and contrast between my data and the literature,
providing the basis for the division of the data into major themes and descriptions. These
themes ultimately provided the basis of the responses to my research questions.

<div align="center">Summary</div>

This mixed-methods study first relied on survey data collection to provide
information about a sample of high-achieving women. Once identified by their responses
on the surveys' scales and a willingness to discuss their experiences further, these women
were asked to participate in interviews and share their experiences as academically high-
achieving Southland University women. Questions regarding perfectionism, academics,
community roles and responsibilities, environmental factors, stress, and coping strategies
were explored. These data will hopefully serve as guidelines for faculty, administrators,
staff, and peers about how to best understand and provide support for the female

undergraduate student experience, given Duke University's suggestion that female

college students are prioritizing their appearance and image above their own self-worth.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE DATA

"And eventually being perfect became like carrying a backpack filled with bricks every

single day. And oh how I wanted to lay my burden down." ~Anna Quindlen

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate to what degree academically high-

achieving females at Southland University manifest attributes of perfectionistic self-

presentation (PSP) and effortlessness. I was also interested in ascertaining the frequency

of anxiety, depression, and risky eating behaviors in the lives of the study population, in

addition to discerning the environmental factors and coping mechanisms contributing to

the participants' responses to pressures for perfectionistic self-presentation and

effortlessness. This chapter presents the quantitative data collected from a population of

academically high-achieving Southland University women and the qualitative data

gathered from interviewing a subset of the survey respondents.

Identifying and describing perfectionistic self-presentation (PSP) and the

pressures for effortlessness and effortless perfection in the participants' collegiate

experiences was an overarching goal of this mixed methods study. An online survey was

administered that quantified the respondents' perfectionistic self-presentation behaviors,

effort exerted in projecting perfect self images, and the frequency with which the women

exhibited incidents of depression, anxiety, and risky eating behaviors, various

psychological conditions associated with perfectionism. Interviewees of a subset of survey respondents were conducted to enhance how PSP and effortlessness are understood. The qualitative data complements the quantitative data applicable to research questions one, two, and three; it serves as a response to research questions four and five.

<div align="center">Presentation of the Quantitative Data</div>

Data results for each of the six scales are presented in the order they relate to each research question. Relevant descriptive data for each apparatus are also included. For ease of comparison, the descriptive characteristics of the survey and interview samples are presented in tandem.

<div align="center">*Prevalence of Perfectionistic Self-Presentation*</div>

The 27-item Perfectionistic Self-Presentation Scale (PSPS) was included in the survey to deduce to what degree academically high-achieving women at Southland University manifested attributes of perfectionistic self-presentation (PSP). As explained in Chapter 2, the perfectionistic self-presentation apparatus is comprised of three scales: perfectionistic self-promotion, nondisplay of imperfection, and nondisclosure of imperfection (Hewitt, et. al., 2003). Relevant descriptive characteristics for the entire scale, as applied to the survey and interview samples, are included below.

Table 4.1

Perfectionistic Self-presentation

Population	N	M	SD	α
Survey Population	265	25.86	9.464	.913
Interview Population	20	32.30	11.45	.946

All the cutoff scores were rescaled at the same ratio as the three subscales. The range of scores for nondisclosure of imperfection ranged from 0 to 20, with a cutoff score of 13. Using this cutoff score, 27% of the survey sample indicated a concern for perfectionistic self-promotion, while the remaining 73% did not meet or exceed the threshold for perfectionistic self-promotion. Again, perfectionistic self-promotion is defined as the public advancement of one's perfection or accomplishments. Among the interviewees, the percentage of individuals with responses above the cutoff scores was higher than among the survey respondents, with 55% reporting scores above the cutoff, or high on perfectionistic self-promotion, and 45% reporting scores below the threshold, or low on perfectionistic self-promotion.

Table 4.2

Perfectionistic Self-promotion

Population	*n*	*M*	*SD*	Above Cutoff Scores*		Below Cutoff Scores*	
				Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency
Survey Population	265	10.03	4.201	27%	72	73%	193
Interview Population	20	15.85	6.319	55%	11	45%	9

*Cutoff score was 13.

Data analysis for the second prong on the PSPS, nondisplay of imperfection, or the act of hiding mistakes, revealed results similar to those on the perfectionistic self-promotion subscale. The range of scores for nondisplay of imperfection ranged from 0 to 20, with a cutoff score of 14. Using this cutoff score, 20% of respondents indicated their concern with the nondisplay of imperfection, while 40% of respondents in the interview population were concerned. Furthermore, 80% of respondents did not meet or exceed the

threshold for concern for nondisplay of imperfection in the survey population; 60% did not meet or exceed the same cutoff within the interview population.

Table 4.3

Nondisplay of Imperfection

Population	*n*	*M*	*SD*	Above Cutoff Scores		Below Cutoff Scores	
				Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency
Survey Population	296	10.95	3.967	20%	52	80%	213
Interview Population	20	13.45	3.706	40%	8	60%	12

*Cutoff score was 14.

The final subscale of the perfectionistic self-presentation scale was designed to capture nondisclosure of imperfection, or the lack of verbalization of one's mistakes or fallacies. The range of scores for nondisclosure of imperfection ranged from 0 to 14, with a cutoff score of 7. Using this cutoff score, the responses broke down into 19% meeting and/or exceeding the cutoff scores classifying them as concerned with the nondisplay of imperfection, while 81% of respondents did not indicate high concern with the nondisplay of imperfection. In the interview population, the responses were evenly split with 10 individuals (50%) falling at or above the cutoff scores and 10 individuals (50%) falling below the cutoff scores.

Table 4.4

Nondisclosure of Imperfection

Population	*n*	*M*	*SD*	Above Cutoff Scores		Below Cutoff Scores	
				Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency
Survey Population	296	4.88	2.876	19%	50	81%	215
Interview Population	20	13.45	3.706	50%	10	50%	10

*Cutoff score was 7.

In summation, within the survey population, 27% of respondents indicated a focus on perfectionistic self-promotion, 20% noted a focus on the nondisplay of imperfection, and 19% voiced a concern with the nondisclosure of imperfection. Within the interview population, a subgroup of the survey population, the frequencies were 55%, 40%, and 50%, respectively. My sampling strategy for the interview sample, as described in chapter 3, explains the higher percentage of women with high perfectionistic self-presentation scores than the percentage of women in the survey sample. See Chapter 3 for more detail.

Prevalence of Effortlessness

Research question two asked for the level of effortlessness exerted by academically high-achieving women at Southland University who also exhibited perfectionistic self-presentation. Since this apparatus was new, I calculated a Cronbach's alpha coefficient for both the survey and interview populations to demonstrate the scale's reliability. See Table 4.5 for descriptive statistics of the two populations.

The mean score from the survey sample was 41.68, which also served as the dividing score separating the population into two groups: those with a high willingness to disclose their effort (high effort score) and those with a low willingness to disclose their effort (low effort score). For the 16-item scale, the scoring ranged from 0 to 64. Of the 113 people who scored above the mean on the PSP scale, 78 women (69%) were below the mean on the effort scale, indicating a low willingness to disclose their effort, i.e., the work and emotion they put into achieving their academic goals. (Thirty-five people, or 31 percent, from this group were above the mean and willing to display their effort). These data are contrasted with the 136 people who scored below the mean on the PSP scale, 55

of those people (40%) scored below the mean on the effort scale, indicating a low

willingness to reveal their effort. Eighty-one people (60%) scored above the mean on the

effort scale, indicating a high willingness to display their effort.

Within the interview population, 13 of the women were high in their

perfectionistic self-presentation, or 65%. Of these women, three revealed a high

willingness to display their effort (23%) and 10 participants revealed a low likelihood of

disclosure (77%). Given my interest in the emerging phenomenon of effortlessness, I

oversampled those women with a low willingness to disclose their effort in selecting my

interview population. Seven of the interview participants (35%) did not display

perfectionistic self-presentation and four of them had a high willingness to display their

effort.

Table 4.5

Willingness to Disclose Effort

Population	N	M	SD	α	Above Effort Cutoff Scores, i.e. High Willingness to Display Effort		Below Effort Cutoff Scores, i.e. Low Willingness to Display Effort	
					Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency
Survey	113	41.59	11.216	.897	31%	35	69%	78
Interview	13	29.92	6.551	.922	23%	3	77%	10

Figure 4.1

Distribution of Willingness to Disclose Effort Scores in High PSP Survey Population
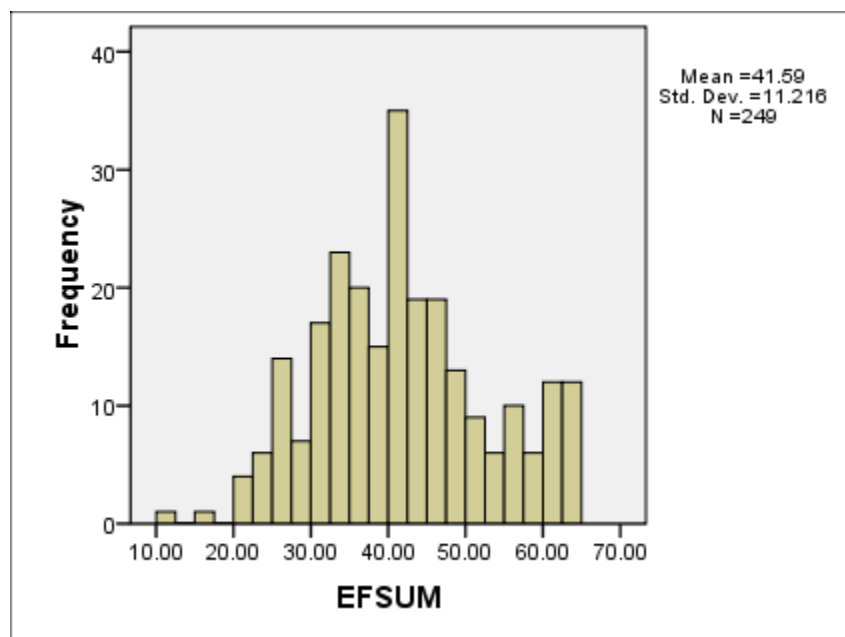
In summation, of the 113 survey respondents with high levels of perfectionistic self-presentation, 69% had a low willingness to disclose their effort to others and only 31% had a high willingness to do so. Given the sampling strategy outlined in Chapter 3, which included oversampling those with a low willingness to disclose effort, it was expected that a higher percentage of the interview population (77%) would possess a low willingness to disclose their effort than a high willingness to disclose (23%). The presentation of the qualitative data later in this chapter provides additional information about the interviewees' decision-making in choosing to disclose or conceal their effort.

Prevalence of Psychological Symptoms

The purpose of research question three was to determine the survey respondents' levels of anxiety, risky eating behaviors, and depression, as the literature indicates a prevalence of these behaviors among perfectionistic high-achieving women.

Caroll-Davidson Generalized Anxiety Disorder Screen

Research concerned with perfectionistic behaviors has also demonstrated the likelihood of perfectionists to suffer from anxiety (Chang & Rand, 2000; Flett, Greene, & Hewitt, 2004). The Carroll-Davidson Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) Screen (Carroll & Davidson, 2000) is a 12-item apparatus that identifies whether respondents have symptoms suggestive of generalized anxiety disorder. Before descriptive statistics were run on the data, missing data were deleted from the group of 296 survey respondents, resulting in an *n* of 293. Within the study's survey population, 70% of respondents did not have symptoms suggestive of GAD, while 30% of respondents had symptoms indicating the possibility of GAD. Within the interview population there were 10 respondents with responses suggestive of GAD and 10 whose responses were not indicative of GAD.

Table 4.6

Generalized Anxiety Disorder

Population	*N*	*M*	*SD*	Percentage Above Cutoff Scores	Frequency Above Cutoff Scores	Percentage Below Cutoff Scores	Frequency Below Cutoff Scores
Survey Population	278	2.81	.924	30%	60	70%	218
Interview Population	20	4.90	3.007	50%	10	50%	10

Youth Risk Behavior Survey Body Image Questions

Numerous researchers have helped expand the collective understanding of perfectionism, particularly in establishing a connection between perfectionism and body image issues (Bastiani, Rao, Weltzin, & Kaye, 1995; Bers & Quinlan, 1992; Brunch,

1977; Cockell, et al., 2002; Davis, 1997; Fairburn & Cooper, 1993; Gellar, et al., 2000; Halmi, et al., 2000; Hewitt, Flett, & Ediger, 1995; Pratt, et al., 2001; Srinivasagam, et al., 1995; Strober, 1991; Vitousek & Manke, 1994). Seven items concerning body image were extracted from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey for the purpose of understanding the respondents' perceptions of their body image (National Center for Health Statistics, 1992). The *n* for this apparatus was 284 as 12 respondents with missing data were deleted from the descriptive analysis.

The first four items on this scale are reported out individually by question. Information about each survey respondent's weight and body mass index was not collected so the significance of these data is not strong; there is no context to judge whether concern for losing weight, the focus of these first four questions, is appropriate given a lack of information on the respondents' levels of fitness and wellness. Given the connection in the literature between perfectionism and unrealistic body image expectations, I wanted to include the survey population and the interview population's answers to these questions because they are indicators of participants' satisfaction with their bodies. The final three body image questions utilized in this study provide insight into the respondents' risky eating behaviors. Even without knowledge of the respondents' fitness and wellness levels, the interviewees' engagement in any risky eating behaviors was cause for concern. As a result, these incidences will be reported out in their totality.

Body weight question one: Description of weight.

The first question on this scale asked participants to describe their body weight. With regards to the survey population, 61% percent described their body weight as "about right," 8% described their body weight as underweight (either very or slightly),

and 31% described their body weight as overweight (either slightly or very). Within the

interview sample, 10 people (50%) described their weight as about right, 3 people (15%)

described their body weight as underweight (either very or slightly), and 7 people (35%)

described their body weight as overweight (either very or slightly).

Table 4.7

Body Weight Question One: Description of Weight

Population	n	M	Underweight (slightly or very)		About right		Overweight (slightly or very)	
			Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency
Survey	284	.4	8%	23	61%	172	31%	89
Interview	20	.55	15%	3	50%	10	35%	7

Body weight question two: Trying to do about weight.

One percent of survey respondents indicated an interest in gaining weight and

40% of survey respondents said that they were trying to stay the same weight or not do

anything about their weight. Fifty-nine percent of survey respondents indicated a desire

to lose weight. Within the interview population, two people (10%) indicated a desire to

gain weight, five people (25%) indicated an interest in maintaining the same weight, and

13 people (65%) were interested in losing weight.

Table 4.8

Body Weight Question Two: Trying to do about Weight

Population	n	M	Lose Weight (slightly or very)		Stay the Same		Gain Weight (slightly or very)	
			Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency
Survey Population	284	.61	59%	167	40%	114	1%	3
Interview Population	20	.8	65%	13	25%	5	10%	2

Body weight question three: Exercise to lose weight in past 30 days.

Seventy-four percent of survey respondents revealed that they had exercised to lose weight or keep from gaining weight in the past 30 days, while 26% of respondents indicated they had not. Results in the interview population were very similar as 15 people (75%) indicated that they have exercised to lose weight in the past 30 days and five people (25%) said they had not exercised to lose weight in the 30 days prior to responding to the survey.

Table 4.9

Body Weight Question Three: Exercise to Lose Weight in Past 30 days

Population	*n*	*M*	Exercise to Lose Weight--yes		Exercise to Lose Weight--no	
			Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency
Survey Population	284	.74	74%	209	26%	75
Interview Population	20	.75	75%	15	25%	5

Body weight question four: Consumed less food, fewer calories, or food low in fat to lose weight.

Sixty-six percent of survey respondents revealed that they had consumed less food, fewer calories, or foods low in fat to lose weight or keep from gaining weight in the 30 days prior to responding to the survey, while 34% of respondents indicated they had not. Within the interview population, 12 people (60%) indicated that they had consumed less food, fewer calories, or foods low in fat in the past 30 days and eight people (40%) said that they had not consumed less food to lose weight.

Table 4.10

Body Weight Question Four: Consumed Less Food, Fewer Calories, or Food Low in Fat to Lose Weight

Population	*n*	*M*	Consumed less to lose weight--yes		Consumed less to lose weight--no	
			Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency
Survey Population	284	.66	66%	188	34%	96
Interview Population	20	.60	60%	12	40%	8

Risky eating behaviors: Body weight questions five, six, and seven.

The body weight questions deemed to be of high-risk involved behavior during the 30 days prior to answering the survey questions: a) going without eating for 24 hours or more to avoid weight gain, b) taking diet pills, powders, or liquids without a doctor's advice to avoid weight gain, or c) vomiting or taking laxatives to avoid weight gain. Within the 284-member survey population, 17 individuals (6%) revealed that they had performed one of these risky eating behaviors (REBs) while only two individuals (1%) indicated engaging in at least two of the risky behaviors. The remaining 265 women (93%) responded that they had never engaged in any of the three risky behaviors in question. The percentages of risky eating behaviors within the interview population showed that one woman (5%) revealed she had performed at least one risky behavior and the other 19 women (95%) indicated that they had not engaged in any risky eating behaviors within the prior 30 days. Zero women in the interview population revealed engaging in two or more risky eating behaviors within the 30 days preceding the survey.

Table 4.11

Risky Eating Behaviors (REBs)

Population	n	M	SD	0 behaviors in the last 30 days		1 behavior in the last 30 days		2 behaviors in the last 30 days	
				Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency
Survey Population	284	.07	.288	93%	265	6%	17	1%	2
Interview Population	20	.05	.224	95%	19	5%	1	0%	0

In summation, in both the survey and interview populations, women were more likely to describe their weight as "about right," than overweight or underweight. Despite their descriptions of "about right" weight, women in the survey sample and interview sample were more likely trying to lose weight than maintain or gain weight. Women in the survey sample and the interview sample were also more likely than not to exercise to avoid weight gain and more likely than not consuming less food, fewer calories, or food low in fat to avoid weight gain. The risky eating behaviors questions were the body image questions of highest concern for me, however, because of the health implications of the women engaging in REBs. Ninety-three percent of women from the survey population had not engaged in a REB in the 30 days prior to the survey administration, 6% had engaged in one REB, and 1% had engaged in two REBs. The interview population's REB frequencies were very similar, breaking down into 95%, 5%, and 0%, respectively.

Harvard Department of Psychiatry National Depression Screening Day Scale

The Harvard Department of Psychiatry National Depression Screening Day Scale (Baer, et al., 2000) is a 10-item instrument, but was amended to a nine-item instrument for the purposes of this study. Specifically, the item on the apparatus concerned with

suicide ideation was deleted because this scale was not administered by a professional

trained to respond to a person with suicidal thoughts. Regarding the survey population in

this study, 72% of respondents indicated symptoms "not consistent with a major

depressive episode," meaning that a "complete evaluation is not recommended" (Baer, et

al., 2000, p. 40). Fifty percent of interviewees, or 10 individuals, answered in a similar

fashion. Twenty-five percent of survey respondents revealed symptoms "consistent with

a major depressive episode," indicating that "a complete evaluation is recommended;" the

latter 50% of the interviewees responses fell into this same category (Baer, et al., 2000, p.

40). Only 3% of women in the survey population, an *n* of 8, disclosed symptoms

"strongly consistent with criteria for a major depressive episode" (Baer, et al., 2000, p.

40). As mentioned in Chapter 3, and dictated by Southland University's Institutional

Review Board, all participants who entered the online survey system automatically

received a list via electronic mail of mental health and counseling resources available at

Southland University, including phone numbers, Web site addresses, and physical

addresses. See Appendix F.

Table 4.12

Depression

Population	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*α*	Major Depressive Disorder Unlikely		Major Depressive Disorder Likely		Major Depressive Disorder Very Likely	
					Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency
Survey	293	3.00	.929	.795	72%	212	25%	73	3%	8
Interview	20	7.15	4.380	.786	50%	10	50%	10	0%	0

Qualitative Interviews

The survey data measuring a willingness to display effort and perfectionistic self-

presentation (PSP) were used to select the interview population. The interview data were

used to provide a rich description of the context and behaviors identified by the quantitative data. As stated previously, the interviews were comprised of topic guide questions and were conducted with 20 female students. The women interviewed in this project fell into four categories according to their scaled effort and PSP scores: (1) high perfectionistic self-presentation and high willingness to disclose effort; (2) low perfectionistic self-presentation and high willingness to disclose effort; (3) low perfectionistic self-presentation and low willingness to disclose effort; and (4) high perfectionistic self-presentation and low willingness to disclose effort. Again, this latter group is the primary group of interest to me given the existing literature about the harmful nature of perfectionism combined with effortlessness. These qualitative data also provide the response to research questions four and five.

In reviewing the interviewees' narratives, six major themes emerged: (a) academic comparison and competition; (b) perception of failure; (c) expectations by and for others; (d) recognition of gender differences; (e) effortlessness; and (f) coping strategies. The first theme, competition and comparison, is related to the participants' motivation to achieve academic goals defined in relation to their own internal standards and the achievements of others. The second theme, perception of failure, refers to the participants' understanding of reactions to behavior that does not meet expectations. The third theme, expectations involving others, describes the interviewees' responses to other peoples' expectations for them, including those of family members and professors. This theme also includes the interviewees' expectations for family, peers, and professors. The fourth theme, recognition of gender differences, represents the interviewees' consciousness of their womanhood and a comparison of the differences in social norms

for women and men. The fifth theme, effortlessness, refers to the ways in which interviewees felt the need to diminish the effort they exerted to achieve their academic goals and concealed resulting emotions of anger, frustration, or sadness in their goal striving. Across these themes, information about how the interviewees responded to stress emerged. As a result, the sixth theme, coping mechanisms, included participants' responses to perceived pressures for perfectionism and effortless perfection.

The themes are presented in such a way as to not displace or mar any accompanying data related to each theme. The thick descriptions contained in the themes are connected to one another, but also supplement the women's quantitative responses in responding to research questions one, two, and three. The fourth and seventh themes, environmental factors and coping mechanisms, respectively, reflect specific questions posed to the interviewees in order to collect data applicable to research questions four and five. These two themes are unique in the intentional insertion of interview questions targeting data regarding these themes, but the relevant data were intertwined throughout the interviews; they were not contained in single question responses.

