

An Investigation of Social Factors Contributing to Unrealistic Self-Assessment

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Abstract: The phenomenon of self-inflation, characterized by individuals overestimating their abilities and accomplishments, has been observed throughout history and is influenced by various factors. This article explores the underlying reasons for unrealistic self-evaluation, focusing on the impact of socialization, culture, and social media. The formation of self is shaped by feedback and validation received from social relationships, which can lead individuals to overestimate themselves to cope with feelings of inadequacy. Cultural values and norms also play a role, with individualistic cultures promoting self-enhancement while collectivistic cultures value modesty. Furthermore, social media platforms exacerbate the trend of exaggerated self-perception by fostering competition and the need for social validation. However, it is essential to maintain a balanced approach to self-evaluation, striving for a realistic assessment of one's abilities and limitations. This balanced perspective promotes mental health, well-being, and improved decision-making. By understanding the factors contributing to unrealistic self-evaluation, individuals can develop a healthier and more accurate sense of self-worth, facilitating personal growth and better relationships.

Keywords: self-inflation, Socialization, Culture, Unrealistic self-evaluation, Realistic assessment, personal growth, Social media.

1. Introduction

The phenomenon of "self-inflation," or the tendency for individuals to overestimate their own abilities and accomplishments, has been observed throughout history. In fact, it can be traced back to ancient Greek mythology with the story of Narcissus, who was so enamored with his own reflection in a pool that he could not tear himself away [3]. With the invention of mirrors, humans gained the ability to see themselves, further strengthening our sense of self. Unsurprisingly, we began to have unrealistic evaluations of ourselves. Narcissism, which is characterized by inflated self-views and a sense of entitlement, has been found to be on the rise in recent decades [20].

2. What's in It?

It is only natural to assume that there must be some motivating factor behind this type of behavior. Indeed, there are potential benefits that come with strengthening one's self-perception, which in turn adds to the tendency to unfairly judge themselves [6]. For example, individuals with higher self-esteem may be more resilient in the face of adversity and may have more confidence in pursuing their goals. This is supported by several studies, including [5], who found that high self-esteem is positively correlated with better performance, interpersonal success, happiness, and healthier lifestyles. Additionally, the Better Than Average Effect, which suggests that people tend to overestimate their abilities relative to others, has been shown to be positively correlated with subjective well-being, according to Positive Illusions [8]. Similarly, Alicke and Sedikides [11] note that self-enhancement can serve both self-protective and self-aggrandizing functions. Roberts et al. [14] even found that self-esteem has an indirect effect on wages. Specifically, they found that self-esteem influences years of education, which in

turn affects wages.

3. Deeper Reasons

But there are deeper underlying reasons for this behavior. For instance, the better-than-average effect has been shown to be influenced by both social and cognitive factors [15]. In addition, researchers have shown the role of socialization and culture in shaping our self-perceptions [4] and the relationship between social relationships and self-esteem [2]. This article aims to explore several aspects responsible for people's unrealistic evaluation of themselves from the perspective of social impact. By delving into these factors, we hope to gain a deeper understanding of why individuals tend to overestimate themselves.

4. The Formation of Self

To tackle this issue, we must first scrutinize the foundation of self-evaluation, which is the formation of self. The concept of self has long been a topic of interest in psychology and philosophy. While humans are not the only animals with a sense of self, our ability to form a complex and abstract sense of self is unique [16]. Socialization and culture play a significant role in shaping our self-perceptions. For instance, our family, peers, and other social groups can provide us with feedback and validation that can influence how we see ourselves [18]. The feedback we receive can be either positive or negative, and it can shape our beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. Additionally, cultural values and norms can shape what we consider to be desirable traits and accomplishments, as well as how we evaluate ourselves and others [13]. Moreover, social comparison, which is the process of evaluating ourselves in comparison to others, can also influence our self-perceptions. Comparing ourselves to others who we perceive as superior in some way can lead to feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem [21], while comparing ourselves to others who we perceive as inferior can lead to

feelings of superiority and overconfidence[1]. Now let's take a closer look at these factors.

5. The Role of Socialization

According to Baumeister and Leary [4] and Rosenberg [17], the desire for interpersonal attachments and the nature and function of self-esteem can play a role in shaping our self-perceptions. Research has shown that individuals with higher self-esteem and more positive self-perceptions are perceived as more attractive and desirable in social contexts [2]. However, this can lead to a self-reinforcing cycle, where the desire for social validation leads individuals to overestimate their abilities to maintain a positive self-image and gain social approval. Our family, friends, and other social relationships provide us with feedback and validation that can shape our self-esteem and sense of self-worth. This feedback can lead individuals to overestimate their abilities as a way to cope with feelings of inadequacy or to maintain a positive self-image [9]. Social media platforms have become a prevalent means for this type of feedback in contemporary society.

