

Possible Selves of School Counsellor Candidates: A Qualitative Study in Turkey

Dr. Seray Tatli Dalioglu¹,

¹*Independent researcher, Muscat, Oman*

Dr. Meryem Demir Gudul²

²*Istanbul Kultur University, Faculty of Education, Istanbul, Turkey*

[tatliseray@gmail.com, m.gudul@iku.edu.tr]

Abstract

According to the Possible Selves Theory, possible selves are the cognitive reflections of individuals' hopes and fears for the future. The hoped-for self is the possible selves that the individual dreams of; and the feared self is defined as possible selves that the individuals are afraid of. The possible selves of school counsellor candidates are very important in terms of revealing their hopes, expectations and concerns about their future professional lives. The aim of this study is to examine the possible self-concepts of school counsellor candidates through qualitative research. The study was conducted with 62 candidates, who attended to the last grade of the undergraduate program at the department of educational sciences in a university in Istanbul. A metaphorical study was conducted to identify the candidates' possible selves. The data obtained from the students were analysed by using the content analysis method, through which the metaphors were examined, the categorization was made and the steps of the reliability analysis were followed respectively. After analysis of the metaphors, 9 of the students were interviewed in order to deepen understanding.

Keywords: *Possible selves, metaphor analysis, qualitative research, school counsellor candidates.*

1. Introduction

"Possible Selves Theory" was founded on the fact that identity is multi-dimensional and was first introduced to the field of personality psychology by Markus and Nurius (1986). They clarified the term as following:

"An individual's repertoire of possible selves can be viewed as the cognitive manifestation of enduring goals, aspirations, motives, fears, and threats" (p. 954).

Markus and Nurius (1986) defined three different self-types with various influence over motivation and self-regulation: expected selves, hoped-for selves, and feared selves. Expected self is the one that an individual thinks she or he can achieve realistically; hoped-for self, on the other hand, is the desired possible future and it may be far from reality whereas feared self is the one an individual

fears to turn into. So possible selves are the cognitive reflections of individuals' hopes and fears for the future.

Gee (2000) also defined the identity as an unstable and multiple concept which is consistent with the idea of Possible Selves Theory:

"Being recognized as a certain "kind of person" in a given context, is what I mean here by "identity." In this sense of the term, all people have multiple identities...." (p.99).

As for Beijaard et al. (2004), development of professional identity requires answering not only the question of "Who am I right now?", but also "Who do I want to be in the future?". Although some studies within the literature emphasizes the impact of future tendencies over the development of professional identities, very few studies have used the Possible Selves Theory as a conceptual framework (Hamman et al. 2010, 2012, 2013; Hong and Green, 2011; Ronfeldt, 2008).

The possible selves of school counsellor candidates are very important in terms of revealing their hopes, expectations and concerns about their future professional lives. They reflect candidates' perceptions about their potential and future. And the identity can be seen as a reflection of the education program (Lopes and Pereira 2012). In this context, studying possible selves of school counsellor candidates should be considered crucial for developing effective programs (Beauchamp and Thomas 2009). The purpose of this study is to examine the possible self-concepts of school counsellor candidates in a faculty of education in Turkey.

2. Possible Selves Theory

Possible Selves Theory, which focused on future selves, provides an appropriate theoretical framework in order to examine the development of professional identities. According to Possible Selves Theory, individuals develop their self-schemes based on their previous experiences (Markus and Nurius, 1986). In this regard, possible selves are the result of individuals' hopes, expectations, and fears shaped by their current and previous social, cultural,

and environmental experiences (Hamman, Gosselin, Romano & Bunuan, 2010). As well as being indicators for probable future behaviours, possible selves can also be employed to hold assessments and make interpretations regarding the present selves (Markus and Nurius 1986). In this regard, Possible Selves Theory may very well provide a crucial theoretical ground for identity studies.

