



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Personality and Individual Differences

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/paid



The basic psychological needs in excellencism and perfectionism: A dual perspective with the need-as-motives and the need-as-nutriments frameworks

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Excellencism
Perfectionism
Basic psychological needs
Self-determination theory
Need for achievement
Fear of rejection
Fear of failure

ABSTRACT

Perfectionism has been theorized as a risk factor for psychological need frustration. However, past studies on basic psychological needs often reported ambiguous and unexpected findings for perfectionistic standards. The Model of Excellencism and Perfectionism (MEP) recently distinguished between perfectionistic standards and the pursuit of high yet attainable standards (excellencism). This study investigated their distinct associations with basic psychological needs, using measures taken from the need-as-motives and the need-as-nutriments perspectives. Young adults ($n = 305$) completed the Scale of Perfectionism and Excellencism and various measures of need-related constructs. A multivariate multiple regression supported the hypothesis that excellencism and perfectionism are differentially linked with psychological needs. Excellencism was positively associated with three approach-oriented motives (need for achievement, affiliation, power) and satisfaction with the need for autonomy, relatedness, and competence. Conversely, pursuing perfectionistic standards was positively linked to two avoidance-oriented motives (e.g., fear of failure and losing control) and frustration with the three basic psychological needs. These findings reconcile research and theories by showing that pursuing perfection is not associated with adaptive psychological needs. Perfectionistic standards are linked to two avoidance-oriented motives (i.e., fear of failure and losing control) and frustration of basic psychological needs when properly distinguished from excellencism.

1. Introduction

The Model of Excellencism and Perfectionism (MEP; Gaudreau, 2019) distinguishes the pursuit of high and attainable standards involved in *excellencism* from the pursuit of flawless, excessively high, and unrealistic standards involved in *perfectionism*. Excellencism has been positively associated with the motivation to approach achievement and the corresponding experience of satisfaction of the need for competence. Conversely, perfectionism has been positively associated with the motivation to avoid failure and corresponding experiences of frustration of the need for competence (Gaudreau et al., 2022). The MEP proposes that such differentiated effects generalize beyond the need for competence to influence interpersonal motives and corresponding need fulfillment. This study investigated this MEP proposition and tested how excellencism and perfectionism are distinctly associated with approach-oriented motives (e.g., need for power), avoidance-oriented motives (e.

g., fear of rejection) as well as the satisfaction and frustration of the needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy.

1.1. A new distinction between excellencism and perfectionism

Perfectionism is a multidimensional construct composed of perfectionistic standards accompanied by perfectionistic concerns (Frost et al., 1990). For three decades, the distinct psychological experiences associated with the pursuit of high and perfectionistic standards have been studied together under a unitary construct called perfectionistic standards (Osenk et al., 2020). This is concerning because many people aim to be competent and produce high-quality work without being perfectionists. They pursue excellence. Recently, the MEP was developed to differentiate excellencism and perfectionism (Gaudreau et al., 2022). In this model, perfectionistic standards are repositioned as the core definitional feature of perfectionism, while perfectionistic concerns are

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2025.113286>

Received 23 October 2024; Received in revised form 7 March 2025; Accepted 21 May 2025

Available online 28 May 2025

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signature expressions enacted when people pursue perfectionistic standards. Excellencism represents a “tendency to aim and strive toward very high yet attainable standards in an effortful, engaged, and determined yet flexible manner” while perfectionism represents a “tendency to aim and strive toward idealized, flawless, and excessively high standards in a relentless manner” (Gaudreau, 2019, p.200).

The MEP aligns with researchers advocating for valence-neutral terminology over labels like “adaptive” and “maladaptive” perfectionism, which prematurely assume effects (e.g., Greenspon, 2000). Adaptive perfectionism is typically positively associated with perfectionistic concerns (e.g., Bieling et al., 2004), whereas excellencism is negatively or unrelated to perfectionistic concerns (e.g., Gaudreau et al., 2022). Excellencism is distinct from perfectionism and should therefore not be equated with adaptive perfectionism.

