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Future Self-Identification is Influenced by the Vividness, Similarity, and Positivity of a Future Self Construct

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Abstract

Identifying strongly with a salient future self increases future-oriented behaviour. Self-report measures can detect variations in future self-identification within and between individuals on the dimensions of vividness, similarity, and positivity. We adapted the Self Association Task (SAT) to detect preconscious perceptual processing biases towards future self-related information. Participants were instructed to imagine different versions of their future selves, constructed using one of the three dimensions mentioned above. These imaginations were followed by the implicit SAT and explicit self-report measures of future self-identification. The similar and positive future self-imaginings led to increased subjective future self-identification. While a classic self-prioritisation effect was prominent throughout, similarity constructs of the future self also elicited processing biases on accuracy but not response time. As suggested by philosophical theories on self-continuity, the construct of a future self can influence future self-identification and direct future-oriented cognitions and behaviours.