57% who felt outdone by a partner’s ex reported lower self-esteem

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The digital trace of a partner’s past relationship can become a benchmark for personal worth. New ClarityCheck research reveals how comparisons with former partners are associated with self-image and confidence in a current relationship.

The internet has made it possible to scrutinize a partner’s romantic past without ever contacting the people involved. Public profiles offer selective glimpses of someone else’s achievements, often stripped of the circumstances behind them. A career milestone or carefully chosen photograph can become a point of comparison for someone who knows little about the person beyond their connection to a current partner. The ease of accessing these fragments gives an otherwise distant relationship a continuing presence in the present.

A ClarityCheck survey of **11,760 adults across the United States, United Kingdom, European Union and Latin America who were currently in a romantic relationship lasting at least six months and knew of at least one serious former partner of their current partner** found that **64%** had looked up an ex online at least once. Where respondents knew of more than one serious former partner, they were asked to think about the one they had looked up most recently.

The survey revealed a significant distinction in what concerned people who searched. **48%** said they were more preoccupied with how they measured up against the ex than with the possibility that their partner might reconnect with them. For these respondents, the former partner’s perceived standing carried greater weight than the prospect of renewed romantic contact.

Among those who searched, **59%** compared themselves with the ex in at least one area they personally cared about, including appearance, career, money, relationships, lifestyle or social status. How respondents judged the comparison was closely associated with their emotional response. Among those who believed they were doing better than the ex in areas important to them, **51%** said the search improved how they felt about themselves. Among those who believed the ex was doing better, **57%** said it made them feel worse.

The distinction extended to respondents’ confidence in their current relationships. Among those who felt they compared favorably, **62%** said the search left them more confident about their place in the relationship, compared with just **27%** of those who believed the ex came out ahead. The **35-percentage-point difference** shows how strongly reported relationship confidence varied with perceived personal standing, although the survey cannot establish that the searches caused those changes.

Existing insecurities appeared to influence which comparisons felt most uncomfortable. **43%** said an ex bothered them most when that person appeared stronger in an area where they already lacked

confidence. Publicly visible success could therefore take on particular emotional significance when it overlapped with an existing concern about personal progress or self-worth.

An unpleasant outcome did not necessarily discourage further investigation. Among respondents who said looking up the ex made them feel worse about themselves, **41%** later returned to the same profile or searched through another public source. The survey does not establish why they continued, but it shows that the negative experience was insufficient to end the searching behavior for a substantial share of respondents.

The findings illustrate how easily limited information about someone else can acquire personal significance. An ex's online presence provides no reliable measure of the person viewing it, yet respondents frequently interpreted what they found through their own insecurities and relationship concerns. The repeated searches are especially revealing: greater access to another person's life did not necessarily bring greater reassurance, even among those who had already found the comparison upsetting.

About ClarityCheck

ClarityCheck is an all-in-one background verification tool for phone numbers, emails, and images. Designed for everyday digital safety, ClarityCheck helps users instantly identify unknown contacts, trace suspicious profiles, and check for potential fraud across phone, email, and photo input. By combining reverse lookup and OSINT technologies, it offers a streamlined way to verify identities and protect yourself online.

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