



Future self-continuity increases concerns for Individualizing moral foundations

Andrej Simić

Università degli Studi di Milano-Bicocca

Social Psychology of the Future, 2nd June
2022

Morality and the temporal dimension



- Positive trajectory of the moral self: our past (im)moral acts can strategically be used to define who we are in the present (Stanley & De Brigard, (2019; Stanley, Henne, & De Brigard, 2019)
- Future moral transgressions are seen as more severe than past ones (Burns et al., 2012; Caouette et al., 2012; Caruso, 2010)
- Focusing on the future elicits a strong tendency to consider the morality of present actions (Gaesser et al., 2018; Monroe et al., 2017; Vonasch & Sjästad, 2021; Wu et al., 2017)

Our focus: a specific type of future-focus **related to the Self**

How does connectedness to the future self affect present moral judgements?

Future self-continuity

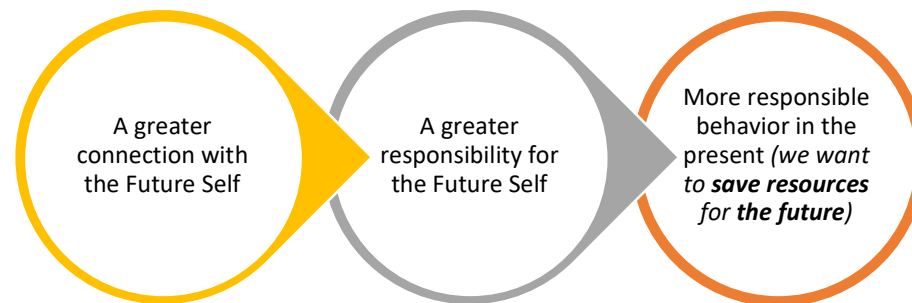


Future self-continuity is determined by the degree **one feels connected** to their future self (Parfit's, 1971, 1984; Multiple self models, Schelling, 1984; Elster, 1985; Thaler & Sherfin, 1981; Bartels & Rips, 2010; Hershfield et al., 2011).

The relationship with the temporally distant future self is no different than the treatment of other people (Pronin & Ross, 2006; Pronin et al., 2008; Burum et al., 2016)

Individuals will feel less connected to their future self if they perceive greater Self-changes in the future (Bartels & Rips, 2010; Bartels & Urminsky, 2011)

Future self-continuity and moral behavior



Future self-continuity **decreases temporal discounting**, the tendency to overvalue rewards closer to the present (e.g., Ersner-Hershfield, Wimmer et al., 2009; Ersner-Hershfield, Garton et al., 2009, Hershfield et al., 2011)

Future self-continuity decreases **specific** moral transgressions:

1. Lying, false promises, and cheating (unethical behavior; Hershfield et al., 2012)
2. Delinquent behavior (Van Gelder et al., 2013, 2015)

Hypotheses

- Future self-continuity might increase concerns for:
 1. Moral values that are considered to be temporally stable
 2. Moral values that are perceived to be more central



Study 1: method

Participants:

195 participants ($N_{female} = 110$, $N_{male} = 82$, $N_{other} = 3$; $M_{age} = 26.70$, $sd = 11.50$)

Materials and Procedure:

Online study (Qualtrics)

1. The Future Self Continuity Questionnaire ([FSCQ], Sokol & Serper, 2019)
 - Similarity (4 items, e.g., How similar are your beliefs now to what they will be like 10 years from now?)
 - Vividness (3 items, e.g., How vividly can you imagine what you will be like in 10 years from now?)
 - Positivity (3 items, e.g., Do you like what you will be like 10 years from now?)
2. The Italian Moral Foundations Questionnaire ([MFQ], Bobbio, Nencini & Scarrica, 2011)
 - Individualizing Moral Foundations (MFs) subscale (12 items, e.g., Justice is the most important requirement for a society.)
 - Binding MFs subscale (18 items, e.g. It is more important to be a team player than to express oneself.)
3. 60-item HEXACO-PI (Ashton & Lee, 2009)

