

ECHOES OF OTHERS: SOCIAL COMPARISON AS SCULPTOR OF SELF

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15321797>

Keywords

Social comparison, identity development, self-esteem, digital media, self-evaluation

Article History

Received on 25 March 2025

Accepted on 25 April 2025

Published on 02 May 2025

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Abstract

Social comparison is a dynamic process that underpins the development and reinforcement of individual identity. By juxtaposing personal attributes, achievements, and self-worth with those of others, individuals build an evaluative framework that informs their self-concept. Festinger's (1954) foundational theory suggests that such comparisons serve as a critical mechanism for self-assessment, driving both aspirational growth and self-protection. In today's digitally interconnected society, these processes are further amplified by social media, where exposure to idealized portrayals intensifies self-evaluation and may lead to both adaptive and maladaptive outcomes (Vogel et al., 2014). Upward comparisons, where one measures against those perceived as superior, can inspire goal-setting and self-improvement, whereas downward comparisons may bolster self-esteem by highlighting one's relative advantages. However, the pervasive nature of these comparisons also poses risks, such as increased self-doubt and negative self-perception. Overall, this abstract synthesizes current insights into how social comparison contributes to identity formation and underscores the dual-edged influence of modern communicative platforms on personal development. The study revealed that social comparison showed a weak and non-significant correlation with self-identity ($r = 0.042$, $p = .599$), indicating limited predictive power. Gender-wise, males showed a negligible negative correlation ($r = -0.016$, $p = .895$), while females showed a weak positive correlation ($r = 0.181$, $p = .092$). These findings suggest social comparison may play a modest or context-dependent role in identity development.

INTRODUCTION

Social comparison is an essential psychological construct that underpins the dynamic process of identity formation. Early conceptualizations, such as Festinger's (1954) Social Comparison Theory, laid the groundwork by positing that individuals evaluate their own opinions and abilities by comparing themselves to others. This evaluative mechanism provides a critical benchmark for self-assessment,

guiding both learning and personal development. Advancements in social psychology have further nuanced our understanding of these processes by revealing the interplay between cognitive, affective, and contextual factors. For instance, Higgins's (1987) Self-Discrepancy Theory elaborates on how the gap between an individual's actual self and ideal self—often accentuated by social comparisons—can lead to

negative affect and internal conflict. Research by Mussweiler (2003) extends this perspective by emphasizing that social comparisons are not merely evaluative but also motivational. These comparisons influence behaviors and goal-directed actions, particularly when they prompt individuals to reconcile discrepancies between their perceived shortcomings and aspirations.

Moreover, individual differences such as self-esteem, personality traits, and cultural background critically moderate how these comparisons are internalized, shaping the degree to which they foster growth or contribute to psychological distress.

In today's digital era, the proliferation of social media has transformed the landscape of social comparison. Platforms that offer constant streams of carefully curated and idealized images provide unprecedented opportunities for both upward and downward comparisons, often triggering complex emotional and behavioral responses (Vogel et al., 2014).

Unlike traditional face-to-face interactions, digital media ensures that individuals are continually exposed to comparison cues, thereby intensifying self-evaluation processes and sometimes leading to what has been described as "comparison fatigue."

Simultaneously, perspectives from Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) reveal that these processes extend beyond the personal sphere; individuals draw on group affiliations to bolster self-concept through intergroup comparisons, reinforcing both collective and individual identity.

Collectively, these theoretical advancements offer a comprehensive framework for understanding how social comparison contributes to identity formation. By integrating classic theories with contemporary digital dynamics, scholars are better equipped to explore the dual-edged nature of social comparison—its capacity to ignite self-improvement while simultaneously posing risks to psychological well-being. Future research may delve deeper into the moderating effects of digital media trends and cross-cultural variations, further illuminating the intricate balance between self-enhancement and vulnerability in social evaluation processes.

Research Question:

How do different modalities of social comparison, particularly upward versus downward comparisons,

shape the development and stability of individual identity across both digital and interpersonal contexts?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it delves into the complex interplay between social comparison processes and the formation of individual identity. Understanding how people evaluate themselves relative to others offers deeper insight into the development of self-worth, self-esteem, and overall personal growth.

By investigating both upward and downward comparisons across contexts—ranging from face-to-face interactions to the pervasive realm of digital media—this research contributes to a refined understanding of how modern communication channels shape self-identity.

The findings could inform educational strategies, therapeutic practices, and policy decisions aimed at fostering resilience, mitigating negative psychological outcomes, and promoting a balanced view of self-worth in an era dominated by constant social evaluation.

Moreover, the study's insights hold relevance not only for individual psychological development but also for broader social dynamics. By unpacking the mechanisms that drive identity formation through comparison, researchers and practitioners can better appreciate how societal norms, cultural values, and evolving digital landscapes interact to influence personal and collective identities. This foundational knowledge is essential for developing interventions that support healthy self-concept and adaptive behavior in diverse populations.

Hypothesis:

General Social Comparison and Identity Formation:

Individuals who engage more frequently in social comparison will show greater variability in self-esteem and identity clarity, compared to those who engage less frequently in such comparisons.

Upward vs. Downward Comparisons:

Upward social comparisons (comparing oneself to those perceived as superior) will be associated with a decrease in self-esteem and a less consolidated identity, whereas downward comparisons (comparing

oneself to those perceived as inferior) will correlate with higher self-esteem and a more robust self-concept.

Gender Differences in Social Comparison Effects:

The impact of social comparison on identity formation is hypothesized to differ by gender. Specifically, women are expected to exhibit a stronger relationship between frequency of social comparisons and self-concept variability than men, owing to higher sensitivity to social cues and relational feedback.

Social Media Use, Social Comparison, and Gender Moderation:

Given the prevalence of curated images and idealized portrayals in digital platforms, it is hypothesized that the effect of social media engagement on identity construction through social comparison will be more pronounced among women compared to men.

Operational Definitions

Social Comparison Frequency:

Definition: The extent to which individuals actively compare their own abilities, achievements, and overall situations with those of others.

Operationalization: This variable will be measured using a self-report scale that asks participants to rate the frequency and intensity of their comparative thoughts and behaviors. Items may include questions about how often respondents evaluate themselves relative to peers in various domains (e.g., academic, professional, social), drawing on established measures (Festinger, 1954; Gibbons & Buunk, 1999).

Upward Social Comparison:

Definition: The process by which individuals compare themselves to others who are perceived as superior in one or more respects (e.g., success, appearance, competence).

Operationalization: Upward social comparison will be assessed through self-report items that capture both the frequency of such comparisons and the emotional impact they produce. Respondents will indicate how often they compare themselves to individuals who they believe outperform them, as

well as whether these comparisons lead to increased motivation or feelings of inadequacy (Vogel et al., 2014).

