6

This chapter provides background theory and practical steps for a possible selves approach to career development in adult education settings. It also identifies methods to foster development, enhance motivation, and manage setbacks.

Possible Selves and Career Transition: It's Who You Want to Be, Not What You Want to Do

Geoff Plimmer, Alison Schmidt

Desire for career change is the driver behind much adult study. Career change and going back to school as an adult are often stressful. For the individual, the experience typically begins with a state of dissatisfaction about who he or she is and who he or she is becoming. Dissatisfied adults who make major career changes generally become more satisfied than those who did not, suggesting that the associated struggle is usually worthwhile (Thomas, 1980).

Career transition often represents a radical break from earlier goals and plans. It may conflict with family obligations; it may involve trying out new roles and identities and revisiting past obstacles and fears (Schlossberg, 1984). Beneath the carefully written résumé, the reasons for seeking career change may be fraught with emotion, uncertainty, and the desire to be someone different. Possible selves theory, when applied to new approaches to career development and adult education, helps us understand how adults manage transition and move toward being the selves that they want to become.

This chapter outlines how possible selves theory is used in career development and how these uses might apply to adult learning. It draws on theory, practice, and, for illustration, vignettes from a study of mature students' experiences in a New Zealand polytechnic college (Schmidt, Mabbett, and Houston, 2005). It includes some personal conclusions taken from our

experience of using possible selves with clients and presents a five-step process to use with learners in developing effective possible selves. Each section ends with some practical career development techniques directed to adult educators.

Being a mature adult in career transition is different from being a younger person, though younger people are the chief concern of traditional learning and career theories (Taylor and Giannantonio, 1990). Mature adults interpret themselves and the world with more complexity than the young do (Hy and Loevinger, 1996), while also having a narrower and more specialized sense of self. Mature adults are less guided by social comparison and more guided by comparison with how they ideally want to be (Ouellette and others, 2005). Usually they are less malleable than younger people and may be experiencing an intense search for meaning (Zunker, 1990). Their sense of opportunity is often limited by obligations to others, as is Kim, a middle-aged woman who comments that "the biggest obstacle for me is my home commitments because I have four children and a family to run."

Adult learners may also have a sense of running out of time. William, a mature part-time student, is dispirited by what he calls his "protracted process" and is daunted by his realization that "I've got a six year process before I'm even qualified . . . at that stage I'll be 51 years old."

An adult who returns to study may be attempting to break out of a sense of limited opportunities and restricted roles. Back in an education setting, adults may find their deeply held assumptions, beliefs, and expectations threatened. Furthermore, mature adults can feel like impostors, culturally alien and isolated (Brookfield, 1999). Older people in career transition often see themselves as having fewer psychological resources; they may experience more stress and less progress and may perceive more barriers to change than younger people do (Heppner, Multon, and Johnston, 1994). These themes of stress, circumscription, search for meaning, complexity, and narrowing and consolidating the self are well traversed in the adult learning and adult careers literatures (Brown, Brooks, and Associates, 1996; Knowles, 1990; Zunker, 1990).

Issues of Self in Adult Learning Theory

Adult learning and career theories have often focused on the need for meaning and the use of past knowledge, but they have not always adequately considered changes in the self. In the adult education field, Knowles (1990) identified prior knowledge and experiences as central to the individual's learning experience. They provide a framework for understanding the purpose of learning, memory, and making sense of what is being learned. Adult learners have a strong need for self-direction and to apply their previous work-related experiences to their learning. More recently, Mezirow and Associates (2000) focus on the transformative nature of learning and the process through which past knowledge is altered. Learners' perspectives are

transformed through a ten-step process that begins with a disorienting dilemma, followed by self-examination, and eventually leading to a new course of action, acquiring new knowledge and skills, trying on new roles, and integrating new learning into one's life (Taylor, 1998).

While Knowles (1990) and Mezirow and Associates (2000) concur on the significance of experience and the importance of personal goals, Mezirow's transformative learning approach has a greater focus on the future and the ways that past knowledge and the self are altered. Mezirow and Associates argue that there is a more profound change within the individual than the simple acquisition of new knowledge and qualifications. As people develop through learning, new goals and concepts of the future self emerge.