In an effort to organize the findings by theme, categories and subcategories were identified within each theme. The intention of this organization was to present a narrative about one group of academically high-achieving collegiate women's experiences with perfectionism and PSP while creating room for the emergent nature of the role of effortlessness. Critically, despite the categorization contained in this chapter, limiting the research findings to a single category and/or subcategories is impossible. There are numerous instances where the data overlap into multiple categories, and, thus, the data should not be viewed as independent from one another. For example, research

question four, which is concerned with identifying the environmental factors contributing to perfectionistic self-presentation and effortlessness, relates primarily to the fourth theme, environmental factors. As organized in this chapter, the environmental factors theme includes data pertaining to academic and social experiences of the interviewees at both the secondary and postsecondary levels. Data regarding the first and second themes, expectations for self and expectations for others, are also related, however, as these themes encompass interviewees' experiences as part of familial and social networks and, thus, their environment. The interconnectedness of the data illustrates not only its applicability across categories, but reveals the complexity of the human narrative behind the data.

Throughout the review of the interview data, there are multiple instances where women refer to striving for perfectionism, but never used the terms "effortless perfection," "perfectionistic self-presentation," or "effortless perfectionistic self-presentation." While the interviewees' choices of words were not surprising given the prevalence of the word "perfectionism" in the daily lexicon and the absence of "effortless perfection," "perfectionistic self-presentation," or "effortless perfectionistic self-presentation," this distinction of terms is significant for the establishment of conclusions contained in Chapter 5. As described by the women in Duke University's campus climate study, the interviewees in this research were also describing "perfectionism" as it is understood in popular media (Marklein, 2003; Quindlen, 2003; Rimer, 2003; Sachs, 2008). I began this study with a similar understanding of perfectionism, until a review of the academic literature regarding perfectionism, perfectionistic self-presentation, and effortlessness resulted in an awareness of the distinction between trait perfectionism and

perfectionistic self-presentation (PSP), as was outlined in chapter 2. These women's narratives reveal the salience of perfectionism as a general concept in these women's lives.

In the 20 interviews conducted with the participants regarding their academic lives at Southland University, 18 women revealed that they held at least some perfectionistic expectations for themselves. Throughout the interviews, women spoke about specific components of effortless perfection, as defined by Duke University, when discussing their experiences, although no one interviewed used the actual term "effortless perfection" (Roth, 2003, p. 12). Only two women indicated that they did not possess an internal drive for perfection. Given my research interest in effortless perfection, defined separately from perfection, I distinguished between the data referring to perfection and the data referring to effortlessness in the discussion of expectations of self. My intention for making effortlessness a separate theme was to make clear the distinction between women who exhibited perfectionism and women who exhibited both perfectionism and effortlessness in their behavior.

Asking women how they defined standards for themselves was helpful in identifying their priorities, including goals related to the achievement of perfectionistic ideals. More specific questions about the interviewees' academic goals, perceptions of "good" and "bad" grades, and the importance of such grades provided information about the interviewees' striving for academic perfection and effortless perfection. Additional questions about how the interviewees defined failure and reacted to failure, as well as inquiries about the interviewees' non-academic goals, created an understanding of the interviewees' perceptions of the pressures for perfectionism and effortless perfection

beyond academe. The intention was for the data to provide a cumulative effect, illustrating the whole created by the pieces of the interviewees' lives, while allowing for an examination of specifics pertinent to the current research undertaking.

When asked if anyone expected perfectionism from them, the majority of women in the interview population responded that the expectation for perfection was theirs alone (13 people). Nina, with high PSP and high willingness to disclose effort, said, "I would say that it's one of those situations where because I demand it of myself first, no one else can, sort of. And so I just kind of, like, beat them to the punch, I suppose." Lin, with high levels of PSP and a low willingness to disclose her effort, agreed that she demanded perfection of herself more so than anyone, commenting, "I can't imagine anybody else really cares." Most responded with some form of, "Me. It's all me." The remaining seven women fell into one of the four following categories: family member(s) joined them in expecting perfection from themselves (four people); professors joined them in expecting perfection from themselves (one person); they did not expect perfection of themselves, but their family members did (one person); or they did not experience internal or external pressures for perfectionism (one person). In summary, in looking at the interviewee group as a whole, there was no apparent relationship between quadrant placement and the locus of pressures for perfectionism.

It is important to note that the two women reporting no internal drive for perfectionism were similar in that they shared low PSP survey scores. While one woman's effort scores were considered high and the other's low, the relevancy of one's effort disclosure level appeared to be moot when an internal pressure for perfection was lacking. Specifically, if one is not concerned with perfectionistic self-presentation or

perfection, her decision to conceal or not conceal her effort does not immediately appear related to her self-reported levels of perfection or perfectionistic self-presentation. This lack of relationship, while existent only in an *n* of two, is significant because it serves as a reminder that only two women in a twenty-member population reported not feeling an internal drive for perfection.

Academic Comparison and Competition

The subthemes of competition and comparison were interwoven in the women's discussion of the academic standards and goals they set for themselves, including whether they felt pressures for perfectionism and PSP. In identifying how they set their academic goals, students referred to grades, effort exerted, personal satisfaction, or learning as the standards for assessing academic goal achievement. Academic grades were the most referenced litmus test of academic performance for interviewees, most likely because of the participants' experience with grading since their elementary school years. The interviewees' views on grades illustrated both the value many students assigned to their grades and the use of grades by some as a measure of assessing perfection. Ten of the women interviewed (eight from the high PSP, low effort expression quadrant; one from the high PSP, high effort expression quadrant; and one from the low PSP, high effort expression quadrant) made multiple references to the achievements of others to in relaying how they set their own standards of academic achievement.

High PSP and low willingness to display effort.

Women in this quadrant offered a range of perspectives in weighting the importance of grades in their rubric of internal standards as well as their comparisons to their peers. Bess revealed a single-minded focus on her marks:

> I want "As". That's pretty much non-negotiable in my mind…If I don't get an "A," I feel like it was a fault of my, like, not seeing something I should have….And I get mad when there isn't a reason behind not getting the "A."

She continued, "I recognize sometimes when I do not deserve said "A," but that does not mean I didn't want it or I am not just mad that I got — that I didn't get it." Two other interviewees joined Bess in her specificity when asked about their academic goals. Anita indicated that she was aiming for "a 3.5 grade point average or higher." Eve desired to "get as close to a 4.0 grade point average as possible" while also "feel[ing] like I've learned something and can apply it to outside situations."

A noticeable pattern within this quadrant was the frequency with which women compared themselves to others in making self-evaluations about their own school work. The women who engaged in competition seemed to have a high level of concern with the public display of perfection and not necessarily effortlessness in that display. Eve was influenced by her roommates' grades in assessing her accomplishments. She said:

> I always want to do the work and be able to answer the questions in class and I think a lot of it has to do with how everybody else is doing. If my roommates are, like, "I have an "A," [or an] "A" minus in this class," I'm like, "Ohhhhh." Like, I don't want to be the dumb girl."

Comparison to the accomplishments of her classmates was integral to the nature of Maria's architecture curriculum; she could hardly avoid public comparisons of her academic work with that of her classmates. Of her classwork, she explained:

> Since it's visual, everything you do is always on display to other people and when you have a good or a bad review everybody knows. So there is no, you know, "I'm going to suck on this paper, no one will know what this grade is, I can make up for it later." You're constantly on display…They know how hard you're working, they know how – they look at your work and they have a visual, they have a physical comparison to everybody else…Which I think is a good and a bad thing. I mean, it pushes people but then it's also something that can, you know, it can be very stressful.

Even though her coursework did not include the public display of Maria's classes, Anita disclosed an inner tendency to compare her work to her peers and even those younger in age than her. "I'm very observational about what other people of my own age are doing and maybe even some people that are younger than me. Which is even worse because you're like, 'Oh my gosh. You're younger and you're doing more.' " Helen summed up the sentiments of the women when she said, "throughout my life I have been at the top of whatever I've been involved in…but I do measure myself against others and try to be the best among my peers."

Several of the women revealed perspectives on grades that had evolved throughout their college careers, citing a desire for their own happiness or a broadening worldview as the reason behind their changes in perspective. Eve said that with regard to grades, "compared to how I used to be, I don't beat myself up about it because I'm like,

'Oh, that's just one grade. There's so much more to it.' " In college, Eve felt, "it's more about yourself and your own self-evaluation, I guess. And I just don't feel as much pressure…it's not as rigorous as the whole academic, getting-into-college process." Maeve expressed related sentiments about wanting to put less emphasis on grades: "enjoy[ing] myself as much as I [can] while still maintaining my own personal standards," but also said "I take a lot of pride in my GPA and my grades. And they are definitely very important." Lin and Maria agreed. Stated Maria, "now I could care less [about my grades]," although she admitted that if she had been asked the same question last year, she "would have said the exact opposite." What seemed most gratifying for Maria was "know[ing] that faculty are confident" in her portfolio.

Meanwhile, Anita was one of two women who said her grades had become "increasingly important" since enrolling at SU.

> I still had my parents' standard of "As" and "Bs" when I first came in my freshman year… but by my junior year; it was definitely I wanted an "A." In everything. And that's a combination of being in your major and you want a high major grade but also I just wanted it for pride.

Her senior year, Anita said:

> Not only did I want an "A," but I wanted to feel that I took something away from that class: whether it was having built a relationship with a professor or having really invested myself in the material. And it felt like it was an "A" well-earned because I had a couple of courses that I discovered it wasn't going to take as much work to get an "A" and it wasn't as fulfilling and even though I still have the "A," I don't even look at it very fondly.

Anita was unique in her aspiration to a level of accomplishment beyond "A" grades; she wanted an accompanying relationship with her professor and/or the knowledge that she had some take-away knowledge from her course. Perfect grades were not enough to satisfy her.

High PSP and high willingness to display effort.

There were shared characteristics between the three women in the high PSP and high willingness to display effort quadrant with the 10 women from the high PSP and low willingness to display their effort, especially with regard to the changing importance of grades in these women's lives. Nina vowed to "never discuss grades with anyone." She based her standards on "how I've done before or what I would consider good for myself and I try not to compare to others—especially at a school like SU, where everyone is the smartest person in the world." Hannah also mentioned others' accomplishments as "push[ing] me a little bit harder I think to do more and try and be the best that I can and be on the same level with my peers." However, Hannah acknowledged a metamorphosis in balancing her desire for good grades with her desire to enjoy herself:

> [Grades are] less important now that I'm done...It took me a while to get there…They were very, very important to me, at least – especially the first two years of college. I think if I wanted to go to graduate school, then maybe I would have more pressure still on me but my grades haven't fallen, even though I have stopped putting as much pressure on myself, which is a good thing…I just wish that I had realized that before. Had a little more fun.

Upcoming graduation ceremonies provided an opportunity to consider the world beyond the SU classroom for the remaining two women in Hannah's quadrant. With her

graduation date nearing, Nina deemed grades of "almost no importance" because "in the real world, you don't get graded.' " Nina said, "If I get a bad grade it's just kind of like, 'Oh, I didn't do well in that.' Not, 'I've lost my worth as a human being,' which is just kind of how I used to be." Daphne was the final member of Yvonne and Hannah's quadrant. Daphne said, "they're not something that really worries me I don't think…You don't know them until you check them at end of semester…They're just letters that show up. They're not very important."

Low PSP and high willingness to display effort.

For the four women in the low PSP and high willingness to display effort quadrant, pressures for academic perfection, both internal and external, were noted. While she described herself as not "really worry[ing] about what everyone else is doing," Crystal admitted "at the same time I wouldn't want to be the person getting the lowest grade, either….If I got a "C," but everyone else is getting a "C," too, then it was a good grade as far as I was concerned." While Anna's survey scores also indicated a lower concern for perfectionistic self-presentation than 13 of the other interviewees, her interview responses indicated, at minimum, a concern for the act of perfection and its achievement. She stated the even if she earned a grade of "A," she would ask herself, "is it really your personal best or just good enough to get an "A?"" If Anna did not deem the "A" her personal best, she would try to be more creative and work harder; she wanted to earn her "A" in a new and unique way. This behavior was very similar to the sentiments Anita described in her desire for achievement beyond perfect grades, including a worthwhile connection with a faculty member or tangible evidence of her learning.

Jillian also indicated that her criteria for evaluating her academic performance post high school had changed, becoming "a lot more relative." She elaborated:,

> Back when it was possible, excellence was perfection. Like, "Did I get that perfect grade on that test or whatever?" When that ceased being realistic, maybe with AP [Advanced Placement] classes in high school…part of my standard was "Did I have the highest grade in the class?"

Jillian elaborated:

> I sort of defined myself by my academic performance up through high school, and in college I decided that wasn't a viable method of defining your person any more, especially in a place like this where everybody is used to that from back home, wherever they came from. They're all the sort of people that were the smart kids…So grades are something that I want to make sure that they're where I want them to be, but I'm not upset if I don't have a 98 anymore.

Since the difference between a perfect grade and the best grade in the class is likely extremely minute, the paradigm shift Jillian purported to experience was likely less dramatic than what her comments first suggested. The phenomenon of social comparison and academic achievement will be discussed in chapter five.

Other students also seemed to recognize that a provincial focus on grades was perhaps not the healthiest for them, but also seemed reluctant to relinquish that focus in practice. Anna said that while she felt like she was "calm enough" to view a grade of a "B" as "well, it happened, I'm not going to worry too much about it," she also indicated that she was "very aware of needing to be really excellent." She relayed:

Yes, I think grades matter. They matter more when I start to look at the

scholarships [Marshall, Truman, Rhodes] that I want to apply to and I say, "Oh,

my God. Who am I competing against?"

When the final woman in this quadrant was asked about the significance of grades, Selma

remarked, "sadly, they're pretty important." Selma shared more, "And I wish I didn't care

so much, but I do….Because I just feel like sometimes, I get wrapped up in the grade."

Selma did share her college career had brought her relationships that were more

supportive than the relationships she had "with high-achieving women in high school."

She attributed the difference to the dispersion of her friends' academic interests. In

essence, it was harder to be competitive with people she knew whose programs of study

were so different than hers.

Low PSP and low willingness to display effort.

The three interviewees with low levels of PSP were the least likely to use perfect

grades as a standard of self evaluation, independent of their survey responses pertaining

to their concern with effortlessness. Several women cited the effort they exerted, i.e.

whether they "put a hundred percent into something," as the basis of their preferred

method of academic evaluation. Vivian explained:

I set my standards by how much effort I put in and whether or not I felt I got the

grade I deserve…And, usually, if I got a pretty bad grade, and yet—if I knew I

didn't put any effort in it I would feel pretty bad about that. But if I tried my

hardest, and I only got, like, a "B" or something I wouldn't care as much.

Yvonne was the interviewee with perhaps the least stringent grade criteria, the

only woman who identified securing happiness as her standard for achievement. While

she observed people at SU defining achievement "in terms of marks, or scores, or quantitative measures, or resume, CV, how many activities, how much research, how many good jobs, GPA," she did not see that in herself. She said, "Since I'm not a perfectionist, even though I do work hard [perfection for me] doesn't really come from the quantitative. It's more the qualitative, so as long as I'm happy, I'm okay with that." She elaborated:

> I definitely got the poorest of my grades sophomore year. I was taking too many classes. I think they were too difficult at the time, but I didn't really feel bad about it. I was disappointed. I was like, "That sucks. That's bringing my GPA down. I probably could've worked harder, but I'm all right." So it wasn't really anything that bothered me too, too much.

While Yvonne's view on earning As differed from that of many of the other women interviewed, she also had experience earning them. She said,

> I like to do well. I like to think that if I'm here learning things I might as well learn them the best I can and be the best that I can… and I obviously don't have perfect grades, it's not too big of a deal if that's the case.

> When asked specifically about competition with her peers, and external pressures for achievement and perfection from her peers, Yvonne revealed:

> I don't necessarily feel in competition and I don't like being competitive, but I don't think my friends really feel that way either because then you don't want to hang out with each other. You like each other for a reason and you don't really want to out-compete each other. You'd rather be happy for each other. Also, I

would much rather be in the presence of people who are intelligent even if they're

doing better than me than people who I feel are idiots or have lower values.

Summary

Existing literature had not explored the connection between women's concern for

their grades and their levels of effortlessness until the Duke University findings hinted at

a connection between academic achievement and pressures for effortless perfection

(Roth, 2003). The data from this research project offered a sense of the interviewees'

concern with achieving academic perfection and/or portraying an image of academic

perfection. These data also highlighted the existence of internal and external pressures for

perfectionism and achievement, particularly themes of competition and comparison to

internal standards and peer performance. Ten of the women interviewed (eight from the

high PSP, low effort expression quadrant; one from the high PSP, high effort expression

quadrant; and one from the low PSP, high effort expression quadrant) made multiple

references to the achievements of others in relaying how they set their own standards of

academic achievement. In summary, 15 interviewees attached importance to high marks,

specifically "As." Learning, effort exerted, and personal satisfaction were also cited as

benchmarks for achievement.

Women from the quadrant high in perfectionistic self-presentation and low in

willingness to display effort were most likely to equate perfect grades with academic

success and engage in comparison with peers, indicating significant or increased concern

for their academic achievement (five women from this quadrant and two women from the

quadrant low in PSP and high in their willingness to display effort). Two women from

the high PSP and low willingness to display effort quadrant, and one woman from the

low PSP and high willingness to display effort quadrant, revealed that their grades and how they compared to others had increased in importance over time. Upon their matriculation to Southland University, these increases had moved from high levels to even higher ones. Meanwhile, five women indicated that their grades and those of others mattered less to them than in the past and three women indicated that they no longer considered grades to be of much importance in their lives (three women from the high PSP, low willingness to display effort quadrant; two from the low PSP and high willingness to display effort quadrant; and all three women from the low PSP and low willingness to display effort quadrant). Of course, when considering these data, it is important to remember their context given Southland University's competitive admissions process and the presence of these women on the Dean's List for a minimum of two simultaneous semesters. While the SU college experience lessened their reliance on grades as a measure of their academic achievement, undoubtedly their academic standards remained high.

Perception of Failure

The interviewees' definitions of failure also provided insight into the students' formulation of their academic expectations and goals, another means of ascertaining how the women interviewed experienced pressures for perfectionism, perfectionistic self-presentation, and effortless perfection. The potential for those concerned with perfectionistic self-presentation (PSP) and effortlessness to have extreme reactions to failure seemed likely, because by definition, failure is the antithesis of perfectionism and effortless perfectionism. The interviewees' concern with failure at times provided seemingly contradictory viewpoints, as their comments about failure did not always align

with their previous statements about the importance of grades and expectations for self. The nature and potential reason for these inconsistencies are explored in this section of chapter four. Overwhelmingly, the students linked failure with not meeting their own expectations, including not trying hard enough, not structuring time well enough, not taking advantage of an opportunity, or not caring.

High PSP and Low Willingness to Display Effort

The language the interviewees used to describe failure revealed how personally these women perceived their failures. For example, in discussing her withdrawal from a French class, Bess deemed that action a "failure," because she "abandoned French." Bess described her reaction to failure as "a will to very strongly counteract that and overcome it. I dislike walking away from it. I want to make it stop." Other interviewees also had intensely emotional reactions in thinking that they might have failed and disappointed not only themselves, but others. Contemplating failure, which included grades that were lower than her expectations, made Eve feel "horrible…just absolutely horrible. I feel like I've disappointed myself; I've disappointed my family; I disappointed my friends. I'm not going to go anywhere. It's a very debilitating feeling to feel like a failure." Kylie and Anita also described how demoralizing failure was. Anita shared,

> I have a tendency to replay what has failed over and over in my mind. For almost 36 hours…And just going over, "What did I do?" "What did I say?" "How could it have gone differently?"… "How did I prepare vs. not prepare," etc. It's like a broken record until I get over it.

Four women viewed failure in more relative terms than Kylie, Anita, Eve, and Bess, connecting failure to individual abilities. Celeste explained,

I guess if I got a "C," that would be failing because I can do better than that…But

my little cousin has a lot of trouble with school, so a "C" is great for him…So I

think that it's your own personal ability. I also think settling is failing…my friend

is afraid to move away after graduation, so she's just going to stay here, and I

guess if that's what she wants, then that's not failing, but that's not what she wants.

I think she's just settling…So I think that's failing.

Lin and Maria were the two women from this quadrant who were perhaps the most

accepting of their failures, conceiving of failure as "minor little things that you could

rationalize to yourself and get over."

Overall, the ten women in this quadrant varied in their definitions and reactions to

failure, but their perspectives can be divided into three categories. Four women

characterized their reactions to failure as very negatively and emotionally charged. Still

four other women from this quadrant saw failure as in relative terms when compared to

their own abilities and the effort they exerted to achieve a thwarted academic goal.

Finally, two women from this quadrant emerged as the quadrant's most accepting and

least affected by failure; they did not view failure as intensely as the other eight women

in the quadrant.

High PSP and High Willingness to Display Effort

Women in this quadrant described a range of responses to failure, similar to that

of the women whose survey scores placed them in the high PSP, low display of effort

quadrant. Nina took steps to distinguish between a "huge failure," which she equated to

"flunk[ing] out or blow[ing] up your house or something," and "generic failure," such as

"not getting the things done that you wanted to." Nina acknowledged, this "is a very

unfortunate definition because [failure] happens so often." Nina also indicated agonizing

over failure, up to two weeks after the failure occurred. Hannah defined failure as not

doing her best, but Daphne's view of failure was the broadest perspective of the views

offered by the other women in this quadrant.

> Any situation is what you make of it. So if I did fail, it'd be my fault…there's
>
> probably a reason for that. And that ultimately life still goes on a pathway that
>
> you can make the best of and I say this on my bad days, too….And so it's a failure
>
> to not make the most of what you have.

The reactions of the four women in this quadrant are categorized very similarly to

the reaction of the women from the HPLE quadrant. Two women perceived failure as a

very negative personal reflection on them, while one woman viewed failure less

intensely, assessing failure based on the effort she exerted and her abilities. The

remaining woman in this quadrant was the least inclined to take failure personally; she

did not dwell on it, but instead focused on moving forward with her life.

Low PSP and High Willingness to Display Effort

Again, women in this quadrant shared similarities with women from other

quadrants in offering diverse views of the meaning of failure. Immediately apparent was

the emotional reactions of women in this quadrant to failure, which included feelings of

frustration, disappointment, and anger. Selma described feeling mad and bringing up the

failure repeatedly. Anna said she felt guilty when she failed and described herself as

"really apologetic to [the point] where people usually [say], "Anna, just shut up and don't

do it again." Anna also described:

anxiety in wanting to do better the next time. The anxiety of trying to stay in strong association with whatever that task is until I get a chance to sort of do it right and then usually the next time, I'll probably overcompensate a little bit… It's also a show of good faith that you can put your trust in me again.

