POSSIBILITY IN GROUPS: EXAMINING GROUP INTERVENTIONS TO

ENHANCE EMERGING ADULTS' POSSIBLE SELVES

by

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Abstract

Emerging adulthood is a period when a person's sense of who one can become undergoes considerable development. It has been proposed that interventions that focus on enhancing identity can help emerging adults shape and pursue their life goals; however, little is currently known about group interventions that help young people develop a robust sense of identity. Thus, the purpose of this dissertation was to advance understanding of identity-focused group interventions among emerging adults. Three studies were conducted using a staged approach to achieve this goal. Study 1 reviewed identity-focused group interventions that were empirically tested with emerging adults to uncover their defining characteristics and purported mechanisms of change. Interventions were categorized into three groups, including didactic, task-oriented, and experiential. Study 2 compared two possible selves group interventions (interpersonal-experiential and didactic) that aimed to increase participants' sense of future possibilities. Findings indicated significant improvement in future outlook and personal growth initiative following participation in both types of intervention. While no significant change in vocational possible selves was observed, significant improvement in relational possible selves was found among participants who completed the interpersonal-experiential intervention. Follow-up analyses found that improvement in relational possible selves in the interpersonal-experiential intervention was associated with participants' ratings of group engagement during the intervention. Study 3 explored participants' subjective experiences in the aforementioned possible selves group interventions. Three overarching categories emerged from a thematic analysis, including psychosocial changes (four themes), helpful factors (nine themes), and unhelpful factors (five themes). The emergent themes were associated with one or both group interventions. Taken

together, these three studies made the following contributions to the advancement of knowledge: consolidating and interpreting the disparate literature; investigating the effectiveness of and participants' perceptions of change in two identity-focused group interventions; examining group processes in the above interventions, and; exploring participants' perceived limitations and suggestions for improving the aforementioned interventions. Findings from this dissertation provide support for the need to study psychological interventions that address identity development in emerging adulthood, affording an original and substantive contribution to the identity scholarship domain.

Lay Summary

The transitional period between late adolescence and early adulthood can be difficult for some young people as they struggle to figure out who they are and what they want to become. This dissertation aimed to advance knowledge about what counselling professionals can do to help young people strengthen their sense of identity. Three studies were conducted to achieve this goal: (a) a review of what scholars have already done; (b) testing two types of interventions to see if they were effective at enhancing identity, and; (c) capturing the personalized accounts of young peoples' experiences in the interventions. Overall, findings from this dissertation suggested that identity-focused interventions can indeed enhance young peoples' identity development. This work is important because it lays the groundwork for future research and intervention development, which can advance knowledge on positive identity development during the emerging adult years.

Preface

This dissertation is an original intellectual product of the author, Ms. Zarina A. Giannone.

Study 1 (outlined in Chapter 2) was based on published data in the scientific literature. Ms. Giannone was involved in all phases of this study, including constructing the research questions, study design, search and analytic strategies, results categorization, and manuscript writing and preparation. Data interpretation and manuscript composition were Ms. Giannone's original work with the guidance of Dr. David Kealy. A version of this manuscript was accepted for publication in the *North American Journal of Psychology*. Dissertation Committee Members, Dr. Daniel Cox, Dr. David Kealy, and Dr. John Ogrodniczuk are co-authors on this manuscript. The co-authors assisted with manuscript preparation. Ethical approval was not required for the conduct of this study.

Study 2 (outlined in Chapter 3) was conducted at The University of British Columbia. Ms. Giannone was involved in all phases of this study, including constructing the research questions, study design, participant recruitment, data collection, statistical analyses, and manuscript writing and preparation. Data interpretation and manuscript composition were Ms. Giannone's original work with the guidance of Dr. David Kealy. A version of this work was submitted for publication. Dr. Daniel Cox and Dr. David Kealy are co-authors on this manuscript. The co-authors aided with manuscript preparation. Ethical approval for this study was granted by the University of British Columbia Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Identity Matters: H16-02387).

Study 3 (outlined in Chapter 4) was conducted at The University of British Columbia. Ms. Giannone was involved in all phases of this study, including constructing the research questions, study design, participant recruitment, data collection, qualitative analyses and interpretation, and manuscript writing and preparation. Dr. Shelly Ben-David, a qualitative methods expert, helped guide the data analysis and provided comments on data interpretation. Data interpretation and manuscript composition were Ms. Giannone's original work with the guidance of Dr. David Kealy and Dr. Shelly Ben-David. A version of this work was submitted for publication. Dr. Shelly Ben-David, Dr. Daniel Cox, and Dr. David Kealy are co-authors on this manuscript. The co-authors helped with manuscript preparation. Ethical approval for this study was granted by the University of British Columbia Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Identity Matters: H16-02387).

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List of Abbreviations

ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
BPS	Best Possible Self
BPSs	Best Possible Selves
DAIDP	Daytona Adult Identity Development Program
GCQ-ES	Group Climate Questionnaire – Engagement Scale
HHI	Herth Hope Index
IM	Identity Matters
MADP	Miami Adult Development Project
PA	Planning Ahead
PGIS-II	Personal Growth Initiative Scale-II
PSES	Possible Selves Efficacy Scale
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences

List of Key Terms

Developmental Task	Tasks that arise during certain life periods wherein achievement/completion leads to the ability to sufficiently perform the tasks associated with the next developmental period
Emerging Adulthood	A developmental period between late adolescence and early adulthood that describes people living in specific socioeconomic conditions in developed countries
Enhancing Possible Selves	Positive shifts in one's motivation, future expectancy, or initiative for behaviour that advances possible selves goals
Group Interventions	Psychological interventions wherein a group of individuals meet to discuss their concerns/challenges and are guided by group leader(s)
Group Processes	The elements of group interventions that facilitate participant improvement resulting from group member/group leader interactions
Identity	An internalized system representing who a person is that integrates one's inner self and one's external world into a coherent structure
Identity Enhancement	Changes that reflect positive shifts in one's understanding of their identity
Identity-Focused Interventions	Psychological interventions that support identity development
Interpersonal Processes	The coaction of cognitive, affective, behavioural, and motivational elements in social interactions
Possible Selves	An individual's schema of what they would like to become, providing a conceptual link between identity, motivation, and behaviour

Acknowledgements

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family:

my parents, Cathy and John Giannone;

my sister, Sahara Giannone;

and my fiancé, Amir Mirbagheri.

Questa dissertazione e il prodotto del tuo infinito amore, supporto e sacrificio.

Sono eternamente grato per il dono dell'educazione.

Chapter 1: General Introduction

Introduction

A prolonged transition to adulthood has become common in many post-industrial societies (Arnett, 1998; Schwartz, Côté, Arnett, 2005; Shanahan, 2000). Due to complex socioeconomic shifts arising since the 1950s, young people in these societies now pursue increased education, postpone marriage, delay the establishment of permanent and independent residence, and enter parenthood later than they did in the past (White, 2003). In Canada, the average age of first marriage in 1950 was 28.5 years for men and 25.9 years for women (Eichler, 2012). By 2008, people were older, on average, when they entered their first marriage (men = 31.6 years; women = 29.6 years; Eichler, 2012). The average age for first childbirth has also increased over time. Starting in the 1950s through to the 1970s, the average age of mothers at first birth was 24 years. By 2011, it grew to 28.5 years (Statistics Canada, 2019a). Further, the age at which individuals began living independently from their parents has followed a similar trend. That is, while 8.3% of young adults (25-34 years) had not left their parents' home in 1951, this rate continuously increased and reached 17.9% in 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2019b). Moreover, the number of young Canadians pursuing advanced education following secondary school has risen steeply from 33,328 in 1955 to 2,034,957 in 2016 (Statistics Canada, 2019c). Similar shifts have occurred in other industrialized nations (Arnett, 2011; Bongaarts, 2009). These demographic changes suggest that the period between adolescence and adulthood is a distinct developmental era (Arnett, 2000).

