

## Body Dysmorphic Concerns Among Undergraduate Students at Baze University: Examining the Roles of Perfectionism and Social Comparison.

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**ABSTRACT:** This study examined the roles of perfectionism and social comparison on body dysmorphic concern among undergraduate students at Baze University, Abuja. This study set out to explore how perfectionism and social comparison influence body dysmorphic concern among undergraduate student of Baze University, Abuja. Instruments used to collect relevant data were; the Perfectionism Scale (PQ), Social Comparison Scale (SCC), and Body Dysmorphic Concerns Scale (BDCS). Using a cross-sectional survey design, data were collected from 213 undergraduates through standardized questionnaires measuring perfectionism, social comparison, and body dysmorphic concern symptoms and analyzed with the aid of simple liner regression. The result of the study revealed that perfectionism significantly and positively predicted body dysmorphic concern among undergraduate students at Baze University, Nigeria. In addition, the result of the study showed that social comparison significantly and positively predicted body dysmorphic concern among undergraduate students at Baze University, Nigeria. Furthermore, the outcome of the study revealed that perfectionism and social comparison significantly predicted body dysmorphic concern among undergraduate students at Baze University. Based on these results, the study there concluded that both perfectionism and social comparison are significant predictors of body dysmorphic concern among undergraduate students of Baze University, Abuja. The study recommends targeted campus-based interventions, such as mental health programs addressing perfectionistic beliefs, media literacy training to reduce harmful comparisons, and peer support initiatives to promote body acceptance.

**KEYWORDS:** Perfectionism, Social Comparison, Body Dysmorphic Concern.

### I. INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, physical appearance has become a dominant metric for self-evaluation, peer validation, and social belonging, especially among youth. According to the World Health Organization [31], mental health disorders related to body image are increasingly prevalent among adolescents and young adults worldwide. Body Dysmorphic Concern (BDC) is an increasingly recognized mental health condition marked by ongoing and intrusive worries about supposed flaws in one's appearance, even when these imperfections are either very small or not noticeable to others [2]. People living with BDC often struggle with significant emotional distress, tend to isolate themselves socially, and in some cases, may engage in risky behaviors or seek cosmetic treatments in an attempt to alter how they look [29]. Body dysmorphic concern (BDC) affects about 2% of adults and 1.9–2.2% of adolescents, with higher prevalence among students (3.6%) [31] and older adolescent girls (up to 5.6%) [27; 20]. BDC is associated with impaired psychosocial functioning, poor quality of life, and high suicidality [4]. About 65% report onset in adolescence, which is often linked to greater severity and suicide risk [22; 5]. Emerging research identifies perfectionism and social comparison as key contributors to body dysmorphic concern among university students [12]. Maladaptive perfectionism promotes unrealistic appearance standards and harsh self-criticism

(Smith et al., 2021), while social comparison, especially via social media, heightens body dissatisfaction [16]. Exposure to curated images on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook reinforces unattainable beauty ideals and distorted self-perceptions [27].

Although global studies link perfectionism and social comparison to body image problems, limited research exists within the Nigerian context, where cultural values, peer norms, and media use may shape these experiences differently. Evidence suggests that high social media use and perfectionism increase body dysmorphic concern [16], yet their combined influence among Nigerian students remains underexplored. This study examines the effects of perfectionism and social comparison on body dysmorphic concern among undergraduates at Baze University, Abuja. The social nature of university environments places a huge demand on young adults who are increasingly subjected to unrealistic standards of beauty, success, and social worth primarily through social media and peer interactions. Perfectionism, particularly in its maladaptive form, has been shown to heighten the risk of self-criticism, anxiety, and body-related dissatisfaction [10]. [14] have highlighted a concerning increase in body image dissatisfaction and dysmorphic concerns among young adults globally, particularly within university populations who are at a critical stage of identity formation. perceptions. Only a few studies have considered how perfectionism and social comparison work together to predict body dysmorphic concern, especially among Nigerian university students. These findings are consistent with emerging clinical insights and observational reports from Nigerian university settings, where increasing levels of body dissatisfaction among students have been linked to peer influence, frequent social media comparison, and the internalization of evolving beauty standards shaped by both local and global media.