For Crystal, failure was equated with disappointment, but something she could "get past," while Jillian's conception of failure related to personal goals and fulfillment. She said, "I'm not sure I know enough about failure to really define it. Not that I haven't failed, but I don't think I've failed conventionally." Jillian explained,

For me, I think failure is mostly defined by what your fulfillment level is.…I wouldn't say I've failed academically at all, but I haven't succeeded the way I wanted because I'm not very fulfilled by it, which is why if I were to do it again, I'd do it over [differently].

Despite lacking personal satisfaction from her SU academic experience, Jillian was able to demonstrate a big-picture perspective of her college experience. Acknowledging her dissatisfaction in her academic major, "doesn't mean it was a waste of time, which is what it feels like a lot, and I'm trying to take a different perspective—actively trying." These efforts to look beyond her initial dissatisfaction set Jillian apart from the other women in her quadrant. In summation, with regarding to perspective on failure, this quadrant is stratified into three layers: two women who have extreme emotional reactions to failure; one who views failure in relative terms; and a remaining woman who believes that while she has not failed academically, she has not found success because she has not been fulfilled academically.

Low PSP and Low Willingness to Display Effort

The three women in this quadrant all characterized failure differently from one another, but similarly to the descriptions of failure offered by women in other quadrants. In addition to personal, emotional reactions to failure, like the frustration and disappointment described by Alicia, and the repeated reliving of the failure reported by Vivian, Yvonne viewed failure in relative terms, dependent on one's abilities. For Yvonne being a failure was viewed relatively, similar to Celeste's perspective:

> People have different aptitudes and different preferences for things, so they may not have wanted to do the academic thing after a while. Maybe they wanted to go to Europe and hang around. It's really – anything anyone is doing is fine to me; they're not failing. As long as you're doing something…I pretty much imagine someone being a failure if they live in their parents' basement and smoke weed all day. That would be, to me, failure, but if you're pretty much doing anything; I don't have any place to say that they're failing…Even if they just have a job, it's like they're working. They might not know what they want to do yet, so that's okay. Basically, not doing anything is failure.

This reframing of failure allowed Yvonne to say that she didn't feel she had ever failed, but she cringed at admitting that detail. "That sounds kind of bad…I've definitely made mistakes…I don't know if I can remember exactly what I've done, but not failed."

Summary

Overall, six of the interviewees discussed trying to move on after their perceived failure, trying "to learn from it" and work harder, while six women emerged as the most accepting of failure, moving on from it quickly or ascribing it no power. A far larger

number of interviewees described reactions to failure that were intensely personal and extremely emotional. Eight of those women also disclosed replaying the failure over and over again, while others connected feelings of failure with a decrease in feelings of self-worth. Bess, Eve, Kylie, and Anita, all with high PSP and a low willingness to disclose their effort, had some of the most visceral reactions in the interview population to thoughts of failure. Given that the definition of perfectionism is flawlessness and failure for many of the interviewees indicated the presence of flaws, the extreme reactions to those flaws by some respondents seem to reveal their ownership of preexisting perfectionistic ideals. Anna, Vivian, and Nina, each from three separate quadrants, also had intense descriptions of feelings of failure, indicating that while high perfectionistic self-presentation and low willingness to disclose effort women had the highest incidences of feeling failure intensely and personally, those women in other quadrants were not immune to failure's intensity. Lin, Maria, and Celeste, all with high PSP and a low willingness to display their effort, as well as Daphne (high PSP and high willingness to disclose effort) and Yvonne (low PSP and low willingness to disclose effort) indicated that their feelings of failure were relative: dependent on take-away lessons, one's abilities, and/or one's goals. Again, those women with high PSP were not necessarily the ones with the most rigid definitions of failure or with the lowest level of acceptance of deviance from an ideal.

Expectations by and for others

The third recurring theme present throughout the interviews was the expectations of others (family members, professors, etc.) in influencing the participants' academic goals and expectations, particularly striving for perfect "A" grades. Parents were the

most frequently referenced external influence on the academic and personal goals of the interviewees. Interviewees' expectations for others, including their parents and peers, was also a repeated subtheme included within this theme.

Expectations Involving Others: Familial Expectations

Of the parents who held academic expectations for their daughters, some were particularly strict. Many interviewees indicated that they felt pressures from their parents to achieve at the highest academic levels, whether parents articulated those expectations or not. For some interviewees, family members took on the role of tempering their student's high self expectations, in an effort to relax and reassure their daughter rather than increase the pressure she experienced.

High PSP and low willingness to display effort.

For several participants, the expectations to achieve academically came not from any overt parental pressure to achieve, but rather from the existence of their family members' high academic accomplishments, which gave them an awareness of their own academic performance. Bess shared the following about her father:

My dad is very big academically. He skipped three grades as a child. He has a Masters from Oxford and a law degree from the University of Michigan. So he, like, is certainly very smart and, like, I guess I see it as a personal competition kind of to, like, keep up with that.

For Anita, the academic expectations she held for herself were influenced by her older sister as well as her parents. Anita also described the achievements of her parents and sister as translating into implicit expectation for her own success; the presence of these achievements served as a motivating force as Anita pursued her own academic accolades:

My older sister attended Southland University 10 years before me…And did very well…and sort of set the example for what was successful in the family. I was the second child after her. My dad was an MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology] grad, so I grew up just with education and perseverance in schooling being very important. And my mother was very English-focused. So on both sides, with math and English, it was just "You should be striving for your best," and there were high standards with regards to papers and high standards with regards to grades in general. Even though it was never very strict, the implication was that if you had anything less than a "B," "You're in trouble."

Maeve also came from a family of high-achieving academics, which had a similar effect in motivating Maeve to be academically oriented and focused on academic achievements:

I am a third-generation college student…And I am the first to not go to an Ivy League school, so that, I think, is a big influence for me…my younger brother goes to an Ivy school…And so it was never a question, "Will you go to college?" Or "What are you going to do?" It was, "Okay, where are you going to go to college?" "What are you going to study?" and "What are you going to do with that?" because both my parents are physicians and so on the one hand, it's a really incredibly positive influence, and I know how lucky I was to have this –sort of– but it was just assumed that I would go to college.

The accomplishments of her family meant:

 a lot of pressure…There's a lot to live up to…And I – I'm really close with my family…And so I always wanted to do really well so that they would be proud of

me. And of course they're always proud of me...when I didn't decide to go to an Ivy League school…I chose to go to Southland University...And I think I thought they were more…they would be more disappointed than they actually were. I didn't think they had a problem with it at all but I thought they were going to…I had to prepare – I anticipated a problem and was absolutely prepared, but no problems. But I always felt like I had a lot to live up to which is good. It was a motivating force for me in a lot of ways.

Several participants explained that their parents held expectations for high academic achievements in the earlier stages of their lives, but had lessened those expectations as they aged, most often because their daughters were meeting and exceeding those expectations. The women had adopted their parents' expectations for success and, oftentimes, increased the intensity of the expectations in making them their own. Lin described her adoption of her mother's expectations in this way:

She's very much the stereotypical, like, "get very good grades," like, "they matter a lot," always stressing to do very well in school….my mom was very into stressing that education was important. And then, as I got older, I think it was partly because, like, I had built trust in my parents also because my mom was, like, "Oh. My daughter's fine. She's crazy on her own. Like, she has enough personal drive," so, like, so it, kind of, switched to a role where my parents were like, "Okay. Calm down," like, "It doesn't matter if you get a 4.0 in high school." Like, "Calm down. You can go out. You can do all this other stuff."

Lin continued,

And now, my mom just thinks I'm crazy. Like, I remember in high school, if I

was doing an all-nighter for a paper, she'd be like "Go to bed. Why can't you turn

it in late?" And I'm like, "No. I can't."

One interviewee indicated that her parents told them that some academic

achievements were too hard to obtain. Celeste described her mother's motivations:

I think she always did reverse psychology because she would be, like, "It's too

hard. Just quit. Just don't do it." And I would be, like, "Whatever." So I think

that was a lot of reverse psychology, but it really worked.

Maria was the one student from this quadrant who said that while her parents still have

high expectations for her, those expectations were not what motivated her to do well

academically. She said, "I've figured out what I want. And what they want is important

but I don't follow that. Because I'm old enough to figure that out myself."

High PSP and High Willingness to Display Effort

None of the three women in this quadrant indicated that anyone demanded

perfection for them other than themselves. This lack of external pressure was noted in

more detail under the discussion of the first theme, competition and comparison.

Low PSP and high willingness to display effort.

The experiences of these four women were varied with regard to familial pressure

for academic achievement. The messages Crystal, a first-generation college student,

received about the expectations for her academic work from her family were mixed.

While Crystal's mother demanded "A's", she also told her daughter "just to try and get

through it and try to be the best that I can be….to keep up the work, don't let it get me

down." Jillian's parents also had high expectations for their daughter, which she explained:

> My parents have always just sort of expected academic success and I didn't really get a lot of praise for academic success, which was basically all I had. But then if something went wrong, there was a lot of criticism….My parents had both done well in school and are well-educated and it was just sort of something that my sister and I were expected to do, and if we needed help, then they gave us help, but…it's mostly just been expected – they just expected it.

Still other interviewees from this quadrant indicated that their family members, especially their parents, encouraged them to relax and take comfort in making their best academic effort, regardless of grades. Selma reported having parents who instructed her not to work too hard:

> They're actually the ones who are telling me that I need to take it easy and not get so stressed because I think that they, especially during exam periods, they just hear how stressed out I am, and they're, like… "it's not the end of the world."

Finally, although Anna's father demanded perfection from her, her mother's behavior was similar to that of Celeste's mother's, encouraging her daughter not to pursue her most academically taxing goals. Anna recalled her mother's response to her announcement, in the fifth grade, that she wanted to be a veterinarian:

> She said, "Well, your grades are good, but getting into vet school is really hard and you're going to have to get a lot of "As." You're going to have to get straight "As" if you're going to do that," and I would just look at her and be like, "Are you telling me I can't do this? What the – no, no, there's no saying 'no' to me

right now. People are telling their kids they can be president and you're saying,

'You can be president but not a vet.' Whatever.'"

For Anna, her mother's attempt to mollify the stress of constantly striving for perfect

grades combined with her father's desire for perfection, made Anna "step my game up a

little bit and really strive to do more and do better."

Low PSP and low willingness to display effort.

While there were only three women located in this quadrant, the women were

united in describing supportive family environments that did not include a heightened

focus on academic accomplishments. The connection between familial support and low

perfectionistic self-presentation is explored in Chapter 5. Vivian's parents simply

encouraged her to "do what you want to do, and make sure you do it really well," while

Yvonne's family was less directive. Alicia, whose mother was one of 12 children from a

farm family, worked her way up to success at the World Bank. Unlike any of the other

interviewees with high-achieving parents, Alicia's mother served as both a motivator and

supporter of her academic choices, regardless of her grades. Alicia elaborated:

Sometimes, it's a little intimidating because she just kind of was, in my mind,

really extraordinary for what she is able to do. But my family has always been

very supportive…And they don't really – my mom is kind of funny because even

though she was so smart and always did great things, she's not really big on

grades and she really supports my choice to be an artist… And so it's just kind of

an example of I should really try to be something and strive to be something – to

achieve something great…At the same time, it sounds like a lot of pressure… It's

both things at the same time.

Summary.

In summation, patterns across quadrants with regard to familial pressures were not obviously apparent. Women from all four quadrants, but the quadrant of those with high PSP and a high willingness to disclose effort, experienced both direct and indirect academic pressure from academically high-achieving parents and siblings. The three women in the high PSP, high willingness to disclose effort quadrant did not reveal that their motivation for academic excellence or perfection originated in anyone other than themselves. The most dominant pattern was among the eleven interviewees indicating their parents pushed them to perform at high academic levels, as all but two were from the quadrant with high PSP and low willingness to display effort scores. However, some of those who were not pushed also exhibited high PSP while some of those who were pushed exhibited low PSP. Another obvious pattern was that none of the three women in the low PSP, low willingness and none of to display effort quadrant reported direct, explicit pressure to achieve academic perfection from their family members, although one woman in that quadrant reported indirect pressure stemming from her mother's successes. With their low PSP scores, these women were not highly sensitized to striving for perfection. Furthermore, it is important to note that some women from the high PSP, low willingness to display effort and low PSP, high willingness to display effort quadrants also had parents that did not push for academic perfection. Finally, the high PSP, high willingness to display effort quadrant did not include any women who experienced external pressures for perfection; all three of these women reported internal pressures for perfectionism. These patterns seem to indicate a direct relationship between low PSP and effort scores with low pressure for perfectionism, while high PSP and low willingness to

display effort scores seem most likely to indicate pressure for perfectionism, although the data does not reveal if the pressures for academic perfection are more likely to be external or internal.

Professors' Expectations

Not everyone interviewed mentioned the role of academic faculty members in defining their academic and personal goals. However, six of the 20 interviewees deemed at least one of their Southland University professors as influential in defining their academic goal setting, which including striving for perfectionism and effortless perfection. These six women came from the high PSP and low willingness to display effort quadrant (four people) as well as the high PSP and high willingness to disclose effort quadrant (two people). Given my desire to understand environmental forces in the lives of the interviewees and increase the collective understanding of perfectionism and effortless perfection, these data are worth exploring. This information provides a more comprehensive look at the external forces shaping the interviewees' academic and personal goal setting than a discussion of familial expectations alone allows.

High PSP and low willingness to display effort.

Maria was one of four students from this quadrant with a professor whose high academic expectations motivated her to push herself academically. She recalled the first day of her design 101 class:

> The professor said, "No one is an "A" designer, so don't expect an "A." " So obviously, that became what you reach for…Even though it already was, but it was like another person telling you, you can't…And you go out and look out for that…

For Maria, her design professor's admonishments worked as motivators similar to the academic expectations of Celeste and Anna's mothers. Maria reported that her drive and confidence to achieve academically were further reinforced by comments from her professors that she had really "stepped it [her academic drive] up." As a result of this feedback, Maria expressed feeling increasingly comfortable in enrolling in high-level courses and pursuing leadership roles.

Eve relayed feeling less pressure at Southland than at her high school to achieve high marks. She said, at SU, "Even the teachers don't put as big an emphasis on grades." When it came to faculty interaction, Maeve emphasized wanting to be viewed as "an intelligent person" by her professors. In the classroom, Maeve conveyed her awareness of the remarks of her peers and often asked herself, "Why didn't I think of that?' " Maeve was clearly motivated by the desire to impress her professors, particularly with the quality of her comments in class discussions.

Celeste shared an experience with a professor in her freshman year that ultimately affected her entire approach to learning and striving in classes throughout her SU career. After enjoying straight "As" in high school, Celeste was "very frustrated" with her poor grades in general chemistry. Her chemistry professor responded to her request for help by saying:" You have to learn to learn."

> And I was, like, "Ha, yeah, this is what he thinks helps?" So, I mean, I left his office feeling, like, "Okay. I'm just retarded. I don't know what that means." But I guess really from that, I did kind of; I sat down. I was, like, "Alright. I know how to do this. I can teach myself this." So I ended up getting a "B" minus for

this semester, which isn't a bad grade, but it was significant to pull my grade up the way I did and I studied for the final. I got an "A" on the final.

Celeste went on to say:

So I think that that was the turning point…the "Let's grow up, and if you don't understand it, teach yourself" [approach], which is I think, maybe that experience has made my other classes easier because if I don't understand it, then I look for…I figure out a way to make myself [understand the material].

For Celeste, her chemistry professor's direction went beyond motivating her to impress him and beyond obtaining "A" grades; his words inspired her to persevere in difficult classes and accept an increased amount of responsibility in learning to achieve the grades she desired.

High PSP and high willingness to display effort.

Similar to the women who reported influence from the professoriate in the high PSP and low willingness to display effort quadrant, the two women in the high PSP and high willingness to display effort quadrant who reported influential professors were not uniform in describing faculty influence on their lives. Hannah remarked, "even though Southland is a very demanding environment to be in, my professors are always supportive of me. I don't feel like they're ever demanding perfection." On the contrary, Nina felt that her professors demanded perfection from her, "but always in a very constructive way." She elaborated:

I had a fantastic thesis advisor who a couple of weeks before I turned it in, he looked at my stuff. I was maybe 10 pages shy of the minimum page count. We had to produce 80 to 120 pages. And he was just like, "Okay, this is good, but I

don't want you to just hit the minimum. I really want you to keep writing until you cannot possibly write anymore." And I thought that was actually a really – it was daunting. He kind of looked at me and he was like, "Are you okay?" And I was like "Oh, right, I have to breathe." But it was really great and it made me do better work.

Summary.

Although only referring to an *n* of six, across two quadrants, both of which encompassed high PSP, women reported a diverse number of ways the SU faculty influenced their academic striving. The majority of women with memories of defining interactions with professors (four women) happened to be from the quadrant with high PSP scores and a low willingness to disclose effort, but 50% of the interviewees were from this quadrant so this fact alone is not significant. Most significant is that only one woman from the high PSP and high willingness to display effort quadrant indicated her professors demanded perfection of her, but "in a supportive way." The remaining five women did not directly link the expectations of the SU faculty to perfection or effortless perfection; they did link their expectations to defining and achieving academic success.

Expectations Involving Others: Expectations for Others

The interviewees' expectations for others were also explored throughout the data collection, to ascertain whether women encouraged others to strive for perfection or effortless perfection. While interviewees were willing to say that they "were pretty forgiving of other people" because they knew their "standards are high; women did admit to holding family members (three women) and/or peers (seven women) to high or perfect standards. Women who disclosed projecting perfectionistic expectations onto other

people were more likely to focus on their peers than their families. Since only three women made it known in the interview that they were "very hard" or had been "very hard" in evaluating their family members, their responses are presented together (not by quadrant). The data concerning perfectionistic expectations for family are presented with reference to the interviewees' own perfectionistic standards in order to provide context.

Maria revealed that her parents had expected perfection from her, but that she had learned to figure out what she wanted academically and operate independent of her parents' desires for perfect academic performance. Maria also shared that she remained "very hard" on her family in demanding perfection from them. Anita, who was in the same high PSP, low willingness to disclose effort quadrant as Maria, described an evolution in her expectations for her family:

> I used to demand [perfection] from my family but as I've gotten older, I've just become more human with them, particularly my parents. I had really high expectations for them and as I get older, I realize I'm going to be a parent and there's no manual and it's actually pretty scary.

Anita had also shared in her interview that her parents were very high achieving and expected her to achieve in similar ways academically, but said that her parents did not go as far as to demand perfection of her.

Anna, with low PSP and a high willingness to display her effort, was the final woman who disclosed a history of projecting expectations onto her family. Anna previously indicated that only one of her parents, her father, expected perfection from her. Of her admonitions to her father to adopt a healthy lifestyle to combat his health issues, Anna commented:

I know that's been hard on him and at times I've probably demanded too much. And for the same reasons he demands too much of me, but we love each other. We want each other to succeed and do well.

Of the women who revealed their projection of perfectionistic standards onto other people, peers were by far the most likely recipients of the projection. Six of the 10 women whose survey scores located them in the high PSP and low willingness to display effort quadrant divulged such behavior; the only other woman to project her perfectionistic standards onto others was from the low PSP and low willingness to display effort quadrant. For ease of connection, the data concerning perfectionistic expectations for peers are presented with reference to the interviewees' own perfectionistic standards.

High PSP and low willingness to display effort.

Paige, Maria, and Lin acknowledged projecting high standards and/or perfectionism onto their peers, linking that projection to judgments about their peers' abilities to fulfill their obligations, academic and otherwise, given their own self-imposed standards of excellence and perfectionism. Bess, who demanded nothing but "As" for herself, also held perfectionistic standards for her friends. She described her perspective:

I am probably mentally harder on more of my friends than I am to their face….Sometimes, it surprises me when other people aren't as, like, aren't as perfect as I want them to be or initially thought that they were…And I often see that as a letdown not just, like, an, "Oh, that's just them." So — but it's something I'm conscious of so I try to avoid doing it.

Also a self-described perfectionist, Helen said of demanding perfection from her peers, "I don't often get it, or at least to the degree which I demand." Helen further explained her perspective in discussing her nursing curricula:

> literally what you do and do not do has a life-altering effect on your patients when you're working…[The margin of error] is slim; so I really don't – I expect people to be in class, to know what they're supposed to know, to study, to be at least on an average – which would be sub-par to me – but at least on an average knowledge level. So I demand perfection of my classmates. I demand perfection of a select group of my friends.

Anita, who identified as a perfectionist, also shared the motivating forces behind her perfectionistic expectations for her peers. Similar to Anna's discussion of perfectionistic expectations for her father, Anita characterized her desire for perfection from others as "not really a demand…just because I want the best for them."

The remaining four women in the quadrant made the distinction between holding expectations of perfection for their friends and possessing high expectations for their peers. These women said that while they did not always demand perfection from the people around them, they were "very demanding" when working with their peers on academic or extracurricular group projects and dividing household chores in a shared living situation. Maeve, who expected perfection of herself or "to at least exude that," described the origins of her frustration with her peers:

> I set really high expectations for myself, obviously, and I expect other people to meet my expectations which I guess isn't really fair…And I get frustrated with

people when they don't meet those expectations….I feel like if I'm giving a lot of

myself to putting something together, that other people should be, too.

Maeve's additional remarks revealed her awareness of the consequences of high

expectations for others:

So when I think logically, I know that it's not their fault that they're not meeting

my expectations. It's that my expectations are unreasonable. But it definitely has

been very frustrating for me – sort of coming to terms with that.

Low PSP and low willingness to display effort.

Alicia was the only other woman outside of the high PSP, low willingness to

display effortlessness quadrant who disclosed perfectionistic standards for her friends:

I kind of really expect a certain amount of perfection from my fellow students

who are kind of in the same classes, the advanced art classes and stuff…They

should be putting in the same amount of effort like I've put into it and that's it.

Like Bess, who acknowledged her friends' negative reactions to her perfectionistic

expectations, Alicia's self-awareness also included the acknowledgement of the reactions

of her friends to her perfectionistic expectations.

