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## INTRODUCTION

How would you answer the question "who am I?" According to the Self-Memory System (Conway, 2005), the salience of stored self-concepts is influenced by the retrieval of particular autobiographical memories. In line with this view, recent research suggests that the retrieval of **self-defining memories (SDMs)**—the memories of the most important events in our lives— influences an individual's current sense of self and identity, notably by increasing the tendency to conceptualize oneself in relation to psychological traits (Charlesworth, Allen, Havelka, & Moulin, 2016).

In addition to being supported by such memories, the current sense of self may also be nourished by the anticipation of meaningful future events—referred to as **self-defining future projections (SDFPs)** (D'Argembeau, Lardi, & Van der Linden, 2012). To test this hypothesis, this study examined whether and how the generation of **SDFPs** and **SDMs** modulates subsequent self-definitions.

More specifically, this study aimed to :

- Replicate the results of Charlesworth et al. (2016) for **SDMs**
- Test the hypothesis that **SDFPs** also modulate one's current sense of self and identity
- Compare the effects of **SDFPs** with those of **SDMs**

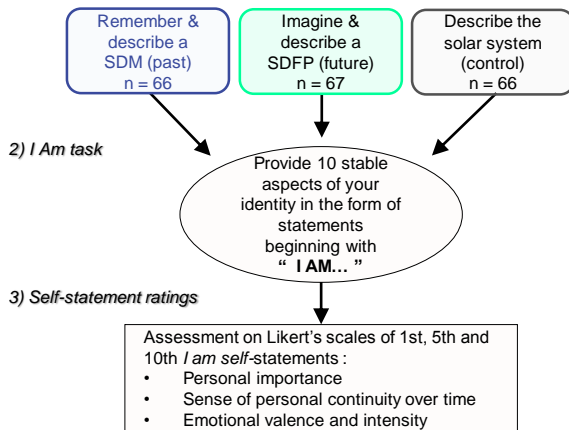
## METHOD

### Participants

199 participants aged 18-35 years ( $M = 22$ ,  $SD = 2.6$ ; 44 males) took an online questionnaire (15 min) and were randomly allocated to one of three conditions.

### Procedure

#### 1) Self-defining event manipulation – 3 conditions



### Data coding

Self-statements were coded according to 3 categories :

- **Psychological** : personality traits (e.g., shy, ambitious, messy, loyal)
- **Social** : social categories (e.g., student, brother, from Liège, single)
- **Physical** : apparent attributes (e.g., small, young, blond, pale)

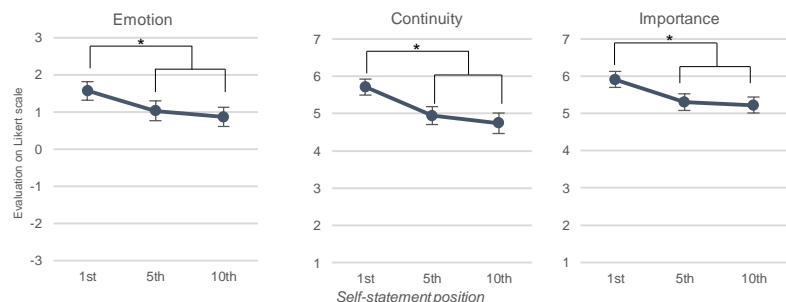
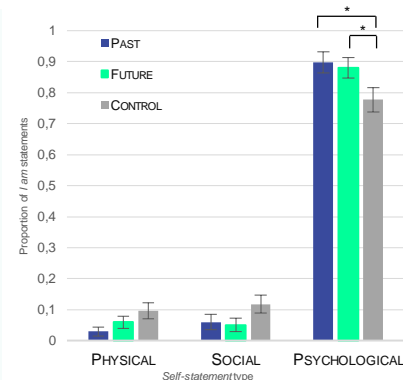
## RESULTS

Mixed ANOVA – 3 (Group : Past, Future, Control)  
X 3 (Self-statement type : Psy, Soc, Phys)

- No principal effect of group [ $F(2, 196) = 0.41$ ;  $p = 0.664$ ]
- Principal effect of self-statement type [ $F(2, 392) = 1958.14$ ;  $p < .001$ ]
- Interaction between groups and self-statement type [ $F(4, 392) = 10.61$ ;  $p < .001$ ]

Bonferroni post-hoc tests –  
Difference between groups for psychological self-statements

- Past vs Control  $p < 0.05$  \*
- Future vs Control  $p < 0.05$  \*
- No difference between Past & Future groups



Mixed ANOVAS – 3 (position) x 3 (group) for each scale

- Effect of position on self-statement ratings :  
Continuity [ $F(2, 392) = 20.12$ ,  $p < .001$ ]  
Emotion [ $F(2, 392) = 8.75$ ,  $p < .001$ ]  
Importance [ $F(2, 392) = 15.34$ ,  $p < .001$ ]

Paired *t*-tests comparisons (corrected) for each scale

- 1st statement vs 5th statement \*
- 1st statement vs 10th statement \*
- No difference between 5th & 10th statements

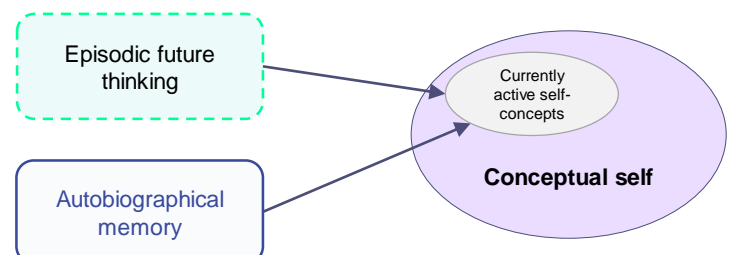
- No difference between groups and no interaction

## CONCLUSION

- Participants engaging in **SDM** descriptions generated significantly more psychological self-statements than those in the control condition, thus replicating the results of Charlesworth et al. (2016)
- Participants engaging in **SDFP** descriptions were also more likely to define themselves in relation to their psychological traits. These results support our hypothesis that the anticipation of a meaningful future event modulates one's current sense of self and identity
- The 1<sup>st</sup> statements were judged to be more important, more positive and giving a higher sense of personal continuity than the 5<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> statements, suggesting that personal importance, continuity, and emotional value modulated the accessibility of self-concepts. This effect did not differ between groups, indicating that these characteristics of self-statements are not modulated by descriptions of a **SDM** or a **SDFP**.

➤ Together, these results suggest that the act of projecting oneself into meaningful future events modulates the current sense of self to the same extent as autobiographical memory retrieval, by increasing the accessibility of psychological, trait-like self-conceptions.

➤ While there is a debate on whether conceptual self-knowledge is dependent on autobiographical memory, Charlesworth et al. (2016) demonstrated that autobiographical memory retrieval increases the access to trait self-knowledge, and therefore that these two constructs are not entirely independent. Our results provide further support to this idea and further suggest that episodic future thinking can also influence our current sense of self and identity by activating particular self-concepts.



## REFERENCES

- Charlesworth, L. A., Allen, R. J., Havelka, J., & Moulin, C. J. A. (2016). Who am I? Autobiographical retrieval improves access to self-concepts. *Memory*, 24(8), 1033-1041.
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- D'Argembeau, A., Lardi, C., & Van der Linden, M. (2012). Self-defining future projections : Exploring the identity function of thought about the future. *Memory*, 20(2), 110-120.