

Fall 2017

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Recommended Citation

Proffer, Sarah; Wilson, Tiffany; and Cochran, Baylee, "Social Media Use, Social Comparison, and Self-Esteem Among College Students" (2017). *Student Posters*. Book 11.

<http://hdl.handle.net/10950/1244>

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Social Media Use, Social Comparison, and Self-Esteem Among College Students

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Background

The effects of social media use, specifically on the self, have become a popular area of research. We surveyed college students about their social media use, levels of social comparison and their overall self-esteem.

We hypothesized that social media use would influence self-esteem through the process of social comparison. Specifically, increased social media use would lead to increased social comparison and ultimately decrease self-esteem levels.

Participants

74 college students
17 men and 57 women
Ages ranged from 18 to 50 years ($M=20.70$)
Sample was 42.9% non-white
Students reported using social media 3.9 hours ($SD = 3.2$) on average

Method

Participants consented to complete an online survey lasting an average of 30 minutes. Participants completed several personality measures, and then viewed one individual's fake Facebook and Instagram profile. Importantly, the profile was matched to the participant's gender, and manipulated to be either high or low in popularity based on number of likes and followers (See Figure 1).

Measures

- **Social Media Use** was measured using the Social Media Use Integration Scale and scored on a 6 point Likert scale.
EX: "Using (my favorite social media) is part of my everyday routine."
- **Social Comparison** was measured using the Scale for Social Comparison Orientation and scored on a 5 point Likert scale.
EX: "I am not the type of person who compares often with others."
- **Self Esteem** was measured using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and scored on a 4 point Likert scale.
EX: "On the whole, I am satisfied with myself."

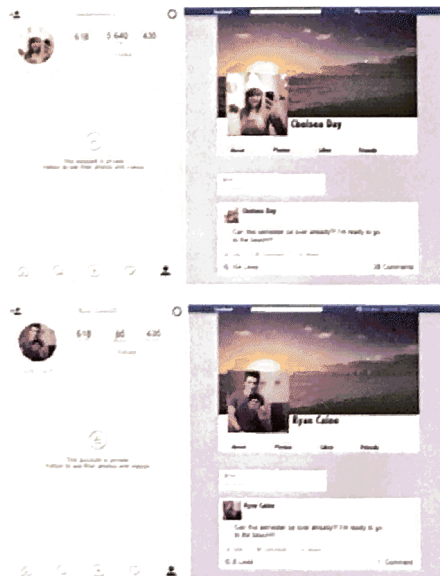
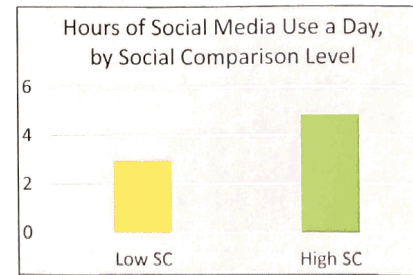


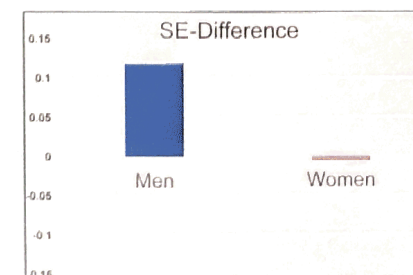
Figure 1: Example of Fake Profile Stimuli

Results

- Social comparison was significantly related to social media use (more social media use = more social comparison), $r = .52, p < .01$.
- Additionally, people high in social comparison spend significantly more hours a day on social media than those low in social comparison, $p < .05$.



- Main effect of profile popularity on change in self-esteem, such that self-esteem lowered when viewing high likes profile vs. low likes profile, $F(1, 61) = 3.6, p = .06$.
- Female participant's self-esteem decreased from pre to post-test measure, while male participant's increased slightly, $F(1, 61) = 5.9, p < .05$.



Results Continued

- There was a significant three-way interaction between participant sex, social comparison, and profile popularity on change in self-esteem, $F(1, 61) = 6.1, p < .01$. The effect appears to be driven by men low in social comparison who experience a large self-esteem boost when viewing unpopular profiles.

Discussion

- Our hypothesis was supported for female students, such that increased social media use was correlated with increased social comparison and decreased overall self-esteem.
- Female students were the most negatively affected by viewing the social media profiles in general.
- Manipulation of profile popularity influenced self-esteem as predicted.
- Future studies should attempt to replicate the study with a larger sample of male students.

References

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