

PRIMAL WORLD BELIEFS AND PERFECTIONISM AS PREDICTORS OF ALCOHOL USE

Marianna Berinšterová, & Peter Babinčák

Institute of Psychology, University of Presov in Presov (Slovakia)

Abstract

Problematic alcohol use is frequently associated with symptoms of depression and anxiety. A major shift in treating these conditions occurred with Beck's theory on beliefs about the self, the world, and the future, later expanded by the concept of Primal World Beliefs—fundamental beliefs about the world, such as whether it is safe, enticing, or good, which influence how individuals perceive and interact with their environment. Studies also suggest a link between problematic alcohol use and perfectionism, understood as a set of self-focused beliefs that heighten the fear of failure. *Aim:* This study examines the relationships of perfectionism (high standards and discrepancy) and primal beliefs with alcohol use levels. *Method:* The sample included 882 participants (52.5% women; $M_{age} = 33.42$; $SD = 14.94$). Measures included the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (Saunders et al., 1993), the PI-18 Primal Inventory (Clifton & Yaden, 2021), and the Short Almost Perfect Scale (Rice et al., 2014). *Results:* Regression analysis, controlling for age and gender, revealed that lower age, male gender, and lower levels of the Primary Primal belief "Good" predicted higher alcohol use. Perfectionism was not a significant predictor. *Discussion:* These findings contribute to health psychology by linking primal world beliefs to problematic alcohol use, with implications for the prevention of both alcohol misuse and depressive disorders.

Keywords: *Alcohol use, perfectionism, primal world beliefs.*

1. Theoretical background

Beliefs shape the way people approach alcohol use. Cultural and normative beliefs are reflected in views about the harms and treatment of alcohol use disorder (Koski-Jännes et al., 2016). Likewise, beliefs may contribute to alcohol misuse as they are a source of emotional experience. Beck (in Bridges & Harnish, 2010) claimed that many disorders originate and are sustained by negative beliefs and thinking styles, that people have about themselves, about their circumstances, and their future. "Beliefs contain assumptions, expectations, fears, rules, and evaluations" (Buschman et al., 2018). Clifton and Crum (2024) state that the world is a situation from which it is impossible to leave, and evaluating of the world is an ongoing process. Primal world beliefs - primals - are defined by Clifton et al. (2019, p.1) as "an individual's most basic beliefs about the general character of the world as a whole". Primal world beliefs form the background that is used to evaluate situations.

According to Beck, negative events in the world trigger a cognitive triad of irrational beliefs about oneself about the world and about the future. Some of these may also manifest in the form of perfectionistic beliefs. Perfectionism is a personality trait that expresses itself in high personal standards and expectations for oneself and a substantial self-criticism toward achieving those standards (Rice et al., 2013). Adaptive perfectionism may appear to be protective in terms of alcohol use (Nelsen et al., 2023; Watson et al., 2020). This may be due to adaptive coping, through which people deal with negative circumstances and environmental pressures. Conversely, maladaptive perfectionism have been shown to be linked to susceptibility to temptation in the context of alcohol use (Hannah Lee & Suh, 2022). Also, drinking to cope is one of the coping strategies people use to deal with negative affect (Richardson et al., 2020).

Previous research found that primals are associated with depression and life satisfaction (Clifton et al., 2019). Studies have also discussed the links between depression, life satisfaction, and alcohol use (Jensen et al., 2021; McHugh et al., 2019). The aim of this contribution is to examine the relationship of primary world belief - good, as well as the personality trait of perfectionism to alcohol use.

2. Methods

The sample consisted of 882 participants (52.5% women; $M_{age} = 33.42$; $SD = 14.94$). Alcohol use level was measured using the AUDIT - Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (Saunders et al., 1993).

AUDIT consists of 10 items that assess alcohol intake, dependence, and adverse consequence. In total, it reflects the frequency, amount, intensity, and consequences of alcohol consumption. Cronbach alpha: .826.