Results:

Study 1: results

- Individualizing MFs were related to FCSQ Similarity ($r = .22$, $p = .002$)
- Binding MFs showed a smaller yet significant relation with the FSCQ Positive affect subscale ($r = .17$, $p = .019$)
- No other correlational relationships reached significance levels

Study 2: method

Participants:

138 (N_{female} = 67, N_{male} = 70, N_{other} = 1; M_{age} = 33.62, sd = 13.83)

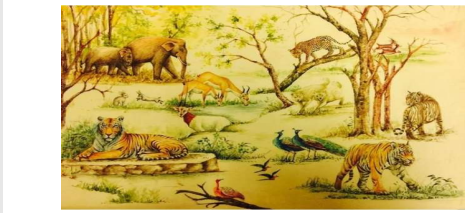
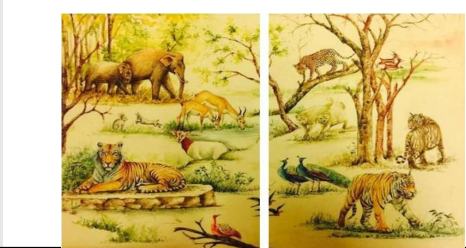
Materials and Procedure:

Random assignment to: Control (N = 66) vs. Experimental (N = 72) condition

- Social self-esteem subscale of the HEXACO-PI (Lee & Ashton, 2017) and the Self-esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965)
- The Future Self Continuity Questionnaire ([FSCQ], Sokol & Serper, 2019)
- The Italian Moral Foundations Questionnaire ([MFQ], Bobbio, Nencini & Scarrica, 2011)

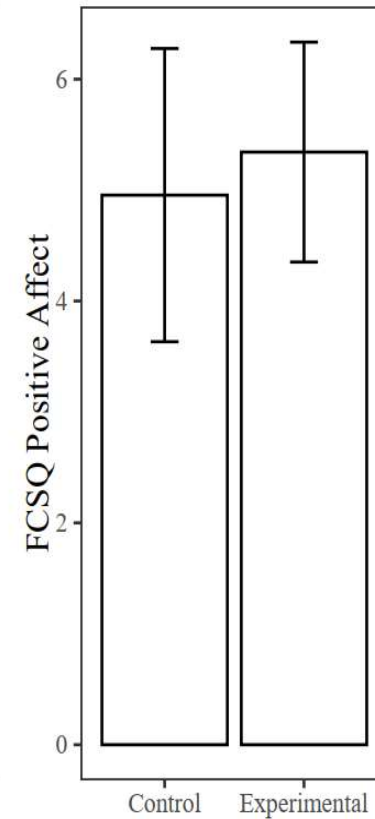
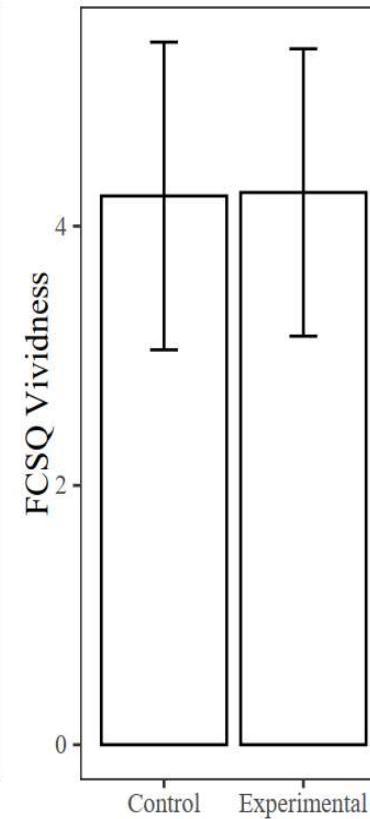
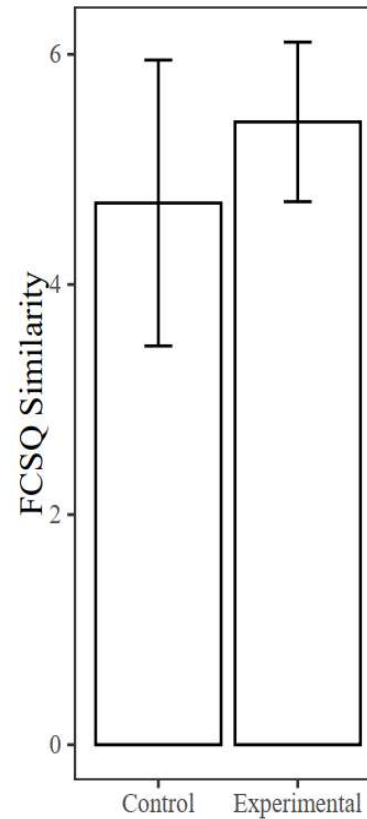
Study 2: method

