



Adolescents' Storying of Possible Selves and Health Behavior

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Agenda

- Self-Theory
- Possible Selves
- Research Design
- Possible Selves Mapping
- Research Results
- Health Behaviours
- Implications for Counselling





Construction of Identity

- Adolescents actively construct their identity or self-theory
- Situated within and constrained by a social-historical context of values, commitments, and intellectual traditions
- Self-theory influences
 - How individuals view themselves
 - What information individuals attend to
 - How they interpret the world around them
- Individuals construct their identities through the stories they tell about themselves



Possible Selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986)

- Future-oriented, personalized, imaginal component of self-knowledge
- Constructed through self-reflection and use of imagination
- Represent the hopes, expectations and fears of people considering their future
- Standards by which one gauges current behaviours or information
- Act as motivators to attain goals and avoid fears
- Procedural knowledge to guide behaviour

Research Objectives

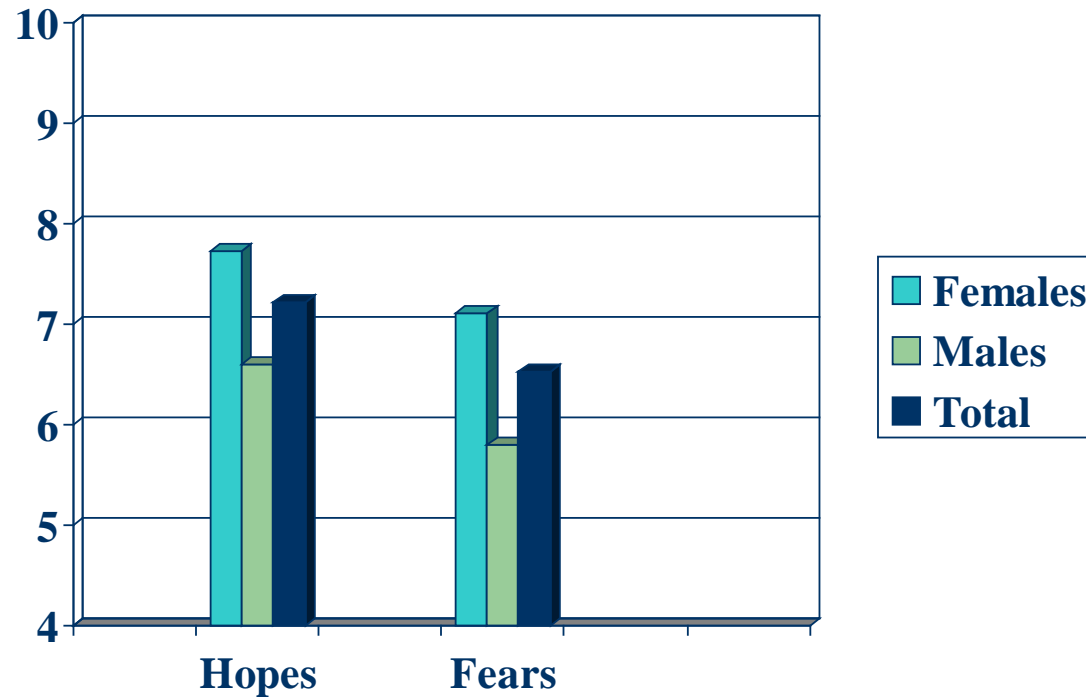
- To elicit stories of future selves
- To ascertain content categories of possible selves
- To assess perceived efficacy and outcome expectancy of possible selves
- To identify gender differences
- To identify possible selves in the domain of health
- To explore self-regulatory processes related to health



Research Method

- 33 participants aged 17-21 living in Victoria and Salmon Arm, BC
- 15 males: 18 females
- Snowball sampling
- Possible Selves Mapping Interview (PSMI)
 - 45- 90 minutes
- 27-item Health Behavior Checklist