Emerging Adulthood

          "Emerging adulthood" refers to a period in the life span between late adolescence and young adulthood. Arnett (2000), an American developmental psychologist, proposed that specific social, cultural, and economic changes beginning in the 1950s have resulted in a longer road to adulthood, particularly within the most economically developed nations in the world (Murray & Arnett, 2019). According to his theory, the period between 18 to 25 years of age constitutes a distinct life stage that is "neither adolescence nor adulthood" (Arnett, 2000, p. 469). Based on Arnett's (2004) empirical work, five distinct features setting emerging adulthood apart from other developmental periods include: being between adolescence and adulthood (e.g., not a child but not a full-blown adult), a focus on one's self (e.g., minimal obligations/responsibilities to others), instability (e.g., multiple changes in relationships, residences, and employment), consideration of vast possibilities (e.g., exploring various life trajectories), and identity exploration (investigating various self-roles and interests; Arnett, 2000; Layland et al., 2018). The "distinctness" of these features does not mean that all young people possess them; instead it suggests that these features are more likely to be experienced in emerging adulthood than any other developmental period in the life course (Arnett, Kloep, Hendry, & Tanner, 2011). Additionally, the features are not meant to convey "discreteness", which means that they are not exclusively experienced in emerging adulthood. In fact, many of the above features begin during adolescence and become more prominent during emerging adulthood, thus garnering the distinct label (Arnett et al., 2011). Emerging adulthood is also understood as a time of life when other significant psychosocial changes are happening for young people including personality organization, cognitive and neurological development, rising risks in psychopathology and mental health,

renegotiating family relationships, exploring friendships and romantic relationships, embarking on educational and career pursuits, and achieving financial independence (Arnett et al., 2011). In the North American context, for many young people, emerging adulthood is characterized as a time of profound change and exploration, laying the foundation for the rest of the life course.

Importantly, emerging adulthood is not meant to be a universal theory that applies to everyone; rather it is meant to describe a common developmental experience for some young people in certain post-industrial societies, resulting from significant social changes over the past 70 years, including delays in marriage, permanent employment, and parenthood (Syed, 2015). Such changes have been expansive, involving broader sociopolitical movements like the sexual revolution, the women's rights movement, the youth movement, and the technology revolution, resulting in the "elongation of the pathway to adulthood" (Murray & Arnett, 2019, p. 5).

Differences have been found in the empirical literature that show disparities in who experiences emerging adulthood and how. For example, there is variability in the cultures of any given country, and some cultures have a period of emerging adulthood and others do not, or the length of emerging adulthood may differ across cultures within the same country (Arnett, 2004). Other factors like variations in socioeconomic status and life circumstance also contribute to whether a specific individual will experience emerging adulthood, even within well developed and affluent countries (Arnett, 2004).

This dissertation recognizes that the developmental period of emerging adulthood is socially determined and is not meant to be applied across all individuals and situations (Côté & Bynner, 2008). However, it is argued that development can be shaped by how people

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capitalize on the exploratory period of emerging adulthood to gain and integrate experiences, particularly those in specific socioeconomic conditions in industrialized countries (Hendry & Kloep, 2007; Layland et al., 2018). Thus, emerging adulthood is conceptualized in this dissertation as a characteristic of culture, especially in those cultures that enable prolonged periods of independent role exploration and hold social values like individualism and autonomy (Arnett, 2004).

Furthermore, this dissertation does not seek to validate the theory of emerging adulthood; instead it uses the theory to situate the population of interest – emerging adults – in a specific context. The emerging adulthood framework helps make sense of what happens developmentally for some people during the age period between the late teens and the mid-twenties. It is helpful because finding a fit between one's identity and the possibilities available to them is essential to making enduring commitments in adulthood (Arnett et al., 2011). These aspects of the emerging adult experience have important short- and long-term consequences. For example, a positive and keen sense of identity contributes to well-being (Pulkkinen & Ronka, 1994), boosts mental health (Montgomery, Hernandez, & Ferrer-Wreder, 2008) and enhances interpersonal functioning (Morgan & Korobov, 2011), with implications for the entire life span. Therefore, because of the distinct features associated with emerging adulthood, emerging adults were selected to be studied in this dissertation to explore the potential benefits of group interventions that facilitate processes like clarifying identity and exploring possibility. It is believed that such processes could have significant implications for long term development, enabling more meaningful and seamless transitions into adulthood.

General Criticisms of Emerging Adulthood Theory

Emerging adulthood theory has generated much attention, from supporters and critics alike. Building from Syed's (2015) work, the section below overviews four critiques of emerging adulthood theory to provide a more balanced perspective of the framework.

The first criticism that is highlighted pertains to the idea that developmental theories should not be historically specific (Hendry & Kloep, 2007). Some scholars warn against promoting a theory of development predicated on historical trends, suggesting that theories should be applicable across time and space. This undermines one of the purported contributions of emerging adulthood theory, which is to offer a theory that is applicable in the current socioeconomic climate versus in historical contexts.

Second, it has been suggested that emerging adulthood is not a positive time, which contradicts the conceptualization that emerging adults tend to have a positive sense about their future. According to Syed (2015), critics reject this "optimistic view of emerging adulthood as a time of exploration and opportunity and suggest that the causes and consequences of emerging adulthood are restrictive in nature" (p. 3). For example, Côté & Bynner (2008) discussed several socioeconomic factors that lead to a "forced" emerging adulthood (e.g., shifts in labour markets now require young people to pursue higher education, not out of desire, but out of necessity to obtain high paying and secure jobs).

Third, and likely the most common critique, regards the idea that emerging adulthood only applies to specific people, both beyond highly industrialized societies and within those societies (Syed, 2015). Some scholars argue that emerging adulthood is only available to people of privilege with enough means to engage in exploratory processes, and those with

less privilege and/or marginalized identities may not experience such a luxury (Hendry & Kloep, 2007).

Finally, critics have opposed the very idea that emerging adulthood theory is a theory at all. The primary argument that is made is that emerging adulthood theory is descriptive rather than explanatory (Syed, 2015). Critics suggest that the theory provides descriptions of variables like age and social class, which may predict behaviour; however, it fails to explain the developmental phenomena at hand (Hendry, 2009).

The above criticisms do not represent an exhaustive list of the arguments made against emerging adulthood theory. However, the author felt it was important to shed light on some of the controversies associated with the theory, with the ultimate goal of reminding readers of the theory's purpose in the dissertation: to frame and contextualize a developmental experience for some people between the ages of 18-25 in specific contexts.

Identity in Emerging Adulthood

One of the fundamental developmental tasks associated with the passage into adulthood is the furtherance of identity (Erikson, 1950, 1968; Schwartz, Kurtines, & Montgomery, 2005). Developmental tasks are endeavours that arise during certain periods of the life course, wherein achievement leads to the ability to sufficiently perform the tasks associated with the next developmental period (Havighurst, 1948, 1953). The definition that is used to conceptualize identity in this dissertation includes an internalized system representing who a person is that integrates one's inner self and one's external world into a cohesive structure. This definition is consistent with theoretical understandings of identity at the level of the individual while considering the influence of the surrounding social context (Breen, McLean, Cairney, & McAdams, 2017; McLean, 2015; McLean &

Breen, 2015; Vignoles, Schwartz, & Luyckx, 2011). For example, Breen, Scott, and McLean (2019) emphasized that "we construct a sense of who we are and a connection between past, present, and future selves through interaction with a layered world of personal, family, and cultural stories" (p. 2). This recognition that our identities are shaped by influences both within and outside the self-system is critical to our conceptualization of identity development.

