Perfectionism, Interpersonal Problems, and Suicide Ideation: An Investigation of the Perfectionism Social Disconnection Model

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INTRODUCTION

• A growing body of empirical evidence supports the notion that Perfectionism is a risk and maintaining factor for various psychological problems, including depression, anxiety disorders, eating disorders, and suicidal behaviours (see Hewitt & Flett, 2002; O'Connor, 2007 for reviews)

• Despite the robust association between Perfectionism and Suicidality (O'Connor, 2007), especially Socially Prescribed Perfectionism (SPP; i.e., the perception that others require perfection of oneself), there is a paucity of research on theoretical models that account for the perfectionism-suicide link.

• Perfectionism Social Disconnection Model (PSDM; Hewitt et al., 2006) provides a promising theoretical framework in which the role of perfectionism in suicidal behaviours may be understood in terms of maladaptive interpersonal styles/behaviours and the ensuing social alienation or disconnection that are associated with these perfectionistic behaviours.

• Therefore, the present study aimed to achieve a better understanding of the relationship between interpersonal perfectionism and suicidality by investigating several key dimensions of the PSDM using a sample of university students.

METHODS

Participants & Procedure
• 217 undergraduate students (147 women and 70 men) participated at Time 1; 164 participants (116 women and 49 men) returned 2 months later to complete Time 2 questionnaires; 24% attrition rate.
• Participants ranged in age between 17 and 29 (M=18.70, SD= 1.66); 51% East Asians and 38% Caucasians at both Time 1 and 2.

Time 1 Measures	Time 2 Measures
Trait Perfectionism Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS; Hewitt & Flett, 1991) • Socially Prescribed perfectionism (SPP) **Perfectionistic Self-Presentation Styles** Perfectionistic Self-Presentation Scale (PSPS; Hewitt et al., 2003) • Perfectionistic Self-Promotion • Nondisplay of imperfection • Nondisclosure of imperfection	**Suicidality** • Suicide Ideation Questionnaire (SIQ; Reynold, 1987) • Multisource Suicide Behaviour Measure (MSBM; Paykel et al., 1974) • Suicidal Behaviours Questionnaire (SBQ; Linehan, 1996) **Interpersonal Problems** • Inventory of Interpersonal Problems - Circumplex Version (IIP-C; Alden, Wiggins, & Pincus, 1980) • 8 subscales: Domineering; Vindictive; Cold; Socially Inhibited; Nonassertive; Overly Accommodating; Self-Sacrificing; Intrusive

METHODS

Social Disconnection (Time 2)
• Alienation Scale (AS; Jessor & Jessor, 1977)
• Social Isolation Items (SII; Dean, 1961)
• De Jong Gierveld Loneliness Scale (DRLS; De Jong Gierveld & Kamphuis, 1985)
• Social Hopelessness Questionnaire (SHQ; Flett et al., 1993)
• UCLA Loneliness Scale (LS; Russell et al., 1978)

Structural Equation Modeling
• Structural equation models were built and tested with maximum likelihood estimation in Mplus. We computed and reported both absolute and comparative fit indices.
• Four latent variables, including interpersonal perfectionism, interpersonal problems, social disconnection and suicide behaviour were constructed prior to model fitting.