Past studies on perfectionistic standards resulted in inconsistent findings (e.g., Hill et al., 2020) and the MEP proposes that distinguishing excellencism and perfectionism is necessary to clarify whether perfectionism is beneficial, unneeded, or harmful (Gaudreau et al., 2024). Emerging research shows that excellencism and perfectionism are distinctively associated with psychological outcomes. For example, psychological distress was negatively associated with excellencism and positively associated with perfectionism (Gaudreau & Schellenberg, 2024; With et al., 2024). Similarly, academic achievement (Gaudreau et al., 2022) and creativity (Goulet-Pelletier et al., 2022) were positively associated with excellencism and negatively associated with perfectionism. When reinterpreted using the MEP guidelines (Gaudreau et al., 2024), these findings indicate that excellence strivers tend to experience less psychological distress and are more accomplished than perfection strivers and those who do not pursue excellence or perfection (non-excellence/nonperfection strivers).

1.2. Two approaches to psychological needs and their associations with perfectionism

Basic psychological needs play two essential roles in motivation and optimal functioning (Prentice et al., 2014; Sheldon, 2011), and they are important processes in perfectionism (e.g., Campbell et al., 2018). First, needs can act as *motives* that orient and energize behaviors and classic distinctions were made between the need for achievement (i.e., hope of success) versus fear of failure, the need for affiliation versus fear of rejection, and the need for power versus fear of losing control (McClelland, 1987; Schönbrodt & Gerstenberg, 2012). Needs can be seen as recurrent standards orienting individuals toward different goals. Second, needs act as *nutriments* whose fulfillment is universally required for optimal functioning (Ryan & Deci, 2000), with satisfaction of the needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy being equally important for psychological functioning. The extent to which needs are satisfied and frustrated can be seen as subjective experiential states capable of optimizing or compromising optimal development (Vansteenkiste et al., 2023).

The *needs-as-motives* framework has inspired perfectionism researchers over the last decades (e.g., Stoeber & Becker, 2008) but most research focused on the need for achievement. Perfectionists aim and strive toward overly ambitious standards. It is easy to characterize them as highly motivated and achievement-driven. However, their unrealistic standards and tendency to perceive minor imperfections as complete failures can intensify motivation to avoid failure (Yosopov et al., 2024). Several studies on perfectionism have also relied on the *needs-as-nutriments* framework. Perfectionists have a strong need to be perfect, project an image of perfection, and expect perfection from others. Given their desire for success, perfectionists may create the conditions needed to satisfy their psychological needs. At the same time, they impose extreme and unrealistic expectations on themselves and others and frequently experience feelings of discrepancy associated with perpetual feelings of dissatisfaction (Gaudreau et al., 2022). Based on these many characteristics of perfectionism (Smith et al., 2022), it appears logically

defendable that the constant pressure to be perfect can also frustrate the need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. For that, perfectionism has been proposed as a transdiagnostic risk factor for need frustration (Campbell et al., 2018).

Past studies reported mixed findings that only partially supported the theoretically proposed associations between perfectionistic standards and psychological needs. Although several studies reported a positive association with need satisfaction (for a review, see Hill et al., 2020), others have found either positive, null, or negative associations with need frustration (e.g., Burkitt, 2024; Herrera et al., 2021; Mallinson & Hill, 2011). Similarly, perfectionistic standards have been positively associated with the need for achievement (e.g., Stoeber & Becker, 2008; Van Yperen, 2006) without being consistently linked to fear of failure (e.g., Stoeber & Becker, 2008; Stoeber & Rambow, 2007). While these studies advanced knowledge, their results should be interpreted cautiously because they did not distinguish excellencism and perfectionism.

1.3. Excellencism, perfectionism, and psychological needs

According to the MEP (Gaudreau et al., 2022), excellencism operates under a good-enough principle that helps excellence strivers approach success without experiencing evaluative concerns and the obsessive and pressuring over-striving unique to perfection strivers. Compared to nonexcellence/nonperfection strivers, excellence strivers should experience higher need for achievement and need satisfaction without more fear of failure and need frustration. These effects should similarly translate across the needs of achievement, affiliation, and power.

Conversely, the MEP assumes that perfectionism operates under a too-much-of-a-good-thing principle (i.e., law of diminishing return) that prevents perfection strivers from reaping benefits over and above those experienced by excellence strivers. The self-imposed pressure and evaluative concerns involved in perfectionism are generally debilitating and likely to increase fear of failure and need frustration. Compared to excellence strivers, perfection strivers should experience a higher degree of fear of failure and need frustration without experiencing more need for achievement and satisfaction of needs. Altogether, perfectionism should yield no additional benefits over and above excellencism, while being associated with elevated psychological risks. Perfectionistic standards are expected to be unneeded for healthy need-related processes and a risk factor for unhealthy need-related processes.