Just as adult education theories have shifted toward a more fundamental type of knowledge than declarative learning and a greater recognition of the whole person than traditional "talk-and-chalk" teaching approaches, so adult career development theory has taken a similar journey.

Issues of Self in Career Development Theory

Careers have changed over the past thirty years. Both jobs and the workforce are more diverse than previously, and new approaches and theories have been developed to explain careers and help people with career transition. Traditional approaches to career advice usually center on classifying people based on factors such as personality (Holland, 1985), stage of career (Super, 1992), and value-based anchors (Schein, 1993), followed by a matching to corresponding jobs. However, this focus on classification and matching misses much of the complexity and emotional intensity of what goes on in adult career change. Traditional approaches treat both people and careers as static rather than evolving. Consequently, career theories need to shift toward more holistic approaches that focus on adaptability rather than decision making and to recognize such features of adult career change as the need to consider both obligations to others and the search for meaning. In practice many career counselors have limited time and resources, so they need to cover a lot of ground quickly.

A focus on adaptability suits the modern world of work where jobs are more flexible than in the past. There is less security but more choice, and career change is more common. Adaptability goes beyond decision making to issues of performance and motivation. Emotion, whole life issues, individual context, and the development of self all need to be taken into account (Savickas, 1997). In practice, career changers need to become sufficiently self-aware to notice and respond to changes in both themselves and the world and to develop a repertoire of different identities, attitudes, and approaches and the skills to implement them (Savickas, 1997).

For people to develop adaptability, they need to be able to call on multiple identities, or selves, and to create new ones (Mirvis and Hall, 1994).

This enables them to develop long-term perspectives, manage relationships between the self and the outer world, and focus on the future (Savickas, 1997). They need to develop planful attitudes, self and environmental exploration skills, informed decision-making skills, and the capacity to recognize their own limitations in both abilities and self-concept.

Possible Selves and Career Change

Possible selves theory is a useful framework for people to manage changes in themselves. Each person has many possible selves that vary in importance, salience (how easy they are to recall and think about), and level of elaboration (how detailed, emotional, and vivid they are; King and Raspin, 2004). Possible selves reflect the images, senses, and thoughts people have about their future (Markus and Nurius, 1986). Possible selves are instrumental in personal and career change because they are changeable; they can liberate people from feeling trapped or restricted in their options. They provide a means of escape from current realities and constraints (Markus and Nurius, 1986), but they also provide a means of evaluating and giving meaning to events in the present. Possible selves can be well integrated with each other (my possible self that gets on well with people fits with my possible career self as a tour guide) or fractured (my career goal of being a facilitator conflicts with my feared possible self as an angry person). They tend to be interconnected through a web of life roles, beliefs, and identities that vary in the degree to which they are core, active, expected, and attached to the present.

As outlined in earlier chapters, possible selves can be positive (hopes) or negative (fears), and they can be rated as likely or unlikely. Hoped-for selves can include both ideal selves (whom you most want to be) and ought selves (whom you feel a duty or obligation to be) (Carver, Lawrence, and Scheier, 1999). This distinction between ideal and ought is conceptually similar to the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in the self-determination literature and between learning and performance goals in the education literature (Elliott and Dweck, 1988; Ryan and Deci, 2000). Having intrinsic goals, such as those centered on community feelings, affiliation, health, and self-development, leads to higher performance, more effort and persistence, and reduced stress (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Emphasis on extrinsic factors or performance goals, such as money and status, leads to comparatively lower performance, resilience, and well-being.

While possible selves are related to both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, a possible self approach in career work encourages more focus on intrinsic goals because of the integration with personal meanings. The approach therefore encourages more self-direction and determination and less social comparison and "keeping up with the Joneses." Using possible selves is also more holistic because the content of a possible self encompasses values, roles, lifestyles, self-beliefs, skills, and interests.

Discussing possible selves with clients generally encourages a focus on who a person wants to be rather than what he or she wants to do. Possible selves serve as a bridge between self-concept and motivation (Ruvolo and Markus, 1992).

