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SELF-COMPARISON AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE: SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE PROBLEM OF SELF-DISSATISFACTION

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Abstract: Nowadays, comparing oneself to others is becoming increasingly common among young people. Someone else's stylish clothes, expensive phone, achievements, or seemingly happy life on social media can sometimes make a person feel dissatisfied with their own life. This article examines the reasons why young people compare themselves to others, the role of social media in this process, and its impact on self-confidence. Drawing on international research, the article analyzes several aspects of this issue and offers recommendations for reducing its negative effects.

Keywords: youth, social comparison, social media, self-confidence, appearance, success, sense of self-worth.

Introduction

Sometimes we open social media and glance through other people's lives. Someone has bought a new phone, someone has traveled abroad, and someone else has posted their achievements or good-looking photos. At first this seems like harmless browsing. But after seeing these images, we sometimes start thinking about our own lives: why don't I have such opportunities, why haven't I reached that level yet, or why isn't my life as interesting as theirs?

These questions are familiar to many people. It is natural to compare ourselves with others, because we try to understand ourselves better through the people around us. The problem begins when this comparison becomes constant and makes us feel worthless.

Youth, in particular, is a time when people try to find their place, shape their future, and work out who they want to be. In this process, other people's opinions and society's expectations can matter a great deal. Social media has made this comparison even easier. We no longer compare ourselves only with the people around us but also with thousands of people living in different corners of the world.

But there is one thing we often forget: we do not see other people's lives in full. Usually we see their best photos, happiest days, and achievements. We know our own lives together with all our worries, mistakes, and difficulties. As a result, we may end up comparing our ordinary days with someone else's best moments.

For this reason, young people's tendency to compare themselves with others, and the self-dissatisfaction that results from it, is one of the issues that needs to be discussed today.

Main Part

1. Why do we compare ourselves with others?

People want to know how successful they are, what they are capable of, and how they differ from others. Sometimes they look at those around them to find out. The social comparison theory put forward by the psychologist Leon Festinger in 1954 (Festinger, 1954) also addresses people's tendency to compare themselves with others when evaluating themselves.

In fact, comparing ourselves with others is not always a bad thing. For example, by watching a classmate who studies well, we can learn from their study methods. A person who has achieved success in some field can inspire us to make an effort too. In such cases, comparison helps us work on ourselves.

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But sometimes another person's success feels not like inspiration but like proof of our own shortcomings. If someone gets a good job, we consider ourselves unlucky. If someone looks attractive, we find fault with our own appearance. If someone owns expensive things, we may feel ashamed of our own means.

At such moments, we stop seeing our own strengths. We pay so much attention to what others have that we forget to value the opportunities we already have. So the main problem is not other people's success but the fact that we define our own worth only by comparing ourselves with them.

2. Social media and the idea of a perfect life

Social media has become part of our lives. Through it we talk with friends, keep up with the news, and learn all kinds of useful things. But it has another side: people often share only the part of their lives that they want others to see.

For example, a person may post photos from a trip but not mention how long they saved money for it or what difficulties they went through. Someone may constantly post cheerful photos, but that does not mean there are no problems in their life.

Even so, young people who see such photos sometimes think that other people's lives are easier, more interesting, and more perfect. By comparison, their own ordinary days start to look boring or unsuccessful.

Giulia Fioravanti and her colleagues (2022), in a scientific review published in the journal Adolescent Research Review, examined how beauty standards and idealized images on social media are related to people's attitudes toward their own bodies. They analyzed the results of 43 experimental studies. The review found that viewing idealized images of physical appearance, especially through comparison with others, may increase body dissatisfaction in some people.

These results do not mean that every photo on social media is harmful. What matters is how we perceive these photos and how much we compare ourselves with them.

3. Comparisons related to appearance, clothing, and money

Among young people, comparing oneself with others often starts with appearance. Someone's face may look more attractive, their clothes more fashionable, or their body different. In such cases, some young people begin to see their own natural features as flaws.

In a study by Scully, Swords, and Nixon (2023), the appearance-related activity on social media and body satisfaction of 210 adolescent girls were examined. The results showed a link between appearance-related comparison and body dissatisfaction. A study of adolescents by Jarman et al. (2021) points in the same direction: appearance-focused social media use was directly associated with lower body satisfaction and well-being, and appearance comparison and the internalization of appearance ideals helped explain the links between social media engagement and these outcomes.

But the problem is not limited to beauty. Clothes, phones, cars, and other material things have also become a sign of success or status for some people. For example, a university student may feel embarrassed about their own phone after seeing a classmate's expensive one. Another young person may feel inferior after seeing their peers' fashionable clothes.