6. To What Extent Is Social Media Responsible?

Social media is an indispensable element that cannot be overlooked when discussing social influence. In recent years, social media has been blamed for exacerbating this trend of exaggerating one's abilities [22]. Social media can create a sense of competition among users, with individuals feeling the need to present a perfect image and to constantly compare themselves to others. This pressure can lead individuals to overestimate their abilities and accomplishments to gain social approval and validation. Social media users may become fixated on the number of likes, followers, and comments they receive, which can become a measure of their self-worth[18]. The desire for social validation can lead individuals to portray themselves in a highly positive light, exaggerating their achievements and abilities. In other words, this can create a distorted self-perception, whereby individuals believe they are more talented, successful, or attractive than they actually are.

In addition, research has explored the relationship between social media use, narcissism, and self-esteem. For instance, a large national survey found that addictive use of social media was positively associated with narcissism and negatively associated with self-esteem [23]. Similarly, a meta-analysis of studies examining the relationship between selfie behaviors and self-evaluations found that individuals who engage in more frequent and intense selfie-taking behaviors tend to have higher levels of narcissism and lower levels of self-esteem [24]. These findings suggest that social media use and selfie-taking behaviors may contribute to the development of distorted self-perceptions and a heightened sense of self-importance. Other than that, social cognitive neuroscience research has shed light on the neural mechanisms underlying self-evaluation and social cognition more broadly[25]. By integrating cognitive, socioemotional, and neuroimaging perspectives, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of self-development and the factors that shape our perceptions of ourselves and others.

7. What About Culture?

Due to the disparities between different cultures, we may

instinctively eliminate cultural element from the current discussions. Some cultures may place a higher value on self-promotion, assertiveness, and individual achievement, while others may place a higher value on humility, collective well-being, and interpersonal harmony. For instance, Markus and Kitayama [13] proposed a cultural psychological framework that distinguishes between individualistic and collectivistic cultures. In individualistic cultures, such as those found in Western societies, self-enhancement and self-promotion are often encouraged and valued, whereas in collectivistic cultures, such as those found in East Asian societies, modesty and self-criticism may be more valued.

Yet cultural values and norms can have a significant impact on self-enhancement and self-evaluation. Research has shown that self-enhancement can sometimes be driven by external factors, such as objectifying media [7], social norms [12], and cultural factors [19]. More specifically, studies show that self-enhancement tendencies are not limited to individualistic cultures. For example, a study comparing self-enhancement in Japan and the United States found that while Japanese participants exhibited lower levels of self-enhancement than American participants, both groups exhibited self-enhancement tendencies [26]. Additionally, a study examining self-evaluative processes across different cultures found that although there were some differences in the content and focus of self-evaluations, there were also many similarities in the underlying cognitive processes[27]. The overconfidence bias, which is the tendency for individuals to overestimate their abilities and underestimate risks, has been found to be a universal phenomenon across cultures [28].

8. Implications

This article primarily delves into the factors contributing to unrealistic self-evaluation, leading to the conclusion that sometimes it is advantageous for individuals to overstate their abilities. However, the drawbacks of overestimating oneself cannot be ignored [10]. Therefore, it's important to take a balanced approach to self-evaluation and strive for a realistic and accurate assessment of one's abilities and limitations, through which we can develop a healthier and more realistic sense of self-worth, promoting mental health and well-being and improving decision-making in various contexts, such as health, education, and the workplace [29][30]

9. Conclusion

In conclusion, this article explores the phenomenon of self-inflation, where individuals overestimate their abilities and achievements. It examines the impact of socialization, culture, and social media on this behavior. The formation of self is influenced by social feedback and validation, leading individuals to inflate their self-perception to cope with feelings of inadequacy. Cultural values and norms play a role, with individualistic cultures promoting self-enhancement and collectivistic cultures valuing modesty. Social media platforms exacerbate this trend by fostering competition and the need for social validation. However, a balanced and realistic self-assessment is crucial for mental well-being, decision-making, and personal growth. Understanding the factors contributing to unrealistic self-evaluation allows individuals to develop a healthier sense of self-worth, leading to personal development and meaningful relationships.

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