Primary world beliefs were measured by the PI-18 questionnaire (Clifton & Yaden, 2021). The questionnaire examines the primal "good" (Cronbach alfa = .809) as well as a triad of primary world beliefs: alive, enticing, safe. Respondents rate items on a 6-point Likert scale.

The Short Form of the Revised Almost Perfect Scale (Rice et al., 2013) was used. The scale includes two aspects of perfectionism, high personal standards (Cronbach alpha: .858) and self-discrepancies (Cronbach alpha: .819). Each of the subscales has 4 items that respondent's rate on a 7-point Likert scale.

Data were analyzed by correlation and regression analysis using SPSS 21.

3. Results

Table 1. Correlational analysis of the relationships between alcohol use, primary primal "good" and perfectionism.

	M	SD	1.	2.	3.	4.
1. AUDIT	13.984	4.048				
2. Primal GOOD	4.133	0.657	-.128**			
3. Perfect Scale - Standards	4.538	1.321	0.033	0.056		
4. Perfect Scale - Discrepancy	3.323	1.200	0.049	-.293**	.290**	

A weak negative correlation was found between alcohol use and primal "good". Also, weak negative correlation was found between discrepancy and primary primal "good". High standards and self-discrepancy were positively correlated.

Table 2. Linear regression: primary primal 'good', high standards and self-discrepancy as predictors of alcohol use.

	B	SE	β	t	Sig.
Gender	-2.236	0.289	-0.281	-7.739	0.000
Age	-0.036	0.011	-0.124	-3.363	0.001
Perfect Scale - Standards	0.105	0.134	0.031	0.789	0.430
Perfect Scale - Discrepancy	0.051	0.150	0.014	0.339	0.734
Primal GOOD	-0.730	0.252	-0.115	-2.896	0.004

Linear regression ($R^2=10.6$, $F= 11.717$, $p<0.001$) proved a negative relationship of primary primal "good" to alcohol use. Neither high standards nor discrepancy was significantly associated with alcohol use. Controlled variables lower age and female gender were positively associated with alcohol use.

4. Discussion

The aim of this paper was to examine the relationship between primal "good", perfectionism and alcohol use. It was found that the more people perceived the world to be "good", the less they used alcohol. No significant relationships were found between perfectionism and alcohol use. Correlational analysis also indicated that respondents with higher self-discrepancy perceived the world as less "good". This means that self-critical respondents perceived the world as less "good".

Previous research has found that negative primary beliefs have almost never been associated with more favorable outcomes in the form of success, life satisfaction, and health (Clifton & Meindl, 2022). For beliefs about the world, one could apply the rule regarding beliefs about the self that it is not the positivity or negativity of the beliefs that is most important. What is essential is the ability to update them, influenced by experience (Kube et al., 2019). In one study, the most common reasons given for holding beliefs include maintaining certainty and keeping expectations low in order to avoid future disappointments (Kube & Rauch, 2025). Demandingness is also known within REBT, indicating a person's persistent assimilative efforts to cope with information that contradicts the schema, leading to persistent arousal and perceived threat (Buschmann et al., 2017). It is possible that beliefs about the self and beliefs about the world correlate in the same direction, but this requires further research.

Developing cognitive flexibility within therapeutic approaches and prevention may respond to these phenomena. It has been shown that in the context of substance abuse, cognitive flexibility could have a protective effect (Jansen et al., 2015).

Acknowledgments

This work was supported by the Agency for Research and Development under contract No. APVV-23-0647.