But owning expensive things does not determine how knowledgeable, kind, or capable a person is. Everyone's family circumstances, income, and opportunities are different. What is ordinary for one person can be a big goal for another.

Therefore, measuring ourselves against other people's material means is not a fair standard. If a person defines their worth only by appearance and wealth, they will always find people who have more than they do. As a result, it becomes hard to enjoy what one has and to value what one has achieved.

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4. Success and the fear of falling behind

Another common experience among young people is the feeling of falling behind others. One person gets high grades at university, another gets a good job, and another starts a business. When we hear such news, it is natural to start thinking about our own lives.

For example, a university student who learns that a peer has landed a good job may worry that they have not found one yet. Forgetting that they are expanding their knowledge or working toward other goals, they focus only on other people's results.

In reality, everyone's path is different. Some people reach their goals earlier, while others take a road that requires more time. One person's success does not mean another person's failure.

This kind of comparison also appears in personal relationships. Seeing other people's happy relationships or family lives, a person may feel that something is missing in their own life. But the happy moments we see from the outside do not show every side of a relationship.

The problem is that society sometimes creates the impression that everyone should achieve the same things at the same age. It is as if, by a certain age, one must have a good job, a high income, an attractive appearance, and an ideal relationship. In reality, everyone's circumstances, opportunities, and priorities are different.

It is useful to draw inspiration from other people's achievements, but it is wrong to turn them into a reason to belittle ourselves.

5. What consequences can self-dissatisfaction lead to?

Constantly comparing oneself with others can lead some young people to lower self-confidence, anxiety, and dissatisfaction with their lives. The more attention a person pays to what others have, the more likely they are to overlook the good things in themselves.

In addition, some young people may make decisions that do not suit them in order to win other people's approval. Examples include spending too much money to be like others, choosing clothes they do not like, or living only for other people's opinions.

Saddest of all, a person sometimes cannot enjoy even their own achievements. When they reach a goal, instead of feeling happy, they see that others have achieved even more. As a result, they consider their own success small.

We should also remember that social comparison does not affect everyone in the same way. Some people are inspired by others' achievements and work harder on themselves. So the important question is not only whether we compare ourselves, but also what conclusions we draw from it.

Ways to Reduce the Problem

To reduce the negative effects of young people comparing themselves with others, we first need to rethink our attitude toward ourselves and toward social media.

First, we need to understand that not everything we see online reflects life in full. People often share their best photos and happiest moments. So it is wrong to look at someone's page and conclude that their life is free of problems.

Second, we should learn to compare ourselves first of all with our earlier selves, not with others. For example, learning more than in the previous semester, gaining a new skill, or overcoming a difficulty is also a success. Valuing such small achievements helps strengthen our self-confidence.

Third, it is important not to measure our worth only by money, clothes, or appearance. A person's honesty, kindness, sense of responsibility, drive to learn, and independent thinking are also important qualities. Appreciating these qualities in ourselves helps us avoid becoming overly dependent on other people's opinions.

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Fourth, we should use social media consciously. If following certain pages constantly makes us feel dissatisfied with ourselves, we can follow them less or choose pages with different content. Social media should not be a tool that takes up our time and forces us to compare ourselves with others; it should also be an opportunity to learn and grow.

Fifth, in families and educational institutions, it is important to support young people's individual abilities instead of comparing them with others. Asking "Which of your skills would you like to develop?" instead of "Why can't you be like so-and-so?" may help strengthen a young person's self-confidence.

If comparing oneself with others turns into persistent low mood or a problem that significantly affects daily life, talking to a trusted person or a psychologist may also be helpful.

Conclusion

Young people's habit of comparing themselves with others is one of the problems that deserve attention in today's society. Social media has widened the opportunity to learn about other people's lives, but at the same time it can push us to compare our own lives with other people's best moments.

Scientific studies show that idealized images on social media and appearance-related comparisons may increase body dissatisfaction in some young people. However, the solution is neither to give up social media entirely nor to ignore other people's achievements. What matters most is how we evaluate ourselves and how we view other people's lives.

Everyone's life, opportunities, and goals are different. Some people reach their goals sooner, while others spend more time. This does not mean that one is more valuable than the other. Instead of seeing others' success as our own shortcoming, we should learn to draw inspiration from it.

Perhaps, to be happier, we do not need to have more than others; perhaps we need to learn to appreciate what we already have. After all, a person's worth is determined not by how much they resemble others or how far they surpass them, but rather by their ability to stay true to themselves, to live by their values, and to strive to build a meaningful life.

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