

# PERFECTIONISM AS A PREDICTOR OF PRIMAL WORLD BELIEFS

**Marianna Berinšterová, Peter Babinčák, & Monika Kačmárová**  
*Institute of Psychology, University of Presov in Presov (Slovakia)*

## Abstract

The study aimed to examine the relationship between primal world beliefs and perfectionism, as both constructs reflect foundational attitudes and expectations that individuals hold about the world and themselves. Previous research has highlighted perfectionism as a mediator between beliefs and anxiety, as well as a correlate of deprivation of social and emotional needs and interpersonal sensitivity, particularly when reality does not align with personal expectations. Our research distinguishes perfectionism into two dimensions – high standards and discrepancy – and focuses on three overarching primal beliefs (safe, enticing, alive) and one primary primal (good), with age and gender included as control variables. *Method:* The sample consisted of 882 participants (52.5% women; Mage = 33.42; SD = 14.94). Measures included the PI-18 Primal Inventory (Clifton et al., 2019) and the Short Almost Perfect Scale (Rice et al., 2014). Separate regression analyses were conducted for each primal belief. *Results:* The primary primal, "Good," was positively associated with age, high standards, and negatively with discrepancy. The primal "Alive" was positively associated with female gender and high standards. "Enticing" was positively related to high standards and age, and negatively to discrepancy. Finally, "Safe" was negatively associated with discrepancy. *Discussion:* The findings suggest a connection between personality and primal beliefs, offering potential implications for psychotherapy. The dimensions of adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism, characterized by secure versus fragile self-evaluations, are reflected in individuals' fundamental beliefs about the world.

**Keywords:** *Perfectionism, primal world beliefs.*

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## 1. Introduction

"Belief", according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, is a habit of mind to perceive things in the same manner. Habit, as a changeable part of the human psyche, can be derived from personality. Personality traits can shape the conditions for habitual ways of behaving as well as habitual ways of thinking accompanied by emotions. As a consequence, uniform experiences are the means through which beliefs are formed. The relationship between personality and beliefs has been explored, for example, by Clifton et al. (2019), who found that beliefs correlate with certain personality traits (e.g., optimism) and well-being. This paper discusses whether perfectionism as a personality trait is a predictor of primary world beliefs.

Perfectionism is a personality trait expressed by high personal standards and expectations for oneself, and by expressive self-criticism toward achieving these standards (Rice et al., 2013). Stoeber and Otto (2006) refer to this as perfectionistic striving and perfectionistic concern.

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". In addition to primary beliefs about whether the world is good or not, they also talk about three secondary beliefs about the world as safe, alive, and enticing, and then about specific qualities of the world, including stability, connectedness, or fun. Secondary primal safe points that the world is rarely threatening, rather it is fair, stable, and comfortable. The secondary primal enticing implies that the world is meaningful, fascinating, and not boring. The secondary primal alive refers to the intentionality of the world with as it interacts with us.

Beliefs about oneself, the world and other people are important in the treatment of depression (Beck, in Clifton, 2024). A maladaptive form of perfectionism, which is thought to be self-discrepant, i.e., a high level of critical view of one's own performance, is similarly associated with depressive symptoms (Smith, 2021). Hewitt (2020) claim, that perfectionism can inhibit successful interaction with the world because fears of failure inhibit any behavioural efforts to improvement and the person only escapes to fantasies of mastery, instead of actual action in which they would gain experience with the world.

## 2. Objectives

The aim of this contribution is to explore the relationship between perfectionism (high standards and discrepancy of real, and expected performance) and primal world beliefs (good, safe, enticing, alive), controlling for gender and age.

## 3. Methods

The sample consisted of 882 participants (52.5% women; Mage = 33.42; SD = 14.94).

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

Primary world beliefs were measured by the PI-18 questionnaire (Clifton, 2019). The questionnaire examines the primal "good" as well as a triad of primary world beliefs: alive, enticing, safe. Respondents rate items on a 6-point Likert scale. Cronbach alphas for each subscale: good .809, safe .712, enticing .807, alive .738.

## 4. Results

By liner regression analysis we examined the predictive power of gender, age and two aspects of perfectionism (see Tables 1-4).

*Table 1. Perfectionism as a predictor of primal GOOD.*

	B	SE	$\beta$	t	p
(Constant)	4.120	.143		28.779	.000
gender	.035	.044	.027	.792	.428
age	.005	.002	.105	3.079	.002
Perfect Scale Standards	.090	.021	.164	4.229	.000
Perfect Scale Discrepancy	-.185	.020	-.330	-9.180	.000

The results in Table 1 showed that the tested model was significant ( $F=26.680$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $R^2=10.8$ ) and primals "Good" was positively associated with age, high standards, and negatively with discrepancy.

$R^2=3.0$ ;  $F=6.792$ ,  $p<.001$

*Table 2. Perfectionism as a predictor of primal ALIVE.*

	B	SE	$\beta$	t	p
(Constant)	2.602	.244		10.664	.000
gender	.251	.074	.118	3.414	.001
age	.003	.003	.034	.940	.347
Perfect Scale Standards	.120	.035	.133	3.397	.001
Perfect Scale Discrepancy	-.047	.033	-.051	-1.397	.163

The tested model for primals "Alive" was also significant ( $F=6.792$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $R^2=3.0$ ) and positively associated with female gender and high standards (Table 2).

*Table 3. Perfectionism as a predictor of primal ENTICING.*

	B	SE	$\beta$	t	p
(Constant)	4.786	.172		27.903	.000
gender	-.011	.055	-.008	-.195	.845
age	.006	.002	.034	2.771	.006
Perfect Scale Standards	.116	.026	.133	4.426	.000
Perfect Scale Discrepancy	-.239	.025	-.302	-9.667	.000

The results for primals "Enticing" ( $F=30.375$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $R^2=12.2$ ) showed positive relationship with high standards and age, and negative with discrepancy.

Table 4. Perfectionism as a predictor of primal SAFE.

	B	SE	$\beta$	t	p
(Constant)	3.880	.176		22.053	.000
gender	.020	.056	.015	.365	.715
age	.004	.002	.064	1.752	.081
Perfect Scale Standards	.040	.026	.061	1.554	.122
Perfect Scale Discrepancy	-.156	.026	-.231	-6.104	.000

The results in Table 4 showed that primals “Safe” ( $F=10.641$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $R^2=4.6$ ) was negatively associated with discrepancy.

## 5. Discussion

In this research, we tested the relationship of perfectionism to primary world beliefs through linear regression. Different results were found for each primary belief. Beliefs that the world is both good and engaging and meaningful are positively associated with high standards, and negatively associated with self-discrepancy. It is also related to older age. The belief that the world is alive and things happen with purpose is associated with femininity and high standards. The belief that the world is safe is negatively associated with self-discrepancy.

The results may indicate how different personality settings create opportunities for beliefs to be formed through frequently repeated experiences. On the other hand, Clifton (2024), following Beck, as well as Dweck, suggests that a change in beliefs results in a change in personality. In the same way, we can consider the different understanding of adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism not as personality traits but as a set of cognitions about the self (Flett et al., 2018). Beliefs about the self have also been found to be significantly associated with beliefs about the world (Catlin & Epstein, 1992). This is particularly the case when they are formed during emotionally significant experiences. If the role of perfectionism is important for gaining experiences about the world, it is also important in the formation of beliefs.

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