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PICTURE PERFECT: Perfectionistic Self-Presentation, Instagram Intrusion and Body Satisfaction in Young Women

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BACKGROUND

In the UK, there are over 57 million active social media users, with the majority identifying as females aged 18-34 years (Dixon, 2023). While many users have positive experiences with these platforms, it has been reported that social media use is positively associated with body dissatisfaction both cross-sectionally and over time, in young women (Fioravanti et al., 2022; Marques et al., 2022; Vandenbosch et al., 2022), which is a key risk factor for eating disorders in women (Benninghoven et al., 2006).

The transactional model of social media and body concerns (Perloff, 2014) suggests personality factors, such as perfectionism – the desire to be perfect - can increase the risk for body image concerns in young women, when combined with the effects of intrusive or addictive social media use.

This may be particularly relevant for perfectionistic self-presentation (PSP) – the desire to *appear* perfect to others, especially when combined with appearance-focussed platforms, such as Instagram. Like trait perfectionism, PSP has three dimensions (Hewitt et al., 2003).

1) **Perfectionistic self-promotion** (overtly presenting your perfection to others).
2) **Non-display of imperfection** (concealing and avoiding the display of imperfection to others).
3) **Non-disclosure of imperfection** (concealing imperfections, but regarding verbal and textual disclosures).

However, to date, no research has tested this model in the context of PSP, and so to do so in the present study, we examine how PSP on Instagram relates to body satisfaction.

AIMS

❑ We aimed to examine the relationships between the three dimensions of PSP (in the context of Instagram use), Instagram intrusion and body satisfaction, in young women, both cross-sectionally and over time.

❑ We expected that PSP would be a negative predictor of body satisfaction and a positive predictor of Instagram intrusion, across both samples. We also examined which of the three PSP dimensions would be most important, but note, this aspect was exploratory.

METHOD

Design:
Study 1 - Cross-sectional.
Study 2 - Two-wave longitudinal with a 5-week lag.

Participants:
Study 1 - 392 female participants, aged 18-34 years (M = 23.98, SD = 3.84).
Study 2 - 383 female participants, aged 18-34 years (M = 24.84, SD = 3.51).
Participants were recruited by opportunity sampling, via social media platforms.

Measures:
The Perfectionistic Self-Presentation Scale (Hewitt et al., 2003).
❑ 27 item self-report measure of PSP.
❑ Items revised for the context of Instagram use.
The Instagram Intrusion Questionnaire (Elphinston & Noller, 2011).
❑ 8 item self-report measure Facebook use.
❑ Items revised for the context of Instagram use.
The Body Image States Scale (Cash et al., 2002).
❑ 6 item self-report measure of state body satisfaction.

Procedure:
Ethical clearance for all procedures was approved by the relevant ethics committee.

Informed consent was obtained for all participants and questionnaires were distributed on Qualtrics.

Sample 1 completed measures on one occasion.

Sample 2 completed measures on two occasions, five-weeks apart. This time interval between waves was considered appropriate based on a shortitudinal approach, as supported by Dormann and Griffin (2015).

RESULTS

Preliminary Analyses:
1 outlier removed (Study 1), 3 outliers removed (Study 2; i.e., standardised scores that were greater than z = 3.29).
Acceptable internal consistency for all measures ($\alpha > .7$).
CFA - The expected models provided adequate fit to the data (RMSEA < 0.10, SRMR < 0.10, CFI > 0.90; Marsh et al., 2004) and all factor loadings were significant and of an adequate size (> .30).

Bivariate Correlations:
Small - medium negative correlations between all three dimensions of PSP and body satisfaction.
Small - medium positive correlations between all three dimensions of PSP and Instagram intrusion.

Multiple Regression:
Model 1 accounted for 15.1% of the variance in body satisfaction ($R^2 = .151$, $f(3,388) = 22.95$, $p < .001$). In Model 1, non-display of imperfection made a significant contribution to the regression model, $\beta = -.243$, $p = .002$. However, perfectionistic self-promotion made a non-significant contribution to the regression model, $\beta = -.151$, $p = .070$, as did non-disclosure of imperfection, $\beta = -.019$, $p = .755$.

Model 2 accounted for a significant 17.3% of the variance in Instagram intrusion ($R^2 = .173$, $f(3,387) = 26.91$, $p < .001$). In Model 2, non-display of imperfection made a significant contribution to the regression model, $\beta = .308$, $p < .001$. However, perfectionistic self-promotion made a non-significant contribution to the regression model, $\beta = .156$, $p = .059$, as did non-disclosure of imperfection, $\beta = -.044$, $p = .472$.

Cross-Lagged Models:
207 participants did not complete the measures on both occasions and were excluded from this analysis, resulting in a final sample size of N = 176.

Non-display of imperfection T1 was a significant negative predictor of body satisfaction T2 and perfectionistic self-promotion T1 was a significant positive predictor of body satisfaction T2 (see Figure 1).

All dimensions of PSP T1 were non-significant predictors of Instagram intrusion T2.

Figure 1.