Mean Hoped-for and Feared Selves

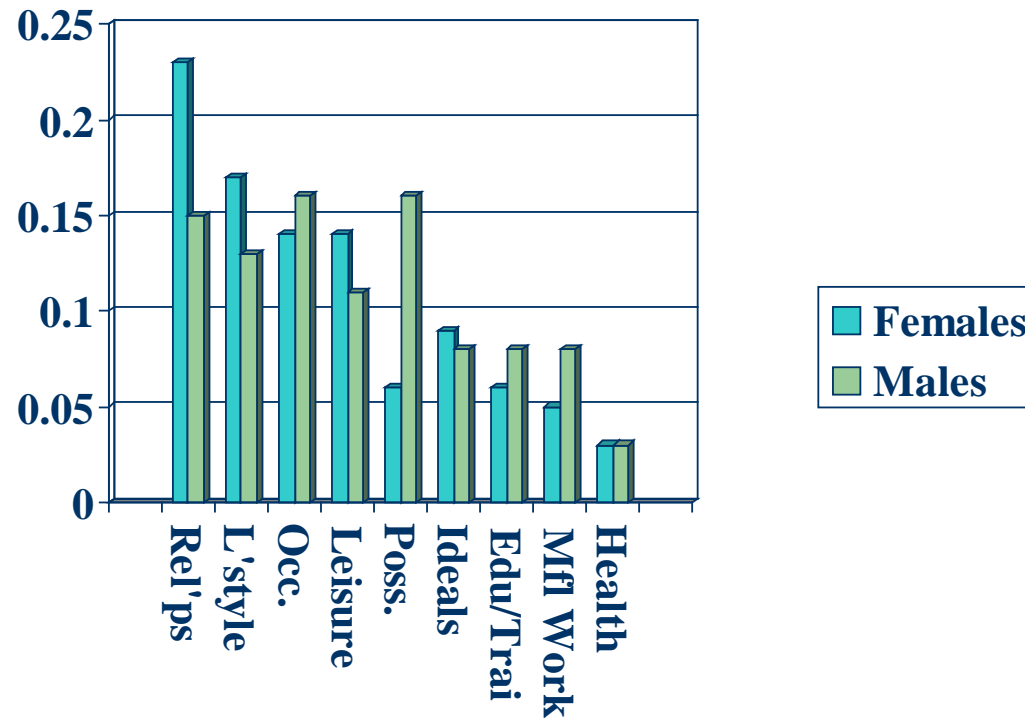




Categories of Hoped-for Selves

Category	Hopes female	Hopes male	Hopes total
Relationships	0.23	0.15	0.22
Lifestyle	0.17	0.13	0.16
Occupation	0.14	0.16	0.15
Leisure	0.14	0.11	0.13
Possessions	0.06	0.16	0.10
Ideals	0.09	0.08	0.09
Education/Training	0.06	0.08	0.07
Meaningful Work	0.05	0.08	0.06
Health	0.03	0.03	0.03

