

Examining acceptance as a protective factor against the negative influence of social media exposure on mood and self-evaluation using ecological momentary assessment



Macon Paine B.A.¹, Sarah-Nicole Bostan, M.A., B.C.B.², & Russell DuBois, Ph.D.¹

1. Blueprint Health, Chicago, IL
2. Alliant International University, San Diego, CA



Background

Research suggests that excessive social media (SM) exposure may have negative consequences under certain contexts, including leading to disturbances in body image and self-esteem (1,2). Studies utilizing EMA methodology identify a relationship between momentary SM exposure and mood and self-evaluation (3), but there is little research on potential protective factors that could limit the negative effects of otherwise maladaptive SM exposure. The current study aims to investigate the relationship between SM exposure and mood constructs using EMA methodology and identify ACT-consistent processes to moderate this relationship.

Method

Participants (N = 58) were prompted via their mobile phone eight times a day for 10 days and asked to answer questions related to social media exposure and momentary experiences of acceptance, negative affect, self-esteem, and body dissatisfaction. Hierarchical linear regression was used to examine acceptance as a moderator of the temporal (t+1) relationship between social media exposure and negative consequences across time.

Ecological Momentary Assessment Items

Social Media Consumption

"I have received or read appearance-related content on social media"

Acceptance

"I notice my thoughts and feelings without having to react to them"

Negative Emotions

"I feel negative emotions"

