

# The Mental Health Implications of Perfectionism in American College Students



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# About the Speaker



A native of southern California, Dr. Malaika is a clinician specializing in traumatology, with a goal of helping all those who had survived the worst life has to throw at them. She holds a bachelor of arts degree in interdisciplinary studies, a master of science in general psychology and a doctorate in clinical psychology. She also holds three seminary degrees: a bachelor of arts in Christian education, a master of arts in sacred music and a doctorate in theology with an emphasis in Christian education administration.

Her love for helping others expands beyond clinical work. She is an associate professor of psychology at numerous southern California colleges, bringing her passion for the field into the classroom. Dr. Malaika is also a social justice advocate who desires to do her part to rid the world of injustice. She champions for minorities understanding the journey personally. She is also a proud member of Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc., another organization committed to the community and service.

# Learning Objectives

Identify the symptoms of perfectionism in college students

Understand the correlation between perfectionism and mental issues in college students

Identify campus, city, county, state and national resources available to assist college students dealing with mental health issues due to perfectionism

# Opening Poll: How would you define perfectionism?



# What is Perfectionism?

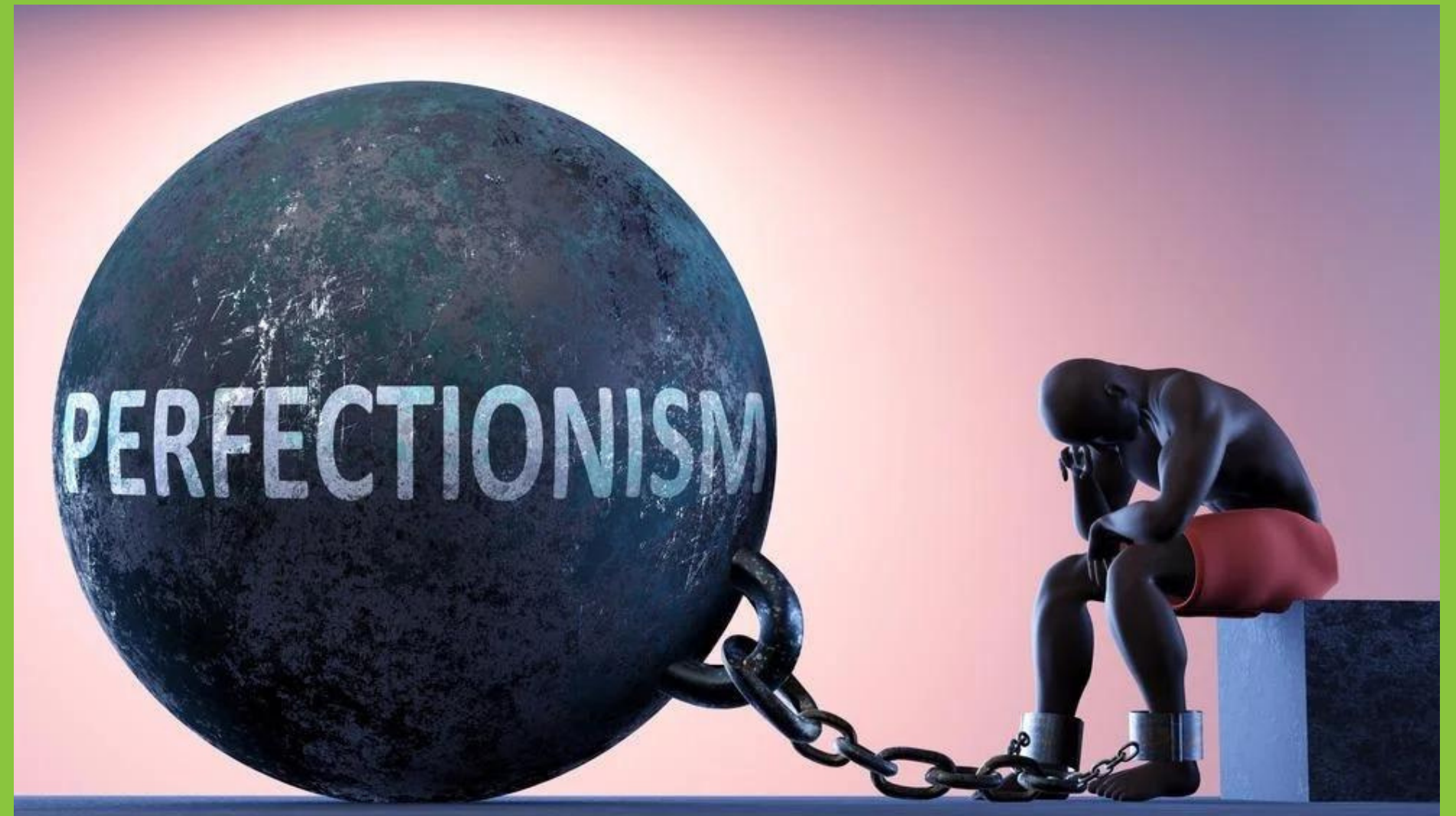
Is it just striving to be perfect?