I think that's when I become really intimidating and annoying to my friends

because sometimes I get very impatient with them or at least when they don't line

up with how I think people should act or the way people should treat other people.

Summary

Of the 20 women interviewed for this research project, only three individuals

revealed that they projected perfectionistic expectations onto their family members.

There was no distinguishable pattern amongst this *n* of three: one of these women had

low PSP and high willingness to display effort, while the other two women were the exact opposite with regard to PSP and effortlessness. Interviewees with perfectionistic expectations for their peers yielded an *n* of 7; six women with high PSP and low willingness to display effort and one woman with low PSP and low willingness to display effort. While the size of these groups prevents any generalizable conclusions, the value of these data lies in the descriptions of the women they represent. Connections between the interviewees' behaviors and perfection, perfectionistic self-presentation, and effortlessness are discussed in Chapter 5.

Recognition of Gender Differences

Many women revealed, in at least one point during their interview, that they had limited experience reflecting on their identities as women. More so than any other inquiry, the research participants had the greatest difficulty providing answers to direct questions about the meaning they ascribed to their identity as women, although responses to other questions provided at least partial, if unintentional, answers to gender identity questions. When probed, many students hesitated, stammered, proclaimed the question "hard," or simply said, "I haven't thought about it." This finding was true across quadrants. Women also remarked feeling like gender inequities were frequently overblown and overstated in society. For those few interviewees who did indicate a connection to their female identity, the depth of their understanding about this facet of female identity was weak. However, discerning what meaning, if any, the interviewees assigned to their identities as women was important in understanding if and how the women linked perfectionism, perfectionistic self-presentation, and/or effortless perfection with their female identity. Specifically, these data reveal how the pressures for

perfectionism, PSP, and/or effortless perfection are intertwined with societal expectations and gender norms for women.

Perfection-seeking and Gender Norms for SU Women

In order to understand the environmental factors contributing to how Southland University women experience perfectionism, perfectionistic self-presentation, and effortless perfection, it is also important to identify the women's awareness of gender norms at SU and in larger society (Roth, 2003). With minor variation, the women at SU agreed with the women at Duke University, perfection was a look: a fit and pretty woman who earns "A" grades. Some interviewees mentioned the extracurricular involvement of the perfect SU woman: she is involved, but is never so overcommitted that she gives off the impression that she is harried, frustrated, or tired. Characteristics about the perfect SU woman include appearing pleasant and put-together, someone who prioritizes time with her friends, but who also does not express negative emotion. While the interviewees' responses were mixed in how they related to this ideal and the value they placed on it, all but two of the 20 interviewees recognized the existence of pressures to achieve the perfect SU female image.

High PSP and low willingness to display effort.

Almost all of the women in this quadrant mentioned the "certain look" of a perfect Southland University student. Lin said appearance was "embedded in our culture," specifically "being, like, attractive and very thin…Working-out at SU is huge. I've heard many people comment during my time here that, like, there are no fat people here." Helen also described the ideal SU woman as someone who "balances her interests" in academics, extracurricular activities, and friendships. Anita agreed that the ideal SU

woman was more than a pretty, "physically fit" woman. She depicted the SU ideal

woman as someone who:

> Every time that you saw them, they looked like they were not just making it, but
>
> were ahead of the game in terms of being on top of their schoolwork; and being
>
> really organized with their activities…feeling as if they were on top of that…And
>
> being friendly….having friends…lots of friends.

Anita also noted, "I don't necessarily think my male friends feel that…as much."

Maeve agreed, "And I just think maybe guys don't care, or maybe guys aren't expecting

that of other guys the way that women expect that of other women." Maeve gave the

example of her younger brother, who also had high grades and a laundry list of

extracurricular involvements, "he doesn't seem to feel the same pressure that I do. And I

can't quite pinpoint what it is, but there is definitely a difference there."

In addition to her remarks about the differences between men and women, Maeve

also depicted the perfect SU woman as someone who achieved at high levels while

looking effortlessly put together. Said Maeve, for SU women, "if you don't look put-

together and if you look like everything is chaotic—it's not seen as ideal." As a result,

Maeve said she worked "really hard to look put-together for people. And that's not so

much in what you wear. It's more the way that you carry yourself." Maeve felt that

clothing mattered at least to some degree when she said, "If you're in the library, even if

you're wearing sweatpants, you have to seem like you've got everything under control."

Eve was another woman in the high perfectionistic self presentation, low

effortlessness quadrant, who discussed feeling the pressure to look perfect publicly. Like

Anita and Maeve, she described perfection as:

the appearance of having it all together. I need to make the best grades, I need to

appear like I know what I'm talking about so appearance – and I guess

consequently I hope that the appearance coincides with the actuality or reality of

it. You know, "do I really have it all together?" And my goal would be to not

only appear to have it all together, but also have it all together.

Eve implied that an appearance of composure was especially important in the SU

classroom because "women have to qualify their answers with a lot more evidence than

guys do," especially "if their appearance is really stereotypical: blonde, big boobs, blue

eyes."

Celeste's understanding of the perfect SU woman aligned with the image

presented by Eve, Maeve, and Anita. For Celeste the perfect SU woman appeared so self-

assured and confident that she didn't need the acknowledgement or "justification from

other people" of the put-together woman she was. This conception was especially

intriguing given Celeste's belief that a woman needs to do more than a man to appear

put-together. According to Celeste, once a man goes to college and has a career "then

he's perfect," while a woman "has to do well in her career but also is expected to do well

with her family and also with her looks…there's a lot of different elements that a woman

has to face." Celeste said "to be a woman you have to do extra…you have to be better

than men," although "you are more likely to be judged negatively for being more career-

focused than a man" is. Maeve agreed with Celeste. She stated, being a woman means

"balancing personal and professional life…which affects women so much more than it

affects men." Even though Paige felt that the differences between men and women were

much more pronounced 20 years ago, "while there are still gender biases, I feel as if it's harder to detect them, and maybe in that sense, it's also harder to get rid of them."

Kylie's understanding of the perfect SU woman was noteworthy because it did not include a physical description of her or a mention of "keeping it all together." Rather she focused on describing the ideal SU woman as someone with a level of awareness as well as a commitment to action: "I'd hope that she was aware, and has some sort of high feminist consciousness. You know, kind of directing lives."

Maria was the only woman from this quadrant, and only one of two of the twenty women interviewed, who rejected the existence of a perfect SU woman completely. She decline to speculate on the characteristics of such a paragon, saying the diversity of people at Southland University prevented the possibility of a shared SU idea of perfection.

High PSP and high willingness to display effort.

In the high perfectionistic self-presentation and high willingness to display effort quadrant, two women were very specific about the look of a perfect SU female student. When asked to describe the perfect SU woman, Nina, who said she was "the complete opposite" of the description she offered, had this to say:

> The first thing that comes to mind is miniskirts and Ugg [brand] boots. I don't know if that's good or not. But I guess someone who's well-dressed….who does well in school, but also is very socially active, probably in a sorority. Somehow manages to get through their class projects despite hangovers, that sort of thing.

Nina also believed that women have to aspire to perfectionistic ideals separate from those of men. She commented, "I think that women might be more self-critical and

it's more like an internal perfectionism. Whereas I think that men might be more oriented towards external recognition…which I would prefer, because that would be easier."

Regarding the pressures on SU women for perfection, Daphne said, "I'm an international student, I'm never expected to fall into that [perfection] category," described by her as: "the sundress physique which carries with it this need to make small talk and appear to be slightly blonde all the time." The women with this physique have an "aura, this self-veneer about them which I don't have and I never could have. I tried it for a long time." Daphne cited regional history and traditions as the source for the pressures for perfection and perfectionistic self-presentation felt by SU women. Daphne described her perception of the ideal Southland University woman as:

> I suppose future homemaker of America, something like that.…you don't even have to be academically driven, honestly. It depends what areas you move in or what circles you move in.…you want someone intelligent and witty, and involved and independent. But I feel like [at] SU in general, there's more this feeling that women have to be much more domestic. There's still a very Southern feeling to the university and a lot of people come in with that. They [women] should still be in the kitchen really. And they should be good at entertaining and intelligent enough to hold a conversation, but at the same time.…They don't really need a career or they should be okay being at home and things like that. So educated enough to be able to do that but not too educated that they want to do something else.

Daphne further explained that at SU she felt the pressure to:

hold my intelligence and have a career and be successful but at the same time, be

a Stepford wife. I wish I could be a Stepford wife, but I can't….Because that's

what people want. Yes, they want someone who appears perfect and appears to

not have problems. I mean yes, it is funny to watch *Bridget Jones* on television

but you want to be more put together. The image of the Stepford wife appears to

be a woman who has no problems and appears to have it all going…it would be

nice to have that and yet appear – like have this other appearance about me that

people would admire from the start… from every angle.

Finally, of the differences in perfection seeking for men and women, Daphne shared

comments about the differences in perfection seeking for men and women that suggested,

as Nina did, that men are motivated by external recognition more so than an internal push

for perfection seeking. Daphne stated:

I feel like women have a more unified view of perfection whereas men maybe

don't….they get to do whatever they want most of the time. It's like an in-

between zone and they express themselves, but for them perfection is more

recognition and from a different area.

Hannah also recognized societal pressures that influence the behaviors of women,

especially in earning comparable levels of respect to men in the workplace.

I think that women try to be on par with men in their perfection.…I think men are

starting to feel that a little bit more…especially in the workplace.…I feel that

women set a little bit higher of a standard for themselves than a man might.

Low PSP and high willingness to display effort.

Women in the low perfectionistic self-presentation, high willingness to display effort quadrant were also opinionated about the existence of a SU paragon, as well as the differences between how men and women experience perfection. Selma cited her experience at "boarding school, where there are also a lot of beautiful people" as preparing her for the pressure of appearing a certain way at SU. Both at boarding school and at SU, Selma encountered individuals who "have a lot of money to spend on clothes and have enough time and money to worry about their weight a lot." In Selma's eyes, these women were more likely to "strive for success, strive for perfection more so than men" because they have to "make up for the fact that they're women because guys already have that leg up….I just feel like women have to try a lot harder than men do."

Jillian was much more skeptical than Selma about the existence of a perfect Southland University woman. Of perfection for SU women, she described academic and extracurricular balance, rather than the appearance of such balance, which was a focus of many women from the high PSP, low willingness to display effort quadrant:

> I don't think that's possible. I think there's too much variability in what each person thinks is perfect. I think my biggest criterion would be that person's personal satisfaction with their classes and – both in what they were getting out of the classes and in the success they were having in those classes, while at the same time not devoting all their time to school.

Anna, however, was dedicated to achieving the image of a high-achieving, articulate, poised SU woman. She deemed herself:

Sixty percent there. I wouldn't say that I've reached it in every level. There have

been times when my stress has had too much of an effect on my relationships

when I've not paid enough attention to my friends when I needed to.

Anna also noted that success for her female SU classmates is often:

just interpreted the wrong way. And where in guys it's seen as being a natural

outgrowth of what got them here in the first place. With girls, it's step one to

becoming a dragon lady and you know, as if the two things, as if that and caring

about people are incompatible, and that you're automatically going to be

sacrificing your friendships and your relationships to be successful. Yeah, I think

the definition of ambition is very different for both sexes at SU.

Crystal was less loquacious than Anna, offering only that the perfect SU female student

was "someone who has good grades, but is also involved in a lot of activities and has a

social life."

Low PSP and low willingness to display effort.

The nature of the data gathered on gender roles from the women in the low PSP,

low willingness to display effort quadrant overlapped with the remarks made by the

women in the other three quadrants. Vivian echoed the existence of the perfect SU image,

one that she does not relate to personally, "but sees a lot of:" a woman who "studies hard

and looks pretty while doing it." In similar fashion, Yvonne also rejected the idea that a

perfect SU woman existed. She responded to my request for her to describe the perfect

SU woman with an answer that included characteristics not of a perfect woman, but of

"an ideal person."

I guess somebody hopefully with a lot of self-worth. I think that's always a really important quality. You can often be competitive and smart and seem successful but a lot of times low self-esteem manifests itself in a lot of ugly ways…Yeah, so I would say a lot of self-worth, a good amount of motivation….hopefully have outside interests, be well-rounded, a good friend, hopefully. I would think that would be part of being an ideal person.

Regarding the differences between men and women, Yvonne mentioned that females:

like to work hard a lot more or they are willing to work hard a lot more. Also, just because they're females, they're in competition in terms of being attractive or being thin and all that kind of stuff, so I think girls feel that kind of a pressure, too, and I think a lot of times those two things get intertwined.

Alicia did not note the existence of any difference in perfection seeking for men and women, focusing primarily on extracurricular involvements in describing the perfect SU student: "someone in all the clubs and has some kind of leadership position in these clubs…excels in school and does amazing things."

Summary.

All but two women interviewed offered specific descriptors of the "ideal SU woman." "Well-balanced," "fit," "pretty," "put-together" and "popular" were frequently used adjectives to describe the SU female paragon, but their personal experiences did not always reflect their aspirations to lead balanced lifestyles. Worth noting was that the interviewees outside of the high perfectionistic self-presentation and low willingness to reveal their effort (HPLE) quadrant were more likely to describe a female ideal with a

caveat that they did not aspire to that ideal than women in the HPLE quadrant. Women from the HPLE quadrant were the likeliest group of interviewees to be concerned with effortlessness in their own attempts to become the perfect SU woman. Only one woman from outside of this quadrant mentioned trying to maintain an image of effortlessness for others, but said she eventually quit because she found her attempts to be too taxing. Most frequently, women from this quadrant expressed the desire to gain a favorable opinion from others in maintaining the appearance of perfection. Thus, the combination of a low willingness to disclose effort and a high level of perfectionistic self-presentation in women seem to suggest heightened aspirations for ideal womanhood. Overall, women with high PSP, regardless of their levels of effortlessness, identified gender pressures for women to appear effortless in public, balancing all of their competing responsibilities.

With regard to differences observed by the interviewees in perfection seeking for women and men, and perceptions of gender inequities, responses were so nuanced that it was difficult to identify any particular patterns regarding women within and across quadrants. Women identified differences in the experiences of men and women with regard to communication styles, self-presentation, emotional expression, and treatment in class. Women from every quadrant viewed the process of perfection and perfectionistic self-presentation as different for men and women, with women facing challenges and pressures to present images of effortless accomplishment that were unique to their gender. Interviewees also noted that women were more motivated by internal pressure and performance comparison with other women than the desire for external recognition sometimes motivating men. The observation of these pressures was most prevalent in women with high PSP, regardless of their willingness to disclose their effort.

Effortlessness

The fifth theme present in this study's group of high-achieving women was pressure for achieving a type of perfection that sometimes included the appearance of effortlessness. The effortlessness theme overlapped with the theme encompassing the recognition of gender differences, as well as the theme of concern and competition. Not all of the women interviewed desired to achieve perfection or present themselves as perfect. Of the group of women who felt pressured to achieve perfection or appear perfect, some specifically felt the pressure to achieve effortless perfection or the appearance of effortless perfection. Two of the interviewees, who had indicated in their interview responses that they did not aspire to effortless perfection, revealed their awareness of their SU female peers who did focus on effortless perfection. In the context of this study on perfectionism, effortlessness was characterized by two major factors. These factors were: (a) the concealment of work or effort used to obtain one's academic goals and (b) the covering up of one's negative emotions such as frustration, anger, sadness, and irritation (Roth, 2003).

Effortlessness: Hiding Work

Included in the 2003 Duke University Women's Initiative Steering Committee's analysis of effortless perfection was the practice of female undergraduate women "minimizing how hard they work to prove their intellectual merit" (Roth, 2003, p. 14). In order to gather more data from Southland University women about the phenomenon of effortless perfection, it was necessary to gather specific information on the practice of hiding effort from the interviewees: who engaged in minimizing their effort and the reasons for such minimizing. Although infrequent, it is also noted where participants

provided interview responses that were counterintuitive to the answers they submitted on the effortlessness measure portion of the survey.

High PSP and low willingness to display effort.

Behavior regarding the decision to conceal effort related to academic work at Southland University was not uniform in this quadrant. Women cited various reasons for their decisions to conceal or share their effort, but their decisions included lack of worry regarding a public display of effort, concerns for their pride, uncertainty about how their academic work compared with that of others, and motivation to protect others from worrying on their behalf. Eve and Bess were not concerned with revealing their academic efforts to their peers in their interviews, even though their survey responses indicated that they had a low willingness to share their effort. Bess explained that even though she was reluctant to share her individual academic goals with her peers, she also revealed, "I don't hide how much work I do. Like, if someone says, 'You look tired,' I'll say it's because I pulled an all-nighter because I have this paper due today." Celeste agreed. She said, "I don't think I hide that I study….my roommate, this one, she's like, 'You study all the time.' And I'm like, 'Well, you have to. There's a lot of material.'" Later in the interview, Celeste did acknowledge, "I have a little bit of a pride issue…If I have problems, I don't really like for people to know and for them to help because I'm, like, that's my deal. I'll deal with it." Maria found herself sometimes concealing her effort from others to achieve her academic goals, choosing to "work away from others" "for the sake of pride."

Maeve shared her reluctance to share her academic efforts and her strategy for doing so. She revealed:

I do a lot of work during the day, so I'll…just go. I'll leave at 9:00 in the morning when I start class and I'll come home at the end of the day when I'm done. And I'll be in the library in all those in-between times so that I'm not really working when anyone can see that…And I generally did not think that that was a conscious effort until right now. And that maybe I do that on purpose so that I don't have to work at home and my roommates are aware.

In continuing to reflect, Maeve identified the people closest to her ("definitely my family, probably my boyfriend as well") as those "I hide it from the most." Maeve offered the following explanation, alluding to her own pride:

Because I didn't work very hard in high school, I felt like that I shouldn't have to work that hard in college…And so when I was writing my undergraduate thesis and stuff like that, I sort of became sneaky about how much time I was spending in the library and how much reading I was doing.

After Maeve's experience in a particularly challenging SU course, she shared:

I met with the teacher a lot, and I didn't want anyone to know I was struggling and I got my grade, and I ended up doing okay in the class. No one knew how hard I was working, because I was really excited about my grade. And I was telling my boyfriend or my roommate or somebody. And they were like, "Okay." It's like, "No, you don't understand.… Just because I didn't tell you [how hard I worked]."

Another woman from the high perfectionistic self-presentation, low willingness to display effort quadrant, Paige, shared Maeve's reluctance to reveal her academic effort to others. Paige reasoned that keeping her parents, classmates, and peers from information about her lengthy academic preparation prevented them from worrying about the effects

such intense preparation might have on her. Paige also admitted to concealing the amount of work she put into her academic goals "because in middle school and high school, work came a lot easier for me. In college, I was hoping to achieve the same level of 'oh, work just comes easy to me' and I wanted to keep that persona when it wasn't; it's not actually that easy."

Comparison not just to their own past academic performance, but comparison to the academic performance of their peers was another reason cited by women in this quadrant in deciding not to share effort. Kylie acknowledged "sometimes" hiding the effort she put into achieving an academic goal from her peers because of the social comparison she engaged in (she was willing to share her efforts with her mother). She noted that she was not able to go nights without sleep to complete academic assignments as some of her peers were able to do. While she admitted feeling as if, "I should be able to turn this out in a night like everyone else," she also knew "it's okay if I can't do that because I've realized what my work style is." Lin was the only woman in this quadrant to distinguish between when she decided to hide her academic efforts and when she chose to reveal them. Studying for a hard test was more likely to result in her decision to hide her efforts, than carrying out academic group work because "it's always, like, important that you make clear, like, how much work you are doing."

Like Lin, Anita made special considerations for revealing her involvement in her non-academic endeavors such as her extracurricular involvements. For academic projects she was willing to disclose the extent of her involvement with her closest friends and her boyfriend, but in her leadership roles:

I find myself, even though I might have done something, I will sign something as

everyone, whether it's this group, this staff, this council, etc. And I think that's 1)

because I don't want people necessarily to know to what extent I'm taking on so

much and 2) because every organization in which I've been a part of, I'm always

trying to make it better and its image better and part of doing that is making sure

people succeed, and not with just one person who is potentially going to leave and

graduate, but the group or organization as a whole.

While Helen revealed that she had engaged in hiding the amount of effort she put

into accomplishing her goals, she was unique in saying she most frequently engaged in

concealing the amount of effort she did not put into accomplishing certain goals.

According to Helen, she was able to accomplish certain tasks much faster than her peers,

but felt uncomfortable letting her speed bring attention from her peers. Helen explained:

people have this image of me…however they perceive me there are certain things

I don't want them to think that I worked really hard to do. Other things I don't

want them to know how little I worked to do them.

When pressed to provide distinguishing examples, she had this to say:

I would take more time probably to write a speech that I had to give at a reception

or something, or probably more time than I would want people to know that I did.

I would not want people to know how little time, for instance, I spent studying for

an exam in a class that was just really easy for me [but not for others].

Helen's desire to not bring attention to herself, but to maintain an image of effortlessness

is described in her own words below:

So if I have something that's going on with me, there's not a lot of people that I'm comfortable with enough to talk about the problems that I'm having, because a lot of people don't perceive me as someone that has a lot of problems. So very few people do I trust enough, or feel like they are equal to me in what my values are, and my standards, and the things that are high priorities to me, that I would discuss things about myself with them….I don't think I'm an extraordinary person like other people may think I am. I think that I have the luck that things kind of come naturally to me, but that being said, I do think that there's a big part of me that, because of that, in order to maintain that, hides that part of my life a little bit from people.

Helen was primarily interested in avoiding the attention of others even if her ability to perform academically with little or no preparation might bring potential kudos from her peers. Helen remained interested in hiding the amount of effort she put into achieving her academic goals to appear effortless unless appearing effortless would bring her attention she was uncomfortable with handling. She explained, "I don't like to talk about myself a lot, really."

In summation, a majority of women in this quadrant engaged in hiding the effort they exerted in the achievement of their academic goals at least some of the time. Only three of the women indicated that they did not care about revealing their academic or extracurricular efforts to others. The remaining eight women from this quadrant engaged in hiding their exertion at least some of the time, to some people. It is worth noting that within this group of women, four always hid their efforts; one woman shared her work when contributing to a collective academic project, but not when studying for exams; one

engaged in the behavior "sometimes;" and one sometimes found herself hiding the work she did not do. While women in this quadrant managed their academic effort in various ways, the fact that eight women engaged in hiding their exertion, at least part of the time, is significant.