Possible selves aid career development through the operation of five mechanisms (Meara, Day, Chalk, and Phelps, 1995). The first is that possible selves are personalized and intensely individual. They reflect matters such as efficacy, values, and personalized meanings. They make the self central to career decision making. The second mechanism is that highly vivid images of success (or failure) often carry salient and elaborated self-concepts that are personally motivating, such as a student's vivid image of a graduation ceremony. The third characteristic is that they are laden with emotions such as happiness or insecurity, which can be personalized goals in themselves (Winell, 1987). These emotions can give meaning and can be energizing or demotivating. Emotions can become goals in the sense that people look forward to positive emotions and try to avoid negative ones.

The fourth mechanism is that possible selves contain the strategies and tactics to achieve career goals through schema that enable effective processing of information and knowledge and strategies to achieve them (Meara, Day, Chalk, and Phelps, 1995). Having a clear possible self often carries with it "mental software," called schema, to help a person become that self. Finally, as discussed by Lee and Oyserman (this volume), a balance of hopes and fears appears to be effectively motivating through the presence of avoidance goals (Meara, Day, Chalk, and Phelps, 1995). People find it easier to avoid a fear coming true if they have an alternative to hope for. And fears can be a good reality check.

How It Works: The Upbeat Stuff

Using possible selves in adult education encourages a positive and strengths-based approach to change and development. It helps people try on new roles and look to the future rather than the past. It can also provide a new and liberating frame of reference with which to interpret the world.

Change and Development. Changing career and returning to study changes people's identities and self-concepts. Part of this process is the development of new possible selves, which can be provisionally "created, tested, discarded and revised" to determine their fit (Ibarra, 1999, p. 765). During career transition, people use provisional selves that they develop through observation and testing to see whether they fit with their values, competencies, requirements, and style. People identify prototypes of what constitutes desirable performance and then match their identity to the prototypes. This creates a personalized repertoire of possible roles and selves. One way this happens is through studying others' styles and ways of working and then practicing emulating those styles to see whether they fit.

Focusing on a positive possible self can liberate people from less appealing current states. Positive possible selves often provide, or are associated

with, feelings of mastery that are incentives for effective behaviors (Markus and Nurius, 1986). Consequently, development of positive futures provides more effective means of self-development than focusing on the present or past self-concept. In other words, focusing on "who I want to be" is often more valuable than focusing on "why am I like this?"

As positive possible selves become more elaborate and influential, they become useful new benchmarks for behavior. Past and present selves become less important or become negative points of comparison that are let go as perspectives change. Hill and Spokane (1995) found that career counseling increased the number and attractiveness of possible selves, while past selves declined in their appeal over several sessions.

Conversely, possible selves are sometimes based on past selves. Midlife career changes and return to studies are often about returning to a career plan vetoed by parents or interrupted for raising children. Often past possible selves are rediscovered and reused (King and Raspin, 2004). Bill, who had sold his hardware store to become a counselor, said this: "You know [the decision to study] brought a dimension into my life which I had given up once I'd become married and did all the roles that were necessary there, and I was really pleased to break out of those roles."

Through these processes of trying on prior and possible selves, focusing on the future, and letting go of or reinventing past selves, new values and choices for the future emerge, and fundamental assumptions about self and the world are challenged. A useful practical application of this is to map out past selves or life stages, including strengths and corresponding emotional states. This mapping can be done into the future as well as looking back to the past. A mapping exercise helps clients or students to develop meaningful future-related selves quickly, which they can then put into action.

Motivation and Performance. Possible selves explicitly aid current performance by providing schema for scanning and processing information in the present (Cross and Markus, 1994). They provide a framework in which a person can evaluate everyday occurrences. The schema attached to positive well-developed possible selves can determine what a person notices, remembers, and associates with the new information. Well-elaborated possible selves are likely to include some rehearsal and simulation, which also improves performance (Cross and Markus, 1994).

For career development, salient and vivid job-related possible selves provide schema that lead people to notice particular job advertisements, overcome the fear of résumé writing, and better plan job-seeking behaviors. In adult learning, possible selves create schema that help students notice and remember relevant course-related material (Fletcher, 2000). For example, a well-developed possible self as a successful sports coach is likely to include highly personalized images of helping people, being outdoors, and the like. Martin, a solo father of four boys, had a clear mental picture of a

future in which he would have "all of these things to add to my CV, like the bachelor degree and all that together will add up. . . . I will pick up a $65k+ job and that's where I'm heading."