So far, one study has examined the associations of excellencism and perfectionism with basic psychological needs. Gaudreau et al. (2022) found positive associations between excellencism and the need for achievement and the satisfaction of the need for competence. Conversely, they found positive associations between perfectionistic standards and both fear of failure and the frustration of the need for competence. Excellence strivers are driven by a desire to succeed, while perfection strivers exhibit a conflictual motivational style involving both a desire for success and fear of failure. Similarly, excellence strivers experience clear competence satisfaction, while perfection strivers face mixed and bitter-sweet experiences of competence satisfaction and frustration. These findings highlight distinct need-as-motives and need-fulfillment outcomes associated with excellencism and perfectionism.

1.4. This study

Gaudreau et al. (2022) provided initial evidence that perfectionistic standards and excellencism are differentially associated with the need for achievement/competence. As noted by Gaudreau et al. (2022, p. 1140), “excellence and perfection strivers are likely to differ on affiliation-related motives and experiences of relatedness fulfillment (i.e., satisfaction and frustration), just as much as they exhibited differentiated ways of expressing their need for achievement”. Our goal was to investigate the distinct associations of excellencism and perfectionism with the needs for achievement, affiliation, and power (needs-as-

motives) and the corresponding satisfaction and frustration of the need for competence, relatedness, and autonomy (needs-as-nutriments).

In line with the good enough principle, we hypothesized that excellencism would be positively associated with the needs for achievement, affiliation, and power, and the satisfaction of the needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy. Based on the MEP interpretational guidelines (Gaudreau et al., 2024), these findings would demonstrate that excellence strivers have higher approach-oriented motivations and need satisfaction than nonexcellence/nonperfection strivers. Based on the too-much-of-a-good-thing principle and the idea that perfectionism is a transdiagnostic risk factor for need frustration (Campbell et al., 2018), we hypothesized that perfectionism would be positively associated with fears of failure, rejection, and losing control, as well as with the frustration of the need for competence, relatedness, and autonomy. These findings would indicate that perfection strivers have higher avoidance-oriented motivations and need frustration than excellence strivers.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

A total of 317 participants were recruited for the study. Five participants missed an attention check question. Two and five were excluded because they were univariate ($Z > |3|$) or multivariate outliers (Mahalanobis $p < .001$). Participants in the final sample ($n = 305$) lived in the UK (62.62 %), the USA (28.20 %), Canada (8.85 %), and other/non-specified locations (<1 %). They were between 18 and 28 years of age ($M = 21.52$, $SD = 2.36$; 5 missing) and 54.10 % were women (44.59 % men, 1.31 % other). Participants were students (57.05 %), employees (29.18 %), unemployed (10.49 %), and in “other” occupations (3.28 %). Most identified as White (64.59 %), followed by East Asian (8.20 %), South Asian (7.21 %), mixed (6.56 %), Latino/Hispanic (4.59 %), Black/African American (4.59 %), African (1.97 %), “other” backgrounds (1.31 %), and Middle Eastern (0.98 %). Our sample was sufficiently powered ($p < .05$, two-tailed, power 80 %) because 233 people were required to reject the null hypothesis for a typical effect ($\beta = 0.18$; $f^2 = 0.034$) observed in personality (Gignac & Szodorai, 2016).

2.2. Procedures

Participants were recruited through Prolific Academic in May 2020. We selected participants who lived in the USA, UK, and Canada, were proficient in English, and were 18+ years old in the Prolific pre-screen questionnaire. They provided their free and informed consent and received monetary compensation (€2) for a 12–15-min online questionnaire. The study was approved by the MASKED research ethics committee.

2.3. Measures

2.3.1. Excellencism and perfectionism

In the Scale of Perfectionism and Excellencism (SCOPE; Gaudreau et al., 2022), participants rated how each of the 22 items reflected their goals in life using a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*totally*). The SCOPE consists of two scales measuring excellencism (e.g., “attain difficult but realistic goals”) and perfectionism (e.g., “accomplish great things perfectly”). Gaudreau et al. (2022) found support for the 2-factor structure of the SCOPE in exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses. They also found evidence for its convergent and discriminant validity. The McDonald’s omega internal consistency was high in this sample (excellencism, $\omega = 0.93$; perfectionism, $\omega = 0.97$).

2.3.2. Need for achievement

Participants answered five items measuring the need for achievement (e.g., “I like situations, in which I can find out how capable I am”)

and five assessing fear of failure (e.g., “I am afraid of failing in somewhat difficult situations, when a lot depends on me”) on a scale from 1 (*not at all agree*) to 7 (*totally agree*) using the Achievement Motives Scale (Lang & Fries, 2006). The subscales demonstrated good reliability (need for achievement, $\omega = 0.88$; fear of failure, $\omega = 0.87$).