High PSP and high willingness to display effort.

The three women in this quadrant brought diverse perspectives in discussing their desire to hide their academic efforts. Daphne indicated that there were several friends whom she felt comfortable sharing her efforts with, but was the only interviewee to say her desire to conceal her work was to avoid wasting her friends' time. Given comments Daphne made throughout her interview, her response about avoiding discussion of her academic work was consistent in her prioritization of the feelings and desires of others over her own feelings. These interview responses appear to contrast with her survey score that indicated a high willingness to reveal the effort she put into achieving her academic goals.

Hannah said that while she felt comfortable sharing the amount of work she put into an academic project with a small circle of friends, she was most likely to refrain from such conversations. Hannah offered an example of a conversation she had with a classmate about a female classmate who had publicly proclaimed not to have studied for a recent exam:

> He was like, "I know she spent hours studying for this exam and she just didn't want to say anything about it," which I thought was funny. I'm like, "Yeah." I said I didn't really study that much but I mean I spent probably longer studying than I let on.

Of the origin of such social comparison, Hannah said:

> I don't know if it's just an SU thing or what, but it's kind of like everyone here – there are the kids here that don't have to study and they automatically just get wonderful grades and they go out and have fun and do whatever and it's not a big deal. And I think that for me, I know that the reason I'm here and the reason why I do well is because I work hard at it. And I mean I guess that's nothing to be ashamed of, but at the same time it almost seems like it's better for it to be effortless than for people to know that you've worked really hard to get something….I don't think it's a bad thing to be a hard worker. But I think that maybe there's a, not a negative perception of it, but it's just not as well respected as someone who can just naturally do something without having to work at it.

The final woman in this quadrant, Nina, shared a problem similar to Helen's: hiding the amount of work she did not do to complete a project, which reveals her perception that at SU the norm was to perform at high, perfect levels. However, Nina indicated that for her, achieving effortless perfection included an underlying current of conformity—the desire that her behavior did not deviate too dramatically from that of her peers. Nina explained:

> I apparently have this just innate talent for time management, so I don't feel like I do a lot of work compared to a lot of my friends. And so if anything, I hide how much work I don't do. I try and gloss over the fact that – because everybody else complains about how long it takes them to do things, and I'm thinking, "I did that a week ago. It only took me a couple hours." [But I say], "Yeah. I totally know how you feel."

Like the women from the high PSP and low willingness to display effort quadrant, the three women in this quadrant engaged in a range of behaviors with regard to sharing their academic efforts. One woman indicated that she would occasionally share her efforts with her friends (as her survey scores suggested), but that she preferred not to burden her friends with stories of how hard she was working. Another woman indicated that she hid her academic efforts, while a third woman, Nina, indicated that she hid how much work she did not do. Unlike Helen from the high perfectionistic self-presentation, low willingness to display effort quadrant, who engaged in this behavior some of the time, Nina's interview responses revealed that hiding how much work she did not do was a regular habit.

Low PSP and high willingness to display effort.

The behaviors of the four interviewees in this quadrant with regard to effortlessness can be divided into a group of three women who freely shared their academic efforts with others and one woman who refrained from sharing her academic efforts. Jillian and Selma were open about how much they studied and how much they cared about achieving their academic goals. They both disclosed that they would be subjected to jokes for the amount of time they spent in the library. To the teasing, Selma responded by saying, "Ahh. I'm sorry; I'm a nerd." Anna was also open about her academic efforts, but did not report the teasing expressed by Selma and Jillian.

Despite survey responses indicating a high willingness to share her academic efforts with others, Crystal was the woman in this quadrant who was the least open about her academic efforts. She acknowledged that keeping confidential the amount of time she studied or time she took to write a paper allowed for things to "not seem quite as bad"

if she did not do well. Crystal disclosed that she felt "weird" saying that she spent more time on something if other people spent less, again indicating the prevalence of social comparison among women at SU.

  Low PSP and low willingness to display effort.

  Like Jillian, Selma, and Anna, Yvonne was also comfortable sharing the amount of work she put into achieving her academic goals. In explaining her perspective, Yvonne indicated engaging in comparison with her peers regarding her efforts and those of her peers who spent less effort and earned better grades.

> I mean if someone was like, "Oh, I studied for like 10 minutes for that test," and they did better than me, I don't think I would like to outwardly express, "Oh man, I studied for three days," but I mean if someone asks me, "Oh, did you work really hard on that paper?" I wouldn't really have a problem being like, "Yeah, yeah. It took awhile to do the research and stuff."

Yvonne's interview responses should be considered in context with her survey responses, which indicate behavior opposite to the openness relayed in her interview marks. Other interviewees shared the amount of effort or work they put into achieving their goals with only one or two select people. Alicia, said "my boyfriend, obviously he knows like exactly how much effort I put into it, and how much stress, but, I guess, to other people…I might say, 'Oh yeah. I have a paper,' but, like, everyone says that." Alicia clearly was concerned, as were other interviewees, that studying more compared to her peers would make others view her less favorably. Vivian, who said "I don't really feel the need to discuss it [my academic effort] as much" although she did "notice that people

will ask me sometimes." When that happens, Vivian said, "I will talk about it with them then, but I don't really think about doing that, myself."

Summary.

Overwhelmingly, interviewees felt that it was more socially favorable to appear naturally smart than to show others the effort that went into an individual's academic success. At least one woman from every quadrant hid their academic effort in preparing for exams and completing course assignments. In the largest quadrant, eight of the 10 women in the high perfectionistic self-presentation and low willingness to display effort quadrant engaged in concealing their academic effort at least some of the time. One woman indicated she concealed her academic efforts to prevent her family members from worrying on her behalf; pride was often cited as a reason to hide effort. If they shared their effort with anyone, the women were likely to only have one or two people as their confidants. These behaviors reflect, in part, the social comparison the women are engaged in: comparison with their own internal standards, but also the standards held by their families, communities, and the greater society (Hewitt & Flett, 1991b). Two interviewees shared that they hid how much work they did not do, versus did do, in completing academic assignments. Social comparison was inherent in this behavior, as women wanted to avoid the potential attention from others for not studying enough in situations where the norm was that everyone else was studying or preparing for a particular assignment.

Interestingly, the women who indicated on their surveys that they had a low willingness to display their effort did not always share interview responses consistent with their survey responses. For example, Bess, Celeste, Daphne, and Yvonne all

expressed a willingness to share the effort they put into their academic work in their interviews, but their effort survey scores indicated the opposite. Perhaps they felt less comfortable publicizing their concealment behaviors in a live interview than through an online, confidential survey. Crystal was the only woman with a high willingness to disclose effort survey score and interview responses suggesting she would be more willing to keep her effort confidential than her survey responses indicated. Crystal's behavior may be attributed to an ability to be more reflective in a one-on-one interview than an online survey or it may be attributed to survey fatigue.

Effortlessness: Sharing of Emotions

In addition to concealing the amount of work or effort a woman put into achieving her academic goals, seven students expressed a reluctance to reveal their emotions to others, particularly in they felt angry, sad, or disappointed. All of these women had high perfectionistic self-presentation survey scores. Six of these women also had a low willingness to express their effort; the remaining woman had a high willingness to display her effort in addition to high PSP. This breakdown makes the discussion of the low PSP and high effort quadrant, as well as the low PSP and low effort quadrant, unnecessary. Since effortless perfection is already linked with concealing effort in ways that ensure social norms about high-achieving women are obeyed and positive impressions are created, exploring how women include emotional control in understanding effortless perfection contributes to our collective understanding of socially acceptable behavior for high-achieving women.

High PSP and low willingness to display effort.

Several woman from this quadrant expressed strong feelings about limiting their emotional disclosure. Maria refrained from sharing her emotions with others because to do so would be "depressing." Celeste attributed her inward focus when dealing with her emotional stress to a long-distance, long-term relationship with a boyfriend whose physical distance prevented him from being "a whole lot of help." Eve was more definitive than Maria and Celeste in saying, "I would not tell my friends, not at all" if she experienced feelings of frustration or disappointment. After being asked why, she responded,

> Because I don't trust them…And it's not that I don't trust them with other things, but just that – that's too intimate. If I share with them that I'm a failure, what's going to keep them in a friendship with me? But my family, if I share that I'm a failure, they're my family. They have to love me no matter what.

Maeve's sentiments about controlling her emotions around her friends were similar to those expressed by Eve. Maeve characterized herself as "one of those people if I make a mistake, I don't want anyone to know about it" even though she got "really upset when people find out about my mistakes, even something really, really minimal. I don't like making mistakes." Of her mother and one close friend, Maeve said:

> I don't talk about my issues with anyone but them, really. Yeah, not even my boyfriend I've been dating for two and a half years and I still don't want to talk to him about a lot of things…I wish I knew why. I think I don't like feeling too vulnerable, and I think for some reason, telling him those, my emotional problems when I'm stressed makes me feel really vulnerable.

For Eve and Maeve, revealing their emotional vulnerability to others meant losing control of the image they wanted to portray to others, an image that included never making mistakes. These two women perceived the loss of respect and esteem of others as a byproduct of making public mistakes, they did not trust that their friendships would sustain such vulnerability.

Helen was another woman from this quadrant who disliked the idea of sharing her emotions with others, not only because she was resistant to altering her public image, but because she was also uncertain if her values and goals were the same as those of her peers. Helen elaborated:

> There are not a lot of people that I'm comfortable with enough to talk about the problems that I'm having, because a lot of people don't perceive me as someone that has a lot of problems. So very few people do I trust enough, or feel like they are equal to me in what my values are, and my standards, and the things that are high priorities to me, that I would discuss things about myself with them.

Helen recognized her mother as her only confidant. "To my friends, I would never want to say to them, 'I'm really stressed out right now,' or 'really busy.' I just really don't like saying that to people, because I don't appreciate when people complain like that to me." Helen continued, "You haven't walked in my shoes. You may not be as busy as me, but I'm not here saying, 'I just don't have time for this right now. I'm too stressed.'" As a result of the discrepancy in busyness Helen perceived in her schedule and that of her friends, Helen essentially deemed the emotional venting of her friends as unnecessary. Helen's irritation at the emotional venting of others offers one explanation as to why she will not tolerate the same venting from herself.

Of the women in this quadrant who voiced reluctance to express their emotions to other people, Anita was the only person who mentioned a reluctance to express her feelings, even without witnesses to such expression. Anita said,

I'm sure crying would help in terms of just releasing and relieving some stress. I usually don't do it…When I do cry, it's usually a buildup of two or three failures in a short period of time, and then I just break down…And that usually happens maybe once or twice a year.

High PSP and high willingness to display effort.

Daphne was the only woman of the three in this quadrant who specifically mentioned a reluctance to share her emotions. She believed emotional expression would increase her agitation rather than soothe her:

I don't believe in needing to express that because it's going to be [over]; I'm not going to be upset forever. I'm going to be happy soon again. So I might as well not talk about it. The more you talk about it, the more upset you are.

Summary.

In terms of effortlessness, more interviewees expressed a desire to hide the amount of work or effort they exerted than to conceal their emotions. Six of the 10 women with survey scores high in perfectionistic self-presentation and a low willingness to disclose effort expressed a reluctance to disclose their emotions. One woman from the quadrant high in PSP and willingness to disclose effort joined the group of six in refraining from emotional disclosure. These interviewees shared concern for the vulnerability that would result from sharing emotionally with friends and peers; the vulnerability made them feel awkward and uncertain and disconnected them from the

image of the female SU paragon. Women also expressed an unwillingness to burden their friends with their problems, as well as reporting past experiences forcing them to be self-reliant in handling their emotions.

One individual shared her belief that expressing herself emotionally would make her feel worse rather than better when dealing with an upsetting situation. Of the women who did share emotionally with a confidant, they were most likely to choose their mother or a close friend; their levels of self-consciousness about behavior believed to be a departure from that of the ideal SU female prevented a connection with additional emotional confidants. Importantly, three women indicated that they were most unlikely to share emotions of sadness and disappointment with the people closest to them, including their significant others and friends. For these three women, their mothers served as their lone emotional confidants; they felt too vulnerable to reveal their emotions to anyone else.

Coping Strategies

The interview participants also shared their coping reactions when relaying their experiences as women at Southland University, particularly as associated with the stress of identifying and realizing their academic achievements. Coping strategies, defined as the human body's response to feelings of tension and stress caused by life's difficulties (Dunkley, et al., 2000), comprise the sixth and final theme of the data. Identifying these strategies enhances the collective understanding of behaviors accompanying perfectionism, effortless perfection, and perfectionistic self-presentation. From this information, effective strategies for responding to the stress and tension associated with women grappling with perfection, PSP, and/or effortless perfection may be identified.

The following data were gathered through direct interview questions so healthy, effective strategies could be highlighted and strategies detrimental to female health and confidence could be recognized and avoided.

High PSP and Low Willingness to Display Effort

More so than in other quadrants, women in the high PSP and low willingness to display effort quadrant sought ways to bring control and order to their environments when faced with stresses. Anita reacted to academic pressure with a "really strong urgency to study very hard, to be very focused," and, as she acknowledged later, "spending a lot of time cleaning. Whether it's my room, my apartment, whatever, I always clean." While Anita's coping reaction was to attempt to control the environment around her, Bess said academic stress, especially stress caused by poor grades, caused her to "spend pretty much the whole day kicking myself." Other women utilized an internal script of reassurance to play during times of stress. Depending on the stressor, the script would include reminders about the preparation and effort they put towards a particular test or assignment. In other situations, the script might include a de-emphasis on the grade point value of the assignment in question, observations that peers were performing comparably, or reminders that the credit for the class did not count toward their major requirements.

Women also relied on reserving "alone time" for themselves as a stress-combating strategy, although not all women enjoyed being alone. Bess, Lin, and Maria said they thrived off alone time. Paige agreed and said, "I'm really the only one who can recoup myself." Other women, like Maeve, said "I really benefit from spending time alone, but I don't know that I like it." Still other strategies employed by women from this

quadrant included sharing their feelings and emotions with others. Lin and Maria, for example, relied on the examples of older students with similar academic goals, for guidance and advice. Of her confidant, Maria said, she "is great because she knows exactly where I'm at in my head." During her stressful periods, Lin relied on her friends to "inspire her thinking" and "give me great insight." Paige, meanwhile, confided in her priest during times of academic duress, helping her through periods of "expecting too much of myself" by "rationaliz[ing] it out."

Eve said that in addition to talking to her mother, father, and her grandparents, her best strategy for combating stress was to stay very structured and "very, very routine." Eve expanded on the techniques that provided her with the sense of control she craved, "having my day planned out, hour by hour with what needs to be accomplished" and "making to-do lists and kind of shutting everybody else out." Bess emphasized how important downtime was for her and routinely spent a day each weekend sans schoolwork in order "to readjust" and ensure that she won't "go crazy the following week." Maria agreed that her stress level was "really, too high" and coped by not sleeping. She commented, I "literally don't sleep at all three nights a week."

Physical changes to the interviewees' environment were also cited as other ways to destress. Maeve said "walking away for 10 minutes can be so therapeutic. It's so nice to get away from my email beeping every 10 minutes." Kylie expressed her inability to destress, saying she did not really know how to relax and sit down. Anita shared her techniques for coping with her stress:

I usually try to not check my email and turn off my phone…Because I'm very

responsive, overly responsive…With my emails, I'm addicted to email. If it's on,

I'll answer the email and sometimes I need to, I need to be responsible to myself

and not to others…And so that helps.

Anita continued:

Removing myself from distracters so that means unplugging the internet cord to

my computer and moving away from the television.…That destresses me.…little

things like just watching a lot of movies, eating popcorn, hanging out with friends

to destress...Oh, and nature. I love the sun and trees.

Bess, meanwhile, responded to stress by "clam[ming] up except for, like, a loud tirade

and then slam[ming] the door now and again."

Finally, maturity and experience were often indirectly cited by some of the

interviewees as contributing to their resilience in the face of stress. Eve and Celeste

described transformations in their behavior over time that aided their abilities to manage

tense situations. For example, previous feelings of misery and despair over "B" grades

were deemed not worth the trouble; Celeste and Eve learned to be gentler with

themselves and focus on their overall happiness and satisfaction. Eve shared that

professional counseling was the key to helping her adopt new coping strategies and

perspectives on stress. While Maeve reported higher levels of frustration than Eve and

Celeste, she did say that time had forced a change in perspective that allowed herself not

to be as hard on herself as she had been in the past. Anita also shared that her most

effective coping strategies for dealing with stress had evolved within her last two years of

undergraduate work. She explained,

I think in my junior or senior years, I've been much more confrontational with

whatever's been stressing me…Whether it's getting whatever's been stressing me

done or finding a way to prioritize exactly what needs to be.…[I say to myself]

It's three main things. These things can all fall in place later. I can handle it.

Maria called her final undergraduate semester "the first time that I really started

to, kind of, spend time for myself a little more." Maria learned to tell friends who called,

"Listen, I have to focus on me right now, this isn't a good time.…And it was the first

time I really said no to people who kind of needed me, because I couldn't get it all done."

Of her sophomore year, Maria said,

> I would get upset or cry to my parents if I got too stressed or [cry to] my
>
> roommate. I think junior year I realized that I'm not dealing with life or death
>
> here. It's not that big of a deal. And I kind of internalized it but if it was bad, it
>
> was healthy in the sense that I was like, just calm down and focus on myself and
>
> get through what I need to do.

Noticeably only one woman from this quadrant reported a decreasing inability to handle

stress over time. Kylie said, I "kind of regressed…I stress out very easily."

High PSP and High Willingness to Display Effort

Women in this quadrant also sought a balance of alone time and time with others,

in both relaxed and professional capacities, to respond to the stressors in their lives.

Similar to the coping strategy enjoyed by Bess, Lin, Maria, and Paige, Daphne expressed

her use of alone time to combat stress, saying, "I know how to be alone which is

important – something that everyone should know how to do." She also acknowledged

that being alone sometimes resulted in temporary insecurity regarding her social

calendar:

as soon as I'm alone, I'm reminded and it's like I have no friends. No one calls

me, no one loves me, which is stupid, because I just – I chose to be alone just

then. But as soon as I'm alone and I'm not getting any emails or items, or text

messages or phone calls, I'm like, "Wow, I have no friends."

For Hannah, "a good mix of" alone time and spending time with friends helped her

diffuse the daily stresses, which largely revolved around sharing responsibilities with

others. She needed to reassure herself that her nervousness regarding whether people

would follow through on their commitments was frequently unfounded.

Like Eve, Nina disclosed seeking professional help to develop her coping

responses. For Nina, internalizing the stress associated with her daily assignments and

extracurricular activities led her to a "short stint in counseling." There Nina learned to

step out of her comfort zone and combat stress, "by talking to her friends about it. It's

just much more productive than not doing it." Nina said that when she's stressed "a lot of

times people don't notice because I'm behaving normally," but in talking to more and

more people about her stress she found, "oddly enough, they don't like become disgusted

with me and stop being my friend. And I'm like, 'Oh, it's okay.' "

Low PSP and High Willingness to Display Effort

Interactions with other people as well as learning to prioritize academic

assignments were the two most frequently mentioned responses to stress in this quadrant.

To bolster the lack of confidence she felt during times of high academic stress, Selma

wanted both alone time and time with other people. Of her venting sessions with friends

who had similar academic aspirations, Selma said, "it's mutual…We're all kind of always

talking and kind of complaining about school or talking about a grade we got that we

didn't deserve or something like that. Selma said volunteering to mentor a 13-year-old foster child living 30 minutes away was one of her most effective coping strategies to reduce stress. The drive gave her necessary alone time to regroup while the play time with the boy allowed her to relax and escape her daily worries.

For Anna, the appeal of sharing her stress with her ex-boyfriend was not his similarities, but his "different social circles and different interests." She said, "it doesn't matter what I failed at, he's just like, 'I think you're wonderful. I think that that's bullshit, so don't worry about it.' Anna also practiced mindfulness as she distressed: "doing things for the sheer pleasure of doing them and trying to empty my mind of everything except what I'm doing at the moment." Finally, her favorite activities of dancing and horseback riding allowed her to combat stress and give her emotional control, knowing that her horse would sense if she was tense or her dancing would suffer if she was too tense while doing it.

Jillian disclosed that she suffered from an autoimmune disorder that required her to get more sleep each night than her peers. While she used to find her need to sleep annoying, she found that dealing with "stress in college is picking my battles" and just admitting "when something is not going to happen and choosing which thing it is going to be." For example, Jillian said she learned about the importance of prioritizing in fighting stress and said if the choice is between writing "the reflection [paper] or the paper in my other class that's worth a third of my grade, I'm going to do the paper. I'm not going to worry about the one percent reflection [paper]."

Low PSP and Low Willingness to Display Effort

In the final quadrant, women's strategies for coping with stress did not differ drastically from the methods employed by women in other quadrants. For Alicia, knowing how to "shut off the world and stop dealing with people" when she felt really stressed, was a preferred strategy. Alicia learned that prioritizing her own downtime reduced her stress levels significantly. Vivian stuck with "activity-based" ways to destress: "buying cookies to bake or renting a movie or going out to eat." Yvonne expressed that she was "pretty good with stress" and reported not frequently feeling stressed, academically. While she acknowledged, "if I have two midterms in one day…I am concerned about it and worried and I feel pressure and I'll do the studying, but it's not like it gets to me. For Yvonne, stress coping strategies did not seem to be a pressing concern, "Generally, I don't feel like I have any reason to be stressed out, so I'm not."

Summary

In conclusion, the interviewees relied on many different methods for coping with the stress related to their experiences as Southland University women, some of which included struggles for perfection, effortless perfection, and perfectionistic self-presentation. The high perfectionistic self-presentation and low willingness to share effort quadrant was unique from the other quadrants in that it included the unhealthiest coping responses: not sleeping for days, obsessively cleaning, berating oneself for feeling the stress of poor academic performance, sharing stresses with their mothers but refusing to share in kind with their closest friends or significant others. Five of the women from this quadrant (half of the quadrant's population) did employ healthy ways to relieve stress,

particularly by sharing their experiences with others. Two women said that they relied on professional therapy to transition from unhealthy coping strategies to healthy ones.