An individual with a well-developed concept of future self is more likely to attend to information linked to this schema and to connect relevant strands of information together, such as techniques, jobs, or opportunities to practice. In contrast, an individual without a relevant schema is less likely to attend to coaching-related information or effectively process or remember it. Having clear personal goals also enhances unconscious processes (Dijksterhuis, Aarts, and Smith, 2005). Research indicates that unconscious decision-making processes often lead to better decisions than conscious, rational thought processes. This is particularly true when decisions are important and complex and involve many trade-offs, as with career decisions (Dijksterhuis, Aarts, and Smith, 2005).

In career transition, people find added meaning and have more energy for difficult, stressful, or mundane tasks if they relate to a desired possible self. Consequently they can more easily overcome barriers. The successful coaching self may see a series of paths, including studying hard, making sacrifices, practicing in voluntary coaching roles, and eventually getting a paid, professional coaching position. For Doris, a mature therapeutic recreation student, a clear view of the end goal helped her to understand the relevance of the papers that she struggled writing. She says: "I can see the end result. . . . Like it's, all the papers sort of connect up to each other and I can see, oh yep, I know where that's going, and I know that at the end of this year I will know how to do certain things."

Possible selves link strongly to the benefits of goal setting because they help the individual to develop strategies to prioritize and allocate resources (Kanfer, 1994). When people make their possible selves more specific (that is, more vivid and concrete) and a consequence of their personal effort, this makes their goals more accessible and more achievable (Ruvolo and Markus, 1992). Narrowing the gap between "where you are now" and "where you want to go" through vivid imagery brings the desired end state closer and enhances motivation. In our practice, we have found that helping clients develop clear images of themselves in the future through quiet contemplation or writing exercises has a remarkable effect on persistence in areas like study and work.

When people develop clear pathways to help achieve their possible selves, they develop the will and find the means achieve them. They can do this because they are better able to plan, judge progress, and develop alternative courses of action (Oyserman and Markus, 1990). Discussing possible selves, their meanings, and pathways to achieve them are good exercises to assist adults in reaching their goals. Possible selves can provide energy for planning and action in areas where change is strongly desired but difficult such as initiating a job change.

How It Works: The Tough Stuff

Adult career transition, and learning and development, often involve hardship and setbacks. They are environments where self-delusion and other defense mechanisms occur, to the detriment of the learner. However, using possible selves can improve resiliency in the face of setbacks by helping to build implementation intentions, providing a richer repertoire of internal resources to draw on, and providing a framework for reality checks.

Dealing with Adversity and Setbacks. People fail to implement their goals for a number of reasons (Gollwitzer and Sheeran, 2006). They may get distracted and forget their goal at crucial times; situational cues may drive their behavior in alternative directions. In other words, people miss crucial opportunities to act in a way that will move them toward their goal. Personalized goals are more likely to be reached when there are clear plans for what, when, where, and how they can be implemented (Gollwitzer and Sheeran, 2006). In practice, for example, a person who has a possible self as a calm but assertive office professional may need very detailed micro goals to help overcome a likely fear of losing his or her temper at management meetings. A hoped-for self along these lines will more likely be realized if there are specific plans about, for example, what to do when certain individuals at management meetings make comments in a certain style. Such clear personalized micro goals are more likely to be developed and adhered to if they relate to a salient, important, and vivid possible self.

People vary in the complexity, number, and degree of interconnections of their self-concepts (Linville, 1985). Having many possible selves has advantages in managing well-being, partly because one possible self may turn out to be unrealizable. There is evidence also that people cope emotionally with life change more effectively if they have more complex future self-concepts (Niedenthal, Setterlund, and Wherry, 1992). The presence of complex, positive, and rich future self-concepts seems more important than the number and strength of negative selves in the present. Put another way, it is beliefs about the future that count in coping with life change rather than how bad things may seem in the present. In the Niedenthal, Setterlund, and Wherry study (1992), it was the existence of alternative possible selves that made the difference for people recovering from a crisis.

