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The Relationship Between Self-Esteem and the Amount of Social Comparison

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SELF-ESTEEM AND THE AMOUNT OF SOCIAL COMPARISON

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The relationship between self-esteem and amount of social comparison has not been previously investigated. According to social comparison theory, the primary motivation for engaging in social comparison is to reduce uncertainty about the self. Previous research has found that low self-esteem (LSE) individuals are uncertain about themselves. Therefore, it may be hypothesized that LSE individuals engage in much social comparison. However, LSE individuals by definition have a relatively unfavorable opinion of themselves. Therefore, it seems plausible that they will avoid social comparison for fear of comparing unfavorably. These hypotheses were examined in two studies. In experiment 1, students who had completed several inventories of self-esteem and personality received their graded psychology test. A folder containing classmates' test scores was left for them to examine while the experimenter left the room. A hidden experimenter recorded how long the student spent looking at the scores. In Experiment 2, students who had taken inventories similar to those in Experiment 1 completed anagrams which were either difficult or easy and a dot estimation task. The amount of time they subsequently spent looking at other students' scores was recorded.