Across all quadrants, coping strategies included retreating inward, spending time alone to sharing frustrations with friends, boyfriends, and/or family; sometimes interviewees relied on a mix of reaching out and turning inward. They developed responses for their stresses that included exploring hobbies, dining out, spending time outdoors, physical exercises, listening to music, sleeping, attending religious services, and disconnecting from the phone and email. One or two close friends, church figures, and family members were the most likely confidants for the interviewees. One woman indicated that emotional outbursts helped her diffuse her stress. Several of the interviewees indicated that their college experience had taught them the best ways to de-stress, learning how to prioritize their responsibilities, listening to their bodies' needs, and teaching women to be comfortable whenever threatened by the loss of control over their surroundings. Only one woman indicated that the passage of time had left her less equipped to cope with her stress. Two interviewees shared that their experiences in professional therapy gave them the guidance they needed in developing effective ways to handle their stress.

This study provides insight into the experiences of high-achieving female undergraduate students, particularly how these women perceive and respond to pressures for perfection and effortless perfection throughout their collegiate experiences. Internal and environmental influences (including familial, peer, and societal expectations) and the psychological impact of these pressures are presented so a thorough representation of the pressures for perfection and effortless perfection in the lives of collegiate women is

achieved. Chapter 5 reviews the implications of the data collected in this chapter and the

significance of future research related to this topic.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE,

AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Introduction

As a recovering perfectionist who suffers from the occasional setback, I began thinking about this research topic in an effort to understand myself, as well as many of my female peers whose motivations and behaviors mirrored mine. I moved beyond thinking about this topic and onto researching and studying women and perfectionism when I began a professional career in student affairs and higher education. In this capacity, I regularly interacted with female college students consumed by striving for perfection in their academic accomplishments, their physical appearance, and social connections, even to the detriment of their personal health. When Duke University released the results of their campus climate study focusing on the experiences of Duke females, identifying "effortless perfection" and its negative psychological effects as the goal of some Duke undergraduate women, and articles began appearing in the mainstream media touting the prevalence of female perfectionism, I knew there was a void to fill in the collective understanding of women, perfectionism, and effortless perfectionism.

After examining the substantial body of literature comprising the study of perfection to date (Flett & Hewitt, 2002; Hewitt & Flett, 1991b), I noticed an absence of

qualitative research studies dedicated to the study of perfectionism. In addition, while a small, but significant body of research existed pertaining to perfectionistic self-presentation (Azzi, 2007; Hewitt, et al., 2003; Sherry, et al., 2006; Sherry, et al., 2007), no other formal research study devoted to the study of effortless perfection existed outside of Duke University's campus climate study (Roth, 2003). Given numerous studies regarding the maladaptive nature of perfectionism, preliminary findings about the negative effects of effortless perfection from the Duke study, and other studies linking perfectionistic self-presentation with reduced emotional expression and lowered self-esteem in women (Azzi, 2007; Cockell, et al., 2002), further research was warranted. Dissecting perfectionistic self-presentation and effortlessness in ways that yielded qualitative and quantitative results within a population of high-achieving female students emerged as necessary to understand these phenomena and to ensure the health of women prone to perfectionistic thinking, behaviors, and striving.

This chapter addresses the study's survey and interview data findings as they relate to the research questions. The scope of the discussion also expands to include a discussion of gender norms, social comparison, and social reproduction, issues of greater scope than the research questions alone cover. The chapter concludes with a review of implications for student affairs and higher education practice, in addition to suggestions for future research.

<div align="center">Discussion</div>

Perfectionistic Self-presentation

Selecting Southland University undergraduate women who not only gained admission to Southland, but had reached Dean's List status in their junior year, produced

a research population with academic accomplishments similar to those of the high-achieving women participating in the Duke University study. The Perfectionistic Self-Presentation Scale (PSPS) (Hewitt, et al., 2003) survey data provided information about the prevalence of perfectionistic self-presentation within a population of high-achieving collegiate women. The data revealed PSP's existence with the population: 27% of women surveyed were concerned with perfectionistic self-promotion; 20% of the same sample population was concerned with nondisplay of imperfection; and 19% were concerned with the nondisclosure of imperfection.

While determining frequency results of the prevalence of perfectionistic self-presentation within a population of high-achieving women provides a starting point for understanding PSP, interpreting these distributions is somewhat difficult. Previously published literature studies regarding PSP have not included baseline frequencies of self-promotion, nondisclosure of imperfection, and nondisplay of imperfection in a college-student or community-member population. Hewitt, et al., (2003) used a population of 661 university students, as well as a 1,041-member clinical sample and 501-member community sample, to establish the accuracy of their conceptualization of PSP as three-pronged. Hewitt, et al., (2003) also found in a population of 130 undergraduate students associations between the three facets of PSP and increased "self-handicapping and self-concealment" behaviors (p. 1311). In the same population, he linked nodisclosure and nondisplay of imperfections with low levels of self-esteem. While Hewitt, et al.'s (2003) findings from their testing across three diverse populations confirmed perfectionistic self-presentation as a variable in personal and interpersonal psychological distresses, baseline PSP frequencies in any population, clinical or otherwise, are still to be determined.

However, the research presented by Hewitt, et al. (2003) suggests the drive to mask one's imperfection and publicly advance one's perfection, both facets of PSP, can influence one's self-esteem in negative ways. In the present research undertaking, it is the qualitative data that lend support for the negative psychological impact of perfectionistic self-presentation.

The survey and interview findings regarding perfectionistic self-presentation join the small body of quantitative research confirming the existence of PSP (Azzi, 2007; Hewitt, et al., 2003; McGee, Hewitt, Sherry, Parkin, & Flett, 2005; Sherry, et al., 2006; Sherry, et al., 2007). However, there are no published qualitative data collection results regarding PSP, so the interview data gathered as part of this study provide previously missing descriptive data about PSP. Even though the interview topic guide questions were not specifically designed to extract information on perfectionistic self-promotion, nondisplay of imperfection, and nondisclosure of imperfection, overarching perfectionistic self-presentation behavior and attitudes was present in several of the interviewees' responses.

Nondisclosure of imperfection was the most frequently cited prong of PSP referenced by the interviewees. The five women who did recognize their strivings for the nondisclosure of imperfection all came from the quadrant of women who were high in perfectionistic self-presentation and low in their willingness to disclose effort (HPLE). Women expressed fear that their reputations would suffer or that they would lose friendships if they shared their imperfections with others. They also mentioned emotional distress when others had knowledge of their mistakes and the fear of harsh, negative judgments regarding their academic work, overall competencies, and ability to

be a friend when their imperfections were exposed. If women were willing to share their imperfections at all, it was with their families, who "have to love me no matter what." The existence of nondisclosure of imperfection is consistent with Flett, Hewitt, and DeRosa's (1996) research illustrating perfectionists' reluctance to talk in social settings when they fear negative judgments or face intimidating situations (Frost, et al., 1995).

Such behavior may also be the result of desires to avoid the upward contrast effects of social comparison, the use of a comparison person or image as a standard for self-assessment, which the individual ranks above their own behavior (Mussweiler & Stack, 2000; Stapel & Koomen, 2000). In these instances, self-image is decreased (Mussweiler & Stack, 2000; Stapel & Koomen, 2000). Because the five women who expressed a reluctance to display their imperfections score highly on the perfectionistic self-presentation scale, intuitively they must have an idea or image of perfection in their minds that they are working to present to others. Imperfections are represented as the discrepancies between the perfect images the women are working to present and their own behavior. Later discussion reveals how images of effortless perfection also yield the same negative upward contrast effects.

Perfectionistic self-promotion, or the efforts to impress others with displays of flawless competence to gain admiration, respect, and an impression of perfection, was not revealed in the interview results (Jones & Pittman, 1982; Hewitt, et al., 2003). While specific questions were not asked about the ways the interviewees promoted their perfection publicly, the absence of perfectionistic promotion when asked to elaborate on their academic achievements was puzzling. Since nine people had PSP promotion scores above the cutoff point, all from quadrants with high overall PSP scores, I would have

expected more perfectionistic self-promotion behaviors in the interviews than what I gathered. In actuality, women were much more likely to talk about why they did not promote themselves, citing a dislike for the attention the promotion would bring and prior negative feedback for previous self-promotion.

Research on female identity development offers an explanation for this behavior. Research findings regarding female identity development and social norms indicate that women are likely to discount their own voices, in this case the promotion of themselves, in order to abide by societal standards of femininity and relationship building (Belenky, et al., 1986; Gilligan, et al., 1990). Promoting one's self, revealing one's independence and separateness, is not a component of femininity in Western culture, although male socialization is characterized by separation and autonomy (Gilligan, et al., 1990; Lytle, et al., 1997). Nor is promoting one's self viewed as contributing to relationship-building, a societal expectation for women (Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, 1982; Taylor, et al., 1995). One participant characterized promoting her accomplishments as the tension between being perceived as the "dragon lady" versus someone who cares about people. Another interviewee talked specifically about this, signing the names of all of her group members in group work assignments rather than confront others about their lack of involvement in the project. Issues surrounding female identity development may also be the reason the nondisclosure of imperfection behaviors emerge as the most prominent PSP behavior within the group of interviewees. These behaviors seek to prevent the separateness and individualism that result from breaking from societal expectations for perfection. Nondisclosure of imperfection also works to maintain relationships, since some of the women engaging in these behaviors think revealing imperfections will destroy their

friendships, promoting what Gilligan, et al. (1990) and Belenky, et al. (1986) consider women's ways of knowing.

Finally, ascertaining how engaged the interviewees' were in the nondisplay of imperfection was difficult given the potential of the interviewee to be unaware she was actively covering up her imperfections. Defined as hiding imperfect actions or preventing others from witnessing imperfect behavior, nondisplay of imperfection might be better measured by observation over time rather than self-reporting (Hewitt, et. al, 2003).

Effortlessness

Findings about the negative effects of effortless perfection from the Duke campus climate study, and results from other studies linking perfectionistic self-presentation with reduced emotional expression and lowered self-esteem in women (Azzi, 2007; Cockell, et al., 2002), warranted further research into effortless perfection. To understand the relationship between perfectionistic self-presentation and effortlessness, it was appropriate to first identify women who scored above the mean on the PSP scale and then determine where those women fell on the effort scale. Of the 113 people who scored above the mean on the PSP scale, 35 scored above the mean on the effort scale, which represented a high willingness to disclose their effort. In the same high PSP population, 78 women scored below the mean on the effort scale, indicating a low willingness to reveal their effort. Twice the number of high-PSP women expressed their reluctance to reveal their effort than the high-PSP women who were willing to reveal their effort. This finding suggests a strong correlation between high PSP and a low willingness to reveal one's effort. This correlation was also supported from within the interview population. Of the 13 interviewees who had survey responses indicating the presence of perfectionistic

self-presentation, 10 of them also had a low willingness to disclose the amount of effort

they exerted to achieve their academic goals. The other three interviewees had survey

responses indicating a high willingness to disclose their effort.

Contextualizing the frequencies regarding the prevalence of effortless perfection

in a population of high-achieving, high-PSP women are again problematic because,

despite prolific media coverage (Marklein, 2003; Martin, 2007; Quindlen, 2003; Rimer,

2003; Sachs, 2008), there no previously established research frequencies within such a

population. However, in addition, to offering strong support of a connection between

PSP and effortlessness, these data also are important because they suggest that the

effortless perfectionism "named" at Duke University is, in fact, a variation of

perfectionistic self-presentation. At Duke, images of effortless perfection were elevated

above perfect actions; the goal was for a woman to appear smart, beautiful, and popular

without looking like she worked for it. This look, this image, was the prize to be won.

Effortless perfection was more about projecting that perfection required no effort than

being effortlessly perfect. None of the participants involved in the Duke study contended

that perfection was naturally obtainable without effort; the goal was just to look that way

(Roth, 2003).

Like the women at Duke, women at Southland University engage in behaviors to

camouflage their effort, so their presentation to others not only appears perfect, it appears

effortless. Characteristics about the perfect SU woman include appearing pleasant and

put-together, someone who prioritizes time with her friends, but who also does not

express negative emotion. While the interviewees' responses were mixed in how they

related to this ideal and the value they placed on it, all but two of the 20 interviewees

acknowledged the image existed. Data from the current study supports conclusions from existing research studies that individuals are engaged in creating a perfect or an effortlessly perfect image of themselves, images that are separate from any actions they may take to be perfect or effortlessly so (Hewitt, et. al, 2003; McGee, et. al, 2005; Sherry, et. al, 2006; Sherry, et. al, 2007). As some interviewees distinguished between the effort exerted to complete an academic project and emotional effort, credence was given to the present study's suggestion that effort is two-pronged.

Expressing Effort.

The qualitative data provided in the interviews revealed more about the nature of effortless perfectionism than statistical frequencies alone can offer. Interviewees with survey scores high in perfectionistic self-presentation and low in willingness to disclose their effort provided several explanations for their concealment behaviors. They cited the negative judgments of others, belief in the fleeting nature of the stress associated with their effort, concern for others who worry about them, the fear of being perceived as a failure, and pride as the reasons for their decisions. If they shared their effort with anyone, the women were likely to only have one or two people as their confidants. These behaviors reflect, in part, the social comparison the women are engaged in: comparison with their own internal standards, but also the standards held by their families, communities, and the greater society (Hewitt & Flett, 1991b). If women compare themselves and feel above these standards, their self-esteem increases, but if they feel their behavior is below these standards, their self-esteem decreases (Jones & Buckingham, 2005). Obviously, some women view working hard to achieve one's goals as undesirable and below their personal standards and/or the standards of their peers and

larger society, so they resort to hiding their work and effort to maintain an image consistent with those expectations.

Unexpectedly, two women revealed that they hid the amount of work they exerted to appear effortless on certain academic assignments, but not on other assignments where the majority of their classmates exerted high levels of effort in the completion of such academic work. In those instances, complying with social norms regarding socially acceptable amounts of effort proved more influential than appearing effortless in the completion of such tasks. This behavior may also be reflective of each woman minimizing her voice, in this case the promotion of herself as effortless, in order to abide by societal standards of femininity and relationship building (Gilligan, et al., 1990). The reluctance expressed by three women in this quadrant to share their excitement over high marks, unless it is revealed that they worked hard to earn said marks, also reflects the power of gender norms in Western culture: encouraging women not to demonstrate their competence for fear they are perceived as self-promoting and separate from others (Silverstein & Perlick, 1995).

The data most worrisome for collegiate educators, however, is the frequency with which some women in this research project compare themselves to familial, community, and societal standards and feel inadequate. Of the current standards for high-achieving women, one interviewee, Hannah acknowledged, "it almost seems like it's better for it to be effortless than for people to know that you've worked really hard to get something." Combined with research on gender roles and norms suggesting that women lose their own voices to preserve their relationships, the silencing of a female's voice and the loss of her self-esteem seems ensured in this population (Gilligan, et al., 1990). Evidence of

the female desire to maintain relationships was also evident in the women who cited the worry of others as the reason they hid their effort. If a woman is seeking effortless perfection, the negative effects on her self-esteem seem guaranteed: first, from the comparison inherent in striving to reach an unobtainable goal and second, from the requirement of reaching an unobtainable goal without revealing effort.

Furthermore, the research dedicated to social comparison already suggests that people are reluctant to admit to engaging in comparison (Helgeson & Taylor, 1993; Hemphill & Lehman, 1991; Schoeneman, 1981). Hewitt, et al. (2003) found that individuals with high PSP are more likely to be sensitive to the behaviors of others in social situations and to social comparison cues than individuals without high levels of PSP. Interestingly, Powers and Zuroff (1988) and Robinson, Johnson, and Shields (1995) found that the perfectionistic self-presentation some engage in to protect their image in the minds of others may actually result in the formation of less-than-favorable impressions. Others are likely to view these behaviors as defensive and/or avoidant of social interactions (Powers & Zuroff, 1988; Robinson, Johnson, & Shields, 1995).

Expressing Emotion.

Of the interviewees who hid their effort, they indicated a higher likelihood of hiding the amount of work they exerted than concealing their emotions. For those who did make the decision to disclose their emotions, they cited their trust levels with their confidants and their perception of their confidant's shared experience with the interviewee as the primary reasons for their decision. Importantly, three women indicated that they were most unlikely to share emotions of sadness and disappointment with the people closest to them, including their significant others and friends. For these three

women, their mothers served as their lone emotional confidants; they felt too vulnerable to reveal their emotions to anyone else. This reluctance to share emotionally reflected what Anna deemed was Southland University's female paragon: "poised under pressure," someone who "can handle herself well even when she's emotionally upset."

This behavior is suggestive of female behavior as described by Gilligan, et al., (1990) where a female's orientation is geared towards preserving relationships, which negative emotions threaten to jeopardize. As evidenced by the women in this research who would not reveal negative emotions to long-term partners and friends, the emotional inhibition caused by concern for the opinions of others, reflective of societal gender norms, are not easily overcome (Silverstein & Perlick, 1995). Furthermore, Burns (1980) found perfectionists to have an increased responsiveness to rejection and disapproval, which offers additional evidence for why perfection-seeking women would internalize their thoughts and feelings. The reduction of emotional expression detailed by the high-achieving women in this study, particularly those with HPLE, support Azzi's (2007) examination of emotional expressivity and PSP behaviors. In that study, Azzi found the negative correlation between emotional expressivity and PSP to be much stronger for women than for men (2007).

Another major finding of Azzi's (2007) work was the likelihood of individuals high in perfectionistic self-presentation to be engaged in conflict or ambivalence over their emotional expression as a result of their unrealistic expectations and need to present themselves as perfect to others. This finding is a departure from previous research suggesting that individuals with high socially prescribed perfectionism are first and foremost preoccupied by reduced emotional expression (Flett, Hewitt, Blankstein, et al.,

1991; Flett, et al., 1996). Conflict and ambivalence about emotions were not cited by any of the women in this study, nor were explicit questions regarding conflict and ambivalence solicited from the survey participants. However, Azzi's own definition of "ambivalence over emotional expression," "when the individual is conflicted over their [sic] emotions and chooses not to express," makes her conclusion problematic (Azzi, 2007, p. 113). If not sharing one's emotion is viewed as ambivalent behavior, it is not immediately clear in her work how that behavior is distinguished from a lack of emotional expression. Thus, while Azzi's work contributes to the growing body of literature dedicated to the study of perfectionistic self-presentation, follow-up studies clearly distinguishing emotional ambivalence and reduction are necessary before comparisons to the current research findings would be prudent.

Depression.

Research indicates that approximately 15 percent of students experience a form of mental illness, including major depression, during their collegiate tenure (Nauert, 2008). The administration of the amended HANDS screening tool (Baer, et al., 2000) revealed that 25% of this research study's survey population answered the HANDS questions in ways "consistent with a major depressive episode" and 3% of the population responded to the tool in a way "strongly consistent with criteria for a major depressive episode" (Baer, et al., 2000, p. 40). On the basis of national data indicating that one in every eight women is likely to develop clinical depression during her lifetime (National Institute of Mental Health, 1999), in addition to research naming depression the most significant health risk for women, the presence of self-reported depression was expected in my survey population (Giled & Kofman, 1995). Recent research commissioned by the Jed

Foundation, utilizing online survey responses from over 500 college students, revealed that the number of students self-reporting some form of depression more than doubles between their first and second years of college: 16% of freshman, 49% of sophomores (Jed Foundation & mtvU, 2006, p. 3). Given research links between depression and high levels of academic achievement (Arthur, 1998; Bray, 2008; DeBerard, Spielmans, & Julka, 2004), perfection and perfectionistic self-presentation (Flett, Hewitt, Blanknstein, & Mosher, 1991; Hewitt & Flett, 1993; Hewitt, Flett, & Ediger, 1996; Kilbert, Langhinrichsen-Rohling, & Saito, 2005; Martin, Flett, Hewitt, Krames, & Szanto, 1996; Vrendenberg, Flett, & Krames, 1993) and women (Culbertson, 1997; Kelly, Kelly, Brown, & Kelly; 1999; Weissman, Bruce, Leaf, Florio, & Holzer, 1992), my expectations for the frequency of depression within a population of high-achieving women were further heightened. The 28% of women in the study reporting at least the strong likelihood of suffering from depression were, thus, not surprising.

While a lack of medical training prevented the posing of interview questions regarding the women's past or present psychological distresses, the survey data indicated that 50% of the women I interviewed had symptoms suggesting the likelihood of a major depressive disorder. Furthermore, given the willingness of some interviewees to internalize their emotions and the relationship between the reduction of emotional expression with an increased risk for health problems of all magnitudes, it is likely that aspirations to further repress emotions also increased the likelihood of depression in my sample (Berry & Pennebaker, 1993; Katz & Campbell, 1994). As such, this research suggests that collegiate women struggling with effortless perfection appear at greater risk for depression than other women and other college students in general. Several

interviewees reported feelings of stress, frustration, and anxiety, all of which have correlations to depression in the literature (Brown, et al., 1999; Culbertson, 1997; Schwitzer, Grogan, Kaddoura, & Ochoa, 1993). Specific findings about the coping strategies utilized by the interviewees are discussed in depth at the conclusion of this discussion section.

Generalized Anxiety Disorder.

The administration of the Carroll-Davidson Anxiety Disorder Screen (Carroll & Davidson, 2000) revealed that 30% of survey respondents had symptoms suggestive of a generalized anxiety disorder (GAD). This is further confirmed by the scoring of the HANDS scale, as 25% of the survey population who answered the HANDS questions were recommended for consultation with a clinician for treatment of "an anxiety disorder instead of, or as well as, a major depressive episode." Research reveals that anxiety in college students has increased substantially over the past 30 years (Davis, 1997). In a 2006 survey of college freshmen, 30% of students reported feeling overwhelmed a large amount of the time, while 38% of freshmen females indicated feeling overwhelmed (Higher Education Research Institute, 2006). According to the National Mental Health Association College Student and Depression Initiative, in 2000 nearly 7% of college students experienced an episode of anxiety within the prior year, which is lower than the likelihood of anxiety expressed in the population surveyed for the current research undertaking. Data on the association between perfectionism and anxiety indicates the possibility of perfectionistic thinking in influencing the high likelihood of depression in my survey sample (Chang & Rand, 2000; Flett, Greene, & Hewitt, 2004).

Lacking the required training of a licensed mental health professional, the decision was made not to probe interviewees with questions regarding their past or present psychological distresses. Women across all quadrants indicated feelings of stress, frustration, and apprehension, which are feelings linked to anxiety in the literature (Flett, et al., 1994).While not equipped to identify interview responses indicative of GAD, I did discern from the survey data that 50% of the women interviewed had symptoms suggesting the likelihood of GAD. As such, this research suggests that collegiate women struggling with effortless perfection appear at greater risk for generalized anxiety disorder, in addition to depression, than other women and other college students in general. Again, conclusions about the coping strategies used by the interviews to manage their anxieties are discussed later in this discussion section.

