

Examining the Relationship Between Public Academic Sharing and Self-Worth Among High School Students: The Role of Social Comparison and Perceived Academic Pressure

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Abstract

Increased reliance on social media during adolescence has transformed student academic performance into an often public and continuously evaluable context, but its psychological outcomes of observing academic peer success remains not well understood. To address this question, this study explored linkages between public exposure to academic accomplishment, the inclination to seek out an upward academic comparison (academic social comparison seeking), and self-worth. It also considered whether these relationships differed across: age, sex, type of school, and country of residence. A cross-sectional survey of 185 Indian and Canadian high school students (ages 14–18) measured public exposure to academic achievements using a researcher-developed scale, academic social comparison seeking (MASCS), perceived academic pressure (ESSA), and contingent self-worth across three domains (Competition, Academic Competence, and Approval from Others). Comparison seeking, but not mere exposure, was significantly associated with academic stress and with all three dimensions of contingent self-worth. It was found that not public exposure, but rather comparison seeking were associated with academic pressure and with the three different dimensions of contingent self-worth. Academic pressure was additionally associated with grade and age increases, higher scores among female participants, government/public school and Canadian vs. Indian students; in contrast, public exposure had nothing with academic stress, the Self-worth domain of Academic Competence; while school, gender, and country variables bore no relation with the tendency to seek social comparisons, and contingent self-worth as a construct. It appears, therefore, that an individual desire to compare oneself to peers has more relevance for academic stress and subsequent self-worth levels than being publicly aware of peers' academic successes. Future attempts to reduce teen academic stress will benefit more from addressing an individual peers tendency to compare rather than the degree to which academic outcomes were made public.

Keywords: Public Academic Sharing, Social Comparison, Academic Stress, Contingent Self-Worth, Adolescents

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