



## THE OVERLAP OF THE CURRENT SELF WITH THE FUTURE SELF AND THE SENSE OF COHERENCE

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### **Abstract**

*This research aimed at pointing out the relationships between the perception of the overlap of the current self with the future self and the sense of coherence or prediction of its evolution, as defined by Antonovsky (1987). The sense of coherence is a cognitive characteristic that expresses how a person judges and interprets the world and himself in it. The current self is the product of one's own experiences in the society and culture to which a person belongs. The future self represents the level of expectation of one's own becoming. The representative sample included 80 participants, aged between 18 and 52 years, of whom 27 (33.3%) were male and 53 (66.7%) were female. The data were collected during 2019. Pursuant to statistical processing, significant, positive associations were found between the sense of coherence (factorial and global) and the overlap between the current self with the future self ( $p > 0.05$ ). Participants for whom the prediction of the sense of coherence was stable and unusual showed a stronger overlap of the current self with the future self ( $p > 0.05$ ) than those with the prediction press upward / downward. In all cases the calculated effect size was average; therefore the results have a practical significance. The explanations were based on the bi-univocal nature of the characteristics of the analysed constructs.*

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**Keywords:** *sense of coherence, current self, future self*

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Psychoanalysis, Ego psychology (Hartmann, 1939) and psychology of Self (Kohut, 1971) have provided the first definitions of the Self.

The current self derives from one's own lived experiences in a social and cultural context. The current self includes: physical self (what do I think about my body); the cognitive self (what do I think about how I think, remember and operate information about the self and the world); the social self (how do I feel others perceive me) and the spiritual self (important things and values in life). The future

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self is determined by the level of expectations of one's own becoming. These include medium to long-term aspirations and goals. The future self acts as a significant force on the motivations that guide our behaviour. We are different, in terms of the feelings we experience, when we relate to the future self (Ersner-Hershfield and collaborators, 2009). Cerebral activity changes depending on how well we correlate our current image with that on our future.

The ability to produce representations on the self and on the world, stored in memory, has important consequences for learning, motivational processes and behaviour (Sîrbu, 2016). The representations also include the perspective of the future. The representations on self, observed through the lens of future actions, may enhance or inhibit behaviors and influence the exercise of perceived or latent abilities. Sense of coherence, developed by Aaron Antonovsky, is a cognitive characteristic that expresses how a person judges and interprets the world and himself in it. The construct, with implications for sanogenesis (Rizeanu, Vasiliu, 2016, Vasiliu, Rizeanu, 2017), involves an attitude that helps process stressors in a positive-adaptive way. Sense of coherence is made up of three factors: comprehension (the ability to understand external and internal stimuli as predictable and explainable); control (perception of ability to cope with obstacles through own forces or by using identifiable external resources); meaning and purpose (understanding current tasks as having significance so that the involvement in solving them appears justified). Antonovsky (1987) deems that the three factors are interrelated and proposes the following eight prediction variants (Tab. 1).

Table 1. Prediction of the sense of coherence  
depending on the variants of relation between factors

<i>Type</i>	<i>Comprehensibility</i>	<i>Manageability</i>	<i>Meaningfulness</i>	<i>Prediction</i>
1	High	High	High	Stable
2	Low	High	High	Unusual
3	High	Low	High	Press upward
4	Low	Low	High	Press upward
5	High	High	Low	Press downward
6	High	Low	Low	Press downward
7	Low	High	Low	Unusual
8	Low	Low	Low	Stable

## 2. OBJECTIVE AND HYPOTHESES

### 2.1. OBJECTIVE

This research aimed at pointing out the relationships between the perception of the overlap of the current self with the future self and the sense of coherence or prediction of its evolution, as defined by Antonovsky (1987).

## 2.2. HYPOTHESES

H1: There is a statistically significant association between the perception of overlap between the current self and the future self and the sense of coherence.

H2: There are statistically significant relationships between the perception of the overlap of the current self with the future self and the types of prediction of the evolution of the sense of coherence.

## 3. METHOD

The research was conducted on a representative sample of 80 participants, aged between 18 and 52 years, of whom 27 (33.3%) were male and 53 (66.7%) were female. The data were collected during 2019.

Sense of coherence was assessed with the SOC13 Scale (Antonovsky, 1987, 1993), having 13 items, validated and rescaled for the Romanian population (Rizeanu, Vasiliu and collaborators, 2015). The type of prediction on the evolution of the coherence direction was operationalised as follows: P = 1 (*stable*) includes the types 1 and 8; P = 2 (*press upward/downward*) includes the types 3, 4, 5 and 6; P = 3 (*unusual*) includes the types 2 and 7.