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# Defining Perfectionism

Perfectionism is "striving for flawlessness and setting exceedingly high standards for performance, accompanied by tendencies for overly critical evaluations" (Stoeber, 2011, p. 128)





# Three Elements of Perfectionism

1. Holding standards that are impossibly high
2. Judging their own efforts (and other people's) with fierce criticism
3. Basing their sense of worth on whether or not those standards are met



# Know the Signs



Academic perfectionism

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Work performance

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Neatness, cleanliness and organization

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Physical appearance

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Health and grooming

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# Know the Facts

# 33%

Perfectionism in college students with social or familial expectation as the source increased 33% from 1989 to 2016.



# Types of Perfectionism

01

## Self-Oriented Perfectionism

“I demand nothing less than perfection of myself.”

02

## Socially Prescribed Perfectionism

“My family expects me to be perfect.”

03

## Perfectionism Imposed By Others

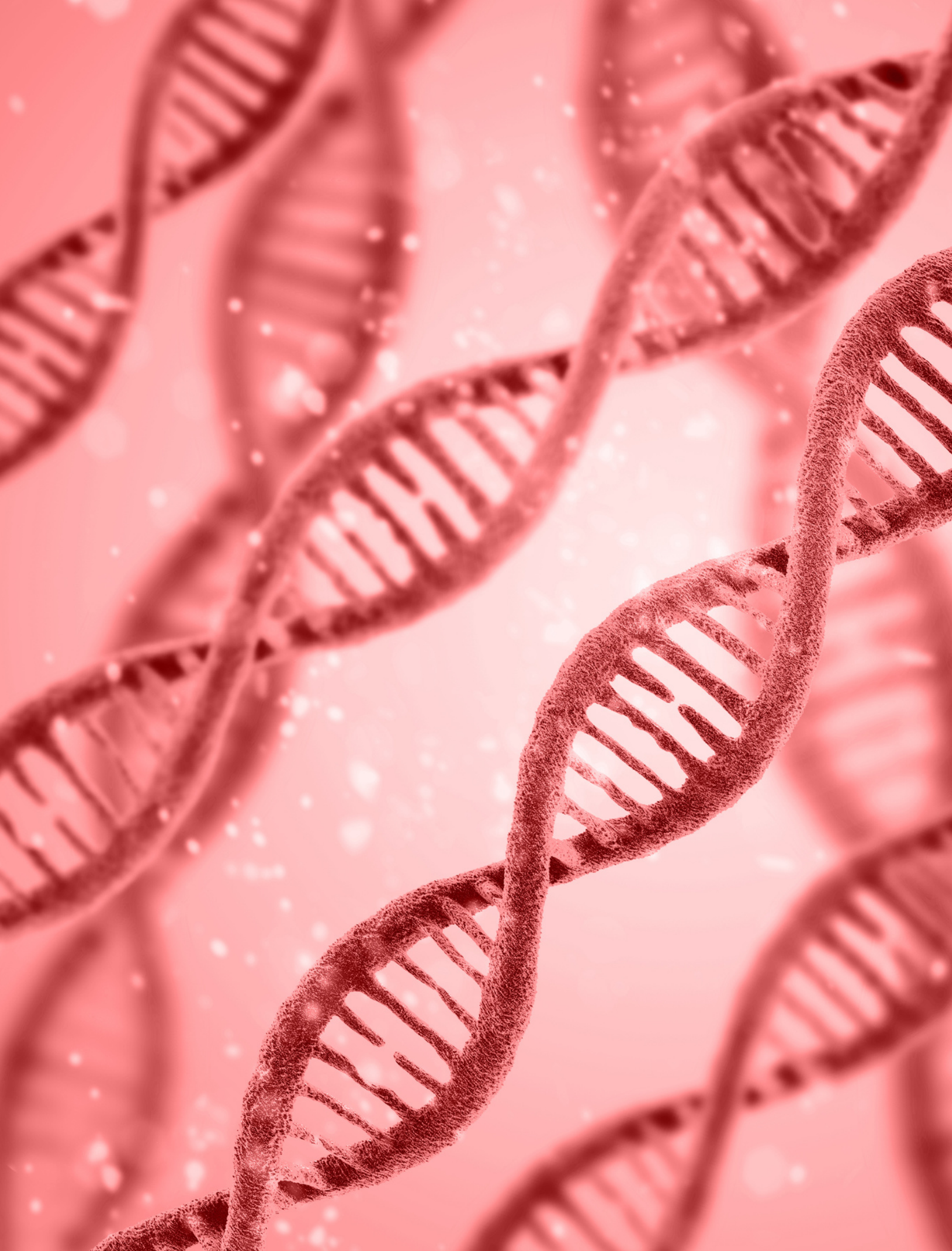
“The people who matter to me should never let me down.”