Accordingly, this dissertation is interested in two overlapping but distinct concepts: identity and the self. Some scholars have argued that the distinction between these two constructs is artificial because they can be considered nested elements within the same concept (e.g., the self as a part of identity as a part of self-concept). As a result, the terms suffer from imprecision and are often used interchangeably in the literature (Vignoles et al., 2011). Other scholars have argued for various ways in which the self and identity can be differentiated. For example, McAdam's (2013) developmental tripartite model of the self offers a way of distinguishing these constructs by using three metaphors: the actor, the agent, and the author.

According to McAdams (2013), the self is initially an "actor" with a strong emphasis on the present moment and orientation towards action in the social world. Eventually the "agent" develops in middle childhood, wherein the self experiences future-oriented goals, hopes, and values for the first time. The primary aim of the agent during this period is to advance the self's purpose and projects. Finally, the "author" emerges in adolescence through to emerging adulthood to interpret past and present experiences, weigh future pursuits, and, ultimately, create a coherent overarching life story. The author endeavours to develop an identity, which is understood as a cohesive sense of self across time and

experiences (Breen et al., 2019). Such identity development is thought to be especially

prominent in adolescence and emerging adulthood because of one's growing cognitive

capacity to connect various "selves" across time (McLean & Breen, 2015). Thus, the self is

depicted as an actor, agent, and author with shifting motivations and aims, whereas the self's

identity serves as a broad unifier of these experiences (Lichtenberg, Lachmann, & Fosshage,

1992; Montgomery et al., 2008).

Furthermore, identity scholars typically focus on three "levels" of identity, including

personal, relational, and collective (Sedikides & Brewer, 2001). The levels of identity are

conceptualized as "a distinction among different forms of identity content, but … also [as]

various kinds of processes by which identities are formed and maintained or changed over

time" (Vignoles et al., 2011, p. 3). Identity content refers to the *what* of identity – what are

emerging adults thinking about as they grapple with questions about who they are? Identity

content is concerned with the context of identity development, including the situations and

domains in which identity is formed (McLean, Syed, & Shucard, 2016). In contrast, identity

processes refer to the *how* of identity – how do people develop their identities? Identity

processes involve the activities or behaviours that people engage in that allow them to

actively consider how identity content fits with their identities (McLean et al., 2016).

Personal identity is defined as the "aspects of self-definition at the level of the

individual person" (Vignoles et al., 2011, p. 3), underscoring a person's agency in the

identity development process (Côté & Levine, 2002; Vignoles et al., 2011). Relational

identity is defined as one's self-definition within the context of their relationships with

others, encompassing various interpersonal roles (e.g., daughter, teammate, colleague;

Vignoles et al., 2011). Relational identity also envelopes how self-roles are "defined and

interpreted by those who assume them" (Vignoles et al., 2011, p. 3). Collective identity is

defined as one's "identification with the groups and social categories to which they belong,

the meanings that they give to these social groups and categories, and the feelings, beliefs,

and attitudes that result from identifying with them" (Vignoles et al., 2011, p. 3). While

there are interconnections among the levels of identity, an emphasis on personal identity is

taken in this dissertation because it focuses on identity processes at the level of the individual

person. This approach is consistent with Erikson's (1950) model of psychosocial

development, which suggests that a person has a singular, unitary identity that is relatively

stable once it has formed. The term "identity" hereafter refers to personal identity.

Identity Development Models

Several theoretical models have emerged over the decades to help describe and

explain identity development.

Pioneering theories of identity development. Questions of identity are essential as

individuals transition from adolescence to adulthood (Schwartz, 2001). "Who am I"? "What

do I value"? "What differentiates me from other people"? Identity scholars have long

debated these questions, beginning with the early writings of Erikson (1950), who pioneered

this area of inquiry in modern psychology and inspired a longstanding tradition of identity

theory. Marcia (1966) subsequently built upon Erikson's work to contribute the first

empirical model of identity exploration and commitment. These two fundamental theories of

identity development are reviewed below.

Psychosocial stages of identity development. More than 70 years ago, Erikson

suggested that developing a sense of identity was critical to the transition to adulthood. He

understood identity as a "single bipolar dimension … ranging from the ego syntonic pole of

identity synthesis to the ego dystonic pole of identity confusion" (Schwartz, 2001, p. 9). Identity synthesis represented the integration of one's experiences into a congruent internalized structure.

In contrast, identity confusion represented the impaired ability to integrate one's experiences. A synthesized identity reflected a coherent "whole" made up of the various facets that comprise who a person is (e.g., personal values, preferences, ideals). Thus, the more integrated and complete a person's sense of identity is the more they experience synthesis. In turn, the more disconnected one is from the various aspects of themselves, the more identity confusion they will experience. Erikson suggested that all individuals were located on the continuum between identity synthesis and identity confusion (Schwartz, 2001).

Erikson presented his theory as a series of eight stages of psychosocial conflict that all individuals must resolve successfully to adjust to the environment sufficiently. He theorized that all individuals encounter specific crises that contribute to our psychological growth at each stage of development, and failure to overcome such crises may lead to psychosocial impairment. The crises included, "trust vs. mistrust" (0-18 months); "autonomy vs. shame" (18 months-3 years); "initiative vs. guilt" (3-5 years); "industry vs. inferiority" (5-13 years); "identity vs. role confusion" (13-21 years); "intimacy vs. isolation" (21-39 years); "generativity vs. stagnation" (40-65 years); and "ego integrity vs. despair" (65 years and above). While Erikson's concept of identity was extensive in scope, it was difficult to operationalize (Côté & Levine, 2002; Schwartz, 2001). Several scholars have since tried to operationalize his theory to create testable models and hypotheses (Schwartz, 2001). Marcia

(1966) was the first "neo-Eriksonian" (perspectives that built upon Erikson's work) scholar to foster substantial research.

Identity statuses. Marcia developed a model that emerged from Erikson's conceptualization of identity exploration and commitment (Schwartz, 2001). He suggested that exploration involved behaviours that intended to elicit information about oneself or one's context, which informed decision-making about life choices. Commitment, on the other hand, represented behaviours that adhered to previously identified roles (Marcia, 1988; Schwartz, 2001). Both identity processes were considered central to identity development among young people. Marcia (1966) constructed an identity status typology by placing exploration and commitment in a matrix (high vs. low; Schwartz, 2001). Four identity statuses were created, including identity achievement, identity moratorium, identity foreclosure, and identity diffusion. Each status represented a person's degree of exploration, coupled with their degree of commitment. Because Marcia did not postulate a developmental sequence, the statuses are characterized as identity "types" rather than as developmental stages (as per Erikson).

Identity achievement is a commitment that is made following a period of exploration (Schwartz, 2001). Individuals classified as "identity achieved" encompass those who have undergone extensive identity search and who have selected one or more identity alternatives. Identity moratorium involves active exploration with a lack of commitment. Identity foreclosure refers to commitments made to identity alternatives with a lack of exploration. Finally, identity diffusion involves a paucity of exploration and commitment (Schwartz, 2001).

