

The Hopes and Fears of Counsellors-In-Training

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Possible selves are the selves we imagine ourselves becoming in the future, the selves we hope to become, the selves we are afraid we may become, and the selves we fully expect we will become. Possible selves can have a very concrete impact on how people initiate and structure their actions, both in realizing positive possible selves and in preventing the realization of negative possible selves. Since envisioning an action entails previewing a sequence of events that would likely accompany that action, the creation of elaborated possible selves achieving the sought-after goal has a direct impact on motivation. Possible selves are also vivid pictures representing the self's potential to actually accomplish hoped-for selves or avoid feared ones.

Research of this type is important because it allows counsellors in training and counsellor educators to understand more about the process of how counselling identity is formed at different stages of a graduate program in counselling (at the beginning and at the conclusion of the program) and to assist students in linking strategies with possible selves to better promote behaviour change. Innovative interventions can then be developed that integrate program initiatives to support the goals of counsellors-in-training in addition to individual-level interventions targeting articulation of feared possible selves and specific strategies intended to facilitate attainment of possible selves.

The purpose of this research project was to: (a) take the Possible Selves Mapping Interview (Shepard, 1997) and apply it to the field of counsellor identity and (b) to identify the hopes, expectations and fears of counsellors-in-training when considering their future. Potential contributions of the research include identifying the ways in which supervision can normalize and support counselling students as they move through a graduate program.

Participants were interviewed two separate times: at the beginning of their program and upon completion of their program. This poster presentation includes only the data collected at the commencement of their program. Participants were recruited from three counselling programs: two at the University of Lethbridge and one at the University of Northern BC, for a total of 34 participants from 2010 to 2011.

Participants completed the Possible Selves Mapping Interview (PSMI), a hands-on, visual strategy that can be used with both individual participants and groups. Participants responded to questions posed by the Research Assistant which included writing their hopes and fears for the future on cards with a focus on themselves as counsellors-in-training and completing four activities related to these hopes and fears. The interview did not require participants to share any information with other members of the group; the group format was for convenience only. At the end of the PSMI, eleven participants took part in an individual audiotaped interview at which time they elaborated on each of their hopes and fears. They also explained their responses to the four activities carried out for both hoped-for and feared selves.