3. Methodology

This study was designed as a qualitative research and metaphor analysis and semi-structured interviews were conducted in order to obtain data. The study was conducted with 62 candidates, 20 males and 43 females respectively who attended to the last grade of the undergraduate program at the department of educational sciences at a university in Istanbul in 2016-2017 academic year. This sample can be considered as a limitation of the study. Because 62 students were all the candidates at the last grade of the department in the mentioned academic year.

A metaphorical study was conducted to identify the candidates' possible selves. The students were asked to fill in the gaps of the following sentences: "The counsellor I imagine to be in my professional life is like.....because....." and "The counsellor I am afraid to be in my professional life is like because".

The data obtained from the students were analysed by using the content analysis method, through which the metaphors were examined, the categorization was made and the steps of the reliability analysis were followed respectively. After analysis of the metaphors, 9 students were interviewed by using semi-structured interview method. The content analysis and categorization of the themes were conducted by each researcher independently and they reached a consensus at the end of discussions.

4. Results

According to results of the analysis, metaphors were categorized and researchers agreed on 6 categories for hoped-for self and 7 categories for feared self as shown on the Table 1.

Table 1. Sub-themes for possible selves of candidates

Hoped-for selves	Feared selves
Relieving	Useless
Problem solving	Detrimental
Guiding	Non-progressive
Realising	Judgemental
Listening	Bossy
Self-improving	Burn-out
	Distant

4.1 Hoped-for selves

Data obtained through semi-structured interviews support the ideas determined in metaphor analysis. The candidates used the metaphors such as "sea, jukebox, relaxing music, mom and home" for the "relieving" sub-theme. For the "relieving" sub-theme, a candidate expressed his/her feelings as:

"The counsellor I imagine to be in my professional life is like a jukebox which sits on a corner of the house and whenever you feel tired, angry and disappointed, you can relax by listening to its music." (C2)

For the "problem solving" sub-theme, the candidates used the metaphors such as "sponge, superhero, bridge and band-aid". One of the candidates expressed his/her feelings as:

"The counsellor I imagine to be in my professional life is like a sponge which soaks up all problems..." (C4).

For the "guiding" sub-theme, the candidates used the metaphors such as "light, google, map, moon and sun". One of the candidates expressed his/her feelings as:

"The counsellor I imagine to be in my professional life is like a map which shows the road..." (C6).

For the "realising" sub-theme, the candidates used the metaphors such as "mirror, eyeglasses and cloud". One of the candidates expressed his/her feelings as:

"The counsellor I imagine to be in my professional life is like a mirror which reflects people..." (C3).

For the "listening" sub-theme, the candidates used the metaphors such as "rainbow, garden, sea and world". One of the candidates expressed his/her feelings as:

"The counsellor I imagine to be in my professional life is like a garden which consists of flowers from different colours, types and smells." (C1).

For the "self-improving" sub-theme, the candidates used the metaphors such as "academician, tree and apple". One of the candidates expressed his/her feelings as:

"The counsellor I imagine to be in my professional life is like a tree which grows up every day." (C5).

These research findings indicate that school counsellor candidates who participated in the research, describe the counsellor they hope to be as someone who offers a feeling of comfort and warmth and peace to his/her students.

4.2 Feared selves

Data obtained through semi-structured interviews support the feared selves' sub-themes determined in metaphor analysis. For the "useless" sub-theme, the candidates used the metaphors such as "invisible pen, wall and empty box". One of the candidates expressed his/her feelings as:

"The counsellor I am afraid to be in my professional life is like an invisible pen..." (C2).

For the "detrimental" sub-theme, the candidates used the metaphors such as "snake, hedgehog, storm". One of the candidates expressed his/her feelings as:

"The counsellor I am afraid to be in my professional life is like a hedgehog hurting while trying to help other animals..." (C1).

For the "non-progressive" sub-theme, the candidates used the metaphors such as "rock, racehorse and lazy cat". One of the candidates expressed his/her feelings as:

"The counsellor I am afraid to be in my professional life is like a rock which never changes for years..." (C3).

For the "judgmental" sub-theme, one of the candidates expressed his/her feelings as:

"The counsellor I am afraid to be in my professional life is like a punch which labels people..." (C6).