Identity domains. Identity domains refer to aspects of a person's life through which one may derive knowledge about themselves or their environment, such as career or academic domains (Schwartz, 2001). Because identity may operate differently across domains (e.g., one's identity as an athlete may be more salient than one's identity as a student), identity scholars began to consider the differential effect of various life domains on identity development. Since Erikson and Marcia's seminal writings, identity status theorists have expanded the life domains that are assumed to be pertinent to identity development, such as interpersonal domains (e.g., familial and intimate relationships), social domains (e.g., gender and sexuality), cultural domains (e.g., racial-ethnic and class) and recreational domains (e.g., sports and arts). It is noted, however, that the above domains do not reflect an exhaustive list of the possible domains that comprise overall identity, nor do they reflect how such domains could be broken down into constituent parts (e.g., gender roles could be further divided into businessperson or parental roles).

Contemporary theories of identity development. Three contemporary theories that extend neo-Eriksonian identity conceptualization are briefly discussed below, representing major extensions of identity theory.

Identity styles. Identity styles theory was developed to understand how people make identity-related decisions (Berzonsky, 1989). Berzonsky (1992) suggested three identity styles, including informational, normative, and diffuse-avoidant. The first identity style regards an informational orientation, which involves the consideration of multiple alternatives and the adoption of a well-informed decision-making process when faced with identity-related choices. The second identity style relates to a normative orientation, which involves acquiescing to interpersonal and familial expectations. The third identity style

regards a diffuse-avoidant orientation, which involves procrastinating and avoiding important life decisions. Individuals who utilize this orientation usually do not attempt to confront identity-related decisions; rather, the decisions are avoided altogether.

Narrative identity.   Narrative identity theory focuses on how individuals organize their experiences into an evolving story. An individual's "life story" tends to focus on the most significant life events because those are the experiences that are assumed to define and shape us (Schwartz, Zamboanga, Luyckx, Meca, & Ritchie, 2013). According to McAdams (2013), a person's narrative "synthesizes episodic memories with envisioned goals, creating a coherent account of identity in time … through narrative identity, people convey to themselves and to others who they are now, how they came to be, and where they think their lives may be going in the future" (p. 233). Through repeated storytelling, narratives become revised and reinterpreted (McAdams, 2013). Thus, the person produces a more integrated story, enabling comprehensive identity development (McAdams & McLean, 2013).

Possible selves. Possible selves refer to an individual's internalized "ideas about what they might become, what they would like to become, and what they are afraid of becoming" in the future (Markus & Nurius, 1986; p. 954). Dunkel (2000) posited that possible selves and identity development are linked, wherein positive or negative future identities can motivate an individual to strive towards or away from their identity goals. Other researchers (e.g., Hamman, Gosselin, Romano, & Bunuan, 2010) have supported the connection between possible selves and broader identity scholarship, contending that "future-oriented thought provides identity-relevant information and motivation to pursue self-relevant goals" (p. 1349).

Possible-selves theory (Markus & Nurius, 1986) describes the importance of future-oriented identities and their relationship to motivating present and future behaviour (Hamman et al., 2010). The development of possible selves can involve a diverse array of opportunities for the self in the future that are anchored by current and past experiences (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Possible selves emerge from what is valued within an individual's socio-cultural context (Hamman et al., 2010).

Markus and Nurius (1986) suggested that possible selves serve two important purposes. Firstly, possible selves serve as "roadmaps" (Frazier, Hooker, Johnson, and Kaus, 2006) that provide information and guide decisions about present behaviours. That is, possible selves dictate whether an individual approaches or avoids a targeted outcome (Hamman et al., 2010), thus affecting moment-to-moment decision-making and action (Cross & Markus, 1991). Secondly, possible selves exert a motivational influence on behaviour (Oyserman & Destin, 2010). Upon considering one's possible selves, "the future becomes the motivational space for acting to achieve goals and avoid undesirable outcomes" (Hamman et al., 2010, p. 1351). Indeed, these two purposes are interrelated.

In essence, an individual's possible selves reflect how one thinks about their potential and their future, functioning as a cognitive link between past and future expectancies (Markus & Nurius, 1986). They represent what individuals hope to become and what they wish to avoid becoming, and they are intricately tied to one's identity (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Unlike other models of identity, which do not present a direct link between identity, motivation, and behaviour, possible selves theory is believed to be especially conducive to interventions that seek to facilitate future-oriented identity development.

A Focus on Emerging Adults' Possible Selves

Possible selves theory was selected to provide the theoretical grounding in this dissertation. Possible selves theory focuses on the aspect of identity that is future-oriented; possible selves specify how individuals may change from who they are now to what they will become (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Importantly, this idea of envisioning and striving towards future-oriented selves intersects with two essential tasks of emerging adulthood: exploring identity and considering diverse possibilities (Arnett, 2000; Arnett, 2011). Emerging adults may imagine themselves in lucrative careers or in loving relationships, which can affect their way forward in life and have lasting consequences in adulthood (e.g., pursuing higher education while delaying marriage, childbearing, or permanent employment). In fact, the word *emerging* in the term emerging adulthood was coined to reflect the exploratory, unstable, and fluid quality of this developmental period. It implies that adulthood has not been reached; young people are on their way to adulthood, but they have not yet achieved it (Arnett, 2004). Thus, possible selves theory provides a helpful framework for understanding how emerging adults explore and negotiate diverse possibilities for themselves. This is further linked with intervention, such that interventions that support emerging adults' exploration of who they can become may be a valuable tool in the developmental process.

General Criticisms of Identity Theories

The above theories provide powerful descriptions and explanations for identity development that reflect the attitudes and values of the socio-cultural context in which they were constructed - traditional Eurocentric individualistic culture (Alberts & Durrheim, 2018). Critics of Eriksonian and neo-Eriksonian theories argue that such conceptualizations only account for the identity development of people who hold mainstream or majority identities

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(e.g., white, middle class; Phoenix & Rattansi, 2005; Schachter, 2005; Sneed, Schwartz, & Cross, 2006; Sorell & Montgomery, 2001). Consequently, they may not appropriately apply to individuals whose cultures differ from traditional Euro-centric patterns or provide sufficient explanation regarding the development of group or social identity (e.g., sexual orientation, gender identity; Alberts & Durrheim, 2018; Cross, 1991; Helms, 1995; Sneed, Schwartz, & Cross, 2006; Sue & Sue, 1990).

It has been proposed that such Eriksonian and neo-Eriksonian theories ignore the possibility that people have multiple, intersecting identities based on sociodemographic categories, which can be complementary or conflicting with one another (Crenshaw, 1989; Schwartz, 2001; Schwartz & Montgomery, 2002). Indeed, a person's unique traits, family dynamics, cultural norms, and experiences of marginalization and oppression significantly contribute to the development of identity (Phoenix & Rattansi, 2005; Schachter, 2005). These factors can inhibit or ease identity development. It is noted that these criticisms may stem from the artificial distinctions between personal and collective identities within Eriksonian and neo-Eriksonian theories that separate "levels" of identity that are, in reality, interrelated.

In light of these limitations, this dissertation seeks to incorporate a broader understanding of identity that recognizes that individuals can be differentially affected by the interplay of one's internal experience and their surrounding context. This broader understanding is reflected in the definition of identity provided earlier in the chapter.

Identity-Focused Interventions in Emerging Adulthood

There is research evidence that suggests that, without help, emerging adults may struggle with identity development (Schwartz et al., 2005). Some emerging adults may

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grapple with the unstructured nature of the developmental process, the breadth of possible identities, and the absence of formalized assistance. Given this, it is expected that opportunities to engage in formalized and structured processes specifically designed to target identity development and the exploration of possibility may help facilitate cohesive identity formation in emerging adulthood.