The experimental manipulation

Group	First task	Second task
Control	Feature identification 	Letter-counting <p>Gli umani sono diversamente capaci rispetto alle altre speci viventi sul pianeta. Siamo capaci di capire le caratteristiche della tecnologia e dell'ingegneria. Quindi perché siamo così propensi a fare errori? E perché commettiamo gli stessi errori più volte? Quando il primario Laurie Santos (psicologa) del laboratorio di cognizione comparativa dell'università di Yale sottopose la questione al suo team, la prima cosa a cui pensarono furono gli errori nel giudizio morale che hanno portato al collasso dei mercati finanziari. Santos ha proposto due risposte a questa domanda: o gli umani hanno progettato un mondo troppo complesso per essere compreso pianamente, oppure siamo propensi a prendere decisioni errate.</p> <p>Il numero di volte che la lettera 'E' è presente nel testo è:</p> <input type="text"/>
Experimental	Picture comparison 	Letter-writing <p>Passiamo ora alla parte successiva dello studio.</p> <p>Su molti aspetti importanti, le persone rimangono le stesse nel tempo. Recenti ricerche in psicologia hanno scoperto che, alla base, le persone rimangono molto simili, se confrontiamo un periodo di tempo con un altro.</p> <p><u>Ti chiediamo di pensare a come sarai tra 10 anni</u> ed elencare nel riquadro qui sotto tutti gli aspetti su cui pensi che <u>sarai simile</u> a come sei ora.</p> <p>Prenditi almeno due minuti per pensare e scrivere la risposta a questa domanda. Non sarà possibile passare alla pagina successiva prima che siano trascorsi due minuti, come mostrato dal timer nell'angolo in alto a sinistra. Puoi impiegare più di due minuti, se ti serve tempo aggiuntivo.</p>

