

# **The Impact of Perfectionism within the Arts**

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## Introduction

The idea of becoming successful in a career can be inspiring and encouraging. To be able to live a comfortable life with a secure job in a nice household is something that, generally, a lot of people look forward to as they pursue their career. While in many cases pushing oneself to work hard and become a successful person can be a positive mindset, there are many issues that come as a result of this hard work and effort. In the case for artists, it may be difficult for them to maintain a healthy mindset when it comes to basing their success and livelihood off their art and how they present it to people. Being a full-time artist can be challenging because the individual has to be their own boss, which means that it is up to the artist to make their own art and to build a community of people who would buy and consume their art. There is no guarantee that an artist would have a stable source of income selling their art because of many uncertainties and possible expectations based around the artist and their creative process.

Artists often tend to be critical of themselves during the creative process because of the belief that they may not be where they should be. An example of this would be a musician believing that they should have an amazing album out when they are 20 years old because they see a young artist, like Billie Eilish who is currently 18 years old, already having a successful career as a singer/artist. In this case, success is defined by the artist's popularity, wealth, and status. When the artist defines success as this, the artist might start to think that they are falling behind because other people appear to be ahead of the game, and if they do not push themselves harder to be like their peers, they will not be a successful artist. Pushing oneself to work harder out of desperation causes the artist to put themselves in a position where they desire to become

perfect with their art, so they end up getting caught up in their work. The idea of working to be perfect to be successful is something that I will explore, describe, and analyze. I will discuss the relationship between mental health and the creative process, with the goal of reassuring other emerging artists that it is alright that they are not perfect. That it is okay that some artists are in their early 20s with successful careers and that there are other artists in their 40s or older who are still working on being successful. I am writing this paper as a way to speak and reassure aspiring artists that they do not need to worry about what other people might expect from them, and how it is alright to be lost and confused along the way. I believe that it is important for artists not to be too critical of their artistic capabilities because of how most of the pressure an artist feels is self imposed. I will provide insight and advice from psychologists and artists, from a variety of fields, to help any artist who reads this can gain confidence in their ability to make art, they will eventually find their own success that they will feel proud of.

### **Methods**

Most of the information that I gathered for my paper is primary research, mainly about qualitative interviews with artists. The reason why my paper contains more primary research about artists is because I wanted to get details about their first-hand experiences dealing with mental health in relation to their art. I want to explore and describe how artists feel about being emerging artists and to shed light upon the effects that could result from the hustle to become a well-known artist. In order to understand this issue, I need to describe and analyze the experiences that certain artists are going through and have gone through. This way, I could pose some solutions to help out any artists struggling to be successful with their art.

Another component of my paper would be collecting secondary research that helps define what some terms are and how certain issues/concepts relate to each other. An example of this would be analyzing what perfectionism means and how it ties to unhealthy habits in an artist's mind and creative process. These secondary sources will help me break down these concepts in a way that people can understand and recognize/relate to.

### **Perfectionism**

In the article “How Perfectionism Affects Your (Mental) Health” on Medical News Today, perfectionism is defined as “a combination of excessively high personal standards and overly critical self-evaluations.” Many artists develop a perfectionist mindset on their art because they want to create something that they will feel proud of making or something that someone else would appreciate. Based on this view, an artist must set certain standards for their art and creative process in order to produce work that is worth distributing to other people. In the same article in Medical News Today, Professor Gordon Flett and Professor Paul Hewitt explained three components in a video that helps to define what a perfectionist mindset is. Professor Paul Hewitt explains these components in the video stating:

Expecting yourself to be perfect: this won't mean you work hard and perform better. It means lots of unnecessary anxiety and worry. Expecting others to be perfect: this can impact negatively on your relationships. Who wants to be around someone who's demanding and unhappy with you all the time? Or thinking other people like a parent,

teacher, or coach, expects you to be perfect. Believing others only like you if you perform, look, or behave the way they want. **(Sandoiu, Ana 2018)**

The first component that Professor Hewitt explained is the idea that setting certain expectations for oneself does not always result in healthy habits. An artist might be too invested in getting their work to be the exact way they want it to be that they end up not enjoying the creative process. Not only does the artist not enjoy their creative process, but the artist finds themselves being too critical of their art, their performance, and of themselves. By forcing oneself to be so precise and exact with their execution of their art, artists leave little room for new ideas that they might come up with or even little room for mistakes they might make. The artist is limiting their freedom when they try to work perfectly, which forces the artist to hyperfocus on every little detail with no tolerance for other ideas. The limitations can make the artist feel stuck as if they do not get every detail “correct” then the final product would not be as great as they imagined it.