For the "bossy" sub-theme, the candidates used the metaphors such as "monster, soldier and boss". One of the candidates expressed his/her feelings as:

"The counsellor I am afraid to be in my professional life is like a monster which frightens everyone..." (C7).

For the "burn-out" sub-theme, the candidates used the metaphors such as "jail, ostrich and decorative plant". One of the candidates expressed his/her feelings as:

"The counsellor I am afraid to be in my professional life is like a decorative plant which never changes for years..." (C3).

For the "distant" sub-theme, the candidates used the metaphors such as "rock, iceberg, poles and Mercedes". One of the candidates expressed his/her feelings as:

"The counsellor I am afraid to be in my professional life is like an iceberg which is very cold..." (C9).

These findings indicate that school counsellor candidates are really afraid of being an ineffective counsellor who does not benefit his/her students. The candidates also fear the idea of not being able to make a meaningful difference in their students' lives. Besides, the school counsellor candidates are also afraid of being a counsellor who hurts

their students. The candidates are also afraid of being a counsellor who does not understand his / her students, who judges him / her, but also exhibits authoritarian and non-progressive characteristics.

4.3 The factors affecting the candidates' possible selves

Data obtained through semi-structured interviews revealed that the most important factors affecting the development of candidates' possible selves are the school counsellors in previous educational life, undergraduate courses and fieldwork. The candidates expressed their feelings as:

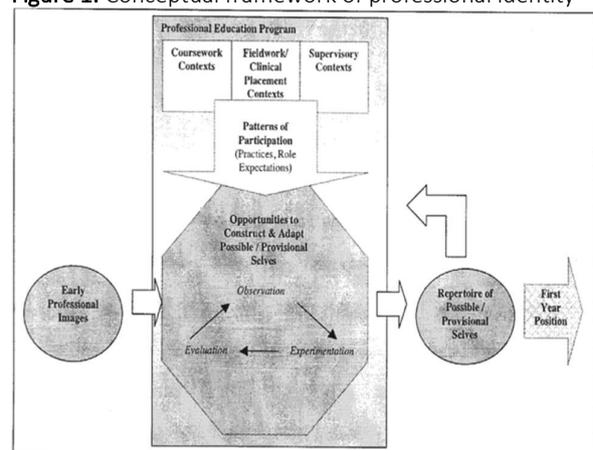
"I didn't meet any counsellor until end of my high school times. When I met him, I realized the importance of being a school counsellor for the life of students..." (C8).

"The courses in the faculty have impacted my future thinking as a school counsellor. Especially the opportunity to apply the theories into practice in some courses was more effective than the courses based on theories only..." (C9).

"The most important experience I had during my education in the faculty was the observation in schools. When you see a school counsellor in a real school setting, you can think about the counsellor you would like to be or afraid to be..." (C7).

The results of this study have shown parallelism with Ronfeldt (2008) study in which a conceptual framework was developed about the professional identity of counsellors (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Conceptual framework of professional identity



As can be seen on the Figure 1, early professional images and professional education are effective factors on development of candidates' possible selves (Ronfeldt, 2008, p.10).

5. Conclusion and Suggestions

In conclusion, this study shows that the school counsellor candidates who participated in the research have a desire to construct a good relationship with their students and wish to be a counsellor who is effective in the students' life, and in parallel with this, what they afraid most is to be a counsellor who is unable to benefit his/her students.

These hopes and fears should be taken into account in curriculum studies for undergraduate programs and professional development programs of school counsellors. As it is obvious that fieldwork is a crucial factor effecting candidates, a special emphasis should be given to improve the practicums in faculties.

Further research can seek answers to such questions "How do school counsellor candidates' possible selves change during educational life and after entering to profession?" or "How do school counsellor candidates' possible selves change during pandemic and in the post covid era?". Furthermore, quantitative studies can be conducted to examine the relationship between different variables and possible selves. It is also important to design cross-cultural studies to see the differences between cultures.

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