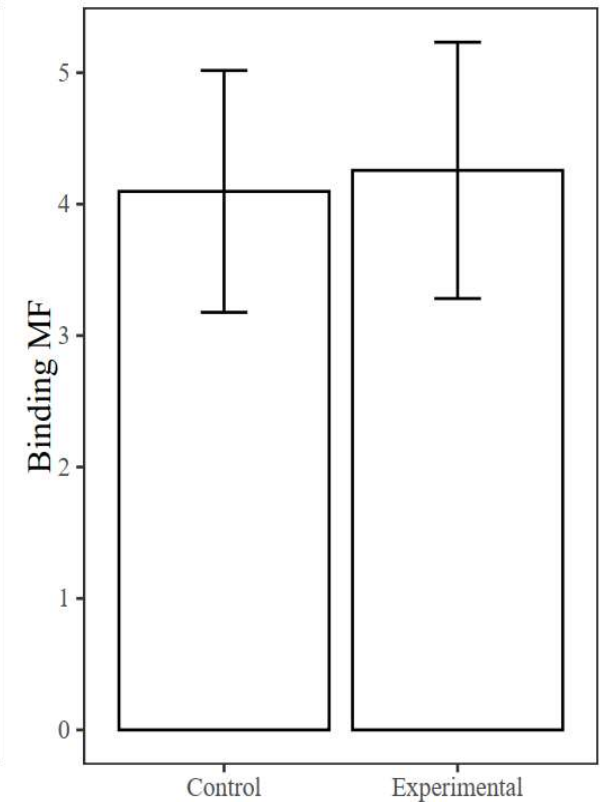
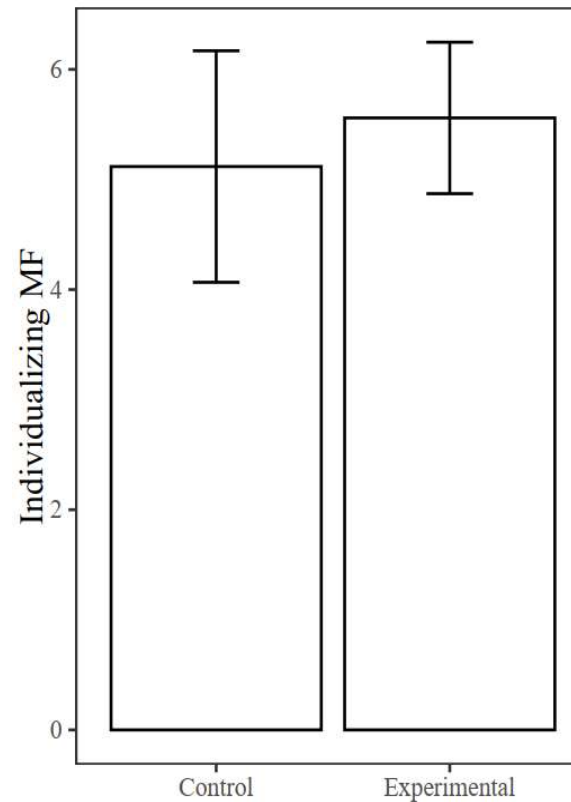
Study 2

- **Results**
- *Manipulation check: participants in the experimental group reported **higher levels** of Similarity with the Future self*
- No differences in the other two FSCQ subscales



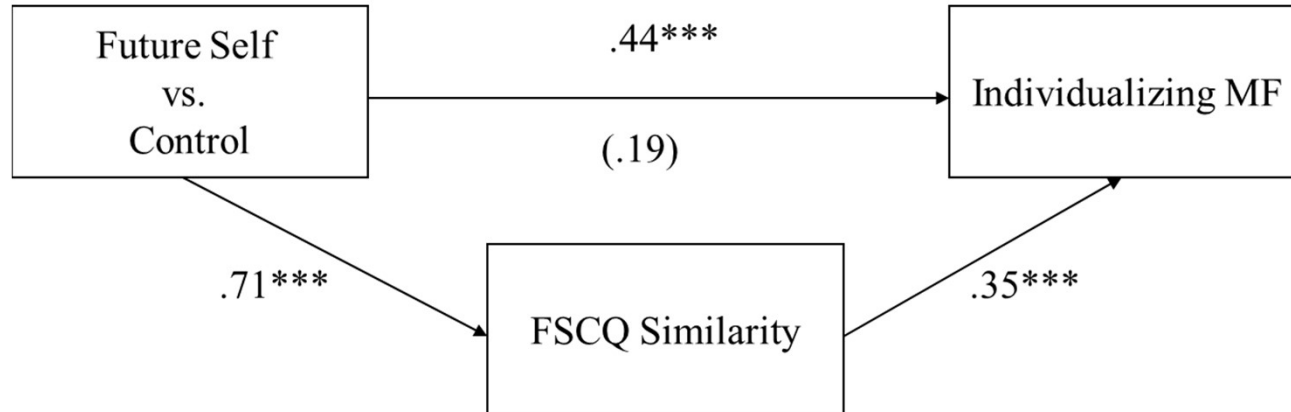
Study 2

- Significant group differences on binding and individualizing MFs
- Univariate follow-ups: **significant differences in Individualizing MFs**



