



## PERCEPTION OF THE OVERLAP OF THE PRESENT SELF WITH THE FUTURE SELF AND SELF-ESTEEM

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### **Abstract**

*The present research aimed to highlight the relationships between self-esteem and the overlap between the present and future selves as well as gender differences in the evaluation of these constructs. Self-esteem is defined by Rosenberg (1965) as a global evaluation of oneself. The actual self is the product of one's experiences in the society and culture to which a person belongs. The future self is the level of expectation of one's own becoming. The representative sample comprised 96 participants, aged between 18 and 52, of whom 32 (33.3%) were male and 64 (66.7%) female. The data was collected during 2019. Statistical processing found significant positive associations between self-esteem and the overlap between the current and future selves ( $p=0.001$ ) with a moderate effect size ( $r=0.442$ ). No statistically significant differences were found in the assessment of the constructs analysed by gender. Explanations were based on the biunivocal nature of some characteristics of the two constructs and the influence of the social paradigm on psychological variables.*

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**Keywords:** *self-esteem, current self, future self*

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The ability to produce representations of the self and the world, stored in memory, has important consequences for learning, motivational processes and behaviours (Bandura, 1977). The representations also include the perspective of the future. Self-representations, observed through the lens of future actions, can enhance or inhibit behaviours and influence the exercise of perceived or latent skills.

The concept of Self was inspired by psychoanalysis, the ego psychology developed by Heinz Hartmann (1939) and the psychology of the self, Heinz Kohut (1971). The actual self is the product of one's experiences in the society and culture

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to which a person belongs. The actual self includes: the physical self, which is what I think about my body, including body image and sexual identity; the cognitive self, which is what I think about how I think, store and process information about the self and the world in my mind; the emotional self, which is how I perceive my own affects, feelings and emotions; the social self, how we feel perceived by those around us; and the spiritual self, which is about the values and important things in our lives. It distinguishes the "ideal self" which represents the level of aspiration, the level a person would like to reach in the more or less distant future. Excessive focus on the differences between the actual and ideal self can lead to feelings of frustration, sadness, depression or dissatisfaction with oneself. The future self is the level of expectation of one's own becoming. Expectations include aspirations and goals, on medium or long term, that we nurture. It acts as a significant force on the motivations behind our behaviours.

Hal Ersner-Hershfield, M. Tess Garton, Kacey Ballard, Gregory R. Samanez-Larkin, and Brian Knutson (2009) have shown that we are different, in terms of the feelings we experience, when we relate to the future self. Brain activity changes depending on how well we correlate our current image with our future one.

Self-esteem is defined by Rosenberg (1965) as a global evaluation of oneself. Depending on how one evaluates oneself, favorably or negatively, a person can feel good or bad. Awareness of one's own value is achieved by relating to others. Self-esteem is a construct with cognitive characteristics of self-protection and self-reinforcement. Negative self-beliefs can prevent further disappointments. This minimizes the impact of failures. High self-esteem correlates with expectations for success. In this case, the person shows increased optimism about future performance. There is a proactive attitude towards achieving the goal and perseverance in activities aimed at overcoming obstacles. The studies conducted by Tafarodi and Milne (2002), Robu (2013) and Vasiliu (2019), have shown a bifactorial structure of self-esteem.

## **2. OBJECTIVE AND HYPOTHESES**

### **2.1. OBJECTIVES**

The research aimed to highlight the relationships between the overlap of the current and future self and self-esteem and their characteristics by age and gender category.

### **2.2. HYPOTHESES**

H1: There are statistically significant relationships between the perception of overlap between current and future self and self-esteem.

H2: There are statistically significant gender differences in the perception of overlap between current and future self and in the level of self-esteem.

### 3. METHOD

The research was conducted on a representative sample of 96 participants, aged between 18 and 52 years, of whom 32 (33.3%) were male and 64 (66.7%) female. The data was collected during 2019. Self-esteem was assessed by Rosenberg's (1965) 10-item questionnaire, validated and rescaled for the Romanian population (Vasiliu, 2019).

The perception of overlap between the current self and the future *self* (*Self* overlap) was rated by the participants on a six-step scale where the first step represents no overlap, the second slight overlap, the third below average overlap, the fourth above average overlap, the fifth strong overlap and the last step total overlap between the two constructs. In order to better understand the meaning of each step of the scale, they were accompanied by a graphic representation - two circles, one associated with the current self and one with the future self, with different degrees of overlap. The data collection from the research participants resulted in the distribution shown in Figure 1.