Body Dissatisfaction

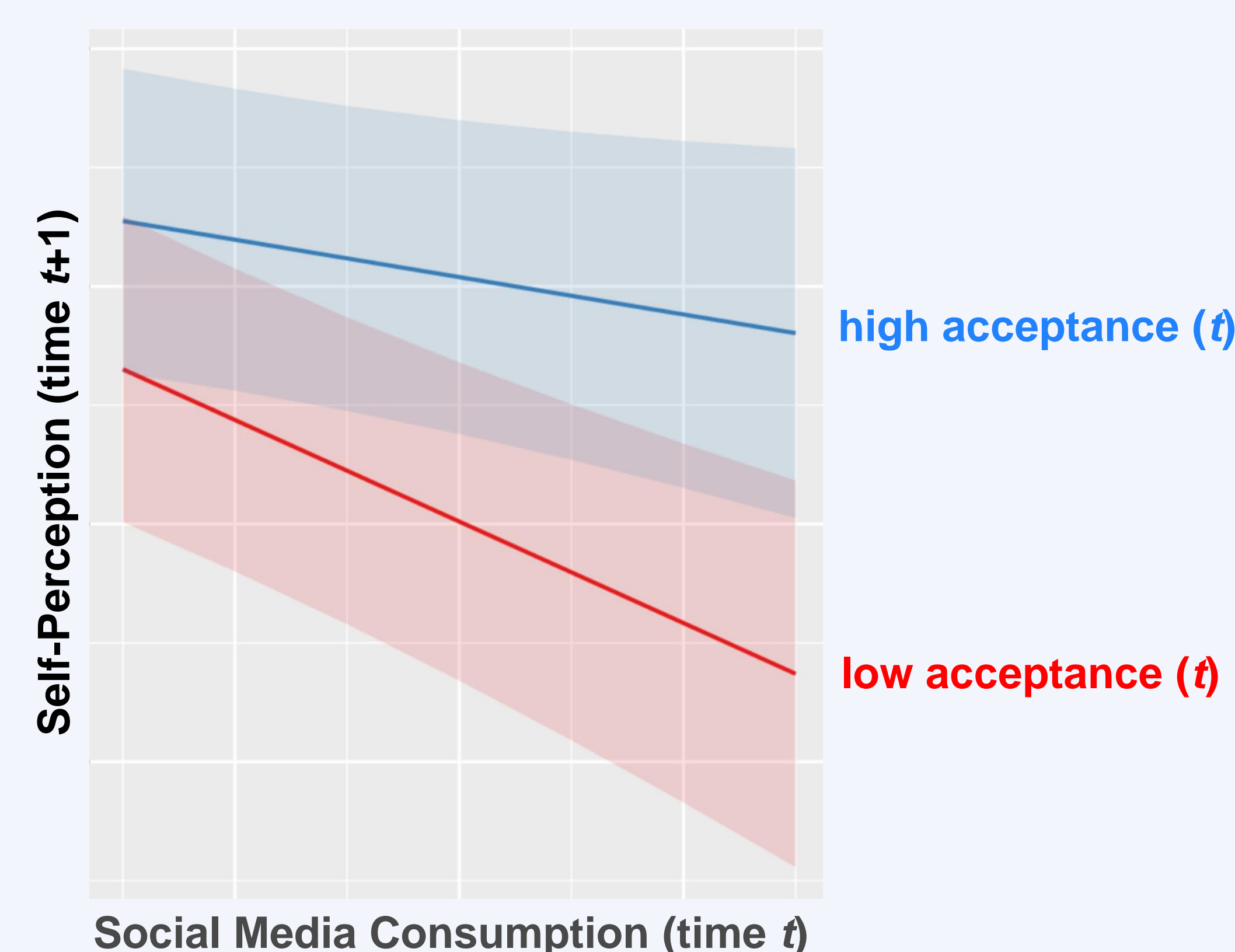
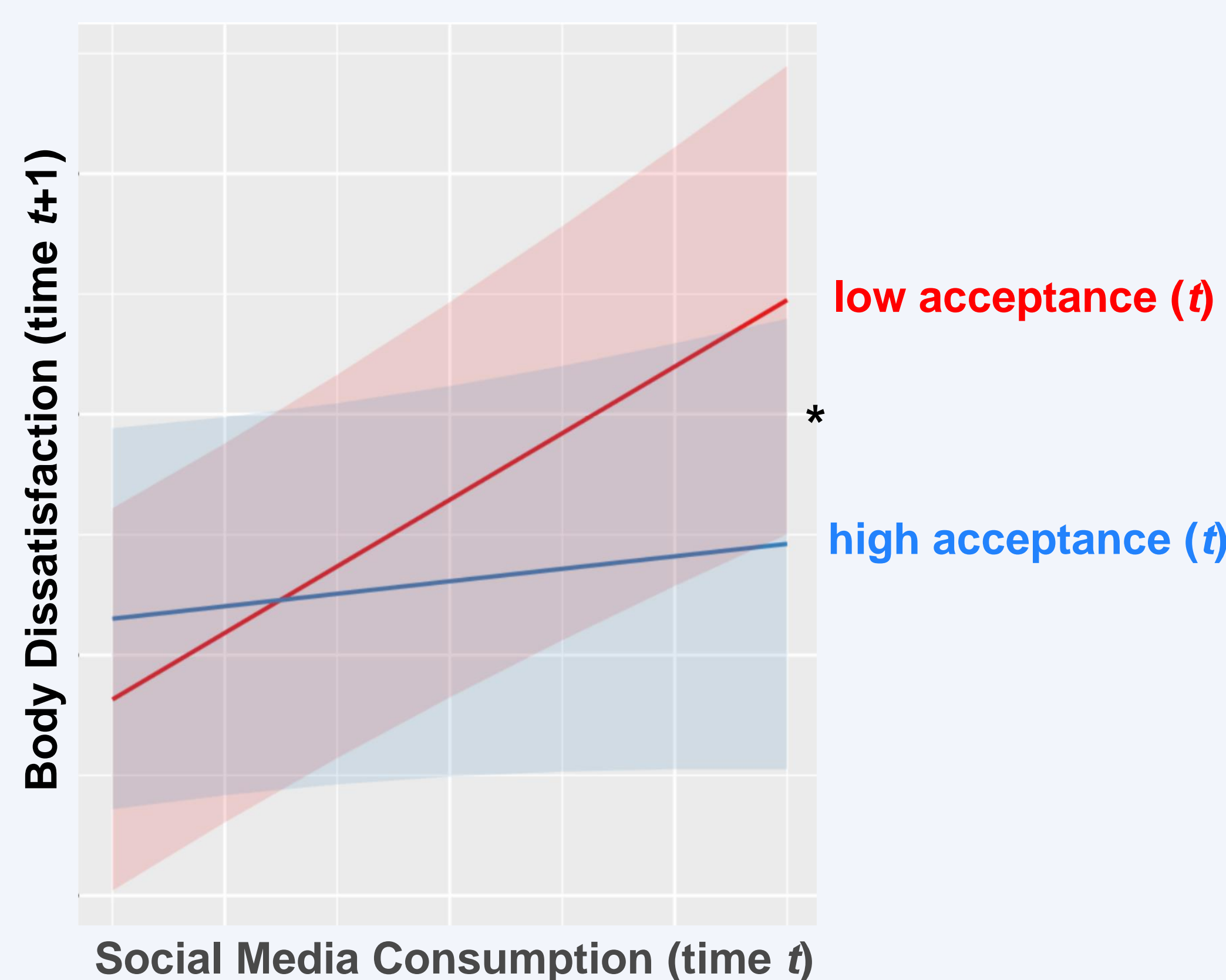
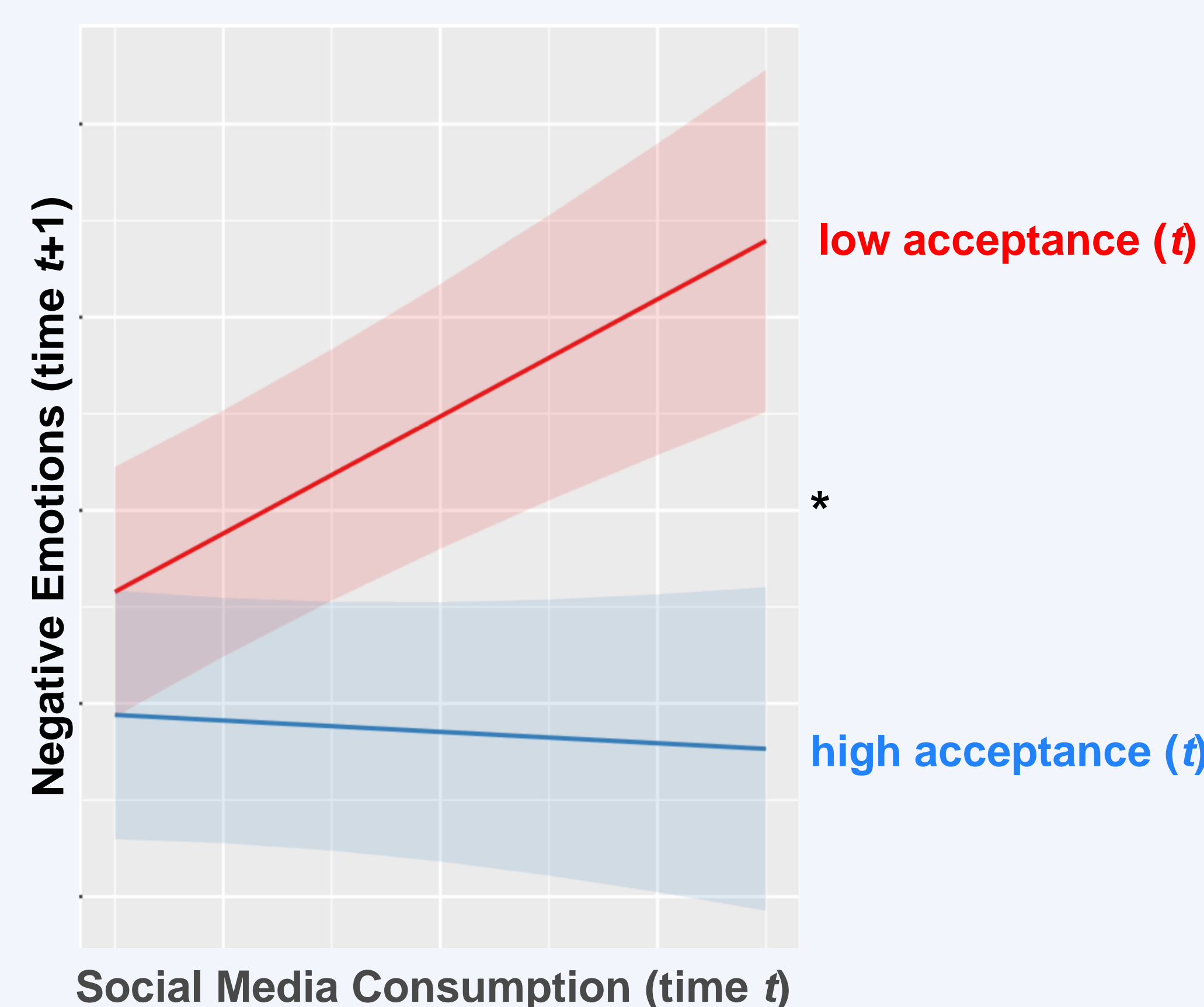
"I am dissatisfied with my appearance"

