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SOCIAL COMPARISON, SUBJECTIVE SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS, AND ENTERTAINMENT TELEVISION

Yuru Zhang

Mentor: Michael Strube

Social comparison is important for gathering relevant social information to fulfill the human drive of evaluating one's opinions, beliefs, and abilities accurately. Previous research studies have found that social comparison processes may be induced through media exposure. The current study examines how self-evaluations of one's socioeconomic status (SES) are affected by images of wealth and status in entertainment television media and also investigates some individual differences as moderators. Participants ($N = 210$) were assigned to watch one of three 10-minute TV drama clips of either high, low, or control SES content and complete questionnaires assessing subjective SES, similarity to target, self-esteem, social comparison orientation, materialism, and household income. The result for the influence of clip content on changes in participants' SES evaluations was only marginally significant. In addition, no significant interactions were found between individual differences and clip content on self-evaluations of SES. However, this is a promising area of study and future research should examine other sources of SES media content (social media) and other potential moderators (perceived control).