Desired possible selves provide buffers against setbacks because their links to self schema help people to develop alternative courses of action. In contrast, individuals without schema related to positive possible selves are more likely to be put off by setbacks because negative possible selves are more easily aroused (Cross and Markus, 1994), and they lack the capacity to process information and develop effective plans. The ability to develop courses of action within a framework of possible selves is illustrated by the case study of Kim, whose strong sense of direction helps when things go wrong. She says, "If it doesn't happen that way, or if I can't do it, or if there is a problem, then I sort of deviate slightly and move around it."

Dealing with Self-Deception. In career transition, people's expectations about the future are often insecure and unstable, and they may have unrealistic optimism and self-deception. Although self-deception and an optimistic bias do occur across past, present, and future self-concepts, future self-concepts seem particularly prone to distortion (Robinson and Ryff, 1999). This can be a good thing, because optimistic possible selves help focus energy, increase resilience, and can elicit better outcomes. But unrealistic optimism can also lead to poor decisions and misplaced effort. Optimistic self-deception is highest in early adulthood and seems to decline during the life course. Possible selves appear particularly prone to the effects of unrealistic optimism when people are low in information and motivational benefits are high. Unrealistic expectations of career opportunities after returning to study are an example of this.

Schemas act to protect the individual from negative information by screening out stimuli that are threatening and by favoring positive information (Greenwald, 1980). Depressed people lack this self-favoring bias and may seek out information that confirms negative schemas. Greenwald (1980) describes the self-protective mechanism as the "totalitarian ego," because it resembles the operation of totalitarian states. Opposing information is oppressed or discounted, and when new information is allowed in, it is interpreted in ways that serve to protect the self. Although this self-protective function is often beneficial, it can also be harmful and undermine the ability to manage risks. Heightening awareness of what parts of life or the self are not likely to change reduces self-deception (Robinson and Ryff, 1999).

Individuals' unrealistic and potentially harmful optimism can be reduced by helping them develop lists of what they think will and will not change across different parts of their life during career transition. Career exploration (research and information gathering) can also reduce optimistic self-deception. To avoid unrealistic pessimism, asking clients to write counterarguments against reasoning that likely feared selves will be realized can reduce anxiety and negative thinking. This abridged cognitive behavioral approach can be effective in dealing with adversity and setbacks and preventing the activation of feared selves (Plimmer, 2001).

Managing the Gap Among Actual, Ought, and Desired Selves. Identifying differences among actual, ought, and ideal selves helps clients understand their motivation and aspirations. Actual selves are who we are in the present tense. Ought selves are more future oriented and concern others' expectations (real or imagined) of who we ought to be. Ideal selves are also future oriented and concern who we would like to become, including wishes and aspirations for the self (Phillips and Silvia, 2005). Gaps among actual, ought, and ideal selves have effects on behavior and emotion. People appear to find that focusing on ideal rather than ought selves is more motivating, because ideal selves capture more personalized and intrinsic goals. Ideal selves are more salient at times when fears are considered to be

less likely (Carver, Lawrence, and Scheier, 1999). There is some evidence that people who focus on who they want to be (ideal selves), more than what they think they ought to be, focus more on positive than negative information and seem more resistant to depressive thinking (Carver, Reynolds, and Scheier, 1994).

Self-awareness, a common goal of adult education and career transition, includes awareness of gaps between who one is and who one wants to be. Raising self-awareness can be upsetting as well as motivating (Phillips and Silvia, 2005), but providing positive, affirming information can reduce defensiveness, increase receptiveness to negative information, and facilitate its integration into the self-concepts (Schwinghammer, Stapel, and Blanton, 2006). This in turn means people can manage risks better, engage in planful foresight, and become increasingly adaptable. Adult educators are in a strong position to help people in this process (Rossiter, 2003).

Dealing with Fears. Possible selves approaches are effective in identifying and addressing the barriers that underlie career indecision (Parkin and Plimmer, 2004). When people discuss their fears, their self-efficacy beliefs, and their views of the world, this often provides a means to tackle the real issues. Feared possible selves, such as failure at law school, provide avoidance goals, which, when balanced with relevant hoped-for selves, increase motivation (Oyserman and Markus, 1990).