Psychological interventions present opportunities to enhance competencies, self-knowledge, positive behaviours, and well-being. Indeed, such work is important during emerging adulthood, a time of rapid change and experimentation (Montgomery, Hernandez & Ferrer-Wreder, 2008). Emerging adults explore possible identities within several life domains, including work, education, leisure, and relationships, eventually making decisions regarding which identities to commit to (Arnett, 2004; Layland et al., 2018). Identity exploration, when aimed at fostering meaningful commitments for the individual, can be most fruitful (Marcia, 1988). At the same time, sorting through new life trajectories may be overwhelming, with some young people suffering from identity-related distress that interferes with optimal functioning (Berman, Montgomery, & Kurtines, 2004; Côté & Bynner, 2008; Meca et al., 2014).

Identity-focused interventions are believed to provide opportunities that enable identity exploration in a proactive and agentic manner, guiding self-discovery, the development of life goals, and the negotiation of social relationships (Schwartz et al., 2005). While there is relatively limited research on identity interventions among emerging adults, a wide range of interventions targeting identity has been developed for adolescents (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 2004). Most of these interventions have been

grounded in Erikson's (1950) theory of identity development as a foundational endeavour of adolescence (Meca et al., 2014).

For example, Markstrom-Adams, Ascione, Braegger, and Adams (1993) effectively promoted adolescent identity development (outcome: ego identity formation) through short-term perspective-taking training among older adolescents ($N = 125$). Further, Ferrer-Wreder al. (2002) found that adolescents ($N = 92$) exhibited statistically significant changes in identity development domains, including exploration/commitment. Other adolescent identity-focused intervention studies have demonstrated positive changes in related identity constructs, including occupational goal-setting (identity-related goals) among Mexican-American children (Day, Borkowski, Dietmeyer, Howsepian, & Saenz, 1994), urban African-American students' school involvement (academic identities; Oyserman, Terry, & Bybee, 2002), and academic performance (academic identities) among middle-school students (Hock, Deshman, & Schumaker, 2006).

In his empirical research with 300 Americans (aged 20-29), Arnett (2000) derived five features that are believed to distinguish emerging adulthood from adolescence and adulthood, respectively. These features, which emerging adults purportedly experience, include: (i) identity exploration, (ii) instability, (iii) focus on one's self, (iv) feeling "in-between", and (v) consideration of vast possibilities. In light of this distinction, it is conceivable that emerging adults require different types of support than adolescents when forming their identities (Meca et al., 2014). According to Meca et al. (2014), "the challenge of forming a sense of identity … becomes more complex during emerging adulthood as they [emerging adults] encounter greater freedom and new possibilities in their transition beyond the structure of childhood and adolescence" (p. 314).

Therefore, due to the complex features of emerging adulthood and its relatively recent identification as a distinct developmental period (see Arnett 2000), there is limited knowledge about methods to strengthen identity development in emerging adulthood (Meca et al., 2014). This dissertation seeks to understand better the role of identity-focused interventions in enhancing identity development during the emerging adult years.

Identity "enhancement". Advancements in research can inform our conceptualization of interventions that aim to engage emerging adults in processes that "enhance" their identities. While enhancing one's identity can mean a number of different things, it is defined in this dissertation as changes that reflect positive shifts in one's understanding of their identity.

A definition for enhancing possible selves is also provided because this dissertation specifically examines possible selves interventions. Enhancing one's possible selves refers to positive shifts in one's motivation, future expectancy, or initiative for behaviour that advances their possible selves' goals. Emerging adults engage in adaptive exploration of possible selves, eliciting group experiences that allow members to reflect upon and consider the selves they wish to become in the future (e.g., interpersonal learning, group cohesion).

Interpersonal processes. Interpersonal processes, or the coaction of cognitive, affective, behavioural, and motivational elements in social interactions (Synder & Stukas, 1999), are central to identity development (Morgan & Korobov, 2011). People can gauge their fit in society by engaging in identity development in social settings (Erikson, 1968). Current conceptualizations of identity are consistent with the notion that identity development is a "complex and dynamic process that is constructed and maintained by individuals in social contexts" (Morgan & Korobov, 2011, p. 1472). These perspectives

suggest that people are simultaneously engaging in identity formation as they interact with one another (Adams & Marshall, 1996; Morgan & Korobov, 2011).

Interpersonal processes are integral to emerging adults' identity development (Erikson, 1968; Sullivan, 1953). Emerging adulthood is a time of heightened interpersonal activity (Arnett, 2000; Douglass, 2007). For many emerging adults, establishing intimate friendships and dating relationships are significant developmental tasks, and identity development can occur within these interpersonal contexts (Morgan & Korobov, 2011). Empirical investigation has provided further evidence in support of the link between interpersonal processes and identity development. For example, as described in Morgan and Korobov (2011), Kerpelman and Pittman (2001) found that interpersonal processes (e.g., peer feedback) were associated with the development of highly important possible selves, suggesting that close relationships are implicated in the development of valued and salient future identities. Thus, contexts that specifically seek to provide interpersonal experiences, such as group-based interventions, are believed to enhance identity development among emerging adults.

Group interventions. Identity-focused group interventions can provide interpersonal processes to help facilitate identity development in emerging adulthood. Group interventions that stimulate interpersonal processes to facilitate identity change are believed to utilize emerging adults' heightened patterns of interpersonal activity. Further, group work can offer the unique opportunity to engage in interpersonal processes in the microcosm of the group, in comparison to individual interventions, which are typically limited to client-therapist interactions. For these reasons, identity-focused group interventions are emphasized in this dissertation.

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The emphasis on group interventions is informed by interpersonal-experiential models of group psychotherapy (e.g., Kiesler, 1982, 1996; Yalom, 1995; Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). According to Kiesler (1996), interpersonal behaviour refers to our actions in the presence of other people. It involves not only individuals' responses to stimuli, but it also elicits particular reactions from other people. Thus, interpersonal behaviour reflects the "recurrent patterns of reciprocal relationship present among two [or more] persons' covert and overt actions and reactions … over some period (sequence) of their transactions with each other" (p. 7). Interpersonal learning, a construct central to interpersonal-experiential models of group psychotherapy, underscores group interventions' potential to facilitate critical identity processes among emerging adults. Interpersonal learning, which is comprised of interpersonal interactions and feedback, is considered a key change agent within the group setting (Leszcz, 2008). It occurs when individuals develop self-insight and learn new interpersonal skills through their interactions and engagement with others (Leszcz & Malat, 2008).

Group interventions also offer opportunities for social support. Group members can seek support for their concerns and provide support to others (Harel, Schechtman, & Cutrona, 2011). Supportive relationships have been recognized as a factor that is associated with the effectiveness of the group modality (Burlingame, Fuhriman, & Johnson, 2004; Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). Compared with individual interventions, the group can serve as a more sophisticated source of social support because multiple group members, versus the group facilitator alone, can provide support (Harel et al., 2011).

Further, the underpinnings of identity-focused group interventions also draw upon identity theory. For example, Erikson (1950) proposed that symbolic interactions with others

and self-reflexive thought were essential to constructing and discovering one's own identity. As articulated by Meca et al. (2014), Erikson theorized that the "support provided by group work may help shift the tension between the potential for synthesis and the potential for confusion, tipping the scale in favor of synthesis … [thus] group work does not eliminate confusion … but it may reduce levels of distress so that the tension between synthesis and confusion becomes more constructive" (p. 327). Overall, group interventions are believed to provide unique opportunities for emerging adults to enhance their identities. In doing so, they can address the demands of emerging adulthood that obstruct growth and development towards their future identities, goals, and desired life directions.