Risky eating behaviors.

Finally, asking the women about their eating behaviors using questions from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (National Center for Health Statistics, 1992) revealed that 6% of the women admitted to one risky eating behavior in the 30 days prior to their completion of the survey and 1% of women engaged in at least two risky eating behaviors in the 30 days prior to answering the survey. According to the Renfrew Center Foundation for Eating Disorders, 25% of college women engage in bingeing and purging as a weight management technique (2003). In a 2006 survey conducted by the National Eating Disorders Association of male and female college undergraduate and graduate students, 20% of the 1,002-member sample indicated that they believed they had suffered from an eating disorder at some point in their lives. Within that same survey, 44.4% of students indicated they knew someone who exercised compulsively for more than two

hours at a time, 38.8% of respondents knew someone who purged by vomiting and 26% knew someone who relied on laxatives to lose weight (National Eating Disorders Association, 2006). In a 1996 study, it was found that over 50 percent of women between the ages of 18 and 25 would rather be run over by a truck than be fat and two-thirds of women would rather be considered mean or stupid (Gaesser, 1996).

The psychology literature is also very clear in its confirmation of perfectionism as a risk factor for the increased likelihood that women will develop eating disorders including anorexia, bulimia, and binge eating (Bastiani, Rao, Weltzin, & Kaye, 1995; Bers & Quinlan, 1992; Brunch, 1977; Cockell, et al., 2002; Davis, 1997; Fairburn & Cooper, 1993; Gellar, et al., 2000; Halmi, et al., 2000; Hewitt, Flett, & Ediger, 1995; Pratt, et al., 2001; Srinivasagam, et al., 1995; Strober, 1991; Vitousek & Manke, 1994). In light of the frequency of risky eating behaviors engaged in by college students and the characteristics of this research population — female, high-achieving, with established incidences of perfectionistic self-presentation (PSP) — the incidence of risky eating behaviors in this study's population is low.   Potential explanations for this finding are discussed under directions for future research.

Environmental Factors

In sharing their experiences, Southland University undergraduates touched upon their education, family values, peer relationships, and societal messages about female gender norms. According to the interviewees, and supported by previous research, these factors are highly influential in shaping the interviewees' perspectives on (Arthur & Hayward, 1997; Astin, 1993; Baxter Magolda, 1992; Belenky, et al., 1986; Hewitt &

Flett, 2002; Roth, 2003) and responses to the existence of PSP and effortlessness as a style of self-presentation.

Although two of the women interviewed refrained from adhering to the demands of perfection, the other 18 women revealed efforts to project perfection and/or effortlessness at least some of the time. While two women were influenced by explicit comments from parents and professors to achieve perfection, two other women indicated that the explicit comments from their parents had stopped because the interviewees had achieved academically, yet never stopped pushing themselves. It was much more common, however, for women to be motivated by the mere existence of the academic accomplishments of their parents, older siblings, professors, and/or peers to achieve academically, pressures that often combined with other forms of competition (comparison to peers, for example) and evolved into pressures for academic perfection.

As mentioned earlier, social comparison was highly influential in the lives of these interviewees. Interviewees did not need direct, verbal encouragement for academic perfection; the motivation for high achievement already existed in the interviewees' comparisons to the accomplishments of their family members. Again, though, it is important to note the decrease in self-esteem expected when an interviewee's comparison resulted in her feeling that her achievements were of lesser quality than those of the comparison model (Jones & Buckingham, 2005). Research also shows that for a woman comparing herself to her image of perfection, the resulting self-esteem decrease is likely more severe than reduced feelings of self-esteem inherent in a contrast comparison alone. The negative effect on self-esteem results in part because the perfectionist is not likely to ever view her perfection as realized (Hewitt & Flett, 1990, 1991a, 1991b; Hewitt, Flett, &

Weber, 1994). From this research, another side effect of perfectionistic self-comparison emerged: women engaging in perfectionistic comparison to such an extent that they expected their family members and peers to live up to the same perfectionistic standards. While the "others" in these situations were not available for interviewing, future research on the effect of such behavior on the relationship between the interviewee and the other would be illuminating.

Furthermore, despite research indicating that women are perceived as less competitive than men (Garza & Borchert, 1990; Jones, Swain, & Cale, 1991; Sutherland & Veroff, 1985), the interviewees arrived at Southland University expecting to push themselves to perform academically in the competitive environment that earned them admission. The difference between Southland University women and those in prior research studies is not a lack of competitiveness in the Southland University women, but the presence of pressure to conceal competitive drives in order to meet social gender norms. Social reproduction of female "activities and attitudes, behaviors and emotions, responsibilities and relationships" (Laslett & Brenner, 1989, p. 382) are responsible for women's ideas about gender normative behavior (Hearne, 1997), behavior that typically includes the prioritization of relationship building and positive affirmation from their peer group (Holland & Eisenhardt, 1990) rather than ideas of separateness that comes from competition (Belanky, et al., 1986; Gilligan, et al., 1990). Research by Beardsley, et al., (1987) and Offerman and Beil (1992) confirms that women are less likely to endorse the direct competitive style of achievement than men. Ironically, then, the pressures women feel to work and gain competitive advantages include working to conceal how hard they are striving for said advantages and, hence, the pressures for effortless

perfection emerges for some interviewees. This behavior can also be interpreted as even more intense striving for advantages and competition than other women and men who do not assume the burden of hiding their effort to achieve academically.

Of course, it is important to note that women did not uniformly perceive or respond to familial, educational, communal, or societal expectations regarding academic achievement, presentation styles of perfection and effortless perfection. Their reactions included either aspiring to an effortlessly perfect ideal, believing in the existence of the ideal but rejecting it, or dismissing the existence of such an ideal completely. Women who did not aspire to the ideals of effortless perfection attributed the influence of environmental factors and specific role models within that environment who shaped their perspectives. They cited people and experiences that encouraged them to prioritize their own happiness, view grades and effort exerted in a course as secondary to learning, and approach failure as mistakes and learning experiences. Research by Bogat and Liang (2005) that focused on gender in mentoring relationships supports the positive effect mentoring relationships can have on female adjustment and self-esteem. Although formal mentoring relationships were not a formal focus of this study, Bogat and Liang's research bolsters the potential positive impact supportive relationships and informal mentoring roles can have for high-achieving female college students.

Coping Strategies

Given that women compose 57 percent of the national undergraduate population (Lewin, 2006), and the Southland University class of 2010 (Southland University Assessment Office, 2006), understanding the unique facets of the female college student experience allows for higher education administrators and professors to respond

effectively to collegiate female needs (Southland University Assessment Office, 2006). As a result, the current research undertaking considered the ways in which the women at Southland University are responding to their stresses, which, for some, includes stress from working to achieve perfectionistic self-presentation and effortless perfectionistic self-presentation. Research on college student stress levels reflects the significant presence stress has in the lives of college students, including the women in this study. In a 2006 on-line survey of over 500 college students, 70% of sophomore women reported increases in pressures to handle stress from their freshman year; only 43% of males felt the same way (Jed Foundation & mtvU, 2006). In the same survey population, 72% of female college juniors reported an increase in pressures to handle stress, while 54% of males indicated that they were experiencing increasing pressure to handle stress (Jed Foundation & mtvU, 2006).

According to Schulenberg, Wadsworth, O'Malley, Bachman, et al. (1997) a college student responds to his or her environment in either positive or negative ways, i.e. adaptive or maladaptive coping. These coping behaviors are precursors to health opportunities or health risks. Health risks encompass behaviors that can threaten healthy living, such as unprotected sex or binge drinking, while healthy opportunities include behaviors that "enhance mental and physical health," such as exercise or acquiring social support (Zaleski, Levey-Thors, Schiaffino, 1998, p. 127). Included in the discussion of coping strategies is the data already presented about the participants' maladaptive responses to stress: depression, anxiety, and risky eating behaviors. Beyond those behaviors specifically identified in the questionnaire, no interviewees revealed alcohol and/or drug misuse or sexual promiscuity, although these are well tracked behaviors

within college student populations (MacDonald, Zanna, & Fong, 1996; Maggs, 1997;

Schulenberg, et al., 1996). Of course, just because such behaviors were not mentioned

does not mean that they were not present. Certainly societal stigmas exist for people who

decide to share publicly their destructive behaviors; for those who are high-achieving and

female, the likelihood of a negative response from others to such behavior is even more

likely (Alden, et al., 1994; Ashby, et al., 2006; Azzi, 2007; Chang, 2002; Gilligan, et al.,

1991; Zaleski, et al., 1998). Especially for women, any type of behavior that deviates

from social norms regarding self-expression, stress responses, and growth is viewed

unfavorably, which further inhibits the emotional expression required for healthy

development (Belenky, et al., 1986; Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan,

et al., 1991).

The coping responses of the Southland University women captured in the

interviews revealed a diverse range of responses to stress. For two of the women in the

high perfectionistic self-presentation, low willingness to display effort quadrant (HPLE),

this included ways to seek control: either through obsessive cleaning or being extremely

structured with their time. Women across all four quadrants employed healthy coping

strategies, spending time alone and/or with friends, boyfriends, and family, although two

interviewees, both with high PSP scores, said that they did not like alone time even

though they recognized that they needed it to recharge. The HPLE quadrant was unique

from the other quadrants in that it included the unhealthiest coping responses: not

sleeping for days, berating oneself for feeling the stress of poor academic performance,

sharing stresses with their mothers but refusing to share in kind with their closest friends

or significant others.

Five of the women from this quadrant (half of the quadrant's population) did employ healthy ways to relieve stress, particularly by sharing their experiences with others. Women cited feelings of inspiration and insight when connecting with others. Encouragingly, several of the women indicated that their college experience helped them identify the de-stressing methods that worked best for them, including: watching movies, dining out, exploring nature, exercising, listening to music, sleeping, attending religious services, and disconnecting from the phone and email. Two women shared that they relied on professional therapy to transition from unhealthy coping strategies to healthy ones.

Also applicable to the discussion on coping strategies is Hewitt, et al.'s (2003) hypothesis that PSP may be classified as a negative coping strategy, a psychological and/or behavioral effort to minimize stress. Since Hewitt, et al. (2003) link distress and heightened levels of perfectionistic self-presentation, he views PSP as a response to distress. Hewitt, et al. (2003) continue: "coping in this manner produces difficulties by influencing relationships or maintains difficulties by precluding dealing with problems appropriately" (p. 1321). Based on research concerned with social comparison (Brown, et al., 1992; Wood, 1989), social reproduction (Laslett & Brenner, 1989), and gender norms (Hart & Kenny, 1997; Silverstein & Perlik, 1992; Spindler, 1997; Steiner-Adair, 1989), the behaviors of some of Southland University's female students confirms Hewitt, et al.'s (2003) classification.

Contributions of this Study to the Research and Literature

By identifying high-achieving collegiate women's pressures for achievement and perfection (internal motivations and external forces of competition, comparison, gender

normative behavior, and social reproduction) previous research on the origins of

perfection are reinforced (Belenky, et al., 1986; Gilligan, et al., 1990; Hewitt & Flett,

1991b; Holland & Eisenhart, 1990; Laslett & Brenner, 1989). The research findings from

this study also suggest the existence of a new variation of perfectionistic self-presentation

than previously understood, expanding the entire body of psychology literature devoted

to understanding perfectionism. The present research not only supported Hewitt et al.

(2003)'s findings that perfectionistic self-presentation is distinct from trait perfectionism,

or the actions of perfectionism, but identified a perfectionistic self-presentation style

concerned with effortless perfection, EPSP. "Effortless perfection" is described by

students at Duke and Southland universities as attempting to appear flawless to others,

competent without trying. As a result, this phenomenon is perhaps more appropriately

labeled effortless perfectionistic self-presentation (the look of EP) rather than effortless

perfection (the acts of EP). For people concerned with self-presentation, image is

elevated above action. The established separation between perfect actions and looking

perfect in the psychology research makes the distinction between acting effortlessly

perfect and presenting oneself as effortlessly perfect necessary. See Figure 5.1 for an

update on the theoretical relationship between trait perfection, effortless perfection, and

perfectionistic self-presentation initially posed in chapter two.

Figure 5.1

Theoretical Relationship between Trait Perfectionism, Perfectionistic Self-presentation,

and Effortless Perfectionistic Self-presentation

Societal Expectations for Women

Perfectionistic Self-Presentation (Including Effortless Perfectionistic Self-Presentation)

Self and Socially-Oriented Trait Perfectionism

Internal Pressures

External Pressures
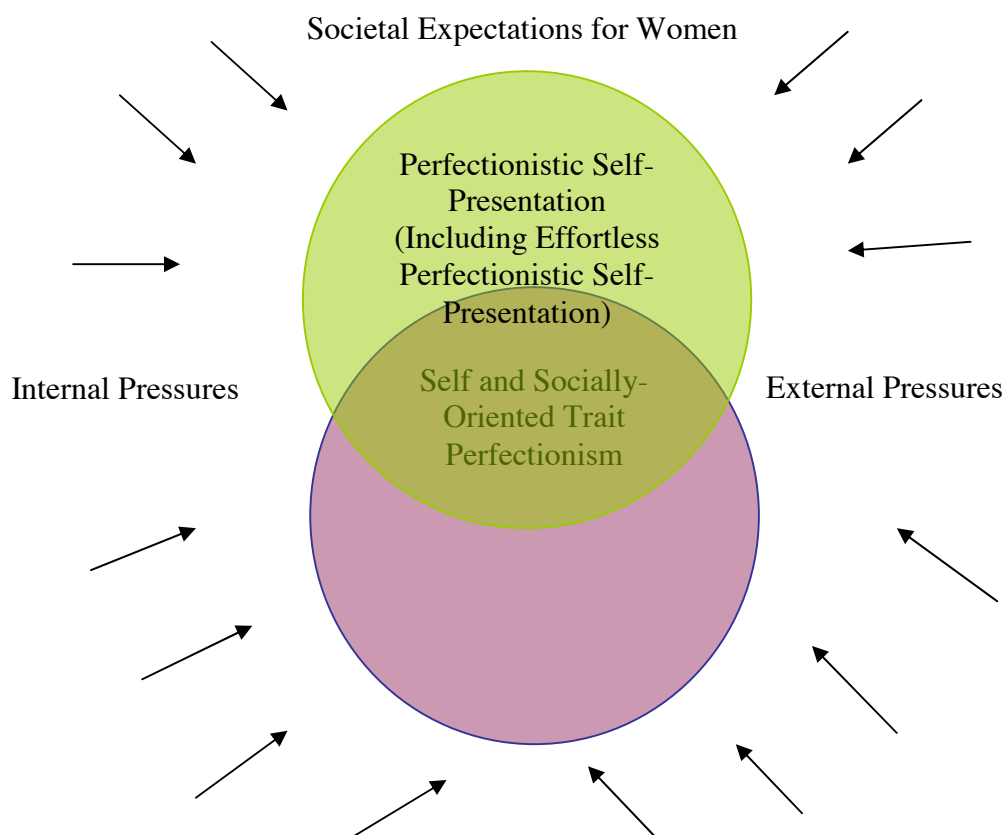
Effortless perfection was first named in a Duke campus climate study (Roth, 2003) and renamed in this research as effortless perfectionistic self-presentation. The manifestations of PSP and EPSP included in this research supports previous research suggesting perfectionism (Cox, et al., 2002; Chang & Rand, 2000; Hewitt & Flett, 1991b; O'Connor & O'Connor, 2003) and perfectionistic self-presentation (Azzi, 2007; Cockell, et al., 2002; Hewitt, et al., 2003) are maladaptive personality constructs. Given research links between perfectionism and such psychological disorders as anorexia nervosa,

anxiety, depression, and suicide, this finding is not surprising (Blankenstein, et al., 1993; Castro et al., 2004; Delisle, 1986; Flett, et al., 1991; Hewitt & Flett, 1991a).

This study revealed the unwavering focus of some women on PSP and EPSP, particularly women with survey scores indicating high incidences of PSP and low willingness to disclose their effort. In doing so, this research revealed the heightened focus women with PSP or EPSP are placing on the opinions of others. It is this emphasis, in particular, that is realized as being especially pernicious to the women engaging in such behavior. The other-oriented aspect of PSP and EPSP is the same aspect of socially-oriented perfectionism proven to increase an individual's psychological distress levels and decrease their self-esteem (Chang & Rand, 2000; Hewitt, et al., 2003; O'Connor, et al., 2004; Wyatt & Gilbert, 1998); Cockell, et al., (2002) called perfectionistic self-presentation a "defensive extension of the social self" (p. 764). This characterization aligns with Schlenker & Weigold's (1992) research linking self-presentation concerns with the internal drive for self-esteem maintenance and enhancement and Baumeister's (1982) research connecting self-presentation to an external drive to appease others. Effortless perfectionistic self-presentation, perfectionistic self-presentation, and socially-oriented perfection are all behaviors focused on earning positive affirmations from others, yet the perfectionist will never successfully be able to control the opinions of others all the time (Azzi, 2007; Geller, et al., 2000; Hewitt & Flett, 1991b; Sherry, et al., 2006; Sherry, et al., 2007). Not surprisingly, women in this study with high levels of perfectionistic self-presentation and a low willingness to disclose their effort reported more incidences of stress than interviewees from other quadrants in my study.

This research study also contributed to the literature by highlighting the likelihood of women with EPSP to reduce their emotional expression and conceal the effort they exert in order to appear effortlessly perfect to others. Geller, et al. (2000) had previously linked all three aspects of perfectionistic self-presentation to self-silencing and reduced expressions of anger in their study of university women. Azzi (2007) also found emotional expressivity of college students with perfectionistic self-presentation to be reduced; the strongest gender correlation was for women. Duke University had previously suggested that it was desirable and routine behavior on its campus for high-achieving women to hide their academic efforts, similar strivings were also found to be true for a couple of women at Southland University. While only interviewees engaged in this behavior, the present study also revealed the inability of some women with PSP and EPSP to form emotional connections with their friends and partners, refusing to share emotionally with them because they did not want to risk negative judgment. Such behavior again highlights the highly other-oriented nature of PSP and EPSP.

In summation, scholarly research dedicated to the study of perfectionistic self-presentation and effortlessness remains incomplete. While the frequencies of PSP and effortless perfectionistic self-presentation within this study's sample of female college students were successfully measured, the absence of frequency data in larger, normed populations remains. These frequencies provide a means of comparison for future studies looking at both PSP and effortless perfectionistic self-presentation, statistics that contextualize the results of the current research project. In addition to establishing a baseline of PSP and EPSP behaviors, increasing the body of qualitative information pertaining to these behaviors would offset the current paucity of qualitative PSP and

EPSP data. The findings revealed in this study provide a solid foundation for future research.

Implications for Practice

As a result of the findings generated by this research, and the conclusions of previous research studies concerned with the experiences of perfectionists and those individuals engaged in perfectionistic self-presentation, changes in higher education are necessary to meet the needs of high-achieving female students. For higher education to effectively educate female students, female student leaders must not be distracted from their academics and careers due to an overemphasis on how perfect they appear. In order to create and enhance support structures that address pressures for perfectionism, perfectionistic self-presentation, and effortless perfectionistic self-presentation, colleges and universities need ways to respond to cultural messages encouraging perfectionistic and effortlessly perfectionistic behaviors for women in American society, the inherent social comparison and competition that reinforces such behaviors, and the negative psychological effects of the behaviors. I posit three modifications to current higher education efforts to support female college students: 1) mentoring programs for female college students; 2) mentoring programs by female college students; 3) counseling and mental health services with a focus on women's issues regarding perfectionism and perfectionistic self-presentation styles.

Mentoring Programs for Female College Students

I was very fortunate to be around girls who have a lot of self-worth and self-value, and I think they had positive self-esteem, so when you're around people that feel positively about themselves and about their roles being female that rubs off on

you a little bit, too, so you know what it's like to be around someone who feels

positively and embraces being a girl and being intelligent and working hard.

(Yvonne)

As discussed in this study, pressures for perfectionistic and effortlessly perfect

behaviors extend far beyond the walls of academia. These pressures are rooted in

Western society, in messages about what it is to be a woman, to be successful, to be liked

by others. The roots of these messages are not easily unearthed; they are institutionalized

in society to such a degree that they are hardly recognizable and perhaps that is when

they become the most insidious. A cultural shift needs to take place for the messages

about females and perfection to change from ones of silence and concealment to

expression and individuality. High achievement and academic excellence are clearly not

defenses against socialization. Given the established research link between social support

and the minimization of stressful responses to life events, developing mentoring

programs seems likes a promising approach to diluting societal messages about

perfectionism, effortless perfection, and what it means to be a woman (Aldwin, 1994;

Balk, 1995; Losel & Bliesener, 1990; Sarason, Shearin, Pierce, & Sarason, 1987).

Research has indicated the positive effects strong mentoring relationships can

have on an individual's development and self-esteem (Bogat & Liang, 2005; Rhodes,

2005). Forming the bonds that result in many mentoring relationships seems particularly

important for women whose concern with perfection and effortless perfection makes

them fearful of forming emotional attachments even with long-term friends and partners.

Obviously, these mentors would need to be trained, especially since they are not

necessarily immune to societal pressures for perfectionism, to recognize the pressures and

their influences. If the female mentors are not willing to disclose their own effort or imperfection, negative mentoring situations might inadvertently be set up. The importance of these relationships and the encouragement to form them seems especially important in light of the earlier work of Brown and Gilligan (1992), who revealed that as adolescent women age, their propensity to express their thoughts and emotions decreases. Engaging in open conflict and vocalization of experience is replaced by concern for others and relationship building (Brown & Gilligan, 1992); perfectionistic self-presentation behaviors only reinforce this behavior.

According to Berndt and Keefe (1995), the quality of a friendship appears to more directly affect female developmental adjustment than male developmental adjustment, so the sense of connection and friendship provided in a mentoring situation is necessary. Furthermore, given the comparison and competition between high-achieving women highlighted in this study and the fact that women outnumber men on today's college campuses, there is further need for women to learn to ensure their own success by becoming more supportive and less critical of one another. Building that trust in a one-on-one relationship breeds the possibility of extending that trust outwards to others. While men at Duke also described pressure to achieve and look a certain way, the consequences for defying social norms were not described as harshly as they were described for women. Women should not be made to feel as if they have to choose between what Anna deemed, "becoming a dragon lady" and "your friendships and your relationships to be successful."