Cross-Lagged Model for Perfectionistic Self-Presentation Dimensions Predicting Body Satisfaction.
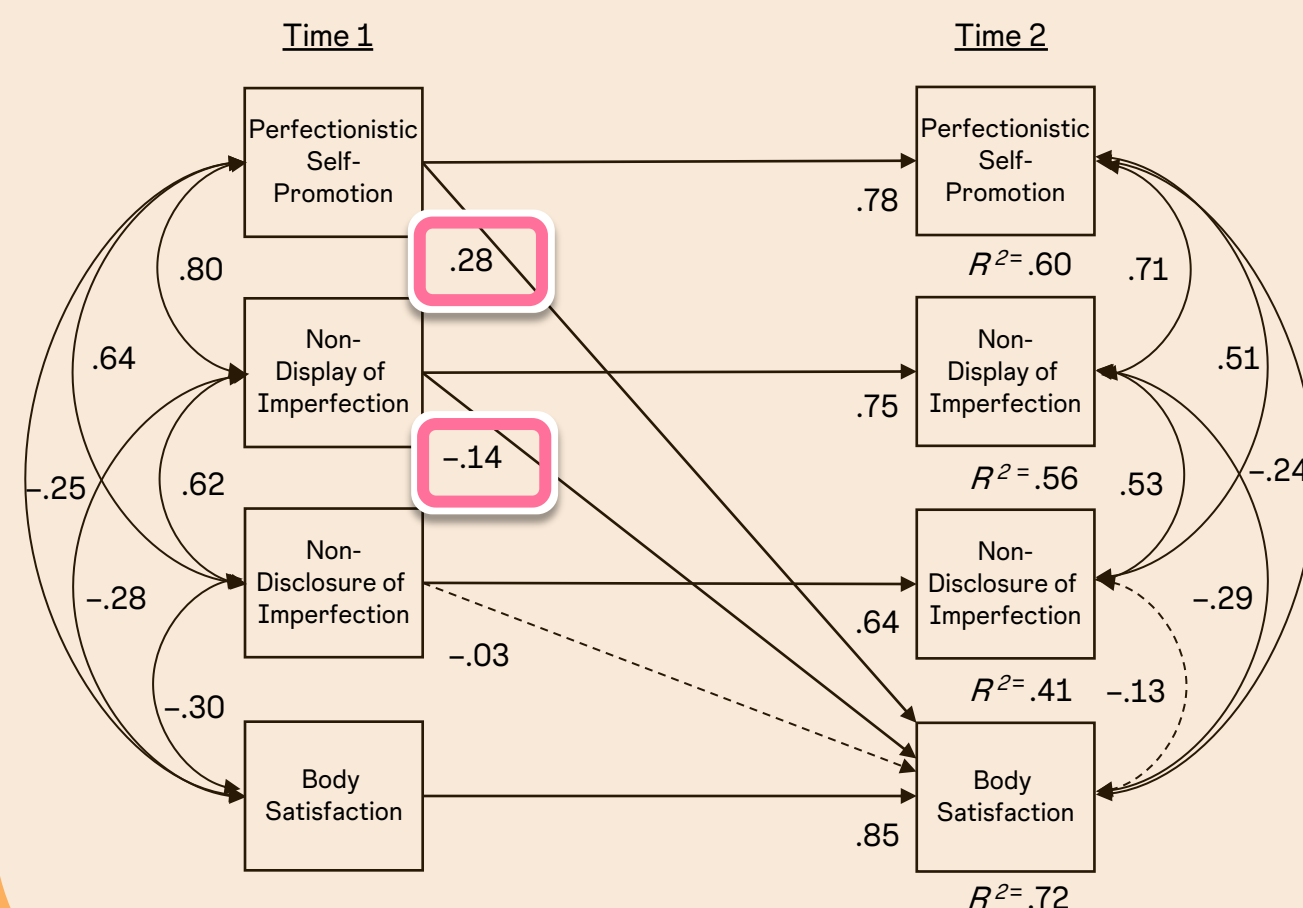
Note. N = 176. Dashed paths are non-significant ($p > .05$).

DISCUSSION

We found that participants who reported higher levels of PSP on Instagram (most importantly non-display of imperfection) also reported lower body satisfaction cross-sectionally and over time, strengthening previous findings (Sherry et al., 2009) and higher Instagram addiction cross-sectionally. It is important to consider that although PSP on Instagram may be a relevant factor in predicting the body satisfaction of young women over time, it may not be as relevant when predicting Instagram intrusion.

At odds with expectations, perfectionistic self-promotion positively predicted body satisfaction over time. It may be that women who are regularly promoting perfection on Instagram, may over time start to identify with this perfection and believe they are in fact perfect, thus improving their body satisfaction over time (Kim, 2021). Future research should explore this further.

Limitations and Future Research:
❑ Although high attrition is common in longitudinal online studies (Gustavson et al., 2012; Hochheimer et al., 2016), future work should determine the generalisability of these findings beyond the present samples.
❑ It is unclear whether these longitudinal effects persist for longer periods of time. Future research should adopt more waves with longer time lags (Robertson et al., 2021).

Overall, our findings offer initial support for examining perfectionistic self-presentation on Instagram, and its utility in understanding the body satisfaction of young women.

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