This study has significant theoretical and practical relevance for psychology, education, and youth development. Body dysmorphic concern is often underreported and places a substantial psychological burden on university students navigating academic, social, and personal challenges. The findings will clarify whether perfectionism and social comparison, particularly through social media, predict or intensify body dysmorphic symptoms. Additionally, the study will expand knowledge on youth mental health in Nigeria and inform evidence-based interventions for campus mental health services, digital literacy, and student support programs, supporting early detection and healthier psychological outcomes among Nigerian undergraduates. The main aim of this study is to explore the influence of perfectionism and social comparison on body dysmorphic concern among undergraduate student of Baze University, Abuja. The specific objectives are to:

- i. Assess the relationship between perfectionism and body dysmorphic concern among undergraduate students of Baze University.
- ii. Investigate the influence of social comparison on body dysmorphic concern among undergraduate students of Baze University.
- iii. Determine the combined effect of perfectionism and social comparison on body dysmorphic concern among undergraduate students of Baze University.

## II. RELATED WORKS

The Cognitive-Behavioral Model of Body Dysmorphic Concern (BDC) proposed by [26] explains BDD as arising from distorted self-perceptions and maladaptive beliefs that link appearance to self-worth and social acceptance. These beliefs are reinforced through cognitive biases and compulsive behaviors such as mirror checking, avoidance, reassurance-seeking, and excessive grooming, causing individuals to misinterpret minor appearance features as significant defects [26]. The model is relevant to this study as it explains how perfectionism and social comparison

intensify appearance-related distress. However, critics argue that it overemphasizes cognitive and behavioral processes while underrepresenting emotional, interpersonal, and neurobiological vulnerabilities, including trauma, attachment insecurity, emotional dysregulation, and unconscious shame [21;11]. Additionally, assuming maladaptive beliefs are always conscious may limit the effectiveness of cognitive restructuring [13]. Empirical evidence consistently links perfectionism to BDD symptoms. Socially prescribed perfectionism is associated with greater appearance-related distress and body dissatisfaction [15], while perfectionism internalized during adolescence predicts persistent body-related anxiety [20]. A meta-analysis by [10] reported rising perfectionism among youth, significantly linked to psychological disorders, including body image disturbances. Similarly, [8] found that university students with perfectionist traits reported stronger BDD symptoms. Social comparison, particularly via social media, also increases BDD symptoms, with frequent upward comparisons significantly associated with BDD [1]. Despite these findings, most studies are cross-sectional, and research within the Nigerian context remains limited. Consequently, this study examines the influence of perfectionism and social comparison on body dysmorphic concern among undergraduates at Baze University, Nigeria.

The findings can be further interpreted through a more detailed integration of the Cognitive-Behavioral Model. Perfectionism appears to be maintained by cognitive distortions, such as all-or-nothing thinking and overgeneralization, which amplify self-criticism and dissatisfaction with personal performance. Additionally, social comparison processes play a key role, upward comparisons with peers or media figures may heighten perceived inadequacy, while downward comparisons can provide temporary relief but do not address underlying perfectionistic tendencies. These cognitive and social mechanisms are further shaped by sociocultural influences, including the internalization of culturally promoted beauty ideals, which reinforce standards that are often unattainable and exacerbate perfectionistic behaviors. Together, these frameworks highlight the interplay of individual cognition, social perception, and cultural context in understanding perfectionism.

### III. METHODS

This section covers the study participants, hypothesis, sampling technique, and data analysis.

#### A. Participants

Table 1 presents comprehensive overview of this study’s demographic and participants characteristics in terms of, gender, age distribution, academic level, faculty affiliation, and daily social media use.

**Table 1:** Demographic Characteristics of Included Participants, Presenting Distribution by Gender, Age, Academic Level, Faculty, and Daily Social Media Use (n = 213).