Purpose and Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation is composed of three independent manuscripts and was developed to advance understanding of identity-focused group interventions in emerging adulthood. The objective of Study 1 was to review the types of identity-focused group interventions that have been empirically tested with emerging adults to uncover their defining characteristics and purported mechanisms of change. The objective of Study 2 was to compare the effectiveness of two types of group interventions aimed at enhancing emerging adults' possible selves. A secondary purpose was to examine the role of group engagement as a reflection of the interpersonal experience generated by the group sessions. Lastly, the objective of Study 3 was to explore participants' subjective experiences in the aforementioned possible selves group interventions.

Importantly, a staged approach was employed in the conduct of this dissertation. A scoping review methodology was selected for Study 1 to determine the nature and extent of available research evidence. Study 1 encompassed a review of the literature regarding group

interventions targeting identity in emerging adults that created the basis for the following two studies. That is, after learning about what identity-focused group interventions had been empirically tested with emerging adults (Study 1), we developed categories based on the interventions' shared and defining characteristics. Studies 2 and 3 built upon Study 1's findings by examining different types of group interventions. Specifically, Study 2 quantitatively compared the outcomes and processes of two types of possible selves group interventions for emerging adults. Study 3 was a qualitative investigation that explored participants' subjective experiences of these two group interventions using thematic analysis. It is believed that the quantitative and qualitative approaches employed in this dissertation are complementary to one another, and the progression of the three manuscripts demonstrates a coherent and original body of research.

Categorization of key concepts. Four major concepts are discussed throughout this dissertation: emerging adulthood, identity development, possible selves, and group interventions. A conceptual map was developed, specifying how these concepts are organized in this dissertation (see Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1 Categorization of Key Concepts.

Developmental Periods

| Adolescence | → | **Emerging Adulthood** | → | Adulthood |

Identity Development

Possible Selves

Group Intervention
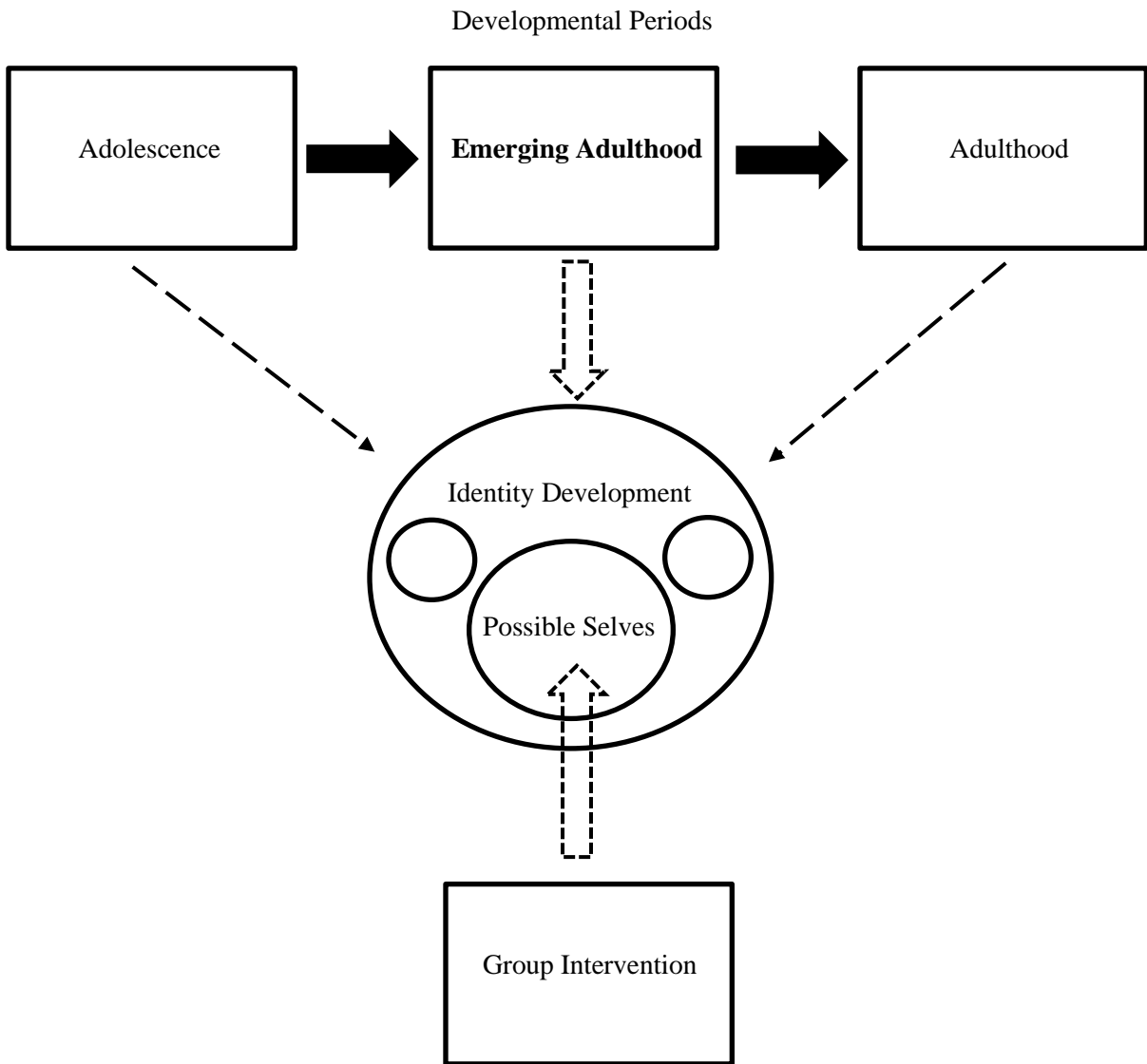
Note. This figure reflects the categorization of key concepts within this dissertation.

Emerging adulthood is at the highest level of categorization, is considered one developmental

period, among others (e.g., adolescence), and reflects the developmental context of interest in

this dissertation. Identity development is situated below emerging adulthood and is

considered a primary task of emerging adulthood. Possible selves are positioned within the

identity development category and reflect only one form of identity development, among

others (e.g., narrative identity) that emphasize future-oriented identities. Group intervention

is positioned below the possible selves category to reflect a mode of intervention that aims to

enhance possible selves during the emerging adult years.

Chapter 2: Study 1

Identity-focused Group Interventions Among Emerging Adults: A Review

Introduction

Developing a sense of identity is one of the fundamental tasks of emerging adulthood, the period between late adolescence and adulthood (Arnett, 2000). Successful identity development is shaped by how individuals use this period to gain and integrate experiences, enabling the unification of various aspects of one's self into a coherent structure called identity (Schwartz, Kurtines, & Montgomery, 2005). A variety of interventions have been developed to support young adults as they navigate the myriad of challenges that are present during this critical transitional period; among these are group interventions. Critically reviewing what is known about such interventions is essential to understanding different approaches to promoting identity development during emerging adulthood.

A cohesive identity can promote well-being (Montgomery, Hernandez, & Ferrer-Wreder, 2008) and reduce anxiety symptoms (e.g., withdrawal, somatic complaints; Schwartz, 2007), especially among those who are navigating the demands of emerging adulthood. While there are diverse understandings about what constitutes one's identity (Vignoles, Schwartz, & Luyckx, 2011), the definition used in this review includes an internalized system representing who a person is that integrates one's inner self and one's external world into a coherent structure (iResearchNet, n.d.). This conceptualization is consistent with the theoretical understandings of identity at the level of the individual while considering the surrounding social context (Vignoles et al., 2011).

