Notes on *The Myth of the Perfect Girl*

*The Culture of Perfectionism: Discovering the Fear of Failure and Never Being “Good Enough”*
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Master’s Counseling, Duke
Green Ivy Educational Consulting
Other books:
- *That Crumpled Paper Was Due Last Week: Helping Disorganized and Distracted Boys Succeed in School and Life*
- *Social Media Wellness: Helping Tweens and Teens Thrive in an Unbalanced Digital World*

I. **Defining Perfectionism**
“A striving for excellence of completeness beyond practical or theoretical improvement.”

Reality
Striving for perfection is actually the most limiting way to live, life by external standards

Effects
Stress, stagnation, decreased productivity, creativity, curiosity, and constant anxiety

“Perfectionism is a trait that makes life is an endless report card on accomplishments or looks. A fast and enduring track to unhappiness, it is often accompanied by depression and eating disorders.” *(Psychology Today, online)*

II. **Today’s Teen World: What Makes for Perfectionism**
- Heightened expectations – culture of comparison, comparing “reel” life to real life, and celebrities and inspirational lifestyles
- Internet culture
  Duck syndrome (peer pressure), martyr syndrome (why it is killing me, I am enduring....)
- Social Medial and School – School peer and academic pressure 24-7....
- Getting Older Younger
  8-14 Girls Confidence drops 30% statistically
  Associated with puberty and that is starting earlier
  Physical, social and emotional ramifications of earlier onset puberty
  Marketers to target these girls at a younger age—feeds seeking external validation
  Bullying, meanness, constant competition
  Cele-bratty culture and reality shows – questionable role models
- Differing views of health
  Looks vs. Feel
  Following (teenage) fitness bloggers
- **Sleep Deprivation**  
  8-10 hours needed for teens  
  Huge sleep deprivation problem  
  Physical, social, and emotional ramifications  
  *Why We Sleep*, Matt Walker – recommended reading

- **The Ultimate Myth**  
  You should be able to do it all, all the time.  
  Leads to procrastination, insecurity, and meanness

### III. Strategies, Ideas and Solutions

1. **Change the Culture** - Overview  
   - Educate parents that there is more than ONE high school outcome  
   - Lead by example (as educators, parents)  
   - Turn failure to a branch of learning (growth mindset)  
   - Use the entrepreneurial model of success  
   - Work on buoyancy, bounce back (again, entrepreneurial examples...)

2. **Build community**  
   - People who belong to functional communities are happier and healthier.  
   - Break the cycle of the cell phone. Create face-to-face time.  
   - Suggestion for school community building – a 3-minute conversation between people you do not know; start with TA, those in same class, then work across classes

3. **Shift the conversation from achievement to overall wellness**  
   - What went really well for you this term, year....?  
   - What would you do differently this term, year....?  
   - Question Physical Wellness  
     - How well are you eating?  
     - How much are you sleeping?  
     - How do you deal with stress?  
     - TA: Short interview, journaling, etc.
4. Recognize the importance of attitude and approach
   o Positive vs. reactive
   o Energizing vs. draining
   o Practice unscheduling – even going so far as putting that in a schedule
   o Make de-stressing part of the ongoing conversation
   o TA: Taking time in the planner to schedule in an “unscheduled time event”

5. Provide Concrete Tools for Organization
   o Binders, tablets
   o Discuss when and how work is completed, generate ideas to organize
   o Planners
   o Weekly regroup sessions
   o TA: Freshmen who are disorganized meet together for binder, planner lesson

6. Focus on Personal Values and Progress Rather Than Perfection
   o Celebrate incremental progress
   o Consider 3-5 Top Values and then track/discuss the daily habits that either take you more toward or away from these goals—TA analysis
   o Practice (teens) 15 minutes on a single task – More time for classwork, small assignments, reflections, formative checks that require no distractions and thinking, writing, drawing, planning.....

7. Address the importance of nutrition, functional exercise and sleep
   o Nutrition for LONG-TERM energy
   o Functional exercise is stress relief; some competitive sports are the opposite
   o Sleep – getting enough

8. TURN NOTIFICATIONS OFF

9. Figuring out what you want to do – which includes not only studies, but meeting people and experiences and working on core values....
   o Focus the goal in high school on figuring out what you like to do and want to pursue (as opposed to grades or a college checklist)