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>	Female	132	61.97
	Male	81	38.03
<b>Age (years)</b>	<18	14	6.57
	18–25	187	87.79
	26–40	12	5.63
<b>Academic Level</b>	100	46	21.60
	200	45	21.13

	300	42	19.72
	400	75	35.21
	500	5	2.35
<b>Faculty</b>	Management & Social Sciences	88	41.31
	Computing & Applied Sciences	45	21.13
	Law	22	10.33
	Medical & Health Sciences	22	10.33
	Engineering	20	9.39
	Environmental Sciences	16	7.51
<b>Daily Social Media Use</b>	<1 hour	5	2.35
	1–3 hours	37	17.37
	4–6 hours	66	30.99
	>6 hours	105	49.30

Source: Author

Inclusion Criteria:

1. Undergraduate students of Baze University with a valid student ID.
2. Both male and female students across the selected faculties.
3. Students who have completed official academic registration for the current session.

Exclusion Criteria:

1. Students enrolled in IJMBE or postgraduate programs.
2. Students who have not completed academic registration.
3. Individuals in bridging or non-degree programs.

## B. Research Hypothesis

Based on the specific objectives of this study, the following hypotheses were formulated.

**H<sup>1</sup>:** There will be a significant relationship between perfectionism and body dysmorphic concern among undergraduate students of Baze University, Abuja, such that higher levels of perfectionism will be associated with greater body dysmorphic concern.

**H<sup>2</sup>:** There will be a significant relationship between social comparison and body dysmorphic concern among undergraduate students of Baze University, Abuja, such that students who engage more in social comparison will report higher levels of body dysmorphic concern.

**H<sup>3</sup>:** There will be a significant joint effect of perfectionism and social comparison on body dysmorphic concern among undergraduate students of Baze University, Abuja.

## C. Sampling Technique

This study adopted the online convenience sampling technique, a non-probabilistic sampling method, to select undergraduate students who formed the representative sample for the study. The sampling process involved sending emails to students registered on the university's official portal who met the inclusion criteria. Participation was based on the availability and willingness of these students to voluntarily respond and complete the survey at the time of data collection.

Instruments: Data were collected using a structured, self-administered questionnaire divided into four sections: Section A – Demographics: Captured gender, age, academic level, faculty, and daily social media use to examine potential influences on the study variables. Section B – Perfectionism: Adapted items from the Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (FMPS) [13] assessed appearance-related and self-critical perfectionism (e.g., high personal standards, concern over mistakes, family pressure) on a 5-point Likert scale. The FMPS has demonstrated strong reliability

( $\alpha = 0.85-0.92$ ) and validity in both clinical and non-clinical settings. Section C – Social Comparison: The Physical Appearance Comparison Scale–Revised (PACS-R); [23] measured frequency of appearance-based comparisons with peers and via social media using a 5-point Likert scale. Higher scores indicate greater engagement in social comparison, which is linked to body dissatisfaction and low self-esteem. The scale showed excellent internal consistency in this study ( $\alpha = 0.891$ ). Section D – Body Dysmorphic Concerns: Adapted items from the Body Dysmorphic Disorder Questionnaire (BDDQ) [21] assessed preoccupation with perceived flaws, distress, and functional impairment. Responses were rated 0–4, with higher scores reflecting greater body dysmorphic concern. The scale demonstrated high reliability in this sample ( $\alpha = 0.868$ ) and has strong construct and criterion validity.

**D. Data Analysis**

Data were analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) summarized demographic characteristics, while multiple regression analysis tested Hypotheses 1,2,3, assessing the individual and combined effects of perfectionism and social comparison on body dysmorphic concern among undergraduates at Baze University. To maximize clarity and transparency, the study acknowledges several methodological considerations. The sample was obtained via convenience sampling through email, which may limit generalizability. While no formal power analysis was conducted, sample size decisions were guided by prior research in the field. Control variables such as age, gender, and daily social media usage were considered in analyses to reduce potential confounding effects. Finally, the study employed a cross-sectional design, which limits causal inference; all interpretations are framed in terms of associations rather than causation

**IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

This section details the results of the data analysis and discusses the key findings in relation to the study’s objectives.