Perception of the overlap between the current self with the future self (*Self*) was assessed on a six-step scale where: 1 = lack of overlap, 2 = low overlap, 3 = below average overlap, 4 = above average overlap, 5 = high overlap and 6 = total overlap between the two constructs. To better understand the meaning of each step, the overlap has been represented graphically by two circles with different degrees of overlap, one associated with the current self and one with the future self.

The method of completing the questionnaires, following instruction, was pencil and paper with no time limit. Participants were informed on the objectives pursued, on content of the instruments used and the fact that participation is voluntary, observing the confidentiality of personal data and the results of the assessment. Furthermore, the participants were informed that they can withdraw from the research at any time without any negative repercussion for them. The provisions of the Code of Ethics of the profession of psychologist with the right to practice have been observed (2019).

Following to the data collection from participants resulted the distributions of the types of overlap of the current self with the future self as well as the types of predictions on the evolution of the sense of coherence (Fig. 1).

Statistical analyses were performed with *PSPP* software and 95% confidence intervals were calculated with the *Practical Meta-Analysis Effect Size Calculator*.

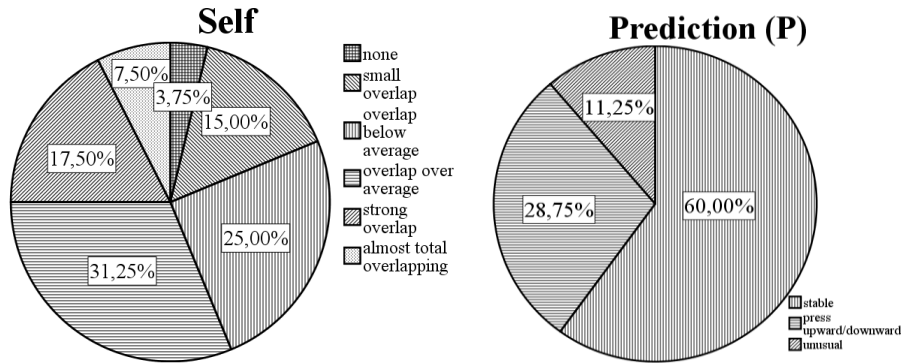


Figure 1. Distribution of overlap between current self and future self (*Self*) and distribution of types of predictions on the evolution of the coherence direction (*P*)

Research followed a non-experimental ex-post-facto design of the observational type, which allowed the study of the participants' current behaviour (Vasiliu, 2018, p.21).

$$N: \quad O_1 \quad O_2$$

where  $O_1$  represents the assessment of the sense of coherence with the SOC13 questionnaire and  $O_2$  the assessment of the overlap between current self and future self.

#### 4. RESULTS

Participants answered all items. The data collected fall within the minimum and maximum values assumed by each questionnaire. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test (Table 1) showed that the distribution of the *sense of coherence (global and factorial)* variable was non-parametric ( $p < 0.05$ ). Non-parametric statistical tests were chosen. Box-Plot analysis did not show any values that might significantly influence the outcome of the research.

Kendall's tau\_b statistical test was applied to test the first null hypothesis. (Tab. 2). We found statistically positive significant associations between the overlap of the present self with the future self and sense of coherence: *SOC-I* – comprehension factor ( $K\tau=0.332$ ,  $p=0.001$ ,  $95\%CI= 0.121 - 0.514$ ), *SOC-C* – control factor ( $K\tau=0.299$ ,  $p=0.001$ ,  $95\%CI= 0.085 - 0.48$ ), *SOC-S* – meaning and purpose factor ( $K\tau=0.316$ ,  $p=0.001$ ,  $95\%CI= 0.103 - 0.501$ ), *SOC13* – global ( $K\tau=0.386$ ,  $p=0.001$ ,  $95\%CI= 0.182 - 0.558$ ). We rejected the null hypothesis. The effect size ( $r > 0.20$ ) is average, as a result the effect obtained is unlikely to have occurred by chance and seems to be quite important from a practical point of view (Vasiliu, 2018, pp. 102-103).

Table 2. Association relationship between the sense of coherence (global and factorial) and the overlapping the present self with the future self

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1. Self	1.000				
2. SOC-I	.332**	1.000			
3. SOC-C	.299**	.612**	1.000		
4. SOC-S	.316**	.496**	.447**	1.000	
5. SOC13	.386**	.805**	.745**	.646**	1.000

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Sense of coherence, global and factorial, tends to increase with the congruence between the current self and the future self. For step 1, lack of overlap, the number of participants being small (N=3) the result is inconclusive. The variable *Self reduced* was operationalized as follows: SELFR=1 (*low overlap*) that includes steps 1-3 and SELFR=2 (*high overlap*) that includes steps 4-6 (Tab. 3).