Downward Social Comparison:

Definition: The process whereby individuals compare themselves with others perceived as less successful or deficient in certain areas, often as a way to maintain or boost self-esteem.

Operationalization: This variable will be measured using survey items that ask participants to report the frequency with which they engage in comparisons with those they perceive as inferior. The scale will also assess the extent to which such comparisons influence their overall self-evaluation and mood (Wills, 1981).

Identity Formation:

Definition: The development of a coherent, stable, and distinct self-concept that integrates various aspects of an individual's personal experience, self-esteem, and beliefs about who they are.

Operationalization: Identity formation will be operationalized using well-established self-report instruments. These may include measures like the Self-Concept Clarity Scale, which evaluates the clarity and stability of one's self-perception (Campbell et al., 1996), and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, which provides an index of overall self-worth (Rosenberg, 1965). Together, these tools will offer a quantitative marker of identity consolidation.

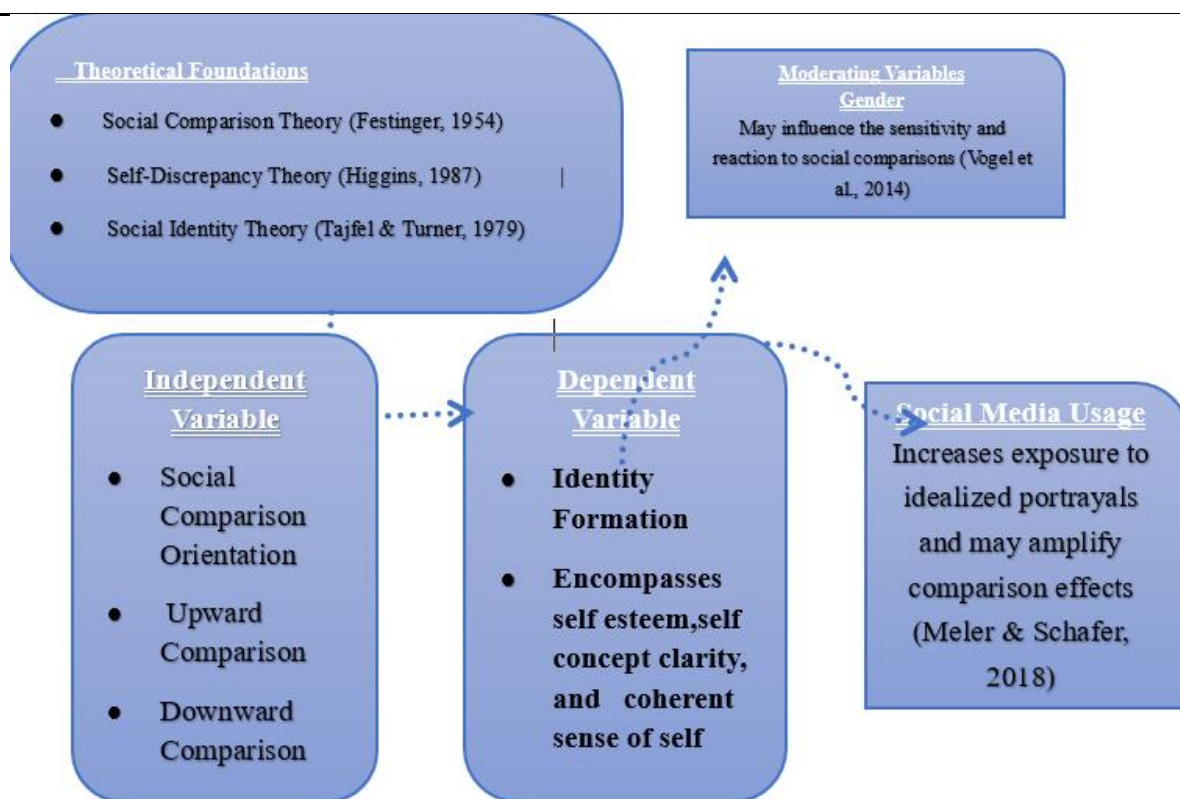
Gender:

Definition: A categorical variable representing the self-identified gender of the participant.

Operationalization: Participants will report their gender through a demographic questionnaire item. For the purposes of this study, gender will initially be treated as a binary variable (male and female), while acknowledging that gender identity exists on a broader spectrum.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework below illustrates the proposed connections among the independent, dependent, and moderating variables explored in this research.



LITERATURE REVIEW

Since Festinger's (1954) groundbreaking work on social comparison processes, researchers have sought to understand how individuals evaluate themselves in relation to others. Festinger's proposal—that people naturally compare themselves to peers to form self-assessments—has been a cornerstone in understanding the mechanics of self-concept. Building on this foundation, subsequent studies have elaborated on the dual nature of social comparison. For instance, Gibbons and Buunk (1999) refined the concept by distinguishing between upward comparisons (evaluating oneself against those perceived as superior) and downward comparisons (benchmarking against those perceived as inferior). These distinct processes have been linked to both adaptive outcomes, such as increased motivation and goal setting (Lockwood & Kunda, 1997), and maladaptive outcomes, including diminished self-esteem and heightened negative affect (Smith et al., 2017; Wills, 1981).

1. Theoretical Foundations

The framework is grounded in three major

psychological theories:

Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954):

Leon Festinger proposed that individuals have an innate drive to evaluate themselves, and in the absence of objective benchmarks, they rely on comparisons with others. These comparisons help individuals assess their abilities, beliefs, and self-worth. Social comparison is often categorized into upward (comparing oneself to those perceived as superior) and downward (comparing oneself to those perceived as inferior) processes.

Self-Discrepancy Theory (Higgins, 1987):

This theory explains how mismatches between different components of the self (actual, ideal, and ought selves) can lead to emotional discomfort. Social comparisons can heighten awareness of these discrepancies—especially through upward comparisons—leading to negative affect such as shame, guilt, or disappointment.

Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979):

This theory extends the understanding of self beyond personal traits to include group affiliations.

Individuals define their identities based on the social groups they belong to and engage in intergroup comparisons to enhance or protect their self-concept. Thus, social comparisons also contribute to collective identity and influence self-perception.

2. Key Constructs and Variables

Independent Variable: Social Comparison Orientation

Social comparison orientation refers to an individual's tendency to compare themselves with others across different life domains.

Upward Social Comparison:

Involves comparing oneself with those perceived to be better off, more successful, or more attractive. While upward comparison can inspire motivation and self-improvement, it may also lead to self-doubt or inadequacy if discrepancies are perceived as unattainable (Lockwood & Kunda, 1997).