Study 2

- Both measures of self-esteem **were not significant moderators** of the experimental effect
- **Similarity with the Future Self mediated** the experimental effect:



Study 3: methods

Participants:

250 (N_{female} = 90, N_{male} = 157, N_{other} = 3; M_{age} = 27.04, sd = 9.40)

Materials and Procedure:

Random assignment to: Control (N = 128); Future self (N = 122)

The manipulation consisted of the same tasks used in Study 2

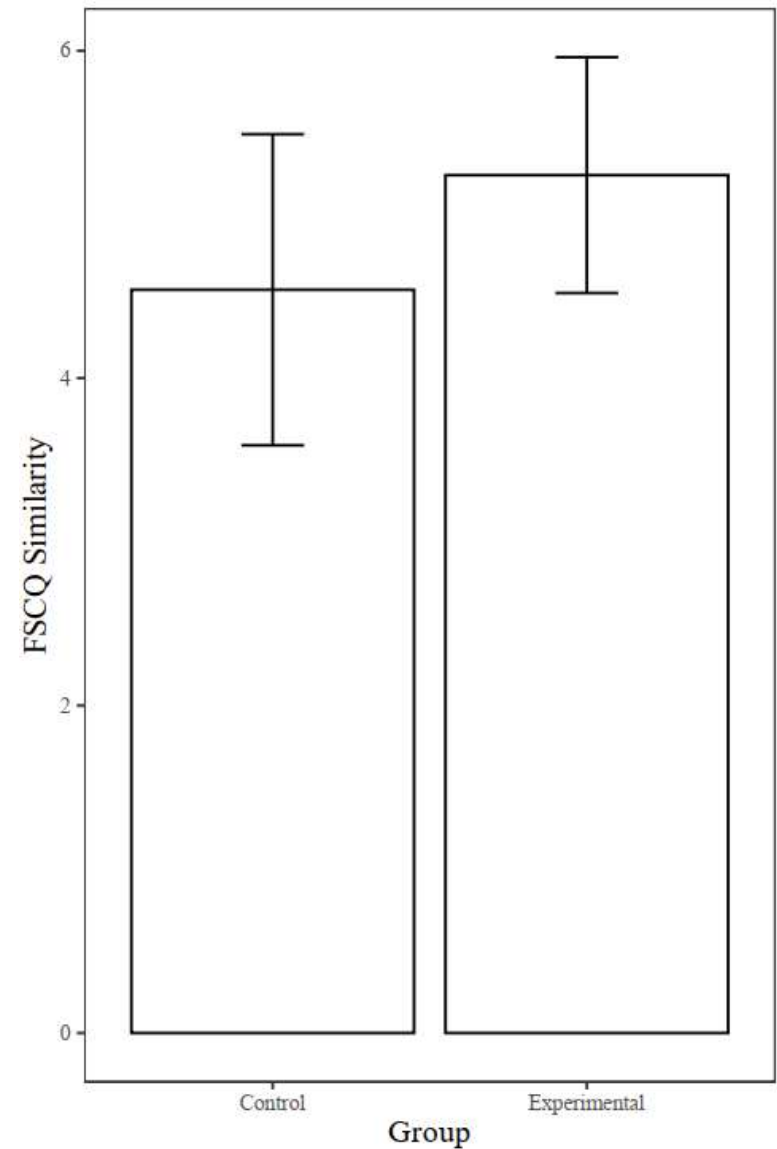
The Future Self Continuity Questionnaire ([FSCQ], Sokol & Serper, 2019)

The Italian Moral Foundations Questionnaire ([MFQ], Bobbio, Nencini & Scarrica, 2011)

The Moral Internalization Scale (Aquino & Reed, 2002)

