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WHO AM I? ANALYZING SELF-DESCRIPTIONS ACROSS THE LIFESPAN

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A considerable body of research on self-descriptions across the lifespan has established a general pattern of progressive development of self-representations. This process begins with specific characteristics in childhood and evolves into a multidimensional framework in adulthood. However, the bifurcation of self-descriptive structures at specific age intervals remains poorly understood. Even in the most thoroughly studied developmental period—childhood through adolescence (e.g., Damon & Hart, 1982; Harter, 2012)—questions persist, such as the emergence of the ‘I-self’ agency and the development of a time perspective. Recent research offers complementary perspectives, focusing on self-descriptions across various developmental stages (Tamm et al., 2024), situational variability (Amato et al., 2020), gender and body-related themes (Oppegaard & Miguel, 2024), and self-descriptions in social media (Ricciardi, 2024), among others. However, the generalizability of these findings is constrained by the significant influence of language and cultural context on self-descriptions (Cousins, 1989; Visapää, 2012; Rhee et al., 1995). In light of these considerations, our research aimed to investigate how Lithuanians of various ages describe themselves. The sample comprised 160 participants, aged 4 to 97 years, recruited through purposeful sampling. Participants answered two open-ended questions: ‘Who are you?’ and ‘What kind of person are you?’ For preliminary data analysis, content analysis using a fourfold categorization scheme (Cousins, 1989; Hartley, 1970), a widely used framework for analyzing self-descriptions, was employed. It suggested 4 basic analytic categories—physical, social, attributive, and global—each representing a different level of abstraction. The final analytic schema emerged through an iterative process aimed at encompassing all aspects of the collected self-descriptions. Findings supported a structural organization around these fundamental categories, primarily concerning the ‘Me-self.’ New insights emerged regarding the ‘I-self,’ including the earlier-than-expected appearance of a global self and the distinctive self-descriptions across age groups, reflecting unique societal contexts at specific historical moments.