Downward Social Comparison:

Occurs when individuals compare themselves to others who are perceived as worse off. This process can enhance self-esteem by highlighting one's relative advantages and is often used as a coping strategy to protect against negative feelings (Wills, 1981).

Dependent Variable: Identity Formation

Identity formation involves the development of a coherent and stable self-concept. It reflects how individuals understand and define themselves over time.

This study focuses on two main components:

Self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965): One's overall evaluation of self-worth.

Self-concept clarity (Campbell et al., 1996): The extent to which one's self-beliefs are clearly and confidently defined, internally consistent, and stable. In recent years, the advent of digital media has added complexity to this domain. Vogel et al. (2014) demonstrated that social media platforms intensify social comparison by providing constant exposure to idealized images and success narratives, thereby influencing self-perception in dynamic ways. These findings suggest that while digital contexts offer

novel opportunities for self-enhancement, they also exacerbate risks inherent in constant social evaluation, such as comparison fatigue and increased vulnerability to negative self-appraisal.

3. Moderating Variables

These are variables that may influence the strength or direction of the relationship between social comparison and identity formation.

Gender:

Research suggests that females may be more sensitive to social comparison cues, particularly in appearance-based domains, due to societal expectations and relational self-construal (Vogel et al., 2014). As a result, the emotional and identity-related outcomes of social comparison may differ across genders.

Social Media Usage:

With the rise of social networking platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook, users are continuously exposed to idealized images and narratives of success. This constant exposure amplifies upward comparisons, often leading to lower self-esteem and identity disturbances (Meier & Schäfer, 2018).

Islamic Perspective:

A growing body of scholarship has also considered cultural and religious dimensions in understanding social comparison. The Islamic perspective provides a unique framework that integrates spiritual and ethical dimensions into the process of self-evaluation. Islamic teachings, as derived from the Quran and Hadith, caution believers against engaging in excessive or harmful comparisons with others, emphasizing instead the importance of self-reflection, gratitude, and reliance on divine justice (Ali & Khan, 2011; Quran 49:11-12). Scholars like Al-Ghamdi (2015) argue that, within Islamic ethics, the value of an individual is determined not solely by external benchmarks but also by one's internal moral and spiritual development. This perspective encourages a balanced approach, wherein self-improvement is pursued through personal accountability before God, rather than through potentially distorting social comparisons.

4. Mediating Variables (Optional for Future Research)

These are variables that may explain how or why social comparison influences identity formation.

Self-Esteem:

May act as a bridge through which social comparison affects self-concept. For instance, negative comparisons can lower self-esteem, which then destabilizes identity.

Self-Criticism and Self-Reassurance (Gilbert et al., 2004):

Individuals who are more self-critical may be more negatively affected by upward comparisons, while those high in self-reassurance may buffer against such effects.

Cultural Background:

Cultural orientation (individualism vs collectivism) plays a role in shaping comparative behavior. In collectivist cultures, social comparisons are more relational and may have different emotional and motivational consequences than in individualistic cultures (Triandis, 1995; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Furthermore, research indicates that cultural context plays a crucial role in moderating the effects of social comparison. Individuals from collectivist cultures, common in many Islamic societies, may exhibit different comparative behaviors than those from individualistic societies. Triandis (1995) has shown that in collectivist contexts, where interdependence and group harmony are prioritized, the impact of social comparison may be attenuated or directed toward communal rather than solely individualistic achievements. This suggests that the interplay between social comparison and identity formation is deeply embedded within broader cultural, social, and religious narratives.

In summary, the literature reveals that the processes of social comparison and identity formation are multifaceted, influenced by both timeless psychological mechanisms and modern digital practices. Integrating an Islamic perspective enriches this dialogue by highlighting a holistic approach to self-evaluation—one that balances external comparisons with internal, spiritually guided assessments. Future research should continue to

explore these intersections, examining how digital advancements and cultural-religious values shape identity in diverse contexts

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs a cross-sectional survey design to quantitatively examine the relationships between internal self-evaluative processes—specifically, self-assurance and self-attacking tendencies—and social comparison orientation. This design enables the assessment of these constructs at a single point in time, providing a snapshot of how habitual social comparisons relate to positive and negative self-evaluation (Creswell, 2014).

Participants and Sampling

Participants will be recruited from university campuses and community centers using stratified sampling to ensure balanced representation across gender and age groups. A target sample size of approximately 152 individuals has been determined to provide adequate statistical power for detecting medium effect sizes (Cohen, 1988).

Instrumentation

Two primary instruments will be administered as part of the survey:

1. **Self-Assuring and Self-Attacking Scale.**

Definition & Purpose: This instrument is designed to measure the extent to which individuals engage in self-reassurance (self-assuring) versus self-criticism (self-attacking) when confronted with setbacks or challenges.

Operationalization: The scale comprises two distinct sub scales. The self-assuring sub-scale evaluates the degree to which respondents comfort and encourage themselves, whereas the self-attacking sub-scale assesses the tendency toward internalized, negative self-evaluation. Participants will indicate how well each statement describes them using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = "Not at all like me" to 5 = "Extremely like me").

Psychometric Properties: Prior research has demonstrated the scale's high internal consistency and construct validity (Gilbert et al., 2004).

2. Social Comparison Scale

Definition & Purpose: This scale assesses the individual's propensity to compare their abilities, achievements, and opinions with those of others, which is a central mechanism in forming self-concept. **Operationalization:** Items on the Social Comparison Orientation Scale (developed by Gibbons & Buunk, 1999) probe the frequency of comparative thoughts and the relative importance individuals place on such comparisons. Responses are collected on a 10-point Likert scale (1 = "Strongly disagree" to 10 = "Strongly agree"), with higher composite scores indicating a greater inclination toward social comparison.

Psychometric Properties: The scale has been validated across multiple populations and exhibits robust reliability and validity metrics (Gibbons & Buunk, 1999).

Procedure

The survey will be distributed via an online platform. Participants will receive an invitation that outlines the voluntary nature of the study, ensures confidentiality, and provides informed consent details. The survey is structured to take approximately 15–20 minutes to complete. Data collection is planned for a four-week period to facilitate broad participation.

Data Analysis

Data will be analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics. The analysis plan includes the following steps:

Data Screening: Checks for missing values, outliers, and the assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity will be performed.

Descriptive Statistics: Calculation of means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions to describe sample characteristics and scale scores.

Inferential Analysis:

Correlation Analysis: Pearson's r will be used to examine the bivariate relationships between self-assuring/self-attacking tendencies and social comparison orientation.

