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Suggested APA style reference:

Marshall, A., & Guenette, F. (2008, July). *Possible selves: Concepts, applications, and implications for career practice and policy*. Paper based on a program presented at the National Career Development Association Global Conference, Washington, DC.



POSSIBLE SELVES: CONCEPTS, APPLICATIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR CAREER PRACTICE AND POLICY

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NCDA Conference

July 9-11, 2008

Washington, DC

Career Transitions

- ▣ School-to-work transitions are a major developmental challenge facing young people (Arnett, 2006; Blustein, 2006)
- ▣ Given societal shifts, impact of a global economy, & increasing emphasis on technological literacy, youth must participate early & actively in career planning
- ▣ Current labour market trends indicate most workers will need to consider new employment options and pathways throughout careers

Social Constructivist and Social Cognitive Career Theories

- ▣ Individuals are active agents in their development (Blustein, 2006; Savickas, 1995)
- ▣ Development is contextual in nature
- ▣ Multidimensional relations exist between individuals and their multiple worlds (social, school, family, etc.)
- ▣ “Selves” are socially constructed and maintained in narrative and in context
- ▣ SCCT: Four variables influence career behavior: behaviors, self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, & goals (Lent, Hackett, & Brown, 1999)
- ▣ Cultural context impacts the variables

Cultural Diversity

- ▣ Culture comprises “those understandings and ways of understanding that are judged to be characteristic of a discernable group” (Chambers, 2000, p.852)
- ▣ Pedersen (1991) views cultural, demographic, and personal constructs as differentiating minority from dominant culture. Culture denotes socially-constructed differences
- ▣ In our work we consider gender, age, ethnicity, place, rural/urban residence, and other factors to be examples of cultural differences
- ▣ e.g., the socio-historical experience of First Nations populations & the impact of Indian residential school system make it challenging for First Nations youth

Self Maps

- ▣ Are concrete representations of self
- ▣ Provide a perspective on the self, including supports, strengths, obstacles
- ▣ Provide both macroscopic and microscopic views of the individual
- ▣ Act as permanent records that allow the creators to return for review & revision

Possible Selves

- ▣ “Possible selves” is a future-oriented and personalized form of self-concept that links to motivation (Markus & Nurius, 1986)
- ▣ Possible Selves represent the hopes, dreams and fears of people considering their future
- ▣ Construction of possible selves involves using imagination and reflection to create a set of
 - hoped-for,
 - expected, and
 - feared future selves

Possible Selves Mapping

- ▣ Generates hopes & fears for the future
- ▣ Develops understanding and appreciation of personal values
- ▣ Connects current activities with hopes and fears for the future
- ▣ Identifies factors that affect sense of self and personal potential
- ▣ Increases motivation
- ▣ Marshall & Guenette (2008) DVD & manual

Seven steps in the Possible Selves Mapping Process

1. Creating a Possible Selves Brainstorm Map.
Brainstorming hoped for and feared possible selves (on a brainstorm map or paper)
2. Grouping and naming the hoped for & feared selves
3. Debriefing the brainstorm map
4. Identifying most likely, least likely and most wanted hoped for selves and feared selves
5. Transferring brainstorm information to overview map
6. "Things to do right now." Exploring how to achieve or avoid various hopes and fears
7. Overall impressions, thoughts & feedback

Step 1. Creating a Possible Selves Brainstorm Map

- ▣ Introduce the concepts
- ▣ Give participants green and yellow post-it sticky notes (or file cards)
- ▣ Invite participant to write as many hoped for selves as possible, one per note – then do the same for feared selves
- ▣ Encourage them to be bold and to include dreams and “long shots”

Step 2. Grouping Hoped for and Feared Selves

- ▣ Have participant arrange hoped for and feared selves into groups or categories and to give each group a name or title
- ▣ Groups may have mixed hopes & fears, or may be all hopes or all fears

Step 3.

Debriefing the Brainstorm Map

- ▣ Have the participant explain how and why they have categorized and arranged their selves
- ▣ Ask what led them to choose that grouping, or that name, etc.
- ▣ They may change or add selves as they explain the map – this is fine

Step 4. Identifying Most Likely & Most Wanted or Feared Selves

- ▣ Ask participant to work with hoped for selves – choosing which hoped for self is most likely to occur (place a box around this one), least likely to occur (place a circle around this one), and the hoped for self they really want (place a star beside this one) – these may overlap
- ▣ Do the same with feared selves

Step 5. Transferring Brainstorm to the Possible Selves Overview Map

- ▣ Transfer most likely (square), least likely (circle) and most wanted (star) hoped for self to the Overview map
- ▣ Do the same for the fears
- ▣ Facilitate exploration and discussion with open questions and curiosity (e.g., what led you to ... and how do you feel about that ...)

[illegible]

Step 6. Things to do right now

- ▣ Connect or “anchor” their hopes and fears to behaviours, e.g., For most likely to happen hope: What are some things you can do right now to ensure this hoped for self will happen?
- ▣ Least likely hope: What are some things you can do right now if you want to give this hope more of a chance?
- ▣ Most likely feared self: What can you do to make sure this does not happen?
- ▣ Most feared self: What can you do to avoid this?
- ▣ Explore each hope and fear
- ▣ Also ask what can you do next week? Next month? Next year? Who can help with this?

Step 7. Overall Impressions, Thoughts and Feedback

Participants can reflect on these questions during the debrief of the overview map:

- ▣ What did you learn about yourself from this interview?
- ▣ What surprised you?
- ▣ Think about your most important hoped-for selves – how would your life be if these came true?
- ▣ What other activities could you engage in to help bring about (or avoid) your most important possible selves
- ▣ What resources and supports do you think you might need to achieve your most important possible selves or avoid your feared selves?

Additional points

- ▣ Encourage clients to look at the big picture of their lives and not just a future career or job – family, personal values, relationships, interests, etc.
- ▣ Allow time for clients to reflect on choices, brainstorm arrangement, and overall map – many important insights come up at this time

Possible Selves Mapping Applications

- ▣ Use PS Mapping to collect information about client interests and values, to develop short and long-term plans, & to evaluate, monitor, and refine plans
- ▣ With a few adaptations, Possible Selves Mapping can be used in a group setting and in workshops
- ▣ Possible selves maps can help develop resiliency in clients. The ability to self-appraise, realistically evaluate capacity for actions and expected outcomes, actively problem solve, change perspectives, and have self-knowledge are valuable resources clients can develop through reflection
- ▣ Policy and program applications in work & education

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