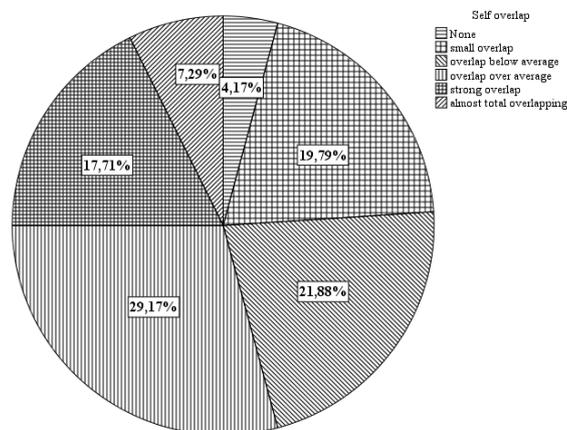


Figure 1. Distribution of the overlap between the present and future self

The method of completing the questionnaires, following instruction, was pencil and paper with no time limit. Participants were informed that the study is to be conducted in compliance with Articles 7, 8, 10 and 11 of the Code of Ethics of the profession of psychologist with the right to practice, adopted by Resolution 4CN/2013 of the Romanian College of Psychologists, as well as the provisions of

Annex 2, Part 1: Preamble of the Code of Disciplinary Procedure (COPSI, 2013). Participants were informed of the objectives and explained the content of the evidence used and that participation is voluntary, with respect for the confidentiality of personal data and evaluation results. At the same time they were informed that they can withdraw from the research at any time without any negative repercussions for them.

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

The 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: O<sub>1</sub> O<sub>2</sub>

where O<sub>1</sub> is the assessment of self-esteem with the Rosenberg questionnaire and O<sub>2</sub> is the assessment of the overlap between the current self and the 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 *self-esteem* variable was non-parametric (p=0.001). Non-parametric statistical tests were chosen.

Table 1. Normality test for the variable self-esteem

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov <sup>a</sup>		Shapiro-Wilk	
	Statistical	df	Statistical	df
Self-esteem	,145	96	,911	96

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Box-Plot analysis showed that the scale-type distribution, self-esteem, contains no outliers (Fig. 2). The variables *Self overlap* and *Gender* are categorical.

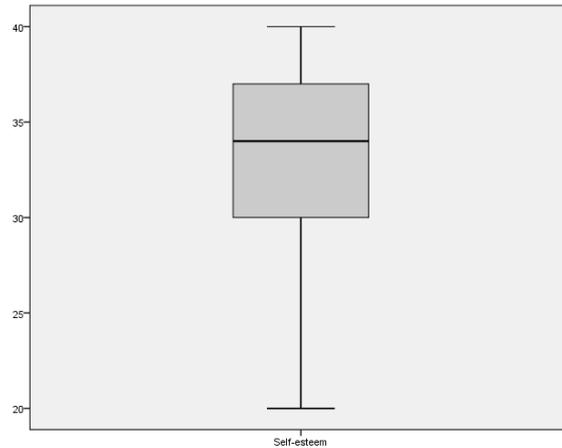


Figure 2. Box-Plot analysis for the distribution of self-esteem

Kendall's tau\_b statistical test was applied to test the first null hypothesis. We found statistically significant associations ( $K\tau=0.442$ ,  $p=0.001$ ,  $95\%CI= 0.265 - 0.5902$ ) between self-esteem and the overlap of current self and future self (Table 2). The effect size ( $r=0.442$ ) is moderate for a statistical power of 95%, which means that the effect seems to be quite important from a practical point of view (Vasiliu, 2018, pp. 102-103). We rejected the null hypothesis.

Table 2. The association between self-esteem and the superimposition of the present and future self

	1.	2.
1. Self		,442** ,000
2. Self-esteem	,442** ,000	

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

The association relationship is positive, which means that a perception of a strong overlap between the present self and the future self implies high self-esteem. On the one hand, strong self-esteem leads to positive expectations of success. The person shows increased optimism about future performance based on present capabilities. On the contrary, low esteem leads to uncertainty about the future. The person refuses to explore the future for fear of failure. On the other hand, a strong overlap between the current and future self helps to set realistic and achievable goals. The person can set strategies, based on current skills and resources, so that achieving the goal is as easy as possible. The perception of small successes leads to a

strengthening of self-esteem. Studies supporting these findings have been conducted by Carver & Scheier (1982), Chraif & Rizeanu (2021), Cosmoiu & Rizeanu (2020), Gergen, Gergen & Meter (1972), Greenwald & Pratkanis (1984), Higgins (1989), Kihlstrom & Cantor (1984), McGuire & McGuire (1988), Nurra & Oyserman (2018), Vasiliu (2019a).