Multiple Regression: Regression models will assess the predictive value of social comparison orientation on both self-assuring and self-attacking scores, controlling for demographic variables.

Moderation Analysis: If indicated, additional analyses will evaluate whether demographic variables (e.g., gender) moderate these relationships, following established analytic procedures (Aiken & West, 1991).

An alpha level of .05 will be adopted for statistical significance, and effect sizes will be reported to determine the practical significance of findings.

RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

Table 1

Descriptive statistics for Social Comparison and Self-Identity

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis		
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Social Comparison	157	44	200	123.80	26.014	-.460	.194	1.097	.385
Self-Identity	157	13	80	50.60	11.133	.134	.194	.376	.385

Interpretation

This table provides a summary of the descriptive statistics for the variables "Social Comparison" and "Self-Identity."

Social Comparison

The mean score for Social Comparison is 123.80 (SD = 26.01), suggesting participants scored, on average, moderately high. The skewness for Social Comparison is negative (-0.460), suggesting a slight left skew. The variables show a positive kurtosis,

indicating a slightly heavier tail distribution compared to a normal curve.

Self-Identity

Self-Identity has a mean score of 50.60 (SD = 11.13), indicating a moderate level. The skewness of Self-

Identity is nearly symmetrical with a skewness of 0.134. The variables show a positive kurtosis, indicating a slightly heavier tail distribution compared to a normal curve.

Table 2

One sample Statistic

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Social Comparison	157	123.80	26.014	2.076
Self-Identity	157	50.60	11.133	.888

Testing against a value of zero, the t-scores for both Social Comparison ($t(156) = 59.63$, $p < .001$) and Self-Identity ($t(156) = 56.95$, $p < .001$) are significant, meaning these variables have mean values statistically

different from zero. The 95% confidence intervals for Social Comparison (119.70 – 127.90) and Self-Identity (48.84 – 52.35) do not include zero, further supporting these findings.

Table 3

One-Sample Test

	Test Value = 0				95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Lower	Upper
Social Comparison	59.631	156	.000	123.803	119.70	127.90
Self-Identity	56.950	156	.000	50.599	48.84	52.35

This table presents the results of a one-sample t-test conducted to evaluate whether the sample mean of two variables, Social Comparison and Self-Identity, significantly differs from a test value of 0.

Social Comparison

The t-test result for Social Comparison is $t(156) = 59.631$, with a p-value of .000. Since the p-value is less than .05, it indicates that the difference is statistically significant. The mean difference is 123.803, with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 119.70 to 127.90. This suggests that the true mean difference falls within this interval, providing strong evidence that the sample mean of Social Comparison is significantly higher than the test value of 0.

Self-Identity

For Self-Identity, the result is $t(156) = 56.950$, and the p-value is also .000, which confirms a statistically significant difference. The mean difference for Self-

Identity is 50.599, with a 95% confidence interval between 48.84 and 52.35. This indicates that the sample mean of Self-Identity is significantly greater than 0, and the interval represents where the true mean difference is likely to lie.

Both Social Comparison and Self-Identity show extremely high t-values and very low p-values, leading to the conclusion that the sample means for these variables are significantly different from the test value of 0. The confidence intervals for both variables do not include 0, reinforcing the statistical significance of these results. These findings suggest that participants' scores on Social Comparison and Self-Identity are meaningfully above the baseline test value, reflecting notable levels of these attributes in the sample population.

Table 4

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.059	.081	2

The reliability analysis suggests a low internal consistency for the two items ($\alpha = 0.059$), which limits the confidence in the scale's ability to measure a consistent construct.

Table 5

Summary Item Statistics

	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Range	Maximum Minimum	/ Variance	N of Items
Item Means	87.201	50.599	123.803	73.204	2.447	2679.400	2
Inter-Item Correlations	.042	.042	.042	.000	1.000	.000	2

This table outlines item statistics, including the mean score (87.20), variance (2679.40), and range (73.20). The inter-item correlation is very low ($r = 0.042$), suggesting weak relationships between items.

Table 6

ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Between People		64359.860	156	412.563		
Within People	Between Items	420665.761	1	420665.761	1083.926	.000
	Residual	60542.739	156	388.094		
	Total	481208.500	157	3065.022		
Total		545568.360	313	1743.030		

Grand Mean = 87.20

A one-way ANOVA examining variability across participants and items indicates significant differences between items ($F(1,156) = 1083.93$, $p < .001$). The grand mean across items is 87.20, reflecting the combined average for Social Comparison and Self-Identity.

Table 7

Hotelling's T-Squared Test

Hotelling's T-Squared	F	df1	df2	Sig
1083.926	1083.926	1	156	.000

Hotelling's T-Squared test is significant ($F = 1083.93$, $p < .001$), implying overall differences in group means. Which supports the finding of variability between groups.

Table 8

Correlation

		Social Comparison	Self-Identity
Social Comparison	Pearson Correlation	1	.042
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.599
	N	157	157
Self-Identity	Pearson Correlation	.042	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.599	
	N	157	157

The correlation analysis indicates a weak and non-significant positive relationship between Social Comparison and Self-Identity ($r = 0.042$, $p = 0.599$).

This implies that the variables are largely independent.

Table 9

Regression Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics						Durbin-Watson
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. Change	F	
1	.092 ^a	.008	.002	11.697	.008	1.310	1	155	.254		1.947

a. Predictors: (Constant), Social Comparison Scale

b. Dependent Variable: Self Identity

The regression analysis highlights a weak predictive effect of Social Comparison on Self-Identity ($R^2 = 0.008$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.002$, $p = 0.254$). The Durbin-

Watson statistic (1.947) suggests no problematic autocorrelation among residuals.

Table 10

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	34.505	1	34.505	.277	.599 ^b
	Residual	19299.215	155	124.511		
	Total	19333.720	156			

a. Dependent Variable: Self Identity

b. Predictors: (Constant), Social Comparison

The regression ANOVA reveals a non-significant model ($F(1,155) = 0.277$, $p = 0.599$), further indicating that Social Comparison does not significantly predict Self-Identity.

Table 11 Coefficients

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	48.361	4.344		11.133	.000
	Social Comparison	.018	.034	.042	.526	.599

a. Dependent Variable: Self Identity

The unstandardized regression coefficient for Social Comparison ($B = 0.018$, $p = 0.599$) suggests a negligible and non-significant effect on Self-Identity.