However, strongly feared selves can inhibit effective functioning if they are seen as inevitable and are not balanced by achievable hoped-for selves. Without this balance, feared selves can reduce performance by interfering with concentration and leading to distracted attention, reduced focus, and negative cognitions and affect (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988).

What This Means for Adult Education Practitioners

The practical advantages of developing possible selves in education and career transition are significant. What distinguishes possible selves from traditional goal-setting concepts are the emotion, values, and schema attached to them. Because possible selves include diverse aspects of human experience as well as specific career options, possible selves support career decision making and provide a much richer foundation to build a "bridge to the future" than traditional approaches (Martz, 2001, p. 131).

Acknowledging and working with possible selves is an empathic process in practice because it recognizes the whole person (Martz, 2001). The relationship building associated with possible selves-based education reduces defensiveness, builds self-awareness, and helps learners process information about work, study, and themselves more effectively. Working with possible selves reaches places in people that are missed by other approaches. By recognizing unique personal meanings, the possible selves approach can have an impact on cognition, affect, and expectancies (Cohen, Duberley, and Mallon, 2004).

A Five-Step Approach

Adult educators can facilitate the development of positive new possible selves and their benefits to performance and motivation through a five-step process. This process involves developing understanding of possible selves, providing contextual and qualitative information about vocational options for learners, and helping learners to find the fit between their possible selves and occupational information. The fourth and fifth steps are elaborating desired possible selves and developing pathways to achieve them.

Step 1: Identify Possible Selves and Make Connections. The first step is to encourage discussion among learners about possible self factors such as values, skills, lifestyle preferences, career goals, hopes and fears, interests, and self beliefs. Building connections and identifying paradoxes across different possible selves enables individuals to develop richer self-understanding for decision making. Developing narratives of "where I've been" and "where I'm going" can add detail and an emotional dimension to possible self options. Narratives can be developed in text form or mind maps (looking forward). Future self software tools are effective in developing engagement with the process, addressing barriers, and ensuring comprehensive coverage of personalized self-representations quickly (Plimmer, 2001).

Step 2: Provide Information and Guidance. The second step is to provide contextual and qualitative information about careers that are relevant to the course or content being taught. Educators can provide more detailed and contextualized vocational knowledge than is available through formal career programs. By suggesting potential career opportunities and recognizing an individual's potential, educators can reduce the sense of lost possibilities or confirm existing original dreams and raise efficacy beliefs through encouragement (Rossiter, 2003).

Step 3: Find the Fit. The third step is helping students to compare the level of fit between their possible selves and career options. Helping learners to apply new learning to their developing self-concept—trying it on for size—allows possible selves to be elaborated. This builds on the foundations of Mezirow's perspective transformation (2000) by widening perspectives and paving the way for change. Enabling learners to observe a range of career identities, practice them, and relate them to their own envisaged selves fosters more internalized goal-related behavior than a more mechanistic, skill-based approach. Discussion and role plays enable learners to evaluate career possible selves and to ask, "Is this really who I want to be?" and "Does it feel right?"

Step 4: Focus on Strengths and Positive Futures. The goal of this stage is to develop clear and vivid representations of the self through techniques such as mental imagery (Fletcher, 2000), mental rehearsal, displaying symbols in private spaces such as diaries, and discussion with others.

Step 5: Develop Positive Pathways. Although pathways often evolve naturally from possible selves, structured planning can be helpful. This can include setting goals for information seeking, goals to measure, or micro goals to overcome hard-to-change behaviors (Gollwitzer and Sheeran, 2006). In some ways, this pathway making is like getting ready for a road trip by filling the car with fuel and getting the maps ready. The exact route may not be known, but there is a general direction in mind, and the upcoming bridges, hills, valleys, and possibilities can be imagined.

Conclusion

Possible selves have particular strengths in adult education and career development because they cover the complexity of what matters as people age and because self is central to the process. Adults differ from younger people in terms of the increasing importance given to the search for meaning and the decreasing importance of comparison with others. "Who I want to be" is at the heart of what matters. The development of self is intensely personal, and the process changes people's perspectives in enduring ways. Because of this, the use of possible selves increases the likelihood of successful transition.