In this case, the artist expects themselves to be better than they think they are, which is a problem because no one is perfect or is expected to make perfection. It is important to always do the best you can, however it is also important to realize that one can push themselves too far, which will do more harm than good for the artist.

The second component has to do with how a perfectionist mindset behaves in collaborative work. The person with the perfectionist mindset might believe that their partner or group they are working with is not at the same mindset or level as them. What this could also mean is that the perfectionist might be too demanding of their partner’s work effort and might

start pushing them in an unhealthy way. Behaving like the perfectionist in this scenario is not a healthy mindset because it does not promote good work ethics and it makes the other partner or group members feel disappointed in their contribution. Either the perfectionist is disliked and collaboration does not occur or those people believe that their art is not good enough. Now those other artists begin to act like the first component and would be more critical of their work due to someone else's inability to collaborate.

The reason why this second component of perfectionism is significant is because artists rely on the support of other people to make their art. One of the main reasons why people make art is because they want to connect with other people and show their audience or fellow artists what they made. Without verbal or even financial support from other people, it becomes difficult for the artist to continue their work, which is why it is important for artists not to be so critical of each other. Expecting someone to be better than what they are hurts that person and insults the creative journey they have been on. A person's artistic style takes many years to develop and during those years the artist can be very critical of their work. They might think that they are not where they should be and to have someone point that out to them worsens the situation. Expecting someone to be better does not motivate that person to make art, rather it makes the artist doubt their ability to make art. Artists, or just people in general, should not be expected to do better than they already are doing. Everyone approaches their own tasks and goals at their own pace and the only exception to taking your own time would be for people working under other people.

The third component of what Professor Hewitt explained is the idea of believing that the people around you have certain expectations of one's quality of performance. This is a key component to understand when learning about how mental health relates to the arts. Whenever an artist releases a new song or dance piece, they want to make sure that their work appeals to their audience because they do not want to let down their audience and have them lose interest in their work. Many artists rely on the money they make from their work, so losing their audience would mean losing their source of income.

The real or made-up expectations that the artist is placed under can limit the artist on what they can create. If an audience expects a certain level of performance with the artist they follow, and the artist is dependent on that audience, the artist is forced in a way to work harder to make all of their work to be perfect. There is nothing wrong with trying to make one's work the best that it can be, but not every song, painting, or choreography that an artist releases will be a masterpiece.

In an interview conducted by myself, I asked Benjamin Carter, a painting and drawing major at SUNY Purchase college, about their experience with their creative process and their experience with perfectionism. When asked about their struggles when it comes to producing art, Ben replied with:

Right now what I'm struggling with, in my art practice, is for the past few years I was always very very particular and very specific about how I wanted my work to look and what I wanted it to mean. I would plan out every step and plan out every color and it led me to become very stressed when the painting didn't come out how I wanted it to and it



led to me feeling very tense and really dense and frustrated because I was so stingy and particular about it. **(Benjamin 2020)**

Despite having full control over their piece, Ben felt frustrated when they were in their creative process because they wanted to replicate each detail they had into their mind. The reason why Ben was frustrated when this happened is because they thought that if everything went according to their plan, then the end result would be as impactful as they imagined in their mind. However, it was because they had so much control over their piece that led them to focus on each detail of their piece and end up becoming stressed because of it. When an artist is given too much control over their piece, the artist develops a sense that they are responsible for the outcome of the piece and that if they do not properly portray their idea exactly as they imagined it, then the end result would not have as big an impact as they wanted. This is the reason why Ben claimed that they become more frustrated when someone interpreted their art differently from how they imagined it: “And if I finished a painting and I was like ‘This is what it means’ but people would look at it and say ‘Ben this is not what it looks like it means. I think it means this other thing’ I would get frustrated!”

Ben, however, was able to pull away from this perfectionist mindset by giving themselves more freedom rather than more control. By giving themselves more freedom rather than more control, Ben became less frustrated with the final result of their piece because they allowed themselves to diverge from the original plan. Ben allowed themselves to have more opportunities to evolve their piece as they are painting, rather than limiting themselves to only having one

interpretation of their idea. Something that Ben does to give themselves more freedom over their art is doodling before they start a piece.