Table 3. Mean of the ranks of the sense of coherence (global and factorial) depending on the operationalized variable *Self reduced*

	Self reduced	N	Mean Rank
SOC-I	low overlap	35	30.41
	high overlap	45	48.34
SOC-C	low overlap	35	30.64
	high overlap	45	48.17
SOC-S	low overlap	35	31.03
	high overlap	45	47.87
SOC13	low overlap	35	28.83
	high overlap	45	49.58

Following to the application of the Mann-Whitney U test, we found that the mean of the ranks of the sense of coherence, global and factorial, for participants with *Self reduced=high overlap* are statistically significantly higher (p=0.001) than those of participants with *Self reduced=low overlap* (Tab. 4).

Table 4. Differences, depending on the type and level of overlap of the current self with the future self (*Self reduced*), between the mean of the ranks of the sense of coherence

	SOC-I	SOC-C	SOC-S	SOC13
Mann-Whitney U	434.500	442.500	456.000	379.000
Wilcoxon W	1064.500	1072.500	1086.000	1009.000
Z	-3.432	-3.365	-3.230	-3.966

Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) .001 .001 .001 .000

a. Grouping Variable: Self reduced

The effect size calculated with the formula  $r=z/\sqrt{N}$  (Pallant, 2007, p. 225) was average ( $r>0.3$ ) in all cases, as a result the effect obtained is unlikely to have occurred by chance and seems to be quite important from a practical point of view (Vasiliu, 2018, p. 103).

The high overlap between the current self and the future self amplifies the motivational force. Anticipating the level of expectation of one's own becoming, the future self, recodes information about lived experiences in the socio-cultural environment and modifies the interpretation of the current self through its components: physical self, cognitive self, emotional self, social self and spiritual self. A high sense of coherence presumes that current situations are understood more clearly, more structured and more consistently (sense of coherence – comprehension factor), when an individual the person perceives new individual or external resources (sense of coherence –control factor) and achieving goals is more exciting and worthy of involvement (sense of coherence – meaning and purpose factor). On the other hand, Overlap between current self and future self is positively associated with self-efficacy (Vasiliu, 2019) and self-esteem (Vasiliu, Bratu, 2021). Statistically and practically significant positive associations were determined among the personality factors self-efficacy, self-esteem and sense of coherence (Vasiliu, 2016, 2017).

The relationship between the evolving sense of coherence, global and factorial, and the congruence between the current self and the future self is illustrated in Figure 2.

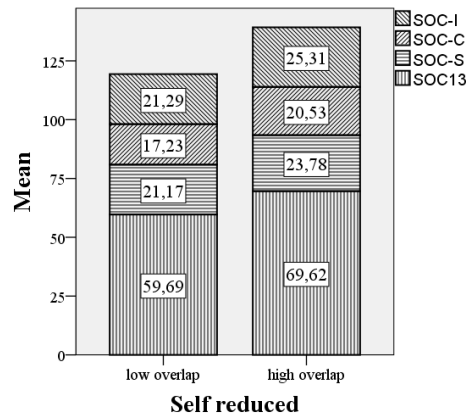


Figure 2. Relationship between the evolving sense of coherence, global and factorial, and the congruence between the current self and the future self

In order to verify the second null hypothesis we applied the Kruskal-Wallis test (Tab. 5). We found that there were statistically significant differences

( $p=0.002$ ) between the overlap of the current self and future self according to the type of prediction ( $P$ ).

Table 5. Intergroup differences, depending on the type of prediction ( $P$ ), between the overlap of the present self and the future self

Self	
Chi-Square	12.444
df	2
Asymp. Sig.	.002

a. Kruskal Wallis Test  
b. Grouping Variable: P

The intergroup differences, two at a time, were tested with the Mann-Whitney U test and the effect size was calculated with the formula  $r=z/\sqrt{N}$  (Pallant, 2007, p. 225).