2.3.3. Needs for affiliation and power

Participants completed the Unified Motive Scales (Schönbrodt & Gerstenberg, 2012). They answered three items that reflected need for power (e.g., “I like to have the final say”; $\omega = 0.72$), six that reflected need for affiliation (e.g., “I try to be in the company of friends as much as possible”; $\omega = 0.75$), three items for fear of rejection (e.g., “When I get to know new people, I often fear being rejected by them”; $\omega = 0.90$), and three for fear of losing control (e.g., “I become scared when I lose control over things”; $\omega = 0.78$), all on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree/not at all important to me*) to 6 (*strongly agree/extremely important to me*) depending on whether they were statements or importance items. The internal consistency in this sample was acceptable.

2.3.4. Need satisfaction and frustration

The Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction and Frustration Scale contains six four-item subscales (Chen et al., 2015): satisfaction of the needs for autonomy ($\omega = 0.86$; “I feel a sense of choice and freedom in the things I undertake”), relatedness ($\omega = 0.89$; “I feel like people I care about also care about me.”), and competence ($\omega = 0.93$; “I feel confident that I can do things well”) and frustration of the needs for autonomy ($\omega = 0.89$; “Most of the things I do feel like I have to”), relatedness ($\omega = 0.90$; “I feel excluded from the group I want to belong to”), and competence ($\omega = 0.89$; “I feel disappointed with many of my performances”). Items were rated on a scale from 1 (*not at all agree*) to 7 (*totally agree*).

2.4. Data analyses

We followed the 7-step peer-reviewed plan of analyses of the MEP (Gaudreau et al., 2024). Multiple regression analyses were conducted using MPlus 8.7 to examine the relationships between excellencism and perfectionism with the 12 dependent variables (i.e., motives and psychological need fulfillment). Excellencism and perfectionism were mean-centered and entered simultaneously as independent variables. This approach is consistent with the MEP (Gaudreau et al., 2024) which specifies that the effects of perfectionism should be interpreted after controlling for excellencism, and vice versa. Based on the intercept and beta weights of the regression model, we calculated, graphed, and compared the predicted values for individuals with different values of excellencism and perfectionism. The predicted values of each dependent variable were calculated using the operational definitions of (a) non-excellence/nonperfection strivers ($-1SD$ of excellencism, $-1SD$ of perfectionism), (b) excellence strivers ($+1SD$ of excellencism, $-1SD$ of perfectionism), and (c) perfection strivers ($+1SD$ of excellencism, $+1SD$ of perfectionism). Predicted values are calculated using the regression equation and do not require separating participants into subgroups using a median-split group-based modeling (Gaudreau et al., 2024). Predicted values have been used to interpret perfectionism (e.g., Gaudreau & Thompson, 2010) and other personality constructs (e.g., Mundelsee & Jurkowski, 2024). Figures were created using the MEP Shiny App available at: https://model-of-excellencism-and-perfectionism.shinyapps.io/Shiny_Version2/

3. Results

3.1. Descriptive statistics and correlations

Means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations are presented in Table 1. Consistent with past MEP studies, the mean score of excellencism was higher than perfectionism, and excellencism and

Table 1

Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations.

	Mean (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Excellencism	5.51 (0.93)	–												
2. Perfectionism	3.51 (1.62)	.46**	–											
3. Need for achievement	5.21 (0.98)	.55**	.29**	–										
4. Fear of failure	4.36 (1.39)	.06	.14*	.06	–									
5. Need for Affiliation	4.34 (0.80)	.29**	.21**	.34**	.11	–								
6. Fear of rejection	4.05 (1.37)	-.05	.06	-.05	.58**	.16**	–							
7. Need for power	3.41 (1.01)	.43**	.50**	.30**	.20**	.34**	.10	–						
8. Fear of losing control	3.87 (1.03)	.13*	.22**	.02	.56**	.24**	.54**	.46**	–					
9. Competence Satisfaction	4.72 (1.13)	.43**	.28**	.39**	-.32**	.21**	-.35**	.29**	-.09	–				
10. Competence Frustration	3.37 (1.55)	-.01	.11	-.04	.53**	.07	.48**	.15**	.41**	-.44**	–			
11. Relatedness Satisfaction	5.11 (1.24)	.23**	.02	.23**	-.07	.38**	-.12*	.08	.01	.34**	-.17**	–		
12. Relatedness Frustration	2.37 (1.42)	.04	.23**	-.04	.24**	-.07	.28**	.23**	.25**	-.11	.43**	-.45**	–	
13. Autonomy Satisfaction	4.40 (1.22)	.31**	.17**	.32**	-.13*	.28**	-.20**	.16**	-.06	.51**	-.15*	.47**	-.15**	–
14. Autonomy Frustration	3.16 (1.41)	-.02	.22**	-.03	.38**	-.01	.27**	.19**	.32**	-.17**	.50**	-.23**	.54**	-.26**