I will sit at my desk, I'll get a giant piece of paper and a bunch of colors and markers, and I would just doodle and doodle and doodle until all the thoughts are out on the piece of paper. And they're not good. They're not good doodles, they're not masterpieces. It's just that it takes the pressure off. When you're doodling there's no pressure because you're just doodling. **(Benjamin 2020)**

Whether an artist is doodling, writing the first thing that comes to your mind, or improvising a musical phrase, letting your mind be free to create without a plan is an excellent way to get ideas going because of how low stakes it is. As Ben said, there is no pressure when you are doodling because doodles are not meant to be masterpieces. Doodling is just drawing the first thing that comes to your mind or drawing wherever your hand happens to go on the paper. There is no inherent plan or goal when fiddling around with your craft, and this can help generate some ideas that you might want to develop. After doodling, Ben would choose a doodle they like and would expand on that doodle because they think it is funny or cute or strange. Being able to let yourself and your mind go to do whatever it wants without any guidelines or goal in mind has helped Ben avoid going back into the perfectionist mindset.

### **Mental Health and the Arts**

A common issue that artists face over their career has to do with their mental health. Within the arts, there is a significant amount of self-discovery and reflection that an artist must

put their time into because the process of making art involves having the artist finding their voice to speak the message they want to portray. Each artist has their own voice and style of art, and an artist's style takes time to develop. Over this period of discovery, many artists might start to doubt their ability to create art because they might lose their confidence with what they are making based on the realization of their capabilities. When an artist is given more time to focus on their art, the more they will be critical of the details in their art. They might find many things that they might have not noticed previously, and the amount of errors those artists make might make them start to doubt their ability to make art. For some people, correcting mistakes can be less of a lesson of making a situation better and more of a reality check that the person is not as skilled as an artist as they hoped to be. In a blog from Dolby Chadwick Gallery "The Biggest Challenges Artists Face During Their Career." by Artwork Archive, the visual artist Jaq Chartier was interviewed about the challenges they faced as an artist. Jaq states this about challenges she faced when making art: "For me, when I'm not busy enough, I would think I'd get stuff done because I have all this time, but I actually start to wallow. My brain slows down, I start wondering, "Is this work any good?" It can become a droopy existential crisis."` (**Archive, Artwork 2019**)

One of the problems that many artists face that Jaq Chartier described has to deal with the time they spent on developing their art and the way they criticize themselves. Many artists have a certain style or aesthetic that they want to portray, whether they are influenced by another artist or based on their personal tastes. The issue is that artists do not simply create the art they want right away without time for development. It takes time for an artist to learn the skills they need to create art and it takes more time for the artist to develop their voice within their art. Many times

along an artist's journey, there are periods where the artist would start to criticize themselves for not being where they expected to be.

This period of doubt in an artist's journey is explained in an interview with Ira Glass titled "The Taste Gap." In this interview, Ira Glass says: "But it's like there's a gap, that for the first couple years that you're making stuff, what you're making isn't so good, OK? It's not that great. It's really not that great. It's trying to be good, it has ambition to be good, but it's not quite that good." (Popova, Maria 2015). Ira goes on to explain that at this point in the artist's journey, they give up on their art. The struggle of knowing that one's art is not good or where the artist wanted it to be can be a major conflict to the artist because they have a realization that they might not be able to pursue a career or life with their passion.

As Jaq Cartier stated: "It can become a droopy existential crisis." This "droopy mentality" could lead to the artist being too critical about their work, and how it is not exactly where they want it to be. That their work is not "perfect." This obsession of wanting to constantly develop one's craft until it is exactly the way the artist wants it to be is the idea of perfectionism, which can be detrimental to the artist in many ways. Placing the expectation of perfection upon oneself is such a heavy burden to carry because the idea of "being perfect" means that there can be no room for mistakes and there can only be one view of the final product. Leaving no room for mistakes and hyperfocusing on one idea is, in a way, the opposite of what art is and should be. People are always going to make mistakes or mess up on something they are working on, and expecting oneself to not make any sort of mistake will leave the person disappointed. By making mistakes with a perfectionist mindset, the artist is always going to act

harsh towards themselves for making those mistakes, and that might result in them losing faith in their ability to create art. It is as Jaq stated earlier about wondering “Is this work any good?” The constant doubt and disappointment of their expectations turns what they hoped to be a passion into a let down.