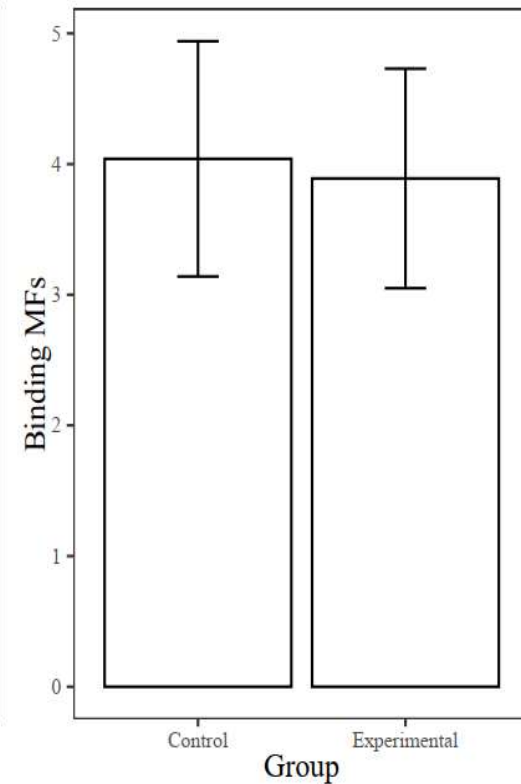
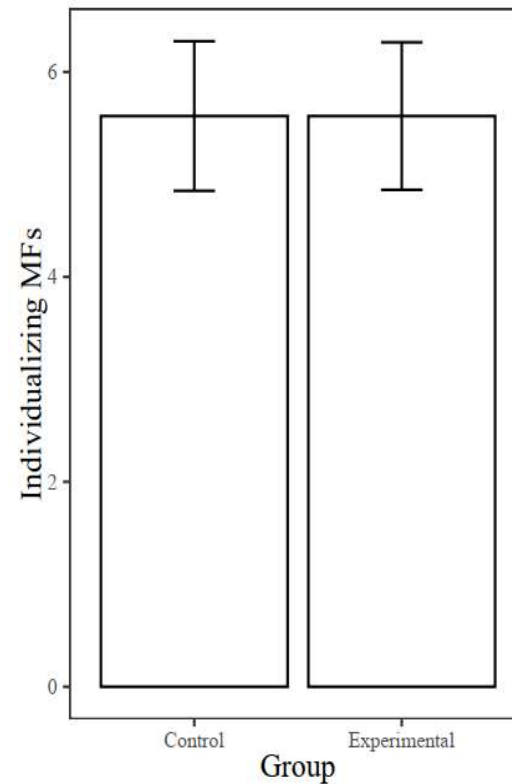
Study 3

- **Results:**
- *Manipulation check:* groups differed on the FSCQ Similarity
- Once again the experimental group scored higher on the FCSQ Similarity Subscale