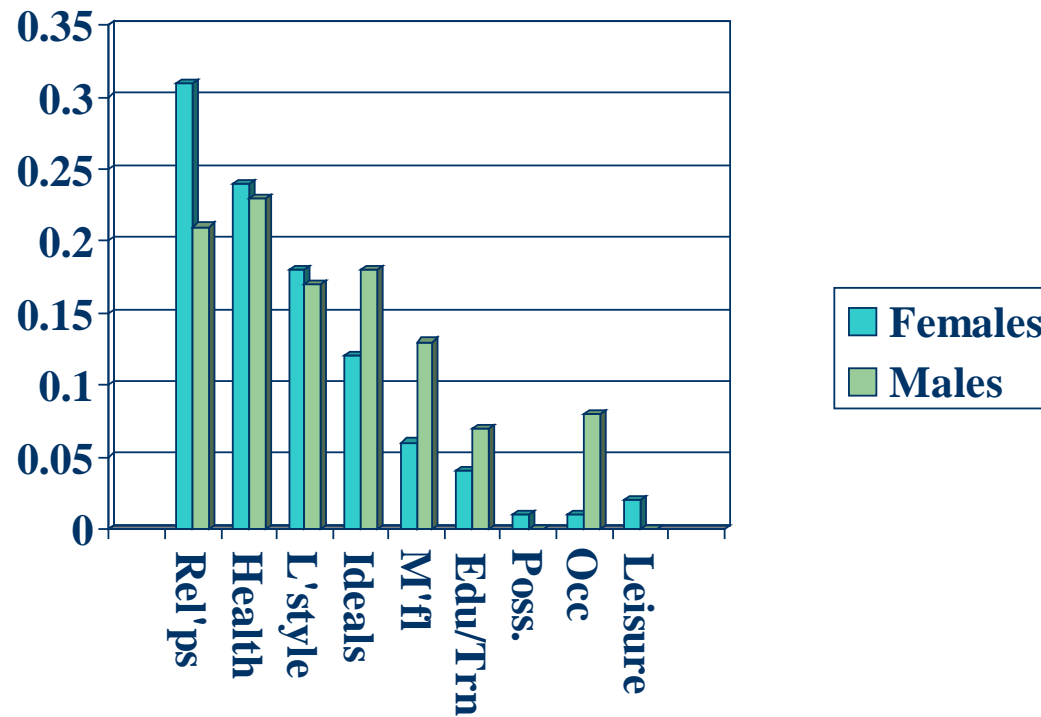
Categories of Hoped-for Selves



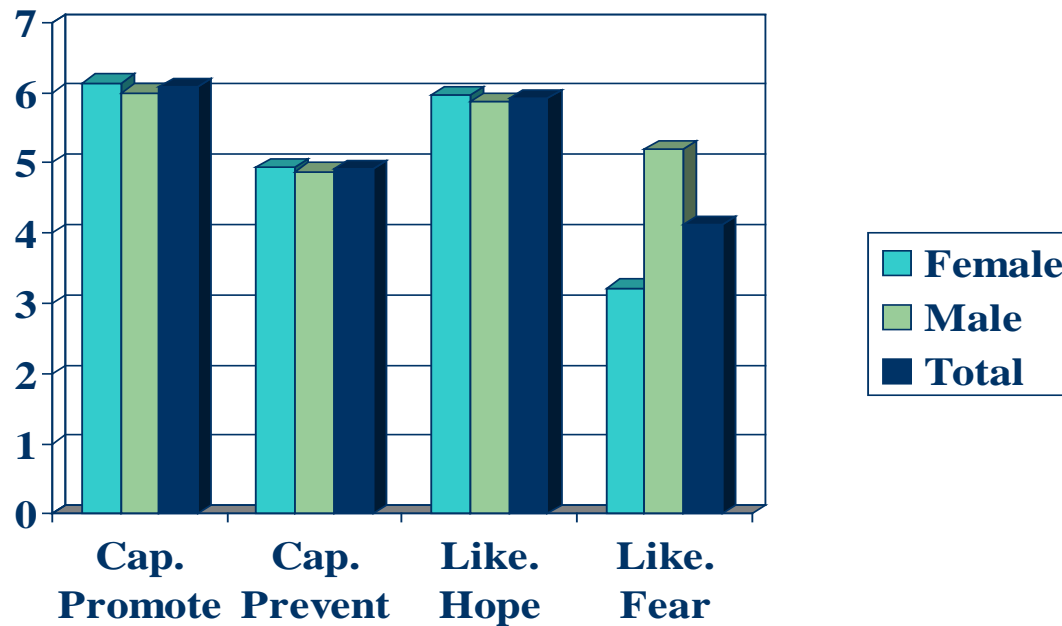
Categories of Feared Selves

Category	Fears female	Fears male	Fears total
Relationships	0.31	0.21	0.27
Health	0.24	0.23	0.24
Lifestyle	0.18	0.17	0.18
Ideals	0.12	0.18	0.15
Meaningful Work	0.06	0.13	0.09
Education/Training	0.04	0.07	0.05
Occupation	0.01	0.08	0.01
Possessions	0.01	0	0.01
Leisure	0.02	0	0.01