Believing that there is only one interpretation of the final product can also hinder an artist’s performance. If you put 10 painters in a room and told them to paint a panda in a bamboo forest, each of them will come up with a different interpretation. The point of view may be different, the artists might use different colors from each other, the size and shape of the panda may be different, the composition of the pieces may be different. Regardless of what the subject may be or even what the art medium is, there are infinite ways in interpreting an idea. Just because what you made may not be what you initially imagined does not mean that the end product is less valid. Perfection in art does not exist, and to expect to be perfect in your creative process is pointless and does more harm than good.

Even though having a perfectionist mindset is seemingly more harmful than good, many artists end up developing this mindset because of the third component of perfectionism, the expectations other people have on you/your work. As an artist, it is important to share your work to other people because that is how you network with people and find a source of revenue for your art. Sharing your work can be done through local performances, galleries, or perhaps the most major platform; social media. Posting your work on social media can be stressful because one’s work and profile is easily accessible. A person’s social media platform is where people can get a glimpse of who you are as an artist and what you are capable of doing. This means that

showing people the best you can do gives you a better opportunity to gain a larger audience and more people who will be willing to share and consume your art. The issue occurs when the artist feels limited to what they can create in order to appeal to their audience as a source of income.

### **Social Media and the Arts**

Having to appeal to an audience or to a certain demographic can be a difficult task because making art for a certain type of people can limit the type of art an artist wants to create. People follow or support an artist because they either like their style, their message, or their personality. When a person follows an artist for these reasons, they generally want to see more work similar to the one that got them interested in the artist. This goes back to the third factor of perfectionism about people expecting perfection out of someone, their work, and how they go about their work. Sometimes an audience would beg for more content of a certain style from an artist and the artist would have to follow through with what their audience wants because they depend on their audience's attraction to their work. Sometimes an artist is not always in full control of what they make, even though they are the one creating the art, because they do not want their audience to lose interest in their art. The artist fears disappointing their audience and so they feel defeated as they feel limited on what they can create.

Examples of artists having to maintain a certain image of themselves, in a way pandering to their audiences, can be seen through artists who have a constant online presence on social media. Social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter can be excellent platforms for artists to compile and share their work in. Users can search up artists, like, comment, and share posts to other people. These devices for interaction prove to be a great

system for artists to be known by other people because of how easily accessible social media can be. Artists can receive direct feedback from their audience and can easily find out which of their posts gets more attraction and likes than others. However, maintaining an online presence could be a detriment to an artist's mental health because of how draining it could be.

In an article titled "Help or Harm? How Social Media Can Impact Musicians' Mental Health," Eoin Murray interviewed several psychologists and an East Indian rapper about how social media can affect an artist's mental health. The rapper, William Doyle, talks about how much social media consumed his time as an artist. Doyle describes the process where he posts a tweet, gains more followers, has to manage keeping his followers entertained off stage, which all gets repeated as he gains more followers. The number of followers he was gaining drained him mentally because of how much time he spent managing his social media accounts rather than making music. Doyle says: "It's a huge amount of pressure to put on yourself, beyond the job of just being an artist. That feeling of needing validation was intoxicating. I had to get off it for a while because of the panic and anxiety I was feeling. There are a lot of things in the industry that can burn you out, and social media was definitely one of them for me." (Murray, Eoin 2017)

Social media can be draining for a lot of artists. It can be stressful having to constantly make new illustrations or to learn new dances or songs to play to post on one's profile page. The artist would feel burnout as they try to keep their audience engaged on top of having to worry about the amount of interaction their posts get. Artists end up spending most of their time worrying about their presence online rather than creating art and doing what they love. Social media could not only be a maintaining issue, but there is also an issue of competition with artists

and their online presence. Many artists use social media as a platform for displaying and sharing their art, and sometimes it can be difficult to stand out from the other artists making similar art. The issue then becomes if the artist wants to be true to themselves and post what they want, or to create something that will attract a viewer's attention.

Another aspect of social media involves drawing inspiration from other artists or even feeling jealous of other people. People can find inspiration from viewing content from other artists in the same field as them, but many artists might not handle the presence of other artists to be inspiring. Sometimes viewing other artists performing or creating can lead to jealousy and self-criticism. Sometimes the person viewing might look at another artist and think that they wish they could create something so effortlessly. Competition within the same field is a significant factor that causes an artist to struggle with their art.