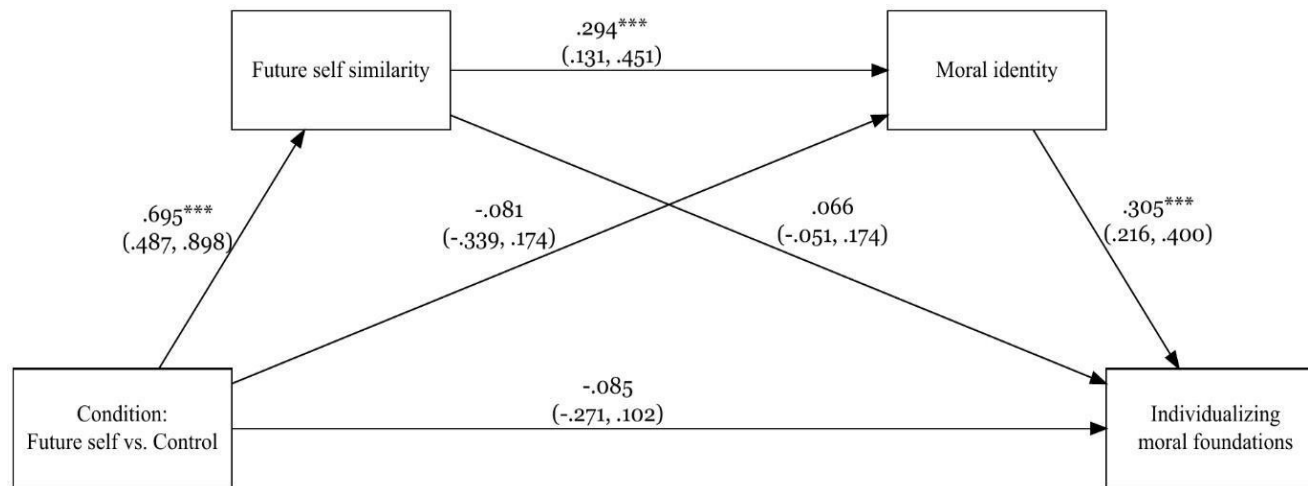
Study 3

- No significant differences on both two MFQ subscales
- Follow-up univariate tests:
 1. **No significant differences on Individualizing MFs**
 2. **No significant differences on Binding MFs**



Study 3

- A significant serial mediation model (Model 6; Hayes, 2018)
- The manipulation **indirectly increased** Individualizing MFs through Future self-similarity and Moral identity centrality:



Discussion

- Expecting the future self to maintain current traits, values, and mindsets might induce a *stronger reliance* on Harm and Fairness when making moral judgments
- High future self-continuity might promote more concerns about broader and more stable moral issues
- Increasing future self-continuity might *make traits that compromise the moral identity more central* and thus promote a greater focus on individualizing MFs

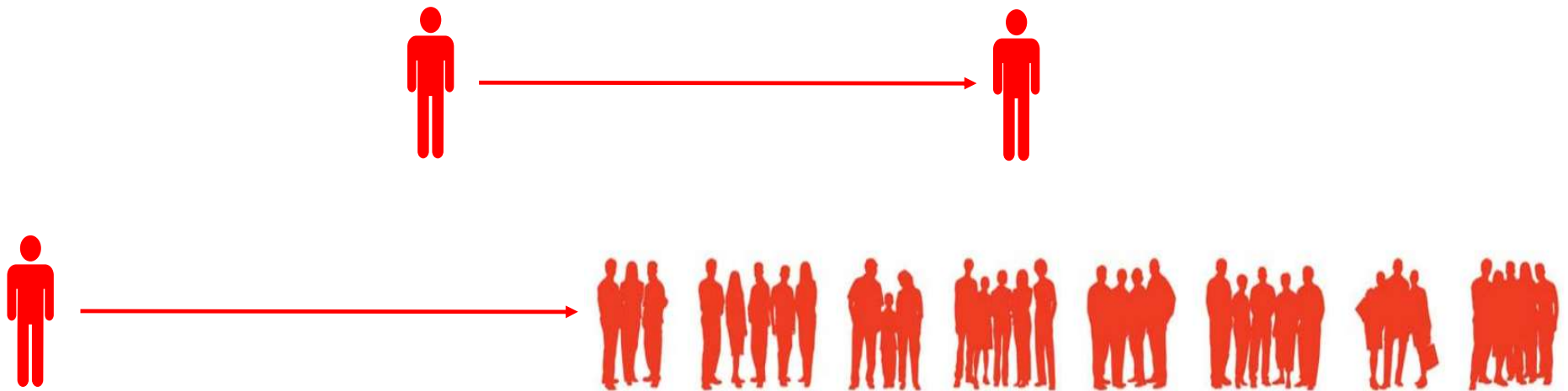
Future avenues

- Extension to the group-level (collective future continuity)
- Exploring the effect of Collective Future Continuity on group-level moral behavior (e.g., prosocial behavior)
- Development of applications to promote Future Self (collective) continuity



Take-home message

Considering the well-being of one's future self could make us more sensitive to the well-being of others





Contact information:

a.simic@campus.unimib.it