



PERFECTIONISM MEETS PANDEMIC

Part One: July 30, 2020 7:00pm-8:00pm EST, 6:00pm-7:00pm CST

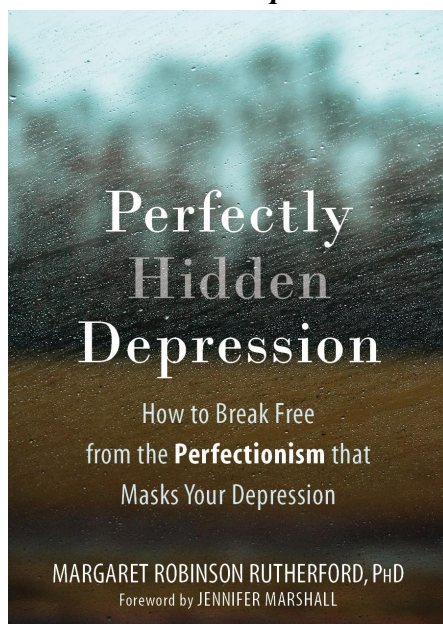
Part Two: August 13, 2020 7:00pm-8:00pm EST, 6:00pm-7:00pm CST

Q&A immediately following the workshop

Featuring Dr. Margaret Robinson Rutherford, author of

Perfectly Hidden Depression: How to Break Free from the Perfectionism that

Masks Your Depression



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Welcome to what I hope will be the beginning of an important journey for you!

In **Part One** of this workshop, you'll learn:

- How to distinguish between constructive or “positive” perfectionism versus destructive perfectionism and identify either in yourself
- How the pandemic may be affecting this need for perfection
- The traits of the syndrome of perfectly hidden depression
- How classic depression is different than perfectly hidden depression
- The important reasons why the perfect-looking life became a working and outwardly successful strategy

Several exercises/reflections will be provided to deepen your experience and guide your understanding. We suggest doing them after the workshop, when you have time to allow yourself the quiet time needed.

It's also recommended that you take the questionnaire below prior to the first workshop so that you can see where you might fall on the spectrum of perfectionism/perfectly hidden depression.

In **Part Two**, you'll learn:

- The model of the Five Stages of Healing: Consciousness, Commitment, Confrontation, Connection and Change
- The importance of mindfulness in any change or healing
- The hurdles involved in commitment to change or healing
- A cognitive technique geared toward challenging outdated spoken and unspoken rules and beliefs
- What a trauma timeline is and how to use one effectively
- Specific directions to travel to gain more self-acceptance, self-compassion and freedom

Again, exercises and reflections will also be given in Part Two.

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A Self-Assessment for Perfectly Hidden Depression

For each question below, answer *Yes* or *No*. Be honest with yourself. Scoring instructions are at the end. No one is going to ask your score! But we'll discuss and you can share your experience with taking it.

(This isn't an empirically validated questionnaire and should not be used as a diagnostic tool. But it may act as a helpful mirror to view yourself through the lenses of perfectionism.)

- Do you struggle with confiding in others, especially about your real-life difficulties and problems?
- Do you obsess about things looking perfect, both for yourself and through others' eyes?
- Do you avoid talking to your partner (or your friends) about feeling hurt by them, or about a growing resentment you might have?
- Do you have trouble sleeping or turning your mind off at night?
- Do you have trouble admitting when you're feeling overwhelmed?
- Do you push yourself to get the job done, regardless of the cost to you?
- Do you respond to the needs of your friends even when it can short-change your own?
- Did you grow up in a family where feelings of sadness or pain were avoided, or where you were criticized or punished for expressing them?
- Have you ever been hurt emotionally, physically, or sexually, and told no one? Or if you did tell someone, you weren't believed or supported?
- Did you grow up in a family (or are you still experiencing a family) where you felt like you had to meet defined expectations rather than being allowed to be yourself?
- Do you like to have control of a situation if you're going to be involved?
- Do you have a growing sense that it's becoming harder to maintain an organized structure in your life?
- If so, do you feel anxiety or even panic?
- Do you tend to not cry or rarely cry?
- Are you considered ultra-responsible, the one that can always be counted on by your co-workers or family and friends?
- Do you think that taking time for yourself is selfish?
- Do you dislike people considering themselves "victims"—that it's not their fault when something goes wrong?
- Did you grow up being taught that you were supposed to handle painful things on your own? That asking for help reflected weakness?
- Do you strongly believe in focusing on the positives in your life, or "counting your blessings"?
- Do you have a critical, nagging inner voice telling you you're not good enough, or that you could have tried harder, even though you accomplished your goal?