Possible selves serve as an umbrella concept under which many other educational and career development approaches can be used, which means that they are adaptable to the personal styles of good educators who wish to help learners achieve their personal goals. They offer a strengths-based approach that emphasizes goals rather than problems. At the same time, their relevance to barriers takes into account the stress and anxiety common in the real-life experience of career change and adult learning.

References

Brookfield, S. D. "What Is College Really Like for Adult Students?" *About Campus*, 1999, *3*(6), 10–15.

Brown, D., Brooks, L., and Associates. *Career Choice and Development.* (3rd ed.) San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996.

Carver, C. S., Lawrence, J. W., and Scheier, M. F. "Self-Discrepancies and Affect: Incorporating the Role of Feared Selves." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin,* 1999, *25*(7), 783–792.

Carver, C. S., Reynolds, S. L., and Scheier, M. F. "The Possible Selves of Optimists and Pessimists." *Journal of Research in Personality,* 1994, *28*(2), 133–141.

Cohen, L., Duberley, J., and Mallon, M. "Social Constructionism in the Study of Career: Accessing the Parts That Other Approaches Cannot Reach." *Journal of Vocational Behavior,* 2004, *64,* 407–422.

Cross, S., and Markus, H. R. "Self-Schemas, Possible Selves, and Competent Performance." *Journal of Educational Psychology,* 1994, *86,* 423–438.

Csikszentmihalyi, M. "The Flow Experience and Its Significance for Human Psychology." In M. Csikszentmihalyi and I. S. Csikszentmihalyi (eds.), *Optimal Experience: Psychological Studies of Flow in Consciousness.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

Dijksterhuis, A., Aarts, H., and Smith, P. K. "The Power of the Subliminal: Perception and Possible Applications." In R. Hassin, J. Uleman, and J. A. Bargh (eds.), *The New Unconscious*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Elliott, E. S., and Dweck, C. S. "Goals: An Approach to Motivation and Achievement." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology,* 1988, *54*(1), 5–12.

Fletcher, S. "A Role for Imagery in Mentoring." *Career Development International* 2000, *5,* 2000, 235–243.

Gollwitzer, P. M., and Sheeran, P. "Implementation Intentions and Goal Achievement: A Meta-Analysis of Effects and Processes." *Advances of Experimental Social Psychology,* 2006, *38,* 69–119.

Greenwald, A. G. "The Totalitarian Ego: Fabrication and Revision of Personal History." *American Psychologist,* 1980, *35,* 603–618.

Heppner, M. J., Multon, K. D., and Johnston, J. A. "Assessing Psychological Resources During Career Change: Development of the Career Transitions Inventory." *Journal of Vocational Behavior,* 1994, *44*(4), 55–74.

Hill, A. L., and Spokane, A. R. "Career Counseling and Possible Selves: A Case Study." *Career Development Quarterly,* 1995, *43,* 221–232.

Holland, J. L. *Making Vocational Choices: A Theory of Careers.* Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1985.

Hy, L. X., and Loevinger, J. *Measuring Ego Development.* (2nd ed.) Mahwah, N.J.: Erlbaum, 1996.

Ibarra, H. "Provisional Selves: Experimenting with Image and Identity in Professional Adaptation." *Administrative Science Quarterly,* 1999, *44,* 764–791.

Kanfer, R. "Work Motivation: New Directions in Theory and Research." In C. L. Cooper and I. T. Robertson (eds.), *Key Reviews in Managerial Psychology: Concepts and Research for Practice.* Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley, 1994.

King, L. A., and Raspin, C. "Lost and Found Possible Selves, Subjective Well-Being, and Ego Development in Divorced Women." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology,* 2004, *72,* 603–732.

Knowles, M. *The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species.* Houston: Gulf Publishing, 1990.

Linville, P. W. "Self Complexity and Affective Extremity: Don't Put All Your Eggs in One Basket." *Social Cognition,* 1985, *3,* 94–120.

Markus, H., and Nurius, P. "Possible Selves." *American Psychologist,* 1986, *41,* 954–969.

Martz, E. "Expressing Counselor Empathy Through the Use of Possible Selves." *Journal of Employment Counseling,* 2001, *38*(3), 128–133.

Meara, N. M., Day, J. D., Chalk, L. M., and Phelps, R. E. "Possible Selves: Applications for Career Counseling." *Journal of Career Assessment,* 1995, *3,* 259–277.