### **Competition**

Competition within the arts is an interesting concept to explore because when people think about art they think about self-expression and the freedom to create without consequences. Art is meant to be a medium in which people are free to express their emotions and to tell their story in their own way. The problem is that not all art gets the same amount of time in the spotlight as other pieces of art due to the commercialization of art. Not everyone has equal grounds when it comes to sharing their art, which is a result of many factors such as the size of an artist's audience, the platform they distribute their art, the way they distribute their art, and even by the amount of money one has. In one instance Artist A might post on Instagram a detailed illustration about woodland elves with bows and arrows and they will receive 56 likes



on their post. At the same time, Artist B could post a drawing they made about the same concept, but they would receive over 10,000 likes on their post with people sharing it on their stories. In this scenario, it is not that Artist A is a bad artist, but rather Artist B has built up their profile through their own marketing strategies. Suddenly, Artist A feels disappointed that only a few people are looking and liking their post and feels like they need to step up their game on marketing themselves to more people.

Once again, there is nothing wrong with trying to build up one's repertoire or trying to gain more followers. One of the aspects of art that helps make artists successful is having more people know about one's art. It is difficult to have a career as a successful artist without a reputation or even a large audience. However, artists can lose sight of what their goal truly is if they start to see their audience as a number on their profile page.

Competition with other artists can be a tricky situation to handle. On one side, someone would love to get the opportunity to prove themselves as a dancer to other people, but they do not want to do it at the expense of hurting someone else's dream. This is a situation described by Eleanor Zywicki in a blog she wrote titled "Competition, Mental Health, and Kids." In her blog, Eleanor describes a memory of when she entered a dance competition:

However, in my last year at my old dance studio, I attended and experienced my first ever dance competition. What I experienced was astonishing: the feeling within the environment was one that I hadn't felt before. You feel as if everyone's eyes are on you and the pressure in the air seems suffocating; self-conscious anxiety was overwhelming on that day. Everyone at the competition knew and understood how many hours, weeks,

and months the dancers had put into their routines. Come ceremony time when the judges gave out medals, I could see some of the younger girls around me getting upset and discouraged that their solos didn't win an award. **(Zywicki, Eleanor 2018**

It is devastating to a person when they put their heart and soul into a project they have been working on for days, weeks, years even, and in the end they do not get rewarded for their hard work. Artists dedicate so much time and energy to learn particular skills to complete their pieces and to find out that someone else was recognized for their skill can do a lot of damage to that artist, especially in an environment such as that dance competition. Everyone performing in that competition was looking forward to showing other people what they are capable of doing, but the fact that there are judges there means that only a few of those people will receive a reward. Any artist would get upset at themselves after losing a competition they were looking forward to and they might start to doubt their ability to create or even their passion for what they do. The common thought for why people believe they do not win such competitions is "I just didn't try hard enough," which most of the time is not true. If you are passionate and have a deep appreciation for what you do then you are giving it your all when you are performing/sharing your art. One should not put their passion on the line if they are not recognized for their skill.

The important lesson to learn is that just because you are not successful at first, it does not mean that you will never be successful. A perfectionist would believe that they have to succeed the first time every time they are participating in any event. What is important to learn is that no one is expected to win first prize at every competition they attend and also that everyone will fail at something at some point in their life. Failure is an expectation for growth because

how can one improve their craft if they do not know what they lack? Despite there being competition between artists in all fields of art, it is critical to remember that failing is acceptable and inevitable for growth and development of one's skill. It is important to remember to get back up and learn from your mistakes and to learn more of what you lack so that you may be prepared for the next challenge that you may face.

Even though the thought of competition between a person's passion may sound unpleasant, competition is almost necessary for artists because that is how artists are able to stand out from others. However, no one wants to do it at the expense of someone else's dreams. Not everyone is guaranteed to react the same way in regards to competing with your peers. Some people will get upset when they do not succeed right away, but would then use their loss as an indication to get back up and try again. Other people might see their "loss" as an indication that they are not good enough, even though they spent so much time practicing and getting better each day. The takeaway is that you have more chances at succeeding than you do at failing. If you continue to work hard on a project you are passionate about, there is no way you will always fail. It is easy to get discouraged at the thought of failure, but even the best or most successful people fail. As simple as it sounds, there is truth to the saying "you miss all the shots you don't take."