The Mann-Whitney U statistical test was used to test the second null hypothesis. The mean ranks for self-esteem and the overlap between current and future self are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Rank averages for self-esteem and the overlap of current self and future self

	Gender	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Self	male	32	51.53	1649.00
	female	64	46.98	3007.00
	Total	96		
Self-esteem	male	32	52.22	1671.00
	female	64	46.64	2985.00
	Total	96		

We found no statistically significant differences between the mean ranks of self-esteem or perception of overlap between current and future self (Table 4) between male and female participants ( $p > 0.05$ ).

Table 4. Comparison of mean ranks, by gender, for self-esteem and overlap of current self with future self

	Self	Self-esteem
Mann-Whitney U	927.000	905.000
Wilcoxon W	3007.000	2985.000
Z	-,773	-,927
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	,439	,354

a. Grouping Variable: Gender

For this statistical test the effect size was calculated with the formula  $r = z / \sqrt{N}$  (Pallant, 2007, p. 225). For self-esteem  $r = 0.09$  and for perception of overlap  $r = 0.08$ . The effect size is small so it appears that the null hypothesis is supported, there is no statistically or practically significant effect (Vasiliu, 2018, p. 103). We have retained the null hypothesis.

Social development has changed many of the paradigms of the past. The fluidity of occupations, of gender-specific activities, the tendency to equalize

attitudes and behaviours, have led to a blurring or even cancellation of psychological differences between people, of how they make choices or set goals. The choice of coping type does not correlate with gender, but rather with perceived abilities, with assigned meanings (Kreitler, Kreitler, 1993). Gender differences in performance or performance skills have been found to diminish or not exist (Gneezy, Niederle, Rustichini, 2003, Feingold, 1988, Feng, Spence, Pratt, 2007, Feingold, 1994, Shulman, Ben-Artzi, 2003). A person will exhibit a certain behaviour based on expectations, planning and prediction. Personal variables are seen both as a product of learning and as a flexible process of response adaptation to context (Rotter, 1982, Bandura, 1986). The attribution of male and female behaviours is due to roles rather than as a consequence of specific traits in traditional cultures. In modern society there is an increasing emphasis on equal opportunities without gender or strict role limitations. The debut of this way of thinking, in the Romanian space, appears in 1815 and develops together with the trends in other European countries (Mihăilescu, 2001).

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

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

1. There is a positive, statistically significant, medium effect size relationship between self-esteem and perceived overlap between the current self and the future self. Previous research anticipates such a relationship given the bi-univocal nature of some of the features involved in modelling the constructs studied. A strong overlap between the current and future self requires confidence in one's own strengths, valuing one's ability to achieve goals and goal orientation. All of this requires high self-esteem. Self-esteem is part of the cognitive schema relating to the self. Self-esteem is conceptualized as a one-dimensional cognitive construct with the role of self-reinforcement and self-protection. There are authors who consider self-esteem as a two-dimensional structure comprising the factors: self-acceptance and self-evaluation (Robu, 2013, Vasiliu, 2019) or the factors: positive self-evaluation and negative self-evaluation (Afari, Ward, Khine, 2012).

2. No gender differences were found in the assessment of self-esteem or the overlap between the current self and the future self. There is a growing body of research, which finds that gender differences in psychosocial constructs are diminishing or even disappearing. The direction in which society is moving favours the blurring of gender boundaries and the liberalisation of roles. The attribution of behaviours is determined by these roles and less and less by specific traits. The meanings of attributions outline the level of self-esteem and the perception of overlap between the current self and future self.

The results of the research captured a specific picture of the development of society up to the time of SARS-COV-2 pandemic crisis. Restrictive measures, stress generated by uncertainty, the unknown, isolation, deterioration of interpersonal relationships and challenges generated by the global health situation have had an impact on the psycho-social picture. Future research should investigate the extent to which relationships between the constructs studied are preserved and whether personal variables, such as gender, discern their evaluation.

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