Note. $N = 305$.** $p < .01$.* $p < .05$.

perfectionism were positively and significantly correlated. Several dependent variables were significantly and positively correlated, though they capture conceptually distinct motives and experiences of need satisfaction and frustration.

3.2. Multivariate multiple regression

Results of the 12 dependent variables are reported in Table 2. Table 3 presents the standardized differences between the predicted values of nonexcellence/nonperfection, excellence, and perfection strivers.

3.2.1. Need for achievement

Excellencism (but not perfectionism) significantly predicted need for achievement. Need for achievement did not significantly differ across perfection and excellence strivers, but it was significantly higher in excellence and perfection strivers compared to nonexcellence/nonperfection strivers (Fig. 1A). Perfectionism (but not excellencism) was marginally associated to fear of failure ($p = .05$). Fear of failure was marginally higher in perfection strivers compared to excellence strivers, but it did not differ between excellence and nonexcellence/nonperfection strivers (Fig. 1B).

3.2.2. Need for affiliation

Excellencism (but not perfectionism) significantly predicted need for affiliation. Need for affiliation did not significantly differ across perfection and excellence strivers, but it was significantly higher in excellence and perfection strivers compared to nonexcellence/nonperfection strivers (Fig. 1C). Excellencism and perfectionism were not significantly associated with fear of rejection. Fear of rejection did not significantly differ between perfection, excellence, and nonexcellence/nonperfection strivers (see Fig. 1D).

3.2.3. Need for power

Excellencism and perfectionism significantly predicted need for power. Need for power was higher in perfection than excellence strivers and higher in excellence than nonexcellence/nonperfection strivers (Fig. 1E). Perfectionism (but not excellencism) predicted fear of losing control. Fear of losing control was higher in perfection compared to excellence and nonexcellence/nonperfection strivers, but it did not significantly differ between excellence and nonexcellence/nonperfection strivers (see Fig. 1F).

3.2.4. Satisfaction and frustration of needs

Excellencism (but not perfectionism) significantly predicted satisfaction of the need for competence (Fig. 1G), relatedness (Fig. 1I), and autonomy (Fig. 1K). Need satisfaction did not significantly differ across

perfection and excellence strivers, but it was significantly higher in excellence and perfection strivers compared to nonexcellence/nonperfection strivers.

Perfectionism (but not excellencism) significantly predicted the frustration of the need for competence (Fig. 1H), relatedness (Fig. 1J), and autonomy (Fig. 1L). Need frustration was significantly higher in perfection than excellence strivers.

4. Discussion

Perfectionism has been theorized as a risk factor for psychological need frustration. However, past studies on psychological needs reported inconsistent and unexpected findings for perfectionistic standards. The MEP recently distinguished perfectionistic standards and excellencism to address this issue. Our results partially supported the hypothesis that perfectionistic standards are linked to avoidance-oriented motives. The association was significant for fear of losing control and marginally significant for fear of failure. Consistent support was found for the hypothesis that perfectionistic standards are significantly related to the frustration of basic psychological needs. These findings highlighted the added value of separating excellencism from perfectionism and the importance of considering psychological needs from the needs-as-motives and needs-as-nutriments perspectives.

4.1. Main findings

Past research from the needs-as-nutriments perspective concluded that perfectionistic standards are beneficial for the satisfaction of basic psychological needs. Our results challenged this position. After accounting for excellencism, perfectionistic standards were positively associated with need frustration rather than need satisfaction. In contrast, we found a positive association between excellencism and satisfaction of the three needs. These findings align with the hypotheses of the MEP and extend the results of Gaudreau et al. (2022) across all three needs. When reinterpreted using the MEP guidelines, perfection and excellence strivers experience similar need satisfaction. The key difference is the elevated need frustrations experienced by perfection strivers. Excellencism (rather than perfectionistic standards) provides an optimal need-fulfillment experience of autonomy, competence, and relatedness because excellence strivers experience elevated need satisfaction without the increased need frustration felt by perfection strivers. In summary, our results refuted previous findings and showed that perfectionistic standards are not associated with better need satisfaction outcomes. Perfectionistic standards, just like perfectionistic concerns, are risk factors associated with frustration of basic psychological needs (Campbell et al., 2018).