### **Interview with Jerome**

Despite how controlling perfectionism can be, there are many ways in which people can avoid having such a mindset. I have conducted 3 interviews with artists who all have different backgrounds in the arts about their experience making art and about how they deal with

perfectionist mindsets. In each of the interviews I conducted, I asked each participant what they personally do to avoid getting caught up in their work and what they believe can help other people.

The first artist I interview is Jerome, who is a musician currently studying and writing music at SUNY Oneonta College. In our interview, we talked about artist's blocks and how he deals with them. His response towards artists block is:

Conquering a block is probably more... people would say 'mental versus physical' but really it's all connected, your brain is a muscle, if you use it enough you can make it stronger and it can do things that you never thought it could do before. So I would say overcoming a block is all about not even how you approach it. Just brute force it in a way. You will use your brain to try and think around this [block] but that in it of itself is a strength. **(Jerome, 2020)**

What Jerome means when he is talking about "mental vs physical" is that just like any other muscle in your body, your brain is a muscle. Understanding that your brain is more physical and less mental is that it puts into perspective about how people work out their minds and their bodies. When you start doing push-ups one day, you are working out your biceps, triceps, and pecs, and when you have not done push-ups before you are going to feel sore the next day in those muscles. When you feel that your arms are sore, you choose to rest them that day and not push yourself too much because they hurt and if you ignore the pain you will get more hurt later on. So, you can apply that same knowledge to your brain. If you are facing a block in your work, it is important to take it on, but remember not to overexert yourself because

your brain will get sore in a sense. If you do not take the time to properly stretch and prepare yourself for the work, then you will get fatigue much faster and if you try to push through that fatigue without recovery, you will go through more pain and the work will not be a pleasant experience.

A lot of people tend to forget that the brain gets just as tired as any other muscle in your body. As an example, say a person pulls an all-nighter to finish a project they are working on, and they skip out on sleeping when they are done because they have to go to work or to school the next day. As a result, they replace their sleep with coffee and feel tired and burned out throughout the day. If the person still has work to do, then they might skip out on sleep again to get their work done. In this scenario, the person is not letting themselves have the time to rest and take a break when they need it. Not allowing yourself to rest is an issue because when you do not allow your brain to rest, that impacts your performance on your work in a negative way. It is important to realize that your brain is more than just a mental aspect of yourself. Your brain is a muscle like all the other muscles in your body and you should take care of it like you do all your other muscles.

There is another aspect of the artist's block that Jerome mentioned during the interview. The point that Jerome brought up is that challenges and blocks are easier to get past than you would expect it to. Rather than trying to perfect the specific details you have in mind when creating a piece of art, Jerome suggests that there are other ways in finding a solution to one's problem.

When there's a block, it feels like there's nothing you can do. But there is, there's a whole lot that you can do. If you create a melody and forget it, that's a block, but there's a whole multitude of things that you can do. You can sit and try to remember it as hard as you can. That is a solution, it doesn't always work, but it's a solution. You can say "Why don't we write another one?" or say "Why don't we take inspiration from a melody that already exists?" or you can say "Why don't we just scrap the whole project and do another one?" (**Jerome, 2020**)

In the case of a musician, if there is a phrase you are trying to write and it does not feel right or correct, try simplifying the phrase. You could also scrap the phrase entirely and write something else that might fit the vibe of your song or piece. Whatever the solution is, there is always a way to work around it, even if it means going in a different direction. If an artist sets out to create one thing, it is alright if they end up with a separate result from what they initially imagined because the artist has that ability. The artist has full liberty of the piece that they are creating, so they should not have to feel like they are being limited by what they set out to do in the first place.

As the interview continued, we began talking about the topic of expectations of an artist and how some artists feel pressured by other people to make certain decisions about their art. Jerome's response to this prompt was:

You will only ever experience someone asking for perfection from yourself. There is always pressure to put something good out there, but chances are if you think it's good then somebody else is going to think it's good. Most humans think very similarly,

obviously there are exceptions to that rule but even they can be artists because no matter what something is relatable to somebody. Even if it's very very minute. **(Jerome, 2020)**

Going back to the third component of perfectionism, the idea of expectations being placed on the artist, an interesting point to note is that most an artist's expectations from their art comes from themselves. Unless the artist is working for someone or a company, the artist is the person who sets the boundaries and limits for what they want to create.