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- Do you outwardly seem hopeful and energetic while, at times, you struggle with a sense of being trapped?
- Do you make lists of tasks to get done during the day, and if they are not completed, feel frustrated or like a failure?

Count your positive answers to the questions above. If you answered **Yes** to 5-to-8 questions, you're likely a very responsible person, though you may need to consider taking more time for self-care. A **Yes** response to 8-to-11 questions indicates that your life is being governed by highly perfectionistic standards, and something you want to think carefully about. Twelve or more positive responses may reflect the presence of hidden depression.

Also provided in this handout are blank pages for you to take notes if desired.

See you soon! Warmly, Margaret Rutherford

The Ten Core Traits of Perfectly Hidden Depression

These traits are not all present in every person who might recognize themselves in PHD. But they're fairly consistent.

If you identify with PHD...

1. You are highly perfectionistic, with a constant, critical inner voice of intense shame.

Having a perfectionistic streak is one thing. You try to do your best: "If it's worth doing, it's worth doing well." Yet you can silently berate yourself if you're not at the top, at all times. You're the perfect parent, most accomplished lawyer, head of the class, or best friend. You may not even see yourself as a perfectionist because you don't believe anything you are or do is perfect enough. Why? Inner self-criticism and shame govern your choices and your world.

2. You demonstrate a heightened or excessive sense of responsibility.

You're very aware of duty, obligation, and loyalty, and can be counted on in a crunch. You're the first to notice when something's going wrong, and look for solutions.

3. You have difficulty accepting and expressing painful emotions.

I know when I'm sitting across from someone who's smiling brightly at me while simultaneously describing a significant loss or disappointment that I may have tripped over someone else who's hiding. Sadness is banished to the back of the closet. Disappointment is for whiners. You may not

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even have the words to express these emotions. You stay in your head most of the time — analyzing, decoding, thinking through things.

4. You worry a great deal, and avoid situations where control isn't possible.

The need for control is strong, and so a lot of time is spent worrying about the things that might occur to interrupt that control. Ironically, it's important to hide this worry. People will shake their heads and wonder aloud, "You never seem to have a care in the world. You don't sweat the small stuff."

5. You intensely focus on tasks, using accomplishment as a way to feel valuable.

"You're only as good as your last success." You count on activity and accomplishment to distract yourself from any inner insecurities or fears that might try to seep out of hiding. And there's value in purpose and effort. But you carry it too far. You may not know what else might bring you a sense of esteem. And that's the problem.

6. You have an active and sincere concern about the well-being of others, while allowing few if any into your inner world.

Caring for others is what you do very well. However, you don't let others sense any vulnerability. There's a wall up against anyone discovering that you're lonely or fatigued, empty or overwhelmed.

This can be especially frightening when suicidal ideation is present. Devastatingly, even if you do, you may not be believed. "What, you? Depressed? You've got everything in the world going for you." And that could lead to devastating consequences.

7. You discount or dismiss hurt or abuse from the past, or the present.

Compartmentalization is a skill. It's the ability to be hurt, sad, disappointed, afraid, or angry about something and to put those feelings away until a time when you can deal with them better.

However, you rigidly over-compartmentalize. You've developed very strong boxes where you lock painful feelings in, consciously or unconsciously, shoving them into a dark recess of your mind. This allows you to discount, deny, or dismiss the impact of life experiences that caused pain in the past, or the present.

8. You have accompanying mental health issues, involving control or escape from anxiety.

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You live your life in a very controlled, well-governed fashion. So actual psychiatric diagnoses that might co-exist with PHD might be disorders having to do with control, such as eating disorders and/or obsessive-compulsive traits. Alcohol or sedative medications could be used to escape anxiety as well.