Self-Acceptance

"I feel happy with who I am"

Time-Series Moderation Analysis

Interaction plots depicting the relationship between social media consumption (x-axis) and negative emotions, body dissatisfaction, and self-perception (y-axes). Red lines indicate participants with high momentary acceptance and blue lines indicate participants with low momentary acceptance.



Sample size (N)	58
Mean Age (SD)	20.5 (3.1)
Sex	
Male, n (%)	0 (0.0)
Female, n (%)	58 (100)
Ethnicity, n (%)	
Hispanic/Latino	8 (13.7)
Not Hispanic/Latino	50 (86.3)
Race*, n (%)	
American Indian/Alaska Native	0 (0.0)
Black/African American	3 (5.2)
Asian	16 (27.6)
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	0 (0.0)
White	25 (43.1)
Other	6 (10.3)
Sexual Orientation*, n (%)	
Heterosexual	48 (82.8)
Homosexual	4 (6.9)
Bisexual	6 (10.3)
Other	0 (0.0)
Year in College, n (%)	
1 st	13 (22.4)
2 nd	12 (20.7)
3 rd	16 (27.6)
4 th	12 (20.7)
5 th or higher	5 (8.6)

*Individuals were given the option to select more than one category for Race and Sexual Orientation

Results

Moment-by-moment acceptance significantly moderated the relationship between social media exposure and negative affect, $b = -2.77$, $t(403) = -3.40$, $p = 0.01$, and body dissatisfaction, $b = -0.02$, $t(401) = -2.46$, $p = 0.01$, but not self-esteem, $b = 0.01$, $t(401) = 1.67$, $p = 0.09$. More specifically, social media exposure positively predicted negative affect and body dissatisfaction only during moments when acceptance was low.

Conclusion

Social media exposure can be harmful to mood and self-image, but abstinence is not a realistic goal for most young people. Results of the current study indicate that acceptance may be a protective factor and may play an important role in buffering youth against the potential negative effects of excessive social media consumption. Future research should aim to evaluate the effectiveness of acceptance-based interventions for improving youth self-image and mood as it relates to social media consumption.



References

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Corresponding author:
Russell DuBois, Ph.D
E: Russell@blueprint-health.com