A major fear many artists have is that when they share their work to other people, they fear that those people will not like it and that their piece will not be well received. The counter to that fear is what Jerome said, which is that someone will always relate to your work as long as you put your work out there. The chances are that if you put out a song about how you feel about a significant other, someone will relate to that song and they will like the song because they feel connected with the music or the artist. People like art for many reasons, and one of those reasons is that art can connect people by expressing the emotions and experiences we share. People like feeling represented and being able to connect with other people, which is why someone is more likely to appreciate your song or art if you share it with other people. If you happen to be given criticism on your work, then you could use that criticism to reflect on your work and how you can develop your craft.

The bottom line that Jerome is claiming is to put your work out there. You will not grow and develop your craft as an artist unless you share your work with other people. Sharing your work with other people can be frightening because of the fear or realization that you might not be as good in your work as you thought. However, how can one prove themselves to be good at

something if no one witnesses their work? It is important to practice, perform, and reflect constantly in order to be more confident in your work and to grow as an artist and as a person.

### **Interview with Effie**

The second interview I conducted was with a writer named Effie, who is studying writing arts management at SUNY Purchase College. In the interview with Effie, I asked her questions about how she deals with struggles and blocks with her writing. One of the responses Effie gave about her creative process was:

When it comes to writing, if I have a scene idea and I start writing it out the way that I imagined it might not translate well onto the page. So that's when I can adjust a sentence or just completely scrap a scene or work on it another time. Nothing has to be set in stone. If I have an idea, there's a good chance that the finished product is not gonna be that exact idea. **(Effie, 2020)**

As Effie said, nothing is set in stone. Art is a process to go through rather than a guideline to follow. If an artist comes to a point where they have different thoughts or feelings about what they are making, they have the full liberty to change it because it is their piece. It is good to have an end goal and a direction to go through in a piece, but if you find yourself going in a different direction, it is not a bad thing. The only expectations someone can face with their art or work comes from themselves rather than other people, and that person is allowed to change their



expectations because it is their work. Going in a different direction than what was originally intended could also bring upon new ideas that the artist can use for future projects.

Another important advice that Effie mentioned was about taking breaks from your work. It may sound simple, but taking breaks helps to ease stress because as stated earlier by Jerome, your brain is a muscle that you work out. If you work it out too much, you get tired. Effie goes deeper about the types of breaks she takes from her work.

I usually take breaks. Sometimes that can mean a day, sometimes that can mean a few days. There have been points where I didn't touch any of my pieces that I was working on for months at a time. I think that's important for any artist really. Because if you work on something so consecutively day and night for 30 days straight, even if it's an interesting story or interesting piece, you're probably going to get tired of it and you're probably going to get confused. (Effie, 2020)

Taking breaks are important because they allow you to rest your mind as well as give you time to reflect on your work. Unless you work for someone and have to get your art out at a certain time, it is important to give yourself time to step away from your work, whether it is 30 minutes or a day or even a week. Taking breaks allows you to step away from your work and be able to look at it through a different lens. If you are working on a painting, you typically step towards your piece to look at specific details of the painting and step back to see how the piece looks as a whole. This works similarly to taking a break from your work. When you take a break from your work, you allow yourself to take your mind off the creative process, and when you get back to your work you might find something that might need revising. Taking breaks are a great

way to reflect on your work because you allow yourself to be able to look at your piece more objectively rather than hyperfocusing on the piece to get it done fast.

Taking breaks could also be productive in other senses. You can take breaks from your work to relax or you could work on other things to help you generate new ideas for your work. As a continuation of Effie's previous response, she stated this when she decides to take breaks:

I'll go on pinterest and make pinterest boards for my characters or, you know I'm writing a fantasy novel so I'll do inspirational boards for the whole thing. So it's like I'm still 'writing' but I'm not doing the hard part. I can still think about the art that I want to create. (Effie, 2020)

Being productive in your work does not mean having to focus solely on the piece you are making to get it done as soon as possible. Art takes time to make and even coming up with ways to create the art you want to make can take time. Allowing yourself to take breaks and do something else other than the task at hand can help benefit you mentally and physically. When you do too much work you will get tired so it is important to understand the importance of breaks.