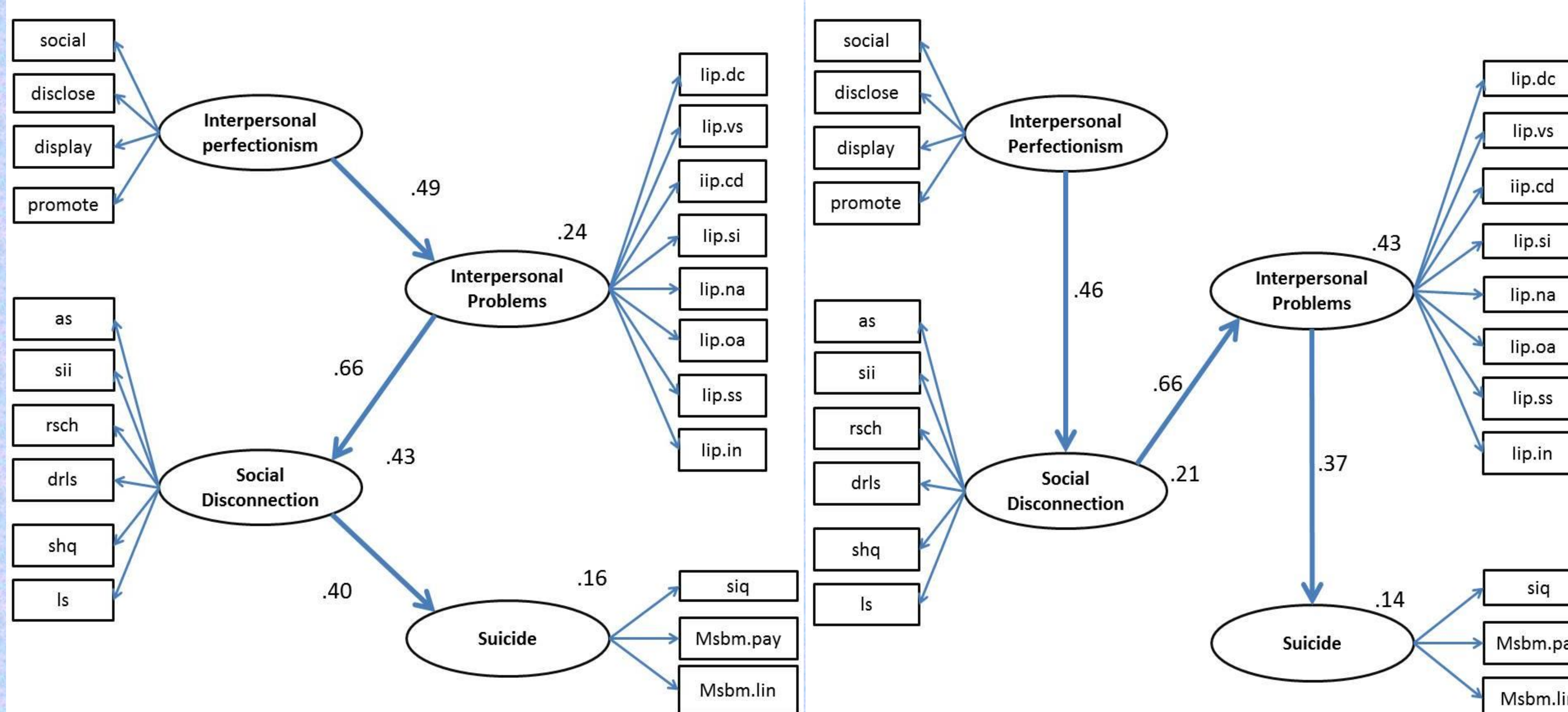## RESULTS

Figure 1. Path Diagrams for Proposed Models

Table 1. Fitting Indices for Proposed Models

Model	X^2/df	RMSEA	RMSEA .90 CI Low	RMSEA .90 CI High	NFI	CFI
Initial Model	3.99	.12	.11	.13	.78	.82
Reverse Model	4.04	.12	.1	.13	.77	.82

• All indicator variables loaded significantly on the latent variables respectively.
• Statistically, data showed no preference for either model (**Table 1**).
• Both models achieved similar and satisfactory R-squared on suicide behaviour (**Figure 1**).
• Since both models shared similar characteristics, the linear model is likely inadequate in depicting the relationship between interpersonal perfectionism, interpersonal problem and social disconnection.
• Both models can be improved to fit data better. A theory-driven and dynamic relationship between latent variables may be tested.

DISCUSSION

• The present research was the first to examine the Perfectionism Social Disconnection Model (PSDM) in predicting suicide behaviour in a sample of young adults. In addition to replicating previous findings on the associations between perfectionism and suicide behaviour (see O'Connor, 2007 for a review), we found empirical support for the PSDM as a plausible model for explaining the role of interpersonal perfectionism in suicide behaviour.

• In keeping with the Perfectionism Social Disconnection Model (Hewitt et al., 2006; in prep), interpersonal perfectionism may contribute to suicide behaviour by indirectly generating perceived and/or actual social disconnection, and maladaptive interpersonal behaviours associated with interpersonal perfectionism.

Implications & Limitations
• Our results are particularly relevant to the assessment and treatment of suicide risk among young adults who present with elevated levels of interpersonal perfectionism.

• Increasing awareness of and directly targeting maladaptive interpersonal behaviour and a lack of social connectedness may be key in reducing suicidal risk among highly perfectionistic individuals.

• Future Directions: Replication of the study using measures of social disconnection other than self reports, e.g., informant report; Testing of the PSDM may be generalized to other demographic groups (e.g., older adults, adolescents, etc.).