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CYBER SCREENING: THE EFFECTS OF SELF-ESTEEM AND SOCIAL COMPARISONS ON SOCIAL OUTCOMES

Danielle Scharf

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This work investigates the association between self-esteem, social comparisons, and relationship outcomes in the context of cyber screening—researching another person’s social media page before meeting them in real life in a benevolent manner. With the increase in social media usage, people are now able to browse other people’s profiles without knowing anything about them before meeting. It is not understood how self-esteem, social comparisons, and social evaluations relate to this concept of cyberscreening, which is what is observed in the study. The participants were 125 Washington University undergraduate students who took a survey on Qualtrics that included a cyber screening profile phase where subjects looked at a fake profile in addition to measures of self-esteem, social comparisons, likability, and closeness. Although self-esteem was not found to be related to any of the outcome variables, social comparisons had many significant relationships with closeness and likability of the profile. People who make upward social comparisons on Facebook liked the target in the profile more ($\beta = .03, p = .025$) and felt closer to them ($\beta = .25, p = .008$). People who tend to make downward social comparisons on Facebook, only liked the target more ($\beta = .03, p = .026$); they did not feel closer to them. These findings show that the act of making social comparisons on Facebook might be related to the perceived social relationship between target figures that the person might be looking at and making comparisons about.