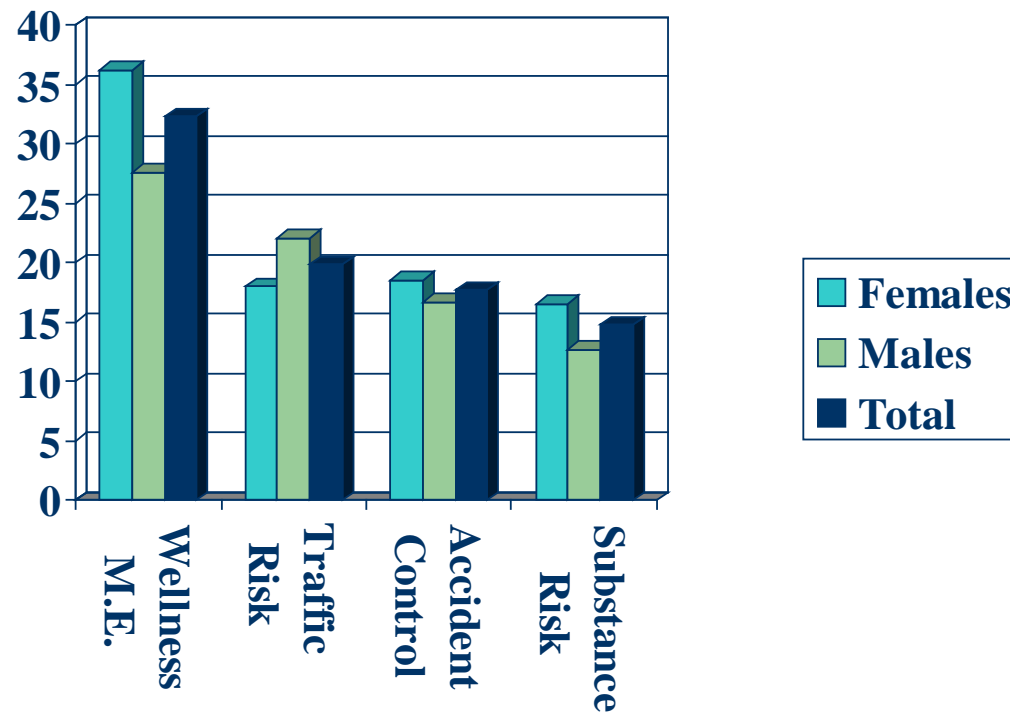
Categories of Feared Selves



Capability and Likelihood Ratings of Important Possible Selves



Health Inventory Scores





Possible Selves in the Health Domain

- Proportions of Health Fears by Sub-Category
 - Other Illness/Disease 14/54
 - Accident/Injury 12/54
 - Cancer 8/54
 - Drug/Alcohol Addiction 7/54
 - Out of shape/obesity 4/54
 - Death 3/54
 - Assault 3/54
 - Other 3/54

Self-Regulatory Processes

- Articulating a goal elevates mood, improves well-being but does not always evoke behavioural strategies (Gonzales, Burgess & Mobilio, 2001)
- Setting self-directed goals can harness motivation and direct action
- Detailed possible selves provide a specific picture of one's goals or a roadmap to reduce discrepancies between the present and one's future possible selves
- Need to be committed to and invested in working toward attaining possible selves and able to link current behaviour to the attainment of future roles.

Identified Concrete Strategies

- I exercise everyday which helps me with my goal to be a dancer.
- It is important to me to eat healthy foods. Living here I can get organic vegetables and eggs from range-fed hens.
- I really worry about getting cancer...and that's why I watch what I eat. I only eat fruit and vegetables that we raise and only meat from wild animals.



Implications for Counselling

- Facilitate detailed, concrete descriptions of future selves
- Develop thinking in terms of time-lines
- Create action boards
- Access previous experiences as problem solvers and strategists
- Work with important possible selves to help youth see the process by which they can attain future selves and deal with anticipated obstacles on the way