

**The DISTORTED LENS of  
*Prentiss the Perfectionist***

**DISTORTION:** “Everything **must** be perfect. I **have** to be perfect (good, compliant).”

In her mid-40s, Prentiss is divorced after 22 years of marriage, described as very attractive, even striking by those who meet her. A sweet, tender and empathetic spirit, Prentiss's intelligence garnered her a place at the top of her college graduating class. Her job performance has consistently been ranked outstanding. Despite the accolades, Prentiss struggles to identify anything positive about herself. She finds her identity in what others opinions are of her and fails to develop her own sense of self. If others are not affirming of her, Prentiss plunges into despair and self-doubt. Plagued by severe bouts of depression, she feels as though "life has passed her by," and she fears she may die before she has ever lived.

Prentiss tends to have perfectionist and obsessive tendencies that seem to hinder her from finishing tasks. She is brilliant, gifted and creative. However, Prentiss starts many projects with few attaining completion. She feels like she is being pulled in many directions and her personality is beginning to fracture.

**INSIGHT FOR REFLECTION:**

How could there be such dissonance between others' perception of Prentiss and Prentiss's view of herself? A look inside Prentiss's history provides clues.

Prentiss's childhood environment was riddled with strife, a result of growing up in low social, economic status, the effects of alcoholism, lack of regular, positive interaction with her father, in addition, her father abused her mother when he drank. Her mother worked long hours to help make ends meet and was often exhausted by the time she returned home, leaving Prentiss to care for her three younger siblings. When confronting her mother about the abuse, her mother denied that anything was wrong. Her mother's denial implied that Prentiss' reality was illusory and that her perception was unreliable.

The stresses at home often led to arguments between her mother and father and Prentiss, being the eldest child, tried to be the peacemaker and handle all of the home tasks. Prentiss felt a sense of intense responsibility for her family's struggles – thinking that if she had not been born there would be less financial struggle. Prentiss carried the "You're not good enough, you are ugly, stupid and poor" persona with her into adulthood. “If I could just be the perfect daughter then maybe my parents would not fight.” Prentiss felt an internal obligation to be and do everything perfectly. Depressive bouts continued and eventually were causal to the dissolution of her marriage.



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