### **Interview with Ben**

The final interview I conducted was with Ben, a painter who studies painting and drawing at SUNY Purchase College. One of the topics that we were discussing was about struggling with their creative process . I asked the simple question if they struggle with their art, and Ben replied with:

Oh everyone does! If you ever meet someone who says that they know what they're doing, they're lying. Nobody, even if it looks like they know what they're doing, everybody is on a journey and everyone is always growing and learning. We may understand certain moments more than others, but I absolutely struggle. I'm human, I don't know the answer to everything and my art process is always changing. My art theme and topic is always changing, and I have to adapt to it. **(Benjamin, 2020)**

Another important lesson to learn is that when growing as an artist and developing new skills is that failing is a part of the process. An artist will not always be able to create great or perfect art everytime they make something. As Ben said, you are lying if you claim to never struggle, which is something people should not be afraid of doing. People fear that if they admit they struggle with their work then that is a sign of weakness and vulnerability. It is important to realize that everyone gets lost at some point in their art and in their life, and that you should not blame yourself for not being good enough or for not accomplishing something. The way artists think about their art and their creative process changes over time, as it is inevitable towards their growth as an artist. Even if an artist claims that they know who they are as an artist, they still have so much to learn. There is always more to learn as an artist or even as anyone who is growing in general.

An important response that Ben gave during the interview involves art students coming into an arts school. Ben stated:

Have a want to learn new things, because I've worked with younger artists as TAs for classes, and they're very hung up on "I already paint this way" or "I draw this way."

“This is what I do and I don’t wanna change it.” So I guess another form of advice is remember you are in a school. You’re at school, a place where you are here to learn. You’re in a class because you don’t know these things. **(Benjamin, 2020)**

Ben is not trying to say that people do not have specific voices or certain ways they go about making art. What Ben is saying is that people are always subjected to change at some point in their life and it is important to recognize that one always has room for improvement. People go to school to either find their voice or to develop their voice, and being stubborn not to learn from others will not help them grow. It is important to accept that as you continue to create art, you will find changes in what you make and how you make it. Allow yourself to listen to new ideas even if you think you know what you are doing because maybe those new ideas can open you up to new opportunities or new tasks to handle. It is alright to set off on one goal and to end up achieving something different along the way. Growth and development occur when you try new things and accept new mindsets to flow through your mind and when you are not open to different perspectives, you are not doing yourself any favors.

Not being open to other people’s point of view can be seen as a negative impact of perfectionism. It is alright to stick with the idea or plan you had in the beginning, but there is no issue with consulting other people of their views. When you are hyperfocusing on what you want to create in the way you want to create it, it is as if you are claiming that your way is the only way your art can be achieved. Denying other people’s input relates to the second component of perfectionism described by Professor Gordon Flett and Professor Paul Hewitt, where the person expects perfection from other people. Viewing your creative process to be the only way to create the result you seek puts down other people’s creative process as if their methods and views are

wrong. The main idea is that there are many different approaches to creating art with each approach leading up to a different result. Different artists can create art about the same subject and each interpretation will be just as interesting or relatable or fascinating as the other, even if one artist takes more time or needs more tools. There are many unique and different approaches to art, and just because you do something else than another person does not mean that your creative process is less valid than theirs. People have their own journeys that they go on at different times, at different speeds, with different people. Backing away from the perfectionist mindset can help artists realize that just because you are different does not mean your art is worth less. All art is valuable and the artist should recognize their achievements without the pressure of being perfect.

### **Resolution**

There is no certainty to how someone will react towards losing a competition, or not having many likes on their post, or having spent several days fixing a certain detail in their art. Not everyone has the ability to get back up feeling motivated to continue moving forward with what they are passionate with. Sometimes someone would get back up but feel defeated as they have to continue slaving at their work until it is completed. Maybe even that person would not even get back up because they concluded that their work is not getting them to where they want to be, even after having worked on their projects for weeks, months, or years.

Despite all these issues, many artists have thrived and have become successful with their work because of the work they put into their art. Art is not meant to be perfect, but rather it is meant to be a reflection of the artist's mind in their environment. The reason why people enjoy

creating art is because they love turning the ideas in their head into something they can share and experience with other people. People love consuming art because they find it fun and exciting or relatable on a deep level. What makes art so powerful is the artist's ability to capture a moment in life that someone may relate to, whether it is about a feeling towards another person or commentary on the world and people around us. The reason why we may call a piece of art perfect is because we believe that that piece speaks to us on a level that only we could understand. In reality, no piece of art is perfect. It is not the painting or the song or the choreography that has been made perfect, but rather the experience we had taking it in.

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