

Chapter 33

Social Capital, Self-Esteem, Popularity, Need for Accessibility to Friends, and Stress Predict Cyber Technology Use

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ABSTRACT

The authors examined social capital, self-esteem, popularity, need for accessibility to friends, and stress as gendered predictors of cyber technology use in 149 undergraduates. The authors investigated four kinds of cyber technology use: social networking, texting, internet surfing, and MP3 player listening. Stress was the most consistent predictor of cyber technology use in men (social networking, texting, and MP3 player listening), while popularity was the most consistent for women (social networking, texting, and MP3 player listening). Furthermore, self-esteem inversely predicted use of internet surfing in men and MP3 player listening in women. On the other hand, the social capital dimension of bridging online which is establishing weak social ties, predicted the use of both internet surfing and MP3 player listening in men and women. The authors extended the literature by establishing gendered social-cognitive dimensions of cyber technology use among undergraduates in the United States.

INTRODUCTION

Cyber technology use is increasing and allowing for constant connectivity (Ehrenberg, Juckes, White, & Walsh, 2008). Researchers have found that college students in particular, make use of cyber technology in various forms (Ogan, Ozakca, & Groshek, 2008). In fact, other researchers have reported that undergraduates have higher use of cell phones, PDAs, and laptops than teenagers (Diamanduros, Jenkins,

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& Downs, 2007), suggesting an increased use of cyber technology in the college years. According to Bandura (2001), this increased use of cyber technology has changed the way that individuals perceive themselves in the context of others. He suggested that social cognitive theory, which addresses how we learn about ourselves through interactions with and observations of others, was adapted to address this vast expansion of cyber technology in recent years. He stated that individuals are now exposed to a much wider variety of people through cyber technology than previously, which allows for observations and learning from multiple new sources in the construction of social-cognitive schemas. In addition, cyber technology like social-networking, texting, internet surfing, and MP3 player listening reciprocally shape the very nature of social interactions or the lack thereof, among undergraduates. It is in such a context that they construct their socialized self-schemas and cognitive expectancies. We will examine social capital, self-esteem, popularity, need for accessibility to friends, and stress, together, as predictors of cyber technology use - social networking, texting, internet surfing, and MP3 player listening.

Theoretical Perspective: Social Cognitive Theory

Bandura (2001) proposed a social cognitive theory that examined the ways in which we interact with the social world and learn about ourselves through others. His social cognitive theory was unique because, unlike previous theorists, he recognized that it is not either the environment or internal factors that solely determine behavior, but a reciprocal interaction between personal factors, behavior patterns, and the environment (Bandura, 1986). Social cognitive theory addresses how we learn through observing others and modeling their behavior. Bandura stated that modeling others is crucial for human development so that we can continually move forward by building on the knowledge of others. Without actually being in a situation ourselves, we can learn the rules for circumstances that others are in, and then extract those rules and apply them to our own lives (Bandura, 1999). The preceding process highlights how cognitions are learned within a social context, thereby constructing our socialized self-schemas and cognitive expectancies. In this study, we examine social capital, self-esteem, popularity, need for accessibility to friends, and stress, as predictors of cyber technology use. As described in the following literature review, the preceding predictors are social-cognitive processes that constitute cognitive expectancies about social experiences and contribute to self-schemas. Social cognitive theory, therefore, offers a lens through which we can interpret the relationships between social-cognitive expectancies, self-schemas, and cyber technology use.

Social Capital

Social capital is an investment in social structure or personal relationships that facilitate the achievement of goals (Glanville & Bienenstock, 2009). Three separate aspects of social capital have been identified. The first, bonding social capital, refers to deep relationships where people share strong emotional ties, while the second, bridging, involves relationships with relatively weak-ties (Putman, 2000). In contrast, the third, maintaining social capital, concerns the maintenance of relationships that have been previously established (Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, 2007). Social capital reflects social cognition, as it evolves from our interactions with others and our evaluations of those interactions (Forsman, Nyqvist, & Wahlbeck, 2011). Bonding, bridging, and maintaining social capital may differentially influence cyber technology use.

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