Mezirow, J. E., and Associates. *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000.

Mirvis, P. H., and Hall, D. T. "Psychological Success and the Boundaryless Career." *Journal of Organizational Behaviour,* 1994, *15,* 365–380.

Niedenthal, P. M., Setterlund, M. B., and Wherry, M. B. "Possible Self-Complexity and Affective Reactions to Goal-Relevant Evaluation." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology,* 1992, *63*(1), 5–16.

Ouellette, J. A., and others. "Using Images to Increase Exercise Behavior: Prototypes Versus Possible Selves." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin,* 2005, *5,* 610–620.

Oyserman, D., and Markus, H. "Possible Selves in Balance: Implications for Delinquency." *Journal of Social Issues,* 1990, *46,* 141–157.

Parkin, F., and Plimmer, G. "Managing the Presence of Personal Issues in Career Counselling: Using Transactional Analysis with Possible Selves." *Australian Journal of Career Development,* 2004, *13*(1), 7–14.

Phillips, A. G., and Silvia, P. J. "Self-Awareness and the Emotional Consequences of Self-Discrepancies." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin,* 2005, *31,* 703–713.

Plimmer, G. "Development and Evaluation of a Career Development Intervention Using Modern Theories of the Self." Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Victoria University of Wellington, 2001.

Robinson, M. D., and Ryff, C. D. "The Role of Self-Deception in Perceptions of Past, Present, and Future Happiness." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin,* 1999, *25,* 595–606.

Rossiter, M. "Constructing the Possible: A Study of Educational Relationships and Possible Selves." Paper presented at the Forty-Fourth Annual Adult Education Research Conference, San Francisco, 2003.

Ruvolo, A. P., and Markus, H. R. "Possible Selves and Performance: The Power of Self-Relevant Imagery." *Social Cognition,* 1992, *10,* 95–124.

Ryan, R. M., and Deci, E. L. "Self-Determination Theory and the Facilitation of Intrinsic Motivation, Social Development, and Well-Being." *American Psychologist,* 2000, *55,* 68–78.

Savickas, M. L. "Career Adaptability: An Integrative Construct for Life Span, Life Space Theory." *Career Development Quarterly,* 1997, *45,* 246–259.

Schein, E. H. *Career Anchors: Discovering Your Real Values.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass/Pfeiffer, 1993.

Schlossberg, N. K. *Counseling Adults in Transition: Linking Practice with Theory.* New York: Springer, 1984.

Schmidt, A., Mabbett, T., and Houston, D. "Retention and Success in Tertiary Education: 'It's a Belonging Thing.'" Paper presented at the New Zealand Association of Bridging Educators Conference, Auckland, 2005.

Schwinghammer, S. A., Stapel, D. A., and Blanton, H. "Different Selves Have Different Effects: Self-Activation and Defensive Social Comparison." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin,* 2006, *32*(1), 27–39.

Super, D. E. "Toward a Comprehensive Theory of Career Development." In D. H. Montross and C. J. Shinkman (eds.), *Career Development: Theory and Practice.* Springfield, Ill.: Charles C. Thomas, 1992.

Taylor, E. W. *The Theory and Practice of Transformative Learning: A Critical Review.* Columbus, Ohio: ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, 1998. (ED 423 422)

Taylor, M. S., and Giannantonio, C. M. "Vocational Guidance." *International Review of Industrial and Organisational Psychology,* 1990, *5,* 281–323.

Thomas, L. E. "A Typology of Mid Life Career Changers." *Journal of Vocational Behaviour,* 1980, *16,* 173–182.

Winell, M. "Personal Goals: The Key to Self-Direction in Adulthood." In M. E. Ford and D. H. Ford (eds.), *Humans as Self-Constructing Living Systems: Putting the Framework to Work.* Mahwah, N.J.: Erlbaum, 1987.

Zunker, V. G. *Career Counselling: Applied Concepts of Life Planning.* Pacific Grove, Calif.: Brooks/Cole, 1990.

GEOFF PLIMMER is director of FutureSelves Ltd. and lectures on training and development topics at the Management School at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand.

ALISON SCHMIDT is an adviser to the New Zealand Qualifications Authority.