**A. Pearson Product Moment Correlation**

Table 4.1 presents the Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficients among the key variables of the study: age, gender, daily time spent on social media, perfectionism, social comparison, and body dysmorphic concern. The results provide insight into the direction and strength of the relationships among these variables, as well as potential multicollinearity concerns.

**Table 4:** Showing the Correlation Matrix of Study Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Age	1					
2. Gender	.188**	1				
3. Daily time Spent on SM	.106	.167*	1			
4. Perfectionism	.043	-.077	-.100	1		
6. Social Comparison	.008	-.127	.019	.355**	1	
7. Body dysmorphic concern	.049	-.204**	.113	.398**	.631**	1
Mean	1.99	-	-	25.36	1.96	1.04
SD	0.350	-	-	4.21	1.00	0.96

Note: \*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ ,  $N = 213$ ; Gender was coded: Female=1, Male=2; etc.

Descriptive statistics (Table 4) indicated that participants were mostly aged 18–25 (mean = 1.99). The mean scores for perfectionism ( $M = 25.36$ ,  $SD = 4.21$ ), social comparison ( $M = 1.96$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ), and body dysmorphic concern ( $M = 1.04$ ,  $SD = 0.96$ ) suggest moderate perfectionism and low-to-moderate engagement in appearance-based comparison and dysmorphic symptoms, with reasonable variability across respondents. Pearson correlations (Table 4.3) revealed a significant negative correlation between gender and body dysmorphic concern ( $r = -.204$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), indicating that females reported higher dysmorphic concerns than males (female = 1, male = 2). Gender also positively correlated with daily social media use ( $r = .167$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), suggesting greater social media engagement among female students. Perfectionism was positively associated with social comparison ( $r = .355$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and body dysmorphic concern ( $r = .398$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), showing that higher perfectionistic tendencies relate to increased comparison behaviors and dysmorphic symptoms. Social comparison demonstrated a strong positive correlation with body dysmorphic concern ( $r = .631$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), highlighting its key role in predicting body image disturbance. Moderate correlations among the independent variables indicate no multicollinearity issues. These findings provide a foundational understanding of students’ psychological profiles and the interrelationships between perfectionism, social comparison, and body dysmorphic concern. To ensure the robustness of the regression analyses, multicollinearity among predictor variables was assessed. Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and tolerance statistics were calculated, and all values fell within acceptable ranges ( $VIF < 5$ , tolerance  $> 0.2$ ), indicating that multicollinearity was not a concern. This explicit confirmation strengthens the credibility and interpretability of the reported results.

### B. Hypotheses Testing

The formulated hypotheses are tested in this section. The study's three research hypotheses were developed and put to the test through regression analysis. Each table is followed immediately by an analysis of the results, which are displayed in summary tables.

#### Hypothesis 1

This hypothesis stated undergraduate students at Baze University who report increased levels of perfectionism will also experience higher levels of body dysmorphic concern. This hypothesis was tested using simple linear regression analysis, and the result is presented in Table 5.

**Table 5:** Summary of Simple Linear Regression Analysis Showing Perfectionism as Predictor of Body dysmorphic concern among Undergraduates in Baze University Nigeria

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficient		t	Sig
	B	Std. Error	B			
1						
Body dysmorphic concern	Constant	-1.627	0.356		-4.564	.000
	Perfectionism	.105	.014	.463	7.588	.000

The result in Table 5 shows that perfectionism positively predicted body dysmorphic concern among undergraduate students at Baze University, Nigeria [ $\beta = .105$ ,  $t = 7.588$ ,  $p < .001$ ]. This indicates that students with higher levels of perfectionism tended to experience more symptoms of

body dysmorphic concern. Based on this outcome, hypothesis H1 was confirmed and accepted, demonstrating that perfectionism is a significant psychological risk factor for body dysmorphic concerns in the study population.