Table 2

Results from the multiple multivariate regression.

	Intercept	Excellencism B SE β	Perfectionism B SE β					R^2
Need for Achievement	5.210	0.567	0.059	.535**	0.024	0.034	.040	.307
Fear of failure	4.363	-0.012	0.096	-.008	0.119	0.061	.139	.018
Need for affiliation	4.341	0.214	0.059	.247**	0.048	0.032	.096	.092
Fear of rejection	4.054	-0.150	0.103	-.101	0.089	0.058	.105	.011
Need for power	3.405	0.279	0.060	.256**	0.238	0.035	.381**	.301
Fear of losing control	3.867	0.044	0.073	.040	0.128	0.043	.201**	.049
Competence satisfaction	4.723	0.471	0.065	.385**	0.069	0.044	.099	.193
Competence frustration	3.373	-0.129	0.098	-.077	0.141	0.059	.147*	.017
Relatedness satisfaction	5.111	0.376	0.084	.280**	-0.086	0.048	-.112	.062
Relatedness frustration	2.373	-0.130	0.087	-.084	0.240	0.057	.273**	.060
Autonomy satisfaction	4.396	0.389	0.076	.295**	0.024	0.047	.032	.096
Autonomy frustration	3.160	-0.235	0.090	-.154**	0.251	0.056	.287**	.066

Note. $N = 305$.** $p < .01$.* $p < .05$.**Table 3**Standardized difference (Cohen d and 95% confidence intervals) between the predicted values of excellence, perfection, and nonexcellence/nonperfection strivers.

Contrasts	Excel vs Non	Perfect vs Excel	Perfect vs Non
Need for achievement	1.070** [0.83, 1.31]	0.080 [-0.14, 0.30]	1.149** [0.90, 1.40]
Fear of failure	-0.015 [-0.27, 0.24]	0.277* [0.00, 0.55]	0.262 [-0.05, 0.57]
Need for affiliation	0.495** [0.21, 0.78]	0.192 [-0.06, 0.45]	0.687** [0.42, 0.95]
Fear of rejection	-0.203 [-0.47, 0.07]	0.209 [-0.06, 0.48]	0.006 [-0.28, 0.29]
Need for power	0.512** [0.29, 0.74]	0.763** [0.54, 0.99]	1.275** [1.06, 1.50]
Fear of losing control	0.080 [-0.18, 0.34]	0.402** [0.14, 0.66]	0.481** [0.21, 0.75]
Competence satisfaction	0.770** [0.55, 0.99]	0.197 [-0.05, 0.44]	0.967** [0.72, 1.22]
Competence frustration	-0.155 [-0.38, 0.07]	0.295* [0.05, 0.54]	0.140 [-0.13, 0.41]
Relatedness satisfaction	0.561** [0.31, 0.82]	-0.224 [-0.47, 0.02]	0.337* [0.07, 0.61]
Relatedness frustration	-0.169 [-0.39, 0.05]	0.546** [0.29, 0.80]	0.377** [0.11, 0.64]
Autonomy satisfaction	0.589** [0.36, 0.82]	0.063 [-0.18, 0.31]	0.652** [0.40, 0.91]
Autonomy frustration	-0.309** [-0.54, -0.08]	0.574** [0.33, 0.82]	0.266 [-0.00, 0.53]

Note. $N=305$. Excel = Excellence strivers. Perfect = Perfection Strivers. Non = Nonexcellence/nonperfection Strivers.** $p < .01$.* $p < .05$.

Results from the need-as-motives perspective consistently supported the positive association between excellencism and the need for achievement, affiliation, and power. Conversely, perfectionism was not significantly associated with approach-oriented motives, except for the need for power. These findings supported the MEP position that past studies observed a positive association between perfectionistic standards and approach-oriented motives because they did not differentiate excellencism from perfectionism. The approach-oriented motives of excellence strivers are higher than nonexcellence/nonperfection strivers. However, perfection strivers are not more motivated to approach success and social relationships than excellence strivers. The need for power is an exception, as they are even more motivated to approach influence and control than excellence strivers. This is not only consistent with the results of Gaudreau et al. (2022) but also supports the idea that the approach-oriented motives of excellence strivers generalize to achievement and interpersonal needs.