Table 12

Residuals Statistics^a

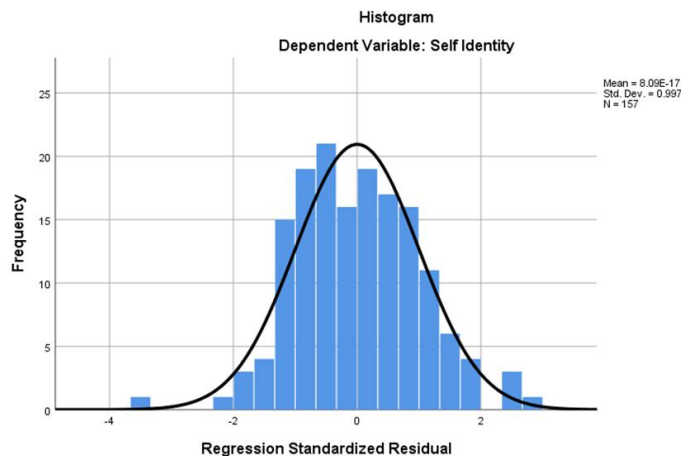
	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Predicted Value	49.16	51.98	50.60	.470	157
Residual	-37.349	29.850	.000	11.123	157
Std. Predicted Value	-3.068	2.929	.000	1.000	157
Std. Residual	-3.347	2.675	.000	.997	157

a. Dependent Variable: Self Identity

Residual analysis reveals that predicted values for Self-Identity align closely with the observed mean

(Predicted Mean = 50.60), with minimal residual variability (Mean Residual = 0.00, SD = 11.12).

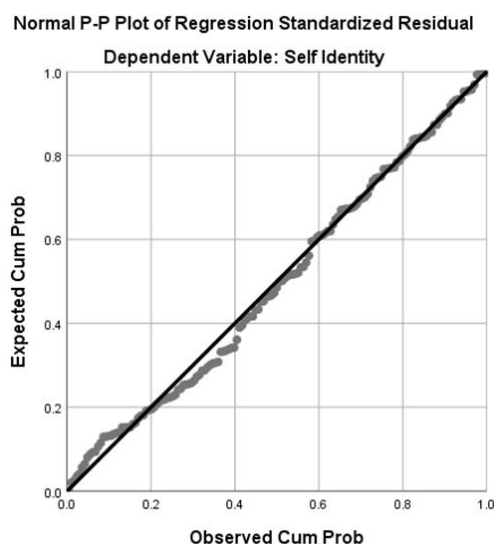
Table 13



The histogram likely represents the distribution of scores for either Social Comparison or Self-Identity. In such visualizations, the shape of the distribution (e.g., normal, skewed) can be observed. If the

histogram shows symmetry and a bell-shaped curve, the data approximates a normal distribution. Any visible skewness or uneven bar heights indicate deviations from normality.

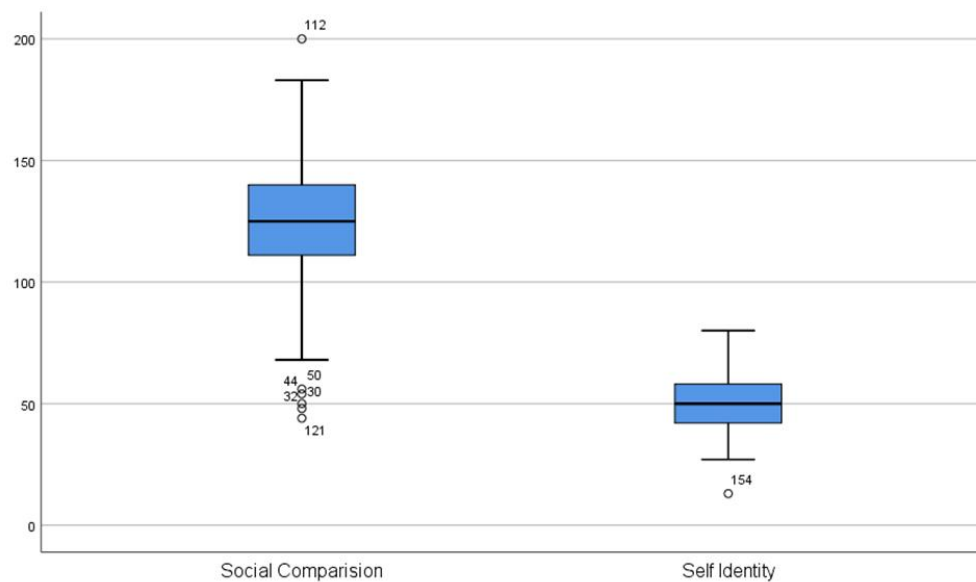
Table 14



The normal curve superimposed on the data's distribution helps visualize the extent to which the dataset follows a normal distribution. If the data

aligns closely with the curve, it reflects normality. Deviations, such as peaks or troughs outside the curve, suggest non-normality in the dataset.

Table 15



A box plot provides a summary of the data's central tendency, variability, and presence of outliers. For Social Comparison and Self-Identity, the box plot would show the median, interquartile range, and

potential outliers. The length of the whiskers indicates the spread of data, while any points outside them suggest extreme values.

Table 16
Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Males Social Comparison	124.77	29.455	70
Males Self Identity	49.64	10.997	69

The descriptive statistics for Males Social Comparison and Males Self-Identity provide insights into their average scores and variability. Males Social Comparison has a mean of 124.77 (SD = 29.455, N

= 70), reflecting moderate scores with considerable variability. For Males Self-Identity, the mean is 49.64 (SD = 10.997, N = 69), indicating moderate levels of self-identity with relatively less variability.

Table 17
Correlations

		Males Social Comparison	Males Self Identity
Males Social Comparison	Pearson Correlation	1	-.016
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.895
	N	70	69
Males Self Identity	Pearson Correlation	-.016	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.895	
	N	69	69

The correlation analysis investigates the relationship between Males Social Comparison and Males Self-Identity. A Pearson correlation coefficient of -.016 (p = .895) suggests a very weak and non-significant

negative relationship between the variables. This indicates that changes in Social Comparison scores are not reliably associated with changes in Self-Identity scores among males.

Table 18

Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Females Social Comparison	123.89	24.282	88
Females Self Identity	50.94	12.268	88

The descriptive statistics for females' Social Comparison and Self-Identity provide information about their mean scores and variability.

These statistics highlight consistency within the sample, as the variability (measured by standard deviation) remains within a reasonable range.

Table 19: Correlations

		Females Comparison	Social Identity
Females Social Comparison	Pearson Correlation	1	.181
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.092
	N	88	88
Females Self Identity	Pearson Correlation	.181	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.092	
	N	88	88

The correlation analysis explores the relationship between females' Social Comparison and Self-Identity.