References

- Bridges, K. R., & Harnish, R. J. (2010). Role of irrational beliefs in depression and anxiety: a review. *Health, 2*(8), 862-877. <https://www.scrip.org/html/2447.html>
- Buschmann, T., Horn, R. A., Blankenship, V. R., Garcia, Y. E., & Bohan, K. B. (2018). The relationship between automatic thoughts and irrational beliefs predicting anxiety and depression. *Journal of Rational-Emotive and Cognitive-Behavior Therapy: RET, 36*(2), 137-162. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10942-017-0278-y>
- Clifton, J. D. W., & Crum, A. J. (2024). Beliefs that influence personality likely concern a situation humans never leave. *The American Psychologist*, Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0001436>
- Clifton, J. D. W., & Meindl, P. (2022). Parents think—incorrectly—that teaching their children that the world is a bad place is likely best for them. *The Journal of Positive Psychology, 17*(2), 182-197. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2021.2016907>
- Clifton, J. D. W., & Yaden, D. B. (2021). Brief measures of the four highest-order primal world beliefs. *Psychological Assessment, 33*(12), 1267-1273. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pas0001055>
- Clifton, J. D. W., Baker, J. D., Park, C. L., Yaden, D. B., Clifton, A. B. W., Terni, P., Miller, J. L., Zeng, G., Giorgi, S., Schwartz, H. A., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2019). *Primal world beliefs*. *Psychological Assessment, 31*(1), 82-99. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pas0000639>
- Hannah Lee, J., & Suh, H. (2024). Perfectionism and alcohol-related problems: The role of procrastination. *Journal of American College Health, 72*(1), 11-19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2021.2011734>
- Jensen, P., Haug, E., Sivertsen, B., & Skogen, J. C. (2021). Satisfaction with life, mental health problems and potential alcohol-related problems among Norwegian university students. *Frontiers in Psychiatry, 12*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2021.578180>
- Jansen, J. M., van Holst, R. J., van den Brink, W., Veltman, D. J., Caan, M. W. A., & Goudriaan, A. E. (2015). Brain function during cognitive flexibility and white matter integrity in alcohol-dependent patients, problematic drinkers and healthy controls. *Addiction Biology, 20*(5), 979-989. <https://doi.org/10.1111/adb.12199>
- Koski-Jännes, A., Penonen, M., & Simmat-Durand, L. (2016). Treatment professionals' basic beliefs about alcohol use disorders: The impact of different cultural contexts. *Substance Use & Misuse, 51*(4), 479-488. <https://doi.org/10.3109/10826084.2015.1126736>
- Kube, T., & Rauch, L. (2025). "It's safer to believe that others don't like me" – A qualitative study on the paradoxical value of negative core beliefs in depression. *Behaviour Research and Therapy, 184*(104665), 104665. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.brat.2024.104665>
- Kube, T., Glombiewski, J. A., Gall, J., Touissant, L., Gärtner, T., & Rief, W. (2019). How to modify persisting negative expectations in major depression? An experimental study comparing three strategies to inhibit cognitive immunization against novel positive experiences. *Journal of Affective Disorders, 250*, 231-240. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2019.03.027>
- McHugh, R. K., & Weiss, R. D. (2019). Alcohol use disorder and depressive disorders. *Alcohol research: current reviews, 40*(1). <https://doi.org/10.35946/arcr.v40.1.017>
- Nelsen, S. K., Kayaalp, A., & Page, K. J. (2023). Perfectionism, substance use, and mental health in college students: A longitudinal analysis. *Journal of American College Health, 71*(1), 257-265. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2021.1891076>
- Rice, K. G., Richardson, C. M. E., & Tueller, S. (2014). The short form of the revised almost perfect scale. *Journal of Personality Assessment, 96*(3), 368-379. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00223891.2013.838172>
- Richardson, C. M. E., Hoene, T. H. M., & Rigatti, H. L. (2020). Self-critical perfectionism and daily drinking to cope with negative emotional experiences among college students. *Personality and Individual Differences, 156*(109773), 109773. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2019.109773>
- Saunders, J. B., Aasland, O. G., Babor, T. F., de La Fuente, J. R., & Grant, M. (1993). Development of the alcohol use disorders identification test (AUDIT): WHO collaborative project on early detection of persons with harmful alcohol consumption-II. *Addiction (Abingdon, England), 88*(6), 791-804. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1360-0443.1993.tb02093.x>
- Watson, T. L., Jordan, H. R., & Madson, M. B. (2020). Perfectionism and alcohol use outcomes in college students: the moderating role of alcohol protective behavioral strategies. *Addiction Research & Theory, 28*(5), 379-386. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16066359.2019.16638>