Finally, our results partially supported the hypothesis that

perfectionistic standards are linked to avoidance-oriented motives. Perfectionism was associated with fear of failure, but the effect was smaller and marginally significant ($p = .05$).² Furthermore, it was not associated with fear of rejection – a surprising finding given the interpersonal problems and social disconnection frequently faced by perfectionists (Stoeber et al., 2017). Finally, perfectionism was significantly linked to the fear of losing control. Overall, perfection strivers manifested more fears of failure and losing control than excellence strivers. Excellencism was unrelated to the three avoidance-oriented motives, thus providing support for the need to separate excellencism from perfectionistic standards in future research.

The findings for fear of losing control indicate that perfection strivers exhibit antagonistic tendencies, simultaneously seeking to exert influence while fearing its loss. These results are consistent with the idea that perfection strivers experience “a conflict between seemingly opposing motives” (Hewitt et al., 2017, p.37). Both excellencism and perfectionism were associated with the need for power, but only perfectionism was associated with the fear of losing control. Perfection strivers were more intensely driven to influence and control others than excellence strivers, while also fearing losing that control. Too much motivation to obtain power combined with the fear of losing control appears to be consistent with the hypercompetitive ethos involved in perfectionism (e.g., Mackinnon et al., 2013). Such a drive to earn and maintain social status at any given cost could lead to hostility toward others (Visvalingam et al., 2024). Future research should examine how motivation for social dominance and power can frustrate the needs of people who frequently interact with perfection strivers.

As reported in Table 1, both excellencism and perfectionism were positively correlated with all three approach-oriented motives. However, correlations should be interpreted cautiously in the perfectionism literature (e.g., Stoeber & Gaudreau, 2017), and these recommendations apply to the MEP. Only looking at perfectionism does not differentiate if a person is an excellence or a nonexcellence/nonperfection striver because they both have low levels of perfectionism. Only looking at excellencism does not determine if a person is an excellence or a perfection striver because they both have high levels of excellencism. The effects of perfectionism are those observed when people pursue the extreme standards that go over and above the high standards of excellencism (Gaudreau, 2019). Therefore, controlling for excellencism when assessing the effects of perfectionism, and vice versa, is necessary for accurate tests of the hypotheses proposed in the MEP.

² This was significant ($\beta = 0.154$, $p = .029$) when outliers were included. Our final results are more conservative and trustworthy.

