Compare and despair or compare and explore? Instagram social comparisons of ability and opinion predict adolescent identity development

# Details

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Noon E.

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177 British adolescents aged between 13-18 years attending a large mixed-ability Catholic secondary school and sixth form college in central England

# Abstract

Whilst there is an emerging literature concerning social comparisons on social networking sites (SNSs), very little is known about the extent to which such behaviours inform adolescent identity. Drawing upon the three-factor model of identity development (Crocetti, Rubini & Meeus, 2008), this study seeks to determine the relationship between Instagram comparisons of ability and opinion and three identity processes: commitment, in-depth exploration, and reconsideration of commitment. 177 British adolescents responded to a paper survey (Mage = 15.45; Female, 54.8%) between December 2018 and February 2019. Instagram social comparisons of ability were positively associated with commitment and in-depth exploration, whilst their relationship with reconsideration of commitment was moderated by gender. In contrast, Instagram social comparisons of opinion were positively related with in-depth exploration and reconsideration of commitment. Findings suggest that although both forms of social comparison behaviour may evoke adolescents to explore their identity, Instagram social comparisons of ability may have less maladaptive identity implications for adolescent males.

# Outcome

"Instagram social comparisons of ability were found to positively associate with commitment and in-depth exploration, whilst for adolescent males, they were also negatively associated with reconsideration of commitment. These findings suggest that rather than reducing self-certainty, suppressing exploration, and increasing self-doubt, such comparisons may compel adolescents to reflect upon their abilities in identity-relevant domains, thus evoking further in-depth exploration, and supporting young people in solidifying their identity commitments... adolescent males reported less mature identity profiles, scoring lower in commitment and in-depth exploration. Importantly, then, for male participants, social comparisons of ability were associated with reduced reconsideration of commitment, thus suggesting that such behaviour may help to alleviate uncertainty regarding abilities in identity-relevant domains." (Noon, 2020: 9).