9. You hold a strong belief in "counting your blessings" as the foundation of well-being.

I believe in counting your blessings. You bet: It's healthy, and it can keep you optimistic and grateful. However, you may feel guilt or even shame if you are ever anything but rigidly positive. Expressing compassion toward yourself? That's out of the question; you've got too many blessings in your life.

10. You have emotional difficulty in personal relationships but demonstrate significant professional success.

The vulnerability that's linked with true intimacy is hard for you. While driven to be productive and achieve, you aren't likely to be someone who can easily relate on an intimate level. And you may have chosen a partner, who in fact, doesn't allow vulnerability, either, or doesn't have that capability. Your relationship will be based primarily on what you do for each other, rather than who you are for each other, with the emphasis staying on the kids, your careers and being the perfect-looking couple.

Your Thoughts and Reactions to the Ten Core Traits:

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SIX EXERCISES/REFLECTIONS FOR PART ONE

These exercises are a sampling from the book, which has over sixty guided exercises. They've been selected to help with your workshop experience.

Reflection 2: Identifying My Shame and Giving It a Name

Find a quiet place to sit and take a few deep breaths. You might even close your eyes for a moment and focus on your body from head to toe, noticing where there might be tension or discomfort.

Allow yourself to think about the family and culture in which you grew up. Take a few moments to consider what you learned was shameful. What were you never supposed to do? What was never allowed or supported?

Write down these inflexible critical voices that still exist in your head. For example, you might write, "It's selfish to put your needs first." If you can only think of one or two, that's fine. And you might think of giving this "voice" a name, like Bob or Gladys. It can help you detach from the thought when you hear "Bob's" voice in your head. "There's Bob again."

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Reflection 3: A List of Emotions

Take a few moments for this brief list-writing exercise. Breathe some calm breaths and then write down the emotions that you find most difficult to feel or express. Try to put them in some kind of order, with hardest to easiest. If you need to look at a list of emotions for help, you can find those on the internet. Afterward, take a moment to look at your list and see what your emotional response is to what you've written.

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Reflection 4: ‘I believe that worry...’

Once again in your calm place, write down the words ‘I believe that worry _____’ Then, fill in the blank with as many responses as you can. Whether the statements seem rational or irrational, write down what function you believe worry serves.. For example, “I believe that worry is part of being responsible. My dad always worried.” Or, “I believe that if I worry about the future, I’ll be able to better protect my kids.” See how many statements you can make about worry.

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Reflection 11: What Were My Emotional Survival Strategies?

Start to think back on your childhood and think of yourself as having played a role in your family, like you'd play a role in a play. If this is hard for you, think about your favorite TV shows or books and ask yourself, *What roles do the different people play? What function do they each service within the story?* Then go back to memories of your childhood. Were you the funny guy or the fixer? Did you get labeled as the smart one or the one who did anything to stay out of trouble? What was your role? Did that role keep you or someone else out of trouble? Did it distract or even save you from something hurtful that was going on?

Then ask yourself, *Am I still playing that role? What might happen if I changed roles or stopped entirely?* This role became your emotional survival strategy. Feel free to add other ideas as you gain more perspective on your past. If you struggle remembering, ask another family what they remember about you.

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Reflection 12: Which of the Ten Characteristics Will Be the Hardest to Change?

In order to begin to let go of something, you have to understand its worth to you. Does giving it up or changing it involve too much loss? Or is it balanced out by the gains made? In this reflection, refer back to the ten traits of PHD and then rate them from 1 to 10, with 10 being the hardest to consider changing or the one you've relied upon the most. Then list them here.

If you're ready, you can write about how those behaviors or beliefs have protected you and what you fear might happen if you alter them in any substantial way. You can also consider which traits you've taken over the top and which you've kept in moderation.

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Reflection 13: If I Accept Myself Then...

The practice of self-acceptance is core to healing from rigid or destructive perfectionism. And definitely for perfectly hidden depression. It's time to reflect once more on what you believe.

When you hear the word "self-acceptance," what does it mean to you? What are you telling yourself that implies? Maybe look up the definition if you're unclear.

Write down "if I accept myself, then _____," and once again fill in the blank with what you predict might happen, both welcome and unwelcome things. A welcome consequence might be, *If I accept myself, then I won't feel so pressured all the time.* But there could be an accompanying fear: *If I accept myself, then what happens if I don't push myself as hard and I disappoint?* Please journal or make a list of what you believe the gains of self-acceptance could be, as well as its feared repercussions.