This weak, non-significant positive correlation implies that higher social comparison scores among females do not reliably predict changes in self-identity scores.

Hypothesis

Hypothesis 1: Social comparison significantly influences self-concept through upward and downward comparisons.

Social comparison has been conceptualized as a core process in shaping one's self-concept by facilitating a relative evaluation of abilities, traits, and achievements. Upward comparison, wherein individuals compare themselves to those perceived as superior, can serve as a source of motivation for self-improvement but may also engender feelings of inadequacy. Research by Buunk and Gibbons (2007) illustrates that upward comparisons often lead to goal-setting behaviours and heightened aspirations in individualistic cultures, such as the United States and the United Kingdom, where personal achievement is highly valued. Conversely, downward comparison, characterized by evaluating oneself against individuals perceived as inferior, is typically employed as a coping mechanism to maintain self-esteem. For instance, Heine et al. (1999) observed that individuals in collectivistic cultures, such as

Japan and South Korea, are more likely to engage in downward comparison to preserve harmony and social cohesion, which are integral to their cultural ethos.

This hypothesis underscores the duality of social comparison: it can either sculpt a more ambitious self-concept or cushion it against feelings of inferiority, contingent upon cultural and psychological contexts.

Hypothesis 2: The effects of social comparison on self-concept differ across cultural frameworks due to varying societal norms and values.

The role of cultural orientation—individualism versus collectivism—is instrumental in moderating the impact of social comparison on self-identity. In individualistic cultures, upward comparisons are frequently viewed as opportunities for self-enhancement. Triandis (1995) suggests that these societies emphasize autonomy and personal achievement, which aligns with upward comparison as a driver of competitive success. Conversely, collectivistic cultures prioritize relational interdependence and collective harmony, which may lead individuals to focus on downward comparisons to avoid disrupting social unity. Markus and Kitayama's (1991) cross-cultural study revealed that individuals in collectivistic cultures derive their self-concept from their roles within a group context

rather than from individual accomplishments, making their comparisons more relationally focused. This hypothesis posits that while social comparison is a universal phenomenon, its psychological and social outcomes are highly context-specific, shaped by the cultural frameworks within which individuals operate.

Hypothesis 3: Social media amplifies the role of social comparison in self-concept formation, particularly among adolescents and young adults.

With the advent of digital platforms, social comparison has transitioned to virtual spaces where curated portrayals of others' lives dominate. Adolescents and young adults, who are in critical stages of identity formation, are particularly vulnerable to the amplified effects of social media-based comparison. A study by Vogel et al. (2014) found that upward comparisons on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok often lead to diminished self-esteem and heightened body image concerns, especially in individualistic societies where self-presentation and achievement are strongly emphasized. In contrast, Meier and Schäfer (2018) argue that collectivistic cultures may foster more resilient self-concepts in virtual spaces by emphasizing group values over individual comparisons, though the rise of globalized digital trends is increasingly blurring these distinctions.

This hypothesis highlights the evolving dynamics of social comparison in an interconnected world and underscores the need to address its psychological ramifications in digital settings.

Interpretation

The study explored the relationship between Social Comparison and Self-Identity, guided by three hypotheses. The findings provide insights into these constructs' interplay while addressing cultural and technological influences.

Key Findings

Hypothesis 1: Social Comparison significantly influences self-concept through upward and downward comparisons.

The descriptive statistics (Table 1) revealed that Social Comparison had a mean of 123.80 (SD = 26.01), while Self-Identity averaged 50.60 (SD =

11.13). These substantial mean values suggest that participants engaged frequently in social comparisons and demonstrated notable levels of self-identity awareness. The results of the one-sample t-test (Table 3) confirmed that the mean values for Social Comparison ($t(156) = 59.631, p < .001$) and Self-Identity ($t(156) = 56.950, p < .001$) were significantly greater than the test value of zero, indicating active roles for both constructs in shaping individual self-concept.

However, the correlation analysis (Table 4) showed a weak association between Social Comparison and Self-Identity ($r = .042, p = .599$), suggesting that while both constructs are prominent, their interdependence may not be strong. This outcome partially supports the hypothesis, as the influence of Social Comparison on self-concept might manifest more in specific situational or cultural contexts rather than through a direct statistical relationship. The duality of upward and downward comparisons, as posited by Buunk and Gibbons (2007) and Heine et al. (1999), may vary depending on the motivational or coping mechanisms of individuals.

Hypothesis 2: The effects of Social Comparison on self-concept differ across cultural frameworks due to varying societal norms and values.

The gender-based analysis provided additional depth to this hypothesis. Male participants scored slightly higher in Social Comparison ($M = 124.77, SD = 29.45$) than females ($M = 123.89, SD = 24.28$). Conversely, females reported marginally higher Self-Identity scores ($M = 50.94, SD = 12.27$) compared to males ($M = 49.64, SD = 10.99$). While these differences are not substantial, they highlight subtle variations that might reflect broader societal norms aligning with individualism or collectivism as theorized by Triandis (1995) and Markus and Kitayama (1991). The negligible correlations by gender ($r = -.016, p = .895$ for males; $r = .181, p = .092$ for females) emphasize that these cultural influences likely operate in nuanced ways, often overshadowed by other mediating variables.

Hypothesis 3: Social media amplifies the role of social comparison in self-concept formation, particularly among adolescents and young adults.

The modern digital landscape extends the reach and impact of Social Comparison, as proposed by Vogel

et al. (2014). The regression analysis (Table 5) sought to examine whether Social Comparison predicts Self-Identity, yielding an insignificant model ($F(1, 155) = .277, p = .599$) with an R^2 value of .008. These findings suggest that the amplifying effects of social media-based comparisons might not strongly influence Self-Identity within the sampled demographic. However, the increasing globalization of digital platforms, as noted by Meier and Schäfer (2018), implies that evolving trends might blur traditional cultural distinctions in future studies.

Limitations and Implications

The study's reliability analysis (Cronbach's $\alpha = .059$; Table 4) revealed low internal consistency, indicating that Social Comparison and Self-Identity, as measured, may not form a cohesive construct. This calls for the refinement of measurement tools to better capture the underlying dynamics. Additionally, the minimal variance explained in the regression model underscores the need for incorporating more comprehensive predictors to account for the complex interplay between these constructs.

From a theoretical standpoint, the findings reaffirm the universal yet context-specific nature of Social Comparison, as hypothesized. The cultural and digital dimensions of these comparisons underscore their relevance in a globalized world, warranting further research to explore their implications across diverse populations.