Table 6. Mean of the ranks for overlapping the current self with the future self depending on the type of prediction operationalized ( $P$ )

	P	N	Mean Rank
Self	stable	48	29.50
	unusual	9	26.33
	press upward/downward	23	14.46

We found that the mean of the *Self* variable ranks for stable type are statistically significantly higher ( $U=279.000$ ,  $N1=48$ ,  $N2=23$ ,  $p=0.001$ ) than those for the *press upward/downward* type. The mean of the *Self* variable ranks for the *unusual* type are statistically significantly higher ( $U=56.500$ ,  $N1=9$ ,  $N2=23$ ,  $p=0.042$ ) than those for the *press upward/downward* type. We rejected the null hypothesis. The effect size is average,  $r=0.409$  respectively  $r=0.359$ , as a result the effect obtained is unlikely to have occurred by chance and seems to be quite important from a practical point of view (Vasiliu, 2018, p. 103). No statistically significant differences were found between participants with the predictions *stable* ( $p=0.586$ ) (Tab. 7).

Table 7. Differences, depending on the type of prediction ( $P$ ), between the overlap of the present self and the future self (*Self*)

	Self		
	<i>stable - press upward/downward</i>	<i>unusual- press upward/downward</i>	<i>stable - unusual</i>
Mann-Whitney U	279.000	56.500	192.000
Wilcoxon W	555.000	332.500	237.000
Z	-3.444	-2.034	-.545
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.042	.586

a. Grouping Variable: P

The relationship between the perception of the overlap of the present self with the future self and the types of prediction defined by Antonovsky (1993) was illustrated in Figure 3.

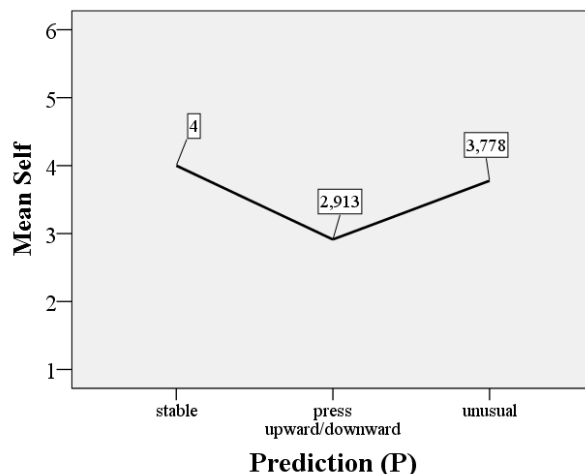


Figure 3. The relationship between the overlap of the current self with the future self (*Self*) and the type of prediction (*P*) in terms of the evolution of the sense of coherence

The direction of change, positive or negative, is given by the meaning and purpose factor of the sense of coherence (Antonovsky, 1987). In the absence of a vision of the future self, an individual may be more oriented towards the ideal self. By experiencing success „*here and now*” the sense of coherence can be pushed to a higher level. The lack of overlap or a slight overlap of the present self with the future self reduces the motivational force to achieve goals. The target is no longer as exciting and worthy of involvement and the end is no longer perceived as necessary or desired. The involvement in the process of decision-making and shaping everyday situations or influencing one's own destiny is lower, which corresponds to the tendency of decreasing the levels of the sense of coherence.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The results obtained from this research allow us to draw the following conclusions:

1. There are statistically significant associations between the overlap of current self and future self and sense of coherence (global and factorial). The effect size is average and as a result the effect obtained is unlikely to have occurred by chance and seems to be quite important from a practical point of view. The sense of coherence, global and factorial, tends to increase with the congruence between the current self and the future self. Explanations are based on correspondences between the level of motivational strength and cognitive and emotional changes resulting



from perceptions of the current self and the future self (Ersner-Hershfield and collaborators, 2009), and the characteristics of personality factors (Sîrbu, 2016; Haica, 2021; Rizeanu, 2020), in particular the sense of coherence (Antonovsky, 1987).

2. Participants for whom the prediction of the sense of coherence was *stable* and *unusual* showed a stronger and statistically significant overlap between the current self and the future self (Self) than those whose prediction was *press upward/downward*. The effect size is average and as a result the effect obtained is unlikely to have occurred by chance and seems to be quite important from a practical point of view. No statistically significant differences were found between participants with *stable* and *unusual* predictions. The explanations lie in the property of the meaning and purpose factor that guides the direction of change, positive or negative, of the sense of coherence. Focusing on the present, when experiencing success, can push the sense of coherence to a higher level. A low overlap, or lack thereof, between the current self and the future self reduces the motivational force to achieve goals. Demotivation can cause the sense of coherence to deteriorate especially in the absence of encouraging experiences.

All the constructs analysed are influenced, positively or negatively, by situational factors as well as the outcome of one's own experiences, by the motivation and interpretation of the world and oneself in relation to the world. Further research should look at the extent to which this picture is relatively stable.

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