**Hypothesis 2**

This hypothesis stated that undergraduate students at Baze University who engage in higher levels of social comparison would be more likely to report symptoms of body dysmorphic concern. This hypothesis was tested using simple linear regression analysis, and the result is presented in Table 6.

**Table 6:** Summary of Simple Linear Regression Showing Social Comparison as a Predictor of Body Dysmorphic concern among Undergraduates of Baze University Nigeria

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficient	t	Sig
		B	Std. Error	B		
1	Constant	.235	4.105		2.236	.000
	Social Comparison	.653	.048	.684	13.628	.000

The result in Table 6 shows that social comparison significantly and positively predicted body dysmorphic concern among undergraduate students at Baze University, Nigeria [ $\beta = .653, t = 13.628; p < .001$ ]. This indicates a strong relationship, suggesting that students who engage more frequently in comparing their appearance with others especially through social media or peer interaction are more likely to report higher levels of body dysmorphic symptoms. Given this statistically significant result, Hypothesis two (H2) was confirmed and accepted, showing that social comparison is a strong predictor of body dysmorphic concern in this population. For example, social comparison accounted for 35% of the variance in the outcome variable ( $R^2 = 0.35, p < 0.01$ ), indicating a substantial effect and predictive strength.

**Hypothesis 3**

This hypothesis stated that undergraduate students at Baze University who report higher levels of both perfectionism and social comparison will exhibit increased symptoms of body dysmorphic concern compared to their peers with lower levels of these traits. The hypothesis was tested using multiple linear regression analysis, and the result is presented in Table 7.

**Table 7:** Summary of Simple Linear Regression Showing Perfectionism and Social Comparison as a Predictor of Body dysmorphic concern among Undergraduates of Baze University Nigeria

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficient	R	R <sup>2</sup>	t	F	Sig
	$\beta$	Std. Error	B					
1				.13	.36			

Body Dysmorphic Concern	Constant	1.72	.19		8.70	6.78	.01
	Perfectionism	.98	.29	.70	14.36		.01
	Social Comparison	.75	.06	.34	7.44		.01

The result in Table 7 shows that the combined influence of perfectionism ( $\beta = .754$ ) and social comparison ( $\beta = .754$ ) significantly predicted body dysmorphic concern among undergraduate students at Baze University, Nigeria [ $\beta = .982; .754; t = 14.363; p < .001$ ]. This result suggests that students who exhibit higher levels of both perfectionism and social comparison are substantially more likely to experience body dysmorphic symptoms. Based on this outcome, Hypothesis Three (H3) was confirmed and accepted, establishing that perfectionism and social comparison together are strong predictors of body dysmorphic concern in the study population. In addition, the results of the regression analysis demonstrated that, on the contribution of all the independent variables (emotional empathy and memory awareness) signify that all the independent variables when pulled together yield a multiple R of .13 and  $R^2$  of .36 [  $F(3, 213) = 6.78^{**} p < 0.01$ ]. This is an indication that undergraduate’s emotional empathy and memory awareness contributed 36% of the variance in social regulation distress. Meanwhile, other variables not considered in this study therefore accounts for 34%.

The study examined how perfectionism and social comparison predict body dysmorphic concern among undergraduate students at Baze University. Hypothesis 1 was supported: perfectionism significantly and positively predicted body dysmorphic concern. Students with high self-critical or socially prescribed perfectionism, characterized by fear of mistakes, high personal standards, and pressure to appear flawless, reported greater dysmorphic symptoms [18; 10; 8; 28]. This aligns with the Multidimensional Perfectionism Theory [15] and demonstrates that maladaptive perfectionism heightens vulnerability to appearance-related distress. However, narcissistic or achievement-focused perfectionism may be less harmful or even protective [9; 28], highlighting the multidimensional nature of perfectionism.

Hypothesis 2 was also supported: social comparison significantly and positively predicted body dysmorphic concern. Students who frequently compared their appearance with peers or idealized images on social media reported higher dysmorphic symptoms [1;7;21]. This finding is consistently reflects how peer and media exposure in university settings amplify self-criticism and dysmorphic thoughts [24]. However, some studies suggest social comparison alone may not always predict BDD, as deeper psychological factors also play a role [33].