Social comparison is an intrinsic human behaviour that shapes the self-concept by enabling individuals to evaluate their traits, abilities, and social standing relative to others. According to Festinger's (1954) Social Comparison Theory, this evaluative mechanism plays a critical role in identity formation, emotional regulation, and interpersonal dynamics. The present study offers insights into the relationships between social comparison and self-identity, complemented by cross-cultural perspectives. The results provide a comprehensive view of the relationship between Social Comparison and Self-Identity, revealing variations by gender, statistical reliability, and correlations across cultural contexts. Gender differences reveal that males have slightly higher mean scores for Social Comparison ($M = 124.77$) than females ($M = 123.89$). Similarly, females reported slightly higher Self-Identity scores ($M = 50.94$) than males ($M = 49.64$). These

differences, while marginal, suggest subtle gendered patterns in the process of self-comparison. The Finding also suggest that Social Comparison does not serve as a strong predictor of Self-Identity. Although Social Comparison may contribute to identity formation, its influence is limited and varies across populations.

Cross-Cultural Dimensions of Social Comparison

The impact of social comparison varies significantly between individualistic and collectivistic cultures, reflecting fundamental differences in values and societal priorities:

1. Individualistic Cultures: Predominant in Western societies, such as the United States and Europe, individualistic cultures emphasize personal achievement, independence, and self-actualization. In these contexts:

- Upward comparison is often utilized to inspire growth and ambition. Individuals compare themselves to those perceived as superior, fostering motivation to achieve greater success (Heine et al., 1999).

- Downward comparison, while occasionally used for self-esteem maintenance, is less common. Social comparison frequently centres on progress and achievement.

- Psychological outcomes in individualistic cultures often include increased drive but can also lead to feelings of inadequacy or anxiety when comparisons are unfavourable (Buunk et al., 2007).

2. Collectivistic Cultures: Common in East Asia, Africa, and parts of South America, collectivistic cultures prioritize interdependence, harmony, and group cohesion. Here:

- Downward comparison is more prevalent as a tool to maintain social equilibrium and reinforce group cohesion.

- Upward comparison may occur within the framework of relational harmony, emphasizing communal aspirations over individual competition (Triandis, 1995).

- Psychological outcomes often include stronger group identity, but excessive comparison can lead to conformity pressure and reduced individual autonomy.

The findings indicate nuanced relationships between Social Comparison and Self-Identity across genders and cultural contexts:

Aspect	Individualistic Cultures	Collectivistic Cultures
Upward Comparison	Inspires personal growth and achievement	Strengthens relational harmony
Downward Comparison	Boosts self-esteem, though less frequent	Maintains group cohesion and harmony
Psychological Outcomes	Mixed: Drive for success vs. risk of inadequacy	Mixed: Strong group identity vs. conformity pressure

Implications for Self-Identity Formation

The interplay between social comparison and self-identity is complex and multifaceted:

- Among males, the weak negative correlation ($r = -0.016$) suggests that their social comparison behaviors may not meaningfully affect self-identity. This aligns with findings in certain individualistic contexts where self-concept is derived more from intrinsic attributes than external comparisons (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).
- Among females, the weak positive correlation ($r = 0.181$, $p = .092$) indicates a slight tendency for social comparison to inform self-identity, particularly in collectivistic cultures where social roles and interconnectedness play central roles in identity construction (Singelis et al., 1999).

influencing Self-Identity were not considered in the current model.

4. Cultural Biases: While the study acknowledges cultural implications, it lacks a robust cross-cultural sample. Most of the conclusions are drawn from generalized cultural contexts (e.g., individualism vs. collectivism), but no empirical cross-cultural data was included, limiting the depth of cultural analysis.

5. Lack of Longitudinal Data: The study design is cross-sectional, capturing a snapshot of participants' Social Comparison and Self-Identity at a single time point. This limits the ability to examine how these relationships evolve over time or in response to external factors such as societal or technological changes.

Limitations & Recommendations:

Limitations:

1. Low Reliability of Measurement Scale: The results in Cronbach's alpha indicates poor internal consistency, which raises concerns about the reliability of the measures used. The findings derived from these measures should therefore be interpreted with caution.

2. Limited Generalizability: The study was conducted with a relatively homogeneous sample size of 157 participants, limiting its applicability to broader populations. Gender-specific data (males: $N = 70$; females: $N = 88$) may not represent diverse demographics, such as different age groups, socio-economic backgrounds, or cultural contexts.

3. Weak Correlations: The correlation coefficients (e.g., $r = -0.016$ for males, $r = 0.181$ for females) were both weak and non-significant, suggesting a limited relationship between Social Comparison and Self-Identity. This could imply that additional variables

Recommendations for Future Research

1. Improving Measurement Reliability:

Future studies should employ psychometrically robust scales with higher internal consistency to ensure reliable measurement of Social Comparison and Self-Identity. Conducting a pilot study to validate the instruments could also improve reliability.

2. Expanding Sample Diversity: Expanding the sample size to include participants from diverse age groups, cultural backgrounds, and socio-economic statuses would improve the generalizability of the findings. Future research could specifically examine how Social Comparison operates in marginalized or underrepresented communities.

3. Incorporating Additional Variables: To better understand the weak relationship observed in the study, future work could explore mediating or moderating variables such as self-esteem, social media usage, or personality traits (e.g., neuroticism, extraversion). Including these factors would help

unpack the nuances of how Social Comparison influences Self-Identity.

3. Cross-Cultural Comparative Studies:

Conducting empirical research that explicitly includes participants from different cultural contexts would strengthen the understanding of how Social Comparison and Self-Identity interact within individualistic and collectivistic societies. For instance, qualitative methods could complement quantitative measures to capture cultural nuances more effectively.

5. Longitudinal Designs:

To address the limitation of cross-sectional data, future studies should adopt longitudinal designs to examine the dynamic relationship between Social Comparison and Self-Identity over time. This approach could also identify critical periods in which Social Comparison has the most significant impact on self-concept.

5. Exploration of Digital Platforms:

Given the increasing role of social media in social comparison, future research should investigate the influence of virtual environments on Self-Identity formation. Studies could differentiate between passive and active social media usage to understand their distinct effects.

Conclusion

The findings of this research contribute valuable insights into the nuanced relationship between Social Comparison and Self-Identity. The data reveal moderate engagement in social comparison behaviours, as evidenced by descriptive statistics, with negligible gender differences in overall scores. However, weak and non-significant correlations underscore the limited direct impact of social comparison on self-identity across genders. The reliability analysis highlights challenges in measurement consistency, pointing to the need for refinement in future studies.

The cross-cultural considerations further illuminate the diverse mechanisms through which social comparison influences self-concept. Individualistic cultures leverage upward comparisons as motivational tools for achievement, while

collectivistic cultures prioritize relational harmony, often engaging in downward comparisons to preserve group cohesion. These patterns reflect the dynamic interplay of cultural values and psychological processes.