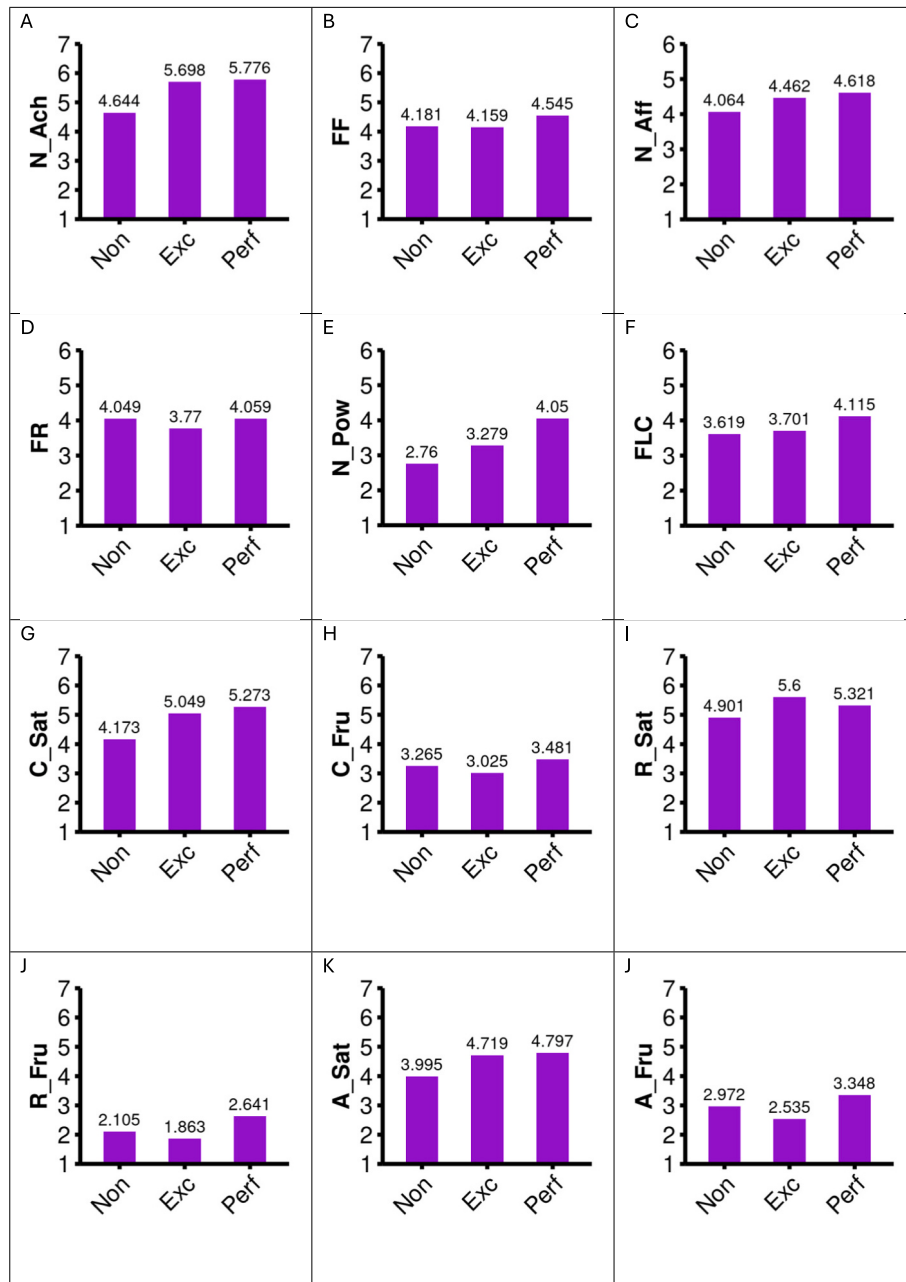


Fig. 1. Predicted values for nonexcellence/nonperfection, excellence, and perfection strivers for the 12 dependent variables.

Note. Non = Nonexcellence/nonperfection strivers. Exc = Excellence strivers. Perf = Perfection strivers. N_Ach = Need for achievement. FF = Fear of failure. N_Aff = Need for affiliation. FR = Fear of rejection. N_Pow = Need for power. FLC = Fear of losing control. C_Sat = Competence satisfaction. C_Fru = Competence frustration. R_Sat = Relatedness satisfaction. R_Fru = Relatedness frustration. A_Sat = Autonomy satisfaction. A_Fru = Autonomy frustration.

4.2. Limitations and future directions

The sample's demographic composition (primarily young, White, and Western) may limit the generalizability of our findings, and data collection in May 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, may have influenced motives and need experiences. The nonsignificant association between perfectionism and fear of rejection should be interpreted cautiously because of restrictions on social gatherings. Future studies could explore psychological needs involved in perfectionism in more depth, such as by dividing the need for affiliation into sociability and intimacy (Mark & Alper, 1980) and the need for power into leadership, dominance, and prestige (Suessenbach et al., 2019). Perfection strivers may try to develop relationships (e.g., social development goals) while avoiding being ignored, teased, or laughed at (e.g., social avoidance

goals). Such antagonistic social goals (e.g., Fletcher & Shim, 2019), which may explain our unexpected null association between perfectionism and fear of rejection, could deepen our differential understanding of excellencism and perfectionism.

5. Conclusion

This study advances our understanding of excellencism and perfectionistic standards by examining their distinct associations with psychological needs as motives and nutriment. Our findings support the MEP, demonstrating that excellencism is primarily associated with approach-oriented motives and need satisfaction. Perfectionism was consistently tied to need frustration but less reliably associated with avoidance-oriented motives. These results have important implications

for theory and practice, underscoring that promoting excellencism rather than perfectionistic standards may be more beneficial for optimal motivational functioning.

Open practices

The database, Mplus codes, and outputs are available at: https://osf.io/gzfrw/?view_only=e56e7b289897484985155b4a6f35dc7f

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Giovanni Andrade: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Project administration, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Philippe Pétrin-Pomerleau:** Writing – review & editing, Formal analysis. **Patrick Gaudreau:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Supervision, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Conceptualization.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

We used Chat GPT to improve readability and shorten sentences. We reviewed, edited, and took full responsibility for the content of this manuscript.

Funding

This work was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (grant number 435-2022-0145).

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Data availability

Data is available on Open Science Framework (see links in the method sections).

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