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FIVE EXERCISES/REFLECTIONS FOR PART TWO

Reflection 34: Where Am I Going and What Beliefs Do I Want to Challenge to Get There

Here are 10 directions to move forward. Ten desired changes you may want to make-- that coordinate with the ten characteristics of PHD. In the left column are examples of self-destructive beliefs that are likely to sound familiar. In the right column are examples that will serve you so much better and are self-constructive. You can make these your own-- change them into whatever specific situation applies to your life. Remember, the emphasis is on moving toward. The focus is on the journey, not the destination.

	Self-Destructive Beliefs	Self-Constructive Beliefs
1. I want to move toward loosening the grip of perfectionism.	I must look competent in everything.	I can accept that I make mistakes.
2. I want to move toward allowing others to take the lead.	I need to feel in charge.	I like being helpful and I want to experience being part of a team.
3. I want to move toward tolerance of emotional pain.	If I feel my pain, it will never stop.	I can learn to manage my emotional pain.
4. I want to move toward calm and the need to worry.	My worry keeps the people I love safe.	My worry keeps me unavailable in the moment.

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5. I want to move toward enriching my life with creativity and play.	I cannot relax.	I want to learn to listen to my body and rest.
6. I want to move toward allowing others into my emotional world.	Others would be burdened by my problems.	I can give others the chance to be a good listener.
7. I want to move toward self-compassion.	What happened to me is nothing if I compare it to what other people have to deal with.	What happened to me is important.
8. I want to move toward accepting and managing my health issues.	My anxiety isn't out of control.	I can recognize the severity of my symptoms.
9. I want to move toward seeing both the positive and the negative.	I refuse to feel sorry for myself.	Every pro has a con, every gain has a loss.
10. I want to move toward building vulnerability and intimacy in relationships.	Real life isn't like what you see on TV.	Real life is messy and that's OK.

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Reflection 35: Becoming Aware of Spoken and Unspoken Rules

This is an exercise that will require patience. Because as you recognize each spoken or unspoken rule, there may be another hiding in the wings, waiting for you to feel safe or strong enough to identify it. Take your time to write down the spoken and unspoken rules you learned from your family, your culture, or your religion, that most applied to you. You may want to have each belief on its own page, because the next few reflections will be built on them.

When you're done with the list, place parentheses around the rules and beliefs that you will no longer follow. Put a star by the ones that are still highly active for you. As you write down these rules, what feelings emerge? Whew! Great work!

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Reflection 36: What Beliefs Serve Me Well in the Here and Now

Now you will begin to more carefully analyze your active rule system. Take the rules from the previous reflection and decide which rules fit here and now. In what situations do the rules serve you well? In what situations do the rules not serve you well?

These recognitions may come too quickly or they may require more time and energy before coming into your awareness. Keep at it... They will come.

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Reflection 37: New Rules, New Choices, New Day

Now's the time to write out your new rules and the new choices that naturally follow. Create as many as you possibly can, again perhaps starting with the ones that would be easy to implement, followed by those that might be the hardest. You could decide, "I don't want any more rules." but that's a bit much. What new rules and beliefs about yourself or others do you want to apply to your life now? They won't always be the opposite of the old rule, or they might be. Set the bar as high as you're comfortable setting it - - knowing you can always come back and recreate.

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Reflection 45: Challenging the Label of “Incompetence”

Write three specific actions in your journal that you fear would earn you the label of "out of control." (Remember, the risk is your own perception.) Then identify the risk, such as, "In my next committee meeting I'll end it by asking for suggestions on how to proceed - - and risk looking like I'm not sure of the best direction." Or, "during my reunion weekend with friends, I'll be honest and confide that my teenager is messing around with drugs - - and risk looking like a bad parent." Or, "When Stacy comes over this afternoon, I'll leave the unfolded laundry out on the table and risk looking disorganized."

All of these examples reflect you freeing yourself from your own perceptions of perfection.

Now decide which one of your three actions would be the easiest for you to risk. Then screw up your courage and do it. This is when you begin to choose how to live your life instead of being governed by fear. Those around you may be a little surprised. But remember, you're doing this for yourself, not for them.

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