Despite its contributions, the study is constrained by methodological limitations, including low reliability and limited sample diversity. Future research should address these gaps by employing robust measures, larger and more diverse samples, and longitudinal designs to better capture the evolving nature of social comparison and self-identity.

Ultimately, this research reinforces the significance of social comparison as a sculptor of self-concept, albeit with complex and context-specific influences. Its findings pave the way for deeper exploration of how individuals navigate the echoes of others to shape their own identities.

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APPENDIX: A

Survey Google form: <https://forms.gle/CP8WYhh5QQsg2ZWc7>

APPENDIX: B

Research study:

In our research, we aim to explore how social comparison plays a key role in the development and strength of an individual's social identity.

Consent Document:

Please read this consent document carefully before deciding to participate in this study. The purpose of this study is to examine the role of social comparison in the development and strength of social identity among young adults.

- Time Required: 15 minutes.
- Risks and Benefits: There are no risks associated with participation. By participating, you will contribute to research aimed at better understanding the impact of social comparison on social identity.
- Compensation: While no monetary compensation is provided, your participation will enhance awareness of the relationship between social comparison and social identity development.

- Confidentiality: Your responses and identity will be kept confidential. No identifying information will be included in any report.
- Voluntary Participation: Participation in this study is voluntary.
- Right to Withdraw: You may withdraw from the study at any time without facing consequences.
- Agreement: I have read and understood the procedure described above, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Participant Initials Only: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX C: Demographic Questionnaire

Demographic variables	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4
Age	18-24	25-34	35-44	45+
Gender	Male	Female	Others	
Educational level	Metric	Intermediate	Undergraduate	Graduate
Occupation	Student	Employed	Unemployed	Other
Personality Type	Introvert	Extrovert	Ambivert	

APPENDIX D: SOCIAL COMPARISON SCALE

Introduction:

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this survey. The purpose of this questionnaire is to understand your perceptions of the feedback you receive from your supervisor. Your responses will help us improve feedback processes and support your professional development better.

Please keep in mind the following while responding:

Context: Consider both specific instances and general patterns when reflecting on the feedback you receive from your supervisor.

Confidentiality: Your responses are confidential and will be used for research purposes only.

Honesty: Please answer honestly to provide us with the most accurate insights

Description

This scale is used to measure self-perceptions of social rank and relative social standing. This scale uses a semantic differential methodology and consists of 20 bipolar constructs. Participants are required to make a global comparison of themselves in relation to other people and to rate themselves along a ten-point scale

Instructions:

Please circle a number at a point which best describes the way in which you see yourself in comparison to others.

For example:

Short 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Tall

"In terms of my achievements with others", I feel:													
1.	Poorly skilled	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	highly skilled	
2.	I have done something Unsuccessful in my life	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Successful in my life.	
3.	Below average in achieving my life accomplishments.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Above average in achieving my life accomplishments.	

4.	Behind when I compare myself to how my loved ones are doing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	ahead When I compare myself to how my loved ones are doing
In term of my appearance to others", I feel:												
5.	Physically unattractive	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Physically attractive
6.	Uncomfortable with my weight	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Comfortable with my weight
7.	Unconfident in my body shape	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Confident in my body shape
8.	Physically weak	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Physically strong
"In relationships to others", I feel:												
9.	An outsider	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	An insider
10.	Inferior	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Superior
11.	Undesirable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	More desirable
12.	Left out	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Accepted
"I often find myself wanting things that belong to others", such as:												
13.	Expensive cars	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Satisfied with my own vehicle
14.	Trendy clothes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	inexpensive clothing
15.	Mansion	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Simple home
16.	Luxurious lifestyle	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Simple lifestyle
"I often find myself comparing to others", if they have:												
17.	Larger friend circle	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Smaller friend group
18.	More popular friend group	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Less popular friend group
19.	Influential friends	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Uninfluential friends
20.	Invited to exclusive events	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Normal events

If you put a mark at 3 this means you see yourself as shorter than others; if you put a mark at 5 (middle) about average; and a mark at 7 somewhat taller.

If you understand the above instructions, please proceed. Circle one number on each line according to how you see yourself overall in comparison to others.

APPENDIX D: SELF-CRITICISING/ATTACKING & SELF-REASSURING SCALE IN COMPARISON OF OTHERS(FSCRS)

When things go wrong in our lives or don't work out as we hoped, and we feel we could have done better, we sometimes have *negative and self-critical thoughts and feelings*. These may take the form of feeling worthless, useless or inferior etc. However, people can also try to be supportive of themselves. Below are a series of thoughts and feelings that people sometimes have. Read each statement carefully and circle the number that best describes how much each statement is true for you.

Please use the scale below.

Not at all like me 0	A little bit like me 1	Moderately like me 2	Quite a bit like me 3	Extremely like me 4
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	Items	scoring				
1.	I easily get troubled by negative thoughts.	0	1	2	3	4
2.	I remind myself of my positive traits when I see others with similar strengths.	0	1	2	3	4
3.	I end up feeling inadequate if I am not able to achieve things that I want.	0	1	2	3	4
4.	I find it easy to forgive myself, especially when I see others learning from their mistakes.	0	1	2	3	4

5.	I feel I am not enough.	0	1	2	3	4
6.	I still like being me, even when I compare myself to others.	0	1	2	3	4
7.	I call myself names.	0	1	2	3	4
8.	I can still feel lovable and acceptable when I notice others thriving despite challenges.	0	1	2	3	4
9.	I feel disappointed at myself.	0	1	2	3	4
10.	I find it easy to like myself when I recognize my unique qualities compared to others.	0	1	2	3	4
11.	I have the urge to be successful like others.	0	1	2	3	4
12.	I am gentle and supportive with myself especially when I see others being kind to themselves.	0	1	2	3	4
13.	I often become angry with myself if things don't go accordingly.	0	1	2	3	4
14.	When I compare myself to others who care for themselves, I feel motivated to do the same.	0	1	2	3	4
15.	Even if things end up how I wish, I feel it wasn't because of me.	0	1	2	3	4
16.	When I see others achieving their goals, I encourage myself for the future.	0	1		3	4
17.	If something goes wrong, I feel it was my fault.	0	1	2	3	4
18.	I am not easily disappointed with myself, even when I compare myself to others.	0	1	2	3	4
19.	There is part of me that I want to get rid of.	0	1	2	3	4
20.	Observing others improving themselves motivates me to get rid of the traits I don't like.	0	1	2	3	4