The women in this study who formed successful emotional bonds saw their role models as women whose achievements inspired them and whose trustworthiness was

ensured. The power of shared experiences in relationships for high-achieving women is evident in Maeve's comments at the end of her interview: "This has actually been very therapeutic for me. This is the right school for a project like this. The right culture to find the answers you are looking for." Since Maeve was one of the two women who indicated that she did not share any of her disappointments or frustrations with her boyfriend and friends, the likelihood for her to benefit from a mentoring relationship seems high.

Mentoring Programs by Female College Students

Mentoring programs designed specifically to match women struggling with perfectionism and effortless perfection is only one way colleges and universities can begin to better meet the needs of their female college students. Reaching out to the next generation of college students is equally important for institutions of higher education. Given that familial and societal messages about female success and perfection are present in the lives of female adolescents, even before they reach the highly-competitive college admission process, future generations of female college students may experiencing pressures to achieve in perfect and effortlessly perfect ways.

Training college women and sending them out into the community to serve as role models for adolescent girls offers the potential for institutions of higher education to break down enduring messages of female achievement and perfection long before these women reach the walls of academe. These intergenerational mentoring relationships seek to prevent the onset of some of the psychological distresses linked to perfectionistic self-presentation and effortless perfectionistic self-presentation, but there are other benefits as well. Engaging female adolescents in a mentoring relationship with college women has the potential to benefit the self-esteem of both the mentor and the mentee, affirm the

experiences of the mentee, give the mentee practice in building trusting relationships with others, and provide an emotional outlet for the mentee (Aldwin, 1994; Balk, 1995; Losel & Bliesener, 1990; Rhodes, 2005; Sarason, et al., 1987). Again, training on how to recognize societal pressures for perfection and effortless perfection, and rapport building through honest portrayals of effort and perfection-seeking, is necessary to prevent ineffective, or even detrimental, mentoring relationships. Intergenerational mentoring offers reinforcement for the building and sustaining of healthy relationships and, in doing so, offers the possibility of social change that will help reform social norms for women.

Counseling and Mental Health Services Focusing On Women's Issues

Regarding Perfectionism and Perfectionistic Self-presentation Styles

Yes. I took that survey and I go to my room. One of my roommates took it as well, and I was like, "Did you feel like she was writing a survey about your life?" "Not really," she said… It's like, "Oh, okay. I need help." (Maeve)

A woman's self-esteem is influenced by a global judgment of her worth (an amalgamation of feedback from parents, teachers, co-workers, friends, classmates, and the environment) and her own self-assessment of worth (Osborne, 1997). Her self-esteem is impacted by the discrepancy between what she desires and what she believes she has achieved, as well as the overall sense of support she feels from people around her (Rosenberg, 1965). If socially-prescribed perfectionism and perfectionistic self-presentation make a woman susceptible to low self-esteem and other psychological complications (Chang & Rand, 2000; Hewitt & Flett, 1991b; Hewitt, et al., 1996; Hunter & O'Connor, 2003; O'Connor, et al., 2004; Wyatt & Gilbert, 1998) and effortless self-

presentation phenomena are linked to reduced emotional expression (Azzi, 2007; Geller, et al., 2000), then colleges and universities have an obligation to support these women.

Of course, for women striving for perfection and effortless perfection in their behaviors seeking support is not something they are likely to be comfortable doing. Convincing these women to seek out support at campus counseling centers will likely be the greatest challenge for higher education professionals, although once the women arrive at the counseling center, the potential to improve women's health is great. Fully-staffed mental health centers with highly-trained professionals and access to support resources will encourage women to promote healthy coping strategies, including some of those already suggested by interviewees. Training at these campus centers should include recognition of the issues pertaining to female perfectionism, including an awareness of female gender norms that encourage women to refrain from expressing negative feelings such as anger or sadness (Belenky, et al., 1986; Brody & Hall, 1993, MacGeorge, 2000; Wood, 1997). Cross campus partnerships between mental health professionals and campus administrators and faculty members have the potential to dispel the myths of perfectionistic self-presentation and effortless perfectionistic self-presentation, as well. The ways in which these individuals govern their classrooms, model realistic identities (disclosing when they are tired, uncertain, etc.), and reward student behavior and performance can serve to deemphasize pressures for perfection and effortless perfection, complementing the work of the mental health centers. Clearly, incidences of mental health are not to be overlooked, as research shows students who feel positive about themselves have fewer sleepless nights, succumb less easily to pressures of conformity

by peers, are less likely to use drugs and alcohol, are more persistent at difficult tasks, are happier and more sociable, and tend to perform better academically (Bray, 2008).

<div align="center">Directions for Future Research</div>

As reviewed in chapter one of this study, Duke University's examination of high-achieving female undergraduate students (Roth, 2003) was the first academic introduction of effortless perfection. Duke's description of the phenomenon provided a crucial foundation in identifying the phenomenon. The review of additional, descriptive data regarding the phenomenon, as well as its prevalence among the population of high-achieving women presented here, provided crucial additional information about perfection, effortless perfection, perfectionistic self-presentation, and effortless perfectionistic self-presentation. In spite of these findings, there are still related areas of additional exploration with the potential to inform and improve student affairs and connected higher education practice.

First and foremost, a lack of published information regarding the prevalence of PSP in a population of university women makes interpreting the significance of PSP in the survey population problematic. Understanding whether the women in my survey population demonstrate more or less perfectionistic self-promotion, nondisplay of imperfection, and nondisclosure of imperfection than those in a nationally normed sample of college women would make it possible to draw stronger conclusions from the data. Furthermore, future researchers should take care in separating the term "perfectionism" from "perfectionistic self-presentation." Due to the presence of "perfectionism" in the common vernacular and the comparative infrequency of "perfectionistic self-

presentation" in colloquial language, future studies might better capture distinctions between the two terms when utilizing self-reported data.

Secondly, the data indicate that academically high-achieving women at one elite institution of higher education experience pressures for perfectionistic self-presentation, effortless perfectionistic self-presentation, and perfectionism. Since the data provided in this study refined the previous understanding regarding the existence of effortless perfection, and redefined it as effortless perfectionistic self-presentation, there is still room for replication studies at other institutions of higher learning. Not only would data collected from other selective American colleges and universities provide information regarding the prevalence of EPSP nationally, these data would serve to further illustrate the nuances of the phenomenon. Naturally, it would also make sense to replicate this study at institutions with less selective admissions standards than those of Duke or Southland in an attempt to further isolate the variables contributing to the manifestation of PSP and EPSP. Do different academic environments result in heightened gender comparison, reproduction, and socialization behaviors or are those forces less influential in less academically selective environments?

Given the prevalence and strength of the literature regarding the connection between women, perfectionism, and eating disorders, it is not immediately clear why my survey data were inconsistent with established data revealing the prevalence of risky eating behaviors among female college students (Cockell, et al., 2002; Gellar, et al., 2000; Hewitt, Flett, & Ediger, 1995). The low incidence of risky eating behaviors within my survey population is perhaps attributable to the educational programming and outreach done at Southland University concerning these issues, but it is an area for

further research. Although the survey questions only asked about behavior in the 30 days prior to the survey administration, it is also possible that a significant percentage of women in the population are in recovery from an eating disorder or disordered eating and therefore have not engaged in a risky eating behavior in the survey's time span of one month. Future questions that ask if women have ever engaged in a risky eating behavior might prove more illuminating than inquiring about behavior in the previous 30 days.

In designing future research related to EPSP, PSP, and perfectionism, the information from the Duke University campus climate study on the experiences of female college students served as the basis for the effort measurement in this study. No previous instrument existed to measure effort and, as such, the scale provides a basis for future research by others interested in measuring effortless perfectionistic self-presentation. Future researchers may also further delineate and operationalize the concealment of effort from the concealment of emotions in creating a similar scale or incorporating effortlessness into the existing scale for PSP and/or trait perfectionism.

Studies where data are collected through direct observation in addition to participant self-reporting would also benefit those interested in understanding the phenomena of EPSP, PSP, and perfectionism. As discussed in the presentation of these data, there were sometimes discrepancies in women's self-reported behavior in their one-on-one interviews and how they responded to confidential survey questions. Given that EPSP and PSP are phenomena largely concerned with perception, it would be prudent to compare observed behavior and participant-reported behavior. Discrepancies between the two might be attributable to the participants' concern with the perceptions of the researcher in reporting their behavior.

Longitudinal studies pertaining to these research findings would also provide interesting insight into how EPSP develops and changes over time. While this study and the preceding Duke University study looked at traditional-aged college women, it would be worth studying women's experiences as they relate to EPSP and perfectionism after college graduation, as women move beyond young adulthood and manage career and familial demands with increased frequency. Do women without prior incidences of EPSP, PSP, or perfectionism become increasing preoccupied with any or all of these phenomena or do they remain unaffected? Similarly, it would also be worthwhile to ascertain the prevalence of EPSP, PSP, and/or perfectionism in the lives of women prior to college, and look at the impact one's higher education environment has in increasing, decreasing, or maintaining a women's concern with EPSP, PSP, and/or perfectionism. Such a longitudinal examination would also allow for an increased understanding of how familial, secondary school, and personality traits impact a woman's level of concern with EPSP, PSP, or perfectionism, although it is likely impossible to separate the effects of early and late cultural socialization (Aschaffenburg & Mass, 1997).

Additionally, interpreting the research findings across a racially and ethnically diverse population is a likely next step at the present study's conclusion. Given the demographics at Southland University, the sample population was largely comprised of Caucasian young women, which is similar to preceding perfectionism studies concerned with college students (Chang, 1998). In one study conducted by Chang (1998) Asians were more likely to report greater perfectionistic tendencies than Caucasians, but more information on the degree to which ethnic or racial backgrounds correlate with perfectionism's influence on academic motivation and academic and psychological

adjustment is necessary. Links between effortless perfectionism and class might also emerge as variables worth isolating. People with the financial means to maintain an image of perfection might be more likely to strive to meet effortless perfection's demands than students for whom the material image of perfection is unattainable.

Finally, it would be appropriate to replicate this study with academically high-achieving men to see the similarities and differences in their experiences with perfectionism, PSP, and effortless self-presentation. Such research would shed additional light on the links between perfectionism and gender.

Conclusion

And so I kind of developed more interest in having a life, and not just having grades. And so I think that college has actually done what it's supposed to do and it kind of turns you more into a person and not just a grade getter. (Nina)

The purpose of this study was to increase understanding of the origins of high-achieving women's perceptions of pressures for PSP, perfectionism, and effortlessness, as well as how female students respond to those pressures. I also desired to make a contribution to the literature by providing a previously nonexistent mixed-method account of perfectionistic self-presentation and effortless perfectionistic self-presentation. Given the suggestion from the existing literature and this research study that perfectionism, perfectionistic self-presentation, and effortless perfectionistic self-presentation are maladaptive, linking female college students to depression, anxiety, and risky eating behaviors, it is important for higher education administrators and professors to understand the experiences of their female college students.

Understanding the experiences of female undergraduates includes understanding how gender norms for female behavior and perfection-seeking are institutionalized in Western society, encouraging women high on perfectionistic self-presentation and low on willingness to show effort to compare themselves to an ideal and to compete with unrealistic goals. While this study does not reveal how many women are high on perfectionistic self-presentation and low on willingness to show effort on the national level, this research reveals that some of the brightest and most talented women are silencing themselves and incurring psychological harm in pursuit of PSP and EPSP.

This study does not suggest that effortless perfectionistic self-presentation is rampant as national frequencies are currently unavailable. However, as female collegiate attendance surpasses the attendance of males and incidences of mental health issues within the college student population increase, understanding the pressures some female college student experience becomes more important (Benton, et al., 2003). Knowing the pressures facing collegiate women will further ensure that higher education professionals will be able to provide the necessary support for students experiencing pressures, securing the persistence, success, and health of these women. It is clear from this study that higher education professionals cannot allow these issues of perfectionistic self-presentation and effortless perfectionistic self-presentation to go unaddressed for modern college women and the college women of future generations.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Sample E-mail to Identified Study Sample Members

Dear Student:

Hello. I am a graduate student at The University of Virginia, conducting research on the experiences of academically high-achieving women. You were selected to receive this e-mail based on your cultivation of an impressive academic record at Southland University. The information that you can share with me regarding your college experience will be tremendously helpful to my research.

I hope that you will be willing to take a few minutes out of your undoubtedly busy semester to complete a brief survey on-line. Your participation is strictly voluntary and your responses will never be linked to you, unless you indicate your permission on the survey.

The survey is located at: URL HERE.

Thank you so much for your assistance. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any difficulty accessing the survey.

Best Wishes,

Alexis Andres

P.S. This study has received University of Virginia Institutional Review Board Approval, #2007-0051-00.

Appendix B

High Achieving Women Questionnaire Packet

Thank you for taking the time to answer the following questions. Your help is really important to me. I am hoping to learn more about how high-achieving women at Southland University think and feel. All of your answers are confidential unless you want to reveal your identity to me for possible follow-up interviewing. Please answer all items as truthfully as possible.

Thank you again for your help!

Alexis L. Andres
Doctoral Student
University of Virginia
434-924-7259

Please take a few moments to provide me with the following information about you. Some of this information is personal. If you are uncomfortable answering a question, please feel free to leave it blank.

1. What is your undergraduate school affiliation?

2. What extracurricular activities are you involved with this semester (include social organizations, volunteer organizations, and clubs)? Please list any of your leadership roles within these organizations:

3. What is your race? (*please check one*)
___African American
___Latino/Hispanic
___Asian/Pacific Islander
___Native American
___White
___Other _____

Over the past <u>two weeks</u>, how often have you?	None or little of the time	Some of the time	Most of the time	All of the time
1 Been feeling low in energy, slowed down?				
2 Been blaming yourself for things?				
3 Had poor appetite				
4 Had difficulty falling asleep, staying asleep?				
5 Been feeling hopeless about the future?				
6 Been feeling blue?				
7 Been feeling no interest in things?				
8 Had feelings of worthlessness?				
9 Thought about or wanted to commit suicide?				
10 Had difficulty concentrating or making decisions?				

These questions ask about things you may have felt most days in the <u>past six months</u>.	YES	NO
1 Most days I feel very nervous.		
2 Most days I worry about lots of things.		
3 Most days I cannot stop worrying.		
4 Most days my worry is hard to control.		
5 I feel restless, keyed up, or on edge.		
6 I get tired easily.		
7 I have trouble concentrating.		
8 I am easily annoyed or irritated.		
9 My muscles are tense and tight.		
10 I have trouble sleeping.		
11 Did the things you noted above affect your daily life (home life, or work, or leisure) or cause you a lot of distress?		
12 Were the things you noted above bad enough that you thought about getting help for them?		

How willing would you be to let your friends know if:	None or little of the time	Some of the time	Most of the time	All of the time	N/A
1 You studied for an extensive amount of time on a major exam?					
2 You devoted a large amount of time preparing for an individual class presentation?					
3 You auditioned or tried out to join a co-curricular activity (clubs, Greek organizations, religious groups, etc.) and did not make it?					
4 You auditioned or tried out to hold a leadership position in a co-curricular activity (clubs, Greek organizations, religious groups, etc.) and were not selected or elected?					
5 You applied for a job and did not get it?					
6 You visited a professor or a teaching assistant and had a grade changed positively as a result of that meeting?					
7 You did not feel fit or thin enough?					
8 You felt rejected in a romantic relationship?					
9 You felt overworked?					
10 You were stressed?					
11 You were worried?					
12 You were sad?					
13 You were angry?					
14 You were embarrassed?					
15 You felt like you could not be yourself in the classroom?					
16 You felt like you could not be yourself socially?					

Please answer the following questions about body weight. Be as honest as you can.
1. How do **you** describe your weight?

a. Very underweight
b. Slightly underweight
c. About the right weight
d. Slightly overweight
e. Very overweight

2. Which of the following are you trying to do about your weight?
a. **Lose** weight

b. **Gain** weight
c. **Stay** the same weight
d. I am **not trying to do anything**
   about my weight.

3. During the past 30 days, did you **exercise** to lose weight or keep from gaining weight?
a. Yes
b. No

4. During the past 30 days, did you **eat less food, fewer calories, or foods low in fat** to lose weight or keep from gaining weight?
a. Yes
b. No

5. During the past 30 days, did you **go without eating for 24 hours or more** (also called fasting) to lose weight or to keep from gaining weight?
a. Yes
b. No

6. During the past 30 days, did you **take any diet pills, powders, or liquids** without a doctor's advice to lose weight or keep from gaining weight? (Do **not** include meal replacement products such as Slim Fast)
a. Yes
b. No

7. During the past 30 days, did you **vomit or take laxatives** to lose weight or to keep from gaining weight?
a. Yes
b. No

Perfectionistic Self Presentation Scale (Hewitt, et al., 2003)

Listed below are a group of statements. Please rate your agreement with each of the statements using the following scale. If you strongly agree circle 7; if you disagree, circle 1; if you feel somewhere in between, circle any one of the numbers between 1 and 7. If you feel neutral or undecided the midpoint is 4.

	Disagree Strongly		Neutral		Agree Strongly		
1. It is okay to show others that I am not perfect.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. I judge myself based on the mistakes I make in front of other people.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. I will do almost anything to cover up a mistake.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. Errors are much worse if they are made in public rather than in private.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. I try always to present a picture of perfection.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. It would be awful if I made a fool of myself in front of others.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. If I seem perfect, others will see me more positively.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. I brood over mistakes that I have made in front of others.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. I never let others know how hard I work on things.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. I would like to appear more competent than I really am.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11. It doesn't matter if there is a flaw in my looks.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12. I do not want people to see me do something unless I am very good at it.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13. I should always keep my problems to myself.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14. I should solve my own problems rather than admit them to others.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15. I must appear to be in control of my actions at all times.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16. It is okay to admit mistakes to others.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17. It is important to act perfectly in social situations.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
18. I don't really care about being perfectly groomed.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
19. Admitting failure to others is the worst possible thing.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
20. I hate to make errors in public.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
21. I try to keep my faults to myself.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
22. I do not care about making mistakes in public.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
23. I need to be seen as perfectly capable in everything I do.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
24. Failing at something is awful if other people know about it.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
25. It is very important that I always appear to be "on top of things."	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
26. I must always appear to be perfect.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
27. I strive to look perfect to others.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Appendix C

First Reminder E-mail to Identified Study Sample Members

Dear Student:

I sent you an e-mail last week regarding my dissertation research on the experiences of academically high-achieving women at Southland University. I know that the start of the semester is a busy time of year for you, but I hope that you might take a few minutes to complete a brief online survey. The information that you can share with me regarding your college experience will be tremendously helpful in understanding the experiences of high-achieving women.

The survey is located at: URL HERE.

Of course, your participation is strictly voluntary and your responses will be anonymous, unless you indicate otherwise on the survey.

Thank you so much for your assistance.

Best Wishes,

Alexis Andres

P.S. This study has received University of Virginia Institutional Review Board Approval, #2007-0051-00.

Appendix D

Final Reminder E-mail to Identified Study Sample Members

Dear Student:

I just wanted to send you a quick reminder about an online survey for my dissertation research on the experiences of academically high-achieving women at Southland University. Please consider taking a few minutes to complete the brief survey online at:

URL HERE

Your experience is crucial to my understanding of the experience of high-achieving women at Southland University. Remember that your participation is strictly voluntary and your responses will be anonymous, unless you indicate otherwise on the survey.

Thank you so much for your assistance!

Best Wishes,

Alexis Andres

P.S. This study has received University of Virginia Institutional Review Board Approval, #2007-0051-00.

Appendix E

Interview Topic Guide

Name: Age:

Hometown: Major:

Race/Ethnicity:

Activities/leadership roles:

1. Self-awareness
      a) How would you describe yourself to others?
      b) What adjectives might others use to describe you?
      c) Are the descriptions of others accurate? If not, where are there discrepancies?

2. Family
      a) How would you describe your mother or mother-figure in your life?
      b) How would you describe your father or father-figure in your life?
      c) In what ways, if any, are you the same as them? Different?
      d) What aspects of your life do you share with them? What are the ones you keep private?

3. Involvement
      a) What motivates you?
      b) How do you decide whether or not to involve yourself in an activity?
      c) How do you decide whether or not to involve yourself with a person?

4. Academics
      a) How important are grades to you?
      b) Are they more/less/the same level of importance as high school?
      c) How do you feel and what do you think when you receive a good grade? A bad grade? How long have you felt this way?

5. Stress
      a) What concerns/stresses do you have in your everyday life?
      b) How do you deal with stress?
      c) When you are stressed do others know?
      d) Who helps support you during times of stress?

6. Failure
      a) How do you define failure?
      b) How do you feel and what do you think when you fail?
      c) Who can you tell when you don't succeed?

7. Female Identity Development
      a) What does being a woman mean to you? How did you develop that sense?
      b) Have you always felt that way?
      c) Do you think there are any important difference between women and men?

Is there anything else you would like to share?

Appendix F

Resources Guide for Survey and Interview Participants

Helpful Information for You

Thank you very much for participating in my study. I am hoping to increase my understanding of how academically high-achieving college women think and feel. The information you submitted will be very helpful in understanding your experiences. These questions may bring up feelings that they would like to talk more about. If you want to discuss in more detail your feelings after taking this survey, consider contacting:

The Health's Center's Counseling Center can be reached at XXX-XXX-XXXX. Located at XXX, the mission of the Counseling Center is the mental health of all Southland University students (http://www.xxxxx.edu).

The Office of the Dean of Students in xxx building provides 24-hour on-call crisis response services to Southland University students. Those in need of support or referrals should be aware that these services are available by contacting the offices in XXX building at XXX-XXX-XXXX or XX Residence Hall at XXX-XXX-XXXX. After hours, contact the Southland University Police Department at XXX-XXX-XXXX. (http://www.xxxx.edu)

The Women's Center offers personal counseling free of charge for individuals dealing with life and career transitions, relationship issues, sexuality, eating and body image concerns, and other issues. Located at XXX on campus, the Center also offers support groups and traveling workshops that address relationship issues, sexuality, alcoholism, self-esteem, and many other topics. Contact them at XXX-XXX-XXXX or http://www.xxxx.edu

Again, many thanks for participating!