Interpersonal processes, or the coaction of cognitive, affective, behavioural, and motivational elements in social interactions (Synder & Stukas, 1999), are essential to identity

development (Morgan & Korobov, 2011). People learn about themselves and their roles in society through engagement in various social contexts (Erikson, 1968). For example, friendships offer the opportunity to learn about one's relational patterns, which are a critical source of self-information (Grotevant, Thorbecke, & Meyer, 1982). Current conceptualizations of identity further support the notion that identity development is a "complex and dynamic process that is constructed and maintained by individuals in social contexts" (Morgan & Korobov, 2011, p. 1472), suggesting that as people interact with others, they are simultaneously engaging in identity development by gaining identity-relevant information in the form of social feedback (Adams & Marshall, 1996; Morgan & Korobov, 2011). As discussed in Morgan and Korobov (2011), identity control theory offers a helpful approach for understanding how interpersonal processes spur identity development (see Kerpelman, Pittman, & Lamke, 1997, for an overview).

Interpersonal processes are especially significant for emerging adults' identity development (Morgan & Korobov, 2011). Emerging adulthood involves heightened levels of interpersonal activity; establishing intimate friendships and dating relationships are crucial developmental tasks (Arnett, 2000; Douglass, 2007; Morgan & Korobov, 2011). It has been argued that interpersonal relationships and broader social activity among peers are key contexts for identity development and are essential to subsequent relational commitments in adulthood (Morgan & Korobov, 2011). The interpersonal processes afforded through various relationships and interactions can provide opportunities for emerging adults to receive identity-relevant information and feedback, thus affirming or disrupting their identity-related beliefs (Morgan & Korobov, 2011). Consequently, emerging adults may adjust their

identities to the received social feedback or seek out new social situations that lead to identity

affirmation (Morgan & Korobov, 2011).

Identity-focused group interventions are believed to leverage emerging adults'

heightened patterns of interpersonal activity and orientation towards social relationships,

enabling members to engage in interpersonal processes within the microcosm of the group.

Evidence from the group psychotherapy literature has found that certain mechanisms, known

as group processes, can uniquely facilitate participant change in group settings (Crouch,

Bloch, & Wanlass, 1994; Yalom, 1995). Group processes refer to the elements of the group

that facilitate participant improvement, resulting from the interactions among members of the

group (Bloch & Crouch, 1985). Group processes, such as self- and other-observation, the

exchange of feedback, and trialling new behaviours in a social context, are associated with

key interpersonal processes relevant to identity development (Yalom, 1995). Therefore,

contexts that provide formalized and structured interpersonal experiences, such as those

afforded in group interventions, are believed to enhance identity development among

emerging adults. "Enhancing" identity is defined in this review as changes that reflect

positive shifts in one's understanding of their identity.

Research aimed at examining identity-focused group interventions during the

emerging adult years has been largely absent in the literature until recently (Meca et al.,

2014). The lack of attention to such interventions is likely due to the relatively recent

identification of emerging adulthood as a new developmental period (see Arnett, 2000).

Some contemporary theories of human development posit that establishing an identity is a

chief task of emerging adulthood due to significant changes that have occurred in post-

industrialized countries over the last several decades (e.g., postponement of major identity

commitments such as marriage or parenthood; Arnett, 2000). This conceptualization differs from earlier perspectives that proposed that adolescence was the age of identity development (e.g., Erikson). More recently, researchers have begun to investigate identity development in emerging adulthood, and a number of preliminary studies have been conducted on identity-focused group interventions during the emerging adult years. It has been proposed that emerging adults require a different kind of support than adolescents (Meca et al., 2014), due to the complex features that distinguish them from adolescents (i.e., feeling in-between, focusing on independence, instability, considering various possibilities, and identity exploration; see Arnett, 2000; Arnett, 2011).

The Present Review

The purpose of this review is to identify group interventions that aim to enhance emerging adults' identity (as defined above) and to describe and categorize them according to their defining characteristics. Consolidating and interpreting the literature can enhance knowledge about the current state of the field, assisting researchers and clinicians in determining what interventions are available and supported by empirical evidence. Moreover, the opportunity to characterize studies based on their defining characteristics can help elucidate the mechanisms through which the group interventions may enhance emerging adults' identities.

The following research questions guided the review: (a) which identity-focused group interventions have been empirically investigated among samples of emerging adults? And (b) what are the defining characteristics of and mechanisms by which these group interventions are purported to enhance emerging adults' identity? These questions informed the search criteria for inclusion in our review.

Method

Selection Criteria

Selection criteria were determined a priori and were applied in the present review. Studies were included if they used an experimental or quasi-experimental research design testing an identity-focused intervention for emerging adults (mean age equal to or less than 30 years of age) in a group context. A group context was defined as a setting in which three or more emerging adults simultaneously participated. Eligible studies were required to have empirically tested an intervention primarily aimed at enhancing identity-related constructs, as opposed to ameliorating pathology. Identity-related constructs refer to broad outcomes associated with identity change (e.g., motivation to pursue identity-related goals). The search was limited to articles written in English. Interventions targeting identity development in clinical populations were excluded.

Search Strategy

We performed a preliminary search using PsycINFO's Thesaurus on EBSCOhost to generate search terms. We then inspected select articles and consulted a key resource in the identity scholarship area, the *Handbook of Identity Theory and Research* (Schwartz, Luyckx, & Vignoles, 2011), to further gather recurring key terms. The final search terms were comprised of: "identity", "identity development", "identity enhancement", "identity-focused", "identity processes", "identity style", "narrative identity", "identity status", "possible-selves", "possible identities", and "best-possible selves". These terms were combined with keywords related to group intervention modalities: "group counseling", "group counselling", "group therapy", "group psychotherapy", "group participation", and "group intervention", as well as key terms representing the emerging adulthood

developmental period: "emerging adulthood", "emerging adults", "young adults", "adults", "adulthood", "late adolescence", and "youth".

The above search terms were entered into PsycINFO and Academic Search Premier electronic databases. PsychINFO was selected because of its expansive abstracting and indexing database, which hosts more than three million peer-reviewed records related to the field of psychology. Academic Search Premier was selected because it is a leading multidisciplinary research database. Several advanced search criteria were employed, including a limited time span from January 1986 (first writing on identity-focused intervention; Marcia, 1986) to July 2019 (date at the time of the search), articles written in English, and published in peer-reviewed journals. Hand-searching was also performed in key journals and articles to reduce the likelihood that studies meeting the above criteria were omitted. Studies were selected as potentially eligible for inclusion in two phases. During the first screening phase, selection was based on the title and abstract. During the second screening phase, selection was based on the full-text article. All of the studies that were identified as possibly eligible at stage one were reassessed for eligibility at stage two.

Search decision-process. The search decision-process occurred in the following steps. One hundred eleven articles were identified through a combined database search in PsycINFO and Academic Search Premier using our identified search terms. Twelve duplicates were detected and removed. Articles identified through hand-searching (10) were also retained. A total of 109 articles were included in preliminary screening (reviewing article titles and abstracts).