Hypothesis 3 examined the joint effect of perfectionism and social comparison. Results showed that these factors interact to increase body dysmorphic concern, meaning students with high perfectionistic tendencies who frequently compare themselves to others are at greatest risk. This supports the Cognitive-Behavioral Model of BDD [26], where cognitive distortions (perfectionism) and behavioral triggers (social comparison) reinforce obsessive preoccupation with perceived flaws. Prior studies confirm that perfectionism amplifies the impact of social comparison in appearance-focused contexts [14; 19; 25]. Mixed findings exist, however, with certain forms of perfectionism showing weaker or inverse effects on BDD [6;28], reflecting variations in personality, measurement, and cultural context.

The findings highlight the need for targeted mental health interventions at Baze University. Programs should address both perfectionism and social comparison to reduce appearance-related distress, enhance self-esteem, and build resilience. Initiatives such as body image awareness campaigns, media literacy workshops, and peer-support networks can help students critically evaluate unrealistic beauty standards and manage social media pressures. Mental health practitioners can integrate cognitive-behavioral therapy, schema therapy, or resilience-building strategies to tackle the combined influence of perfectionism and social comparison, thereby reducing the risk of body dysmorphic concern (BDC) among students.

### Limitations of the Study

This study provides valuable insights but has limitations. First, the sample of 213 students, though adequate for basic analysis, limits generalizability. Second, data were collected from a single private university, which may not reflect experiences of students in public universities or different regions of Nigeria. Third, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inferences between perfectionism, social comparison, and BDD. Finally, self-administered questionnaires are susceptible to response biases. Despite these constraints, the findings offer meaningful guidance for interventions and future research. Future studies should use larger, more diverse samples and longitudinal or mixed-method designs to better understand these psychological factors.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends implementing digital media literacy workshops to help students critically evaluate social media content, challenge unrealistic beauty standards, and reduce harmful upward social comparisons. It also emphasizes strengthening campus mental health services by providing targeted support for perfectionism and appearance-related anxiety through cognitive-behavioral interventions, individual counseling, and group therapy. Additionally, institutions should promote self-acceptance by launching campaigns that celebrate diverse body types, foster self-worth, and prioritize mental well-being, ideally through student voices and peer-led initiatives. Integrating mental health education into the curriculum particularly modules addressing perfectionism, body image, and the psychological impact of social media can further raise awareness and reduce stigma. Finally, establishing peer support networks and mentorship programs can offer accessible emotional support, encourage healthy coping strategies, and facilitate timely referrals to professional services when needed.

Implementing these strategies can help students challenge unrealistic standards, cultivate self-compassion, and thrive academically and emotionally.

## V. CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine whether perfectionism and social comparison predict body dysmorphic concerns among undergraduate students at Baze University. Addressing the growing influence of social media and appearance-related pressures, the research aimed to clarify how individual psychological traits interact to shape body image vulnerability within a university population. The findings demonstrate that both perfectionism, particularly self-critical and socially prescribed dimensions and frequent appearance-based social comparison significantly contribute to elevated body dysmorphic symptoms. Students who regularly compare their appearance to others, especially through social media engagement, reported greater levels of concern. Moreover, the combined presence of high perfectionistic tendencies and persistent social comparison exerted a compounded effect, substantially intensifying body image disturbances. These results advance

understanding in the field by empirically linking personality-driven vulnerabilities with socially mediated comparison processes in a localized university context. By highlighting their interactive impact, the study extends existing literature beyond isolated predictors and underscores the importance of examining combined psychological and environmental influences. In light of these findings, targeted interventions are recommended, including digital media literacy initiatives, campus-based mental health support focused on perfectionism and comparison tendencies, and preventive programs that promote healthy self-perception. Future research may further explore longitudinal patterns and intervention outcomes to better inform evidence-based strategies for reducing body image-related distress among students.

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