# Causes of Perfectionism

Is perfectionism biological?

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# Biological Factors

Studies of twins suggest that genetics account for between 25% and 40% of perfectionism.



# Relational Factors

The quality of a child's relationships with their primary caregivers can set the stage for the development of perfectionism.

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# Cultural Factors

A child absorbs cultural messages about standards and values from society at large.

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# Cognitive Factors

People with a trauma history can have cognitive distortions. These distortions are the hallmark of perfectionism.

# Learned Behaviors

Having high standards is often rewarded with positive attention, reinforcing perfectionistic behavior.



# The Correlation Between Perfectionism and Mental Health Issues

Is perfectionism a disorder?

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# Mental Health Correlations

Perfectionism plays a role in the development and continuation of many serious mental health conditions.

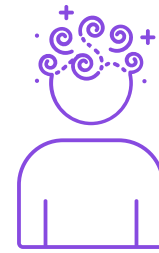


# Disorders Correlated to Perfectionism



Social anxiety

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High-functioning anxiety

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Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder

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Eating disorders

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Depression

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# Supporting Students with Perfectionism

How can we help students?

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# Professors/ Instructors Recommendations

- 01 Praise efforts over results

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- 02 Emphasize realistic goals

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- 03 Break down long-term goals

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- 04 Encourage appropriate risk-taking

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- 05 Focus on process

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- 06 Use rubrics



# Professors/ Instructors Recommendations

01 Practice test-taking

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02 Use cooperative activities

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03 Outline group member responsibilities

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04 Use peer-based activities

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05 Use creative assignments

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06 Encourage flexible problem-solving

# Counselors Recommendations

- 01 Discuss perfectionistic thoughts and behaviors

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- 02 Encourage use of perfectionism diaries

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- 03 Review coping strategies

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- 04 Encourage trying of new activities

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- 05 Teach relaxation techniques

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- 06 Discuss movies, shows, and books with flawed characters

# State of Ohio Higher Education Resources

## **Suicide Prevention Resource Center:**

<http://www.sprc.org/settings/colleges-universities>

## **JED Foundation:**

<https://www.jedfoundation.org/what-we-do/colleges/>

**ULifeline:** <http://www.ulifeline.org/>

## **The Jordan Porco Foundation:**

<https://www.rememberingjordan.org/>



# Questions?

**Contact me:** [www.malaikambrown.com](http://www.malaikambrown.com)

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