During the preliminary screening, 96 articles were excluded from the investigation based on the aforementioned inclusion/exclusion criteria. A total of 17 articles qualified for

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advanced screening wherein full-text articles were assessed. During the advanced screening, seven articles were excluded because the studies did not use an experimental or quasi-experimental design (2), the sample did not include emerging adults exclusively (2), or the focus of the study was inappropriate (3). A total of 10 articles were selected for inclusion in the review. It is noted that one of the included articles contained two studies; thus, the total number of *studies* in the review was 11. See Figure 2.1 for a flow diagram of the search decision procedures.

Coding Strategy

The following extraction fields were used: (a) author information and publication year, (b) country, (c) target population, (d) number of participants, (e) intervention condition, (f) comparison condition, (g) outcome construct/measure, and (h) key findings. Data extraction was performed by one reviewer (first author) and independently checked by a second reviewer (third author). Disagreements were resolved by consensus between the two authors. Classification of the search results were further organized into categories to translate the findings best. These data formed the basis of the analysis below.

<div align="center">

Results

</div>

Data extracted from each article are presented in Table 2.1. Regarding our first research question, eleven identity-focused group interventions that had been evaluated relative to a control group were identified. All the interventions were found to be effective within the context of their respective research designs (see Table 2.1).

To examine our second research question—defining the characteristics and mechanisms through which interventions purportedly enhanced identity—interventions were grouped into categories a posteriori (see Peters et al., 2015). Following a thorough review of

the articles, we developed categories by coding aspects of the interventions (e.g., degree of structure, role of the group leader) and clustering the codes into themes. There was great diversity and overlap in several intervention procedures and in intervention descriptions. Thus, intervention categorization sought to capture the *primary* foci of the group intervention method, namely, the degree of structure, the role of the facilitator, and the predominant focus of the intervention (see Table 2.2 for a summary).

Three intervention categories were created: didactic, task-oriented, and experiential. First, the primary characteristics of identity-focused didactic interventions reflected their significant degree of structure, facilitator directiveness, and use of educational activities (i.e., teaching) to enhance identity development. These interventions positioned the leader as a director of the intervention process such that they engaged group members in various modes of education, including didactic instruction, training, engagement in learning or reflective activities, and group discussion. These aspects appeared to provide ample opportunity for independent learning, in contrast to interpersonal learning opportunities among group members (e.g., exchange of feedback). Second, the primary characteristics of task-oriented interventions reflected their focus on task completion, such as mental imagery, identity-related writing, or some combination of both. There was little to no didactic teaching in these interventions (participants were only provided instructions for the tasks). Task-oriented interventions appeared to be highly structured, thereby seemingly decreasing opportunities for collaborative, interpersonal processes (e.g., group discussion). The role of the facilitator focused on guiding the group through the structured procedures of the tasks (e.g., reading instructions, keeping time). Third, the primary characteristics of the experiential interventions reflected their semi-structured, exploratory, and interactive nature that sought to

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help participants identify personal difficulties and work through them together. The role of group facilitators in these interventions involved serving as a co-learner, enabling participants to generate the session content rather than functioning as an expert or teacher by simply transferring knowledge to participants. The experiential interventions appeared to prioritize interpersonal processes among the group as a means of enhancing identity.

Narrative Summary

Didactic interventions. Three studies reported significant findings for their didactic interventions. In a series of two studies, Markstrom-Adams, Ascione, Braegger, and Adams (1993) investigated whether two training interventions - a "social training intervention", which focused on identifying similarities and differences between the self and others, and an "individuation training intervention", which focused on organizing self-insights in ideological domains such as politics and religion - would influence social identity formation and ideological identity formation, respectively. One hundred undergraduate university students (50 participants in each study) were included. Each intervention consisted of two sessions per week, over four consecutive weeks. Sessions were led by group facilitators, who engaged participants in writing exercises (one session) and didactic lectures with small group discussions (remaining sessions).

In Study 1, both the social training intervention and the individuation intervention were compared with a didactic control condition (i.e., completion of reading/writing tasks unrelated to identity). In Study 2, only the individuation training intervention was compared against two control conditions (a didactic control unrelated to identity and a waitlist control). In both studies, participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions. Study 1 found that participants in both the social training intervention and the individuation training

intervention scored significantly higher on social and ideological identity formation in contrast to those engaged in the didactic control condition. Furthermore, Study 2 found that participants in both the individuation training intervention and the didactic control condition scored significantly higher than the waitlist control group on social and ideological identity formation. These results suggest that both training interventions strengthened emerging adults' commitments to ideological domains of identity, in addition to increasing their ability to consider different social viewpoints.

A study by Hock, Dreshler, and Schumaker (2006) examined whether a 12-week educational program titled Possible Selves Program (the "Program") with 32 first-year university student-athletes would impact role identification and goal setting. The Program consisted of six components (two sessions each) led by peer mentors (fifth year student-athletes), including discovering (i.e., activities designed to help participants identify areas of interest/strength), thinking (i.e., a structured group interview), sketching (i.e., drawing possible selves trees), reflecting (i.e., evaluating the condition of the possible selves trees), growing (i.e., short- and long-term goal setting and action planning), and performing (i.e., activities which foster progress towards participant goals). This intervention was compared with a control condition that required participants to meet with athletic counsellors in a group setting for the same duration of time to discuss generic topics, such as academic motivation. Participants were randomly assigned to either condition that both consisted of one-hour sessions that ran for 12 consecutive weeks. The post-intervention results suggested that participants in the Program had significantly improved on identifying roles and setting goals in the areas of sport, school, and personal life, in comparison to the control group. Additionally, participants in the Program identified significantly more goals for themselves

in various life roles, with more specificity, than the comparison condition. These results indicated that a didactic-based possible identities-oriented group intervention might be sufficient to enhance and diversify student-athletes' self-roles and capacity to set specific identity-related goals.

       Task-oriented interventions. Four studies reported significant findings for their task-oriented interventions, all of which focused on bolstering participants' possible selves. Possible selves are related to identity because they represent emerging adults' future identities. Outcome measures such as negative and positive affect were characterized as identity-related constructs in this review because of their association with identity and their sensitivity to change in the brief identity-focused interventions below.

       Sheldon and Lyubormisky (2006) investigated whether a four-week Best Possible Selves ("BPSs") intervention influenced increased positive emotion, decreased negative emotion, and increased self-concordant motivation in a sample of 67 undergraduate university students. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions. The BPSs intervention involved a facilitator introducing the exercise in small groups, in addition to providing instructions about the imaginal writing task, which directed participants to write about how they would like their life to be in the future. This experimental condition was compared against two control conditions, including a gratitude intervention (i.e., instructed to write about what they were thankful for) and a "life details intervention" (i.e., instructed to write about components of their daily routine). Importantly, participants in all three groups were encouraged to continue the writing exercise at home between each group session. This study found that, while participants in all three conditions experienced immediate reductions

in negative emotion, only the participants in the BPSs intervention experienced a significant increase in positive emotion (measured immediately after the completion of the brief task).

A study by Peters, Flink, Boersma, and Linton (2010) also examined whether the Best Possible Self ("BPS") task-oriented exercise temporarily increased optimism and positive affect in 82 undergraduate students. BPS required participants to engage in a writing task about their best possible self for 15 minutes, in addition to engaging in a mental imagery task about their best possible self for five minutes. This intervention was compared with an imaginal writing control condition that required participants to write about a typical day for 15 minutes and engage in mental imagery about a typical day for five minutes. Participants were randomly assigned to either condition, both of which were led by a facilitator, in groups of 9-19 people over one session. This study found that, compared to the control condition, participants in the BPS condition experienced statistically significant increases in positive affect and future expectancies. The findings suggest that imagining and writing about a positive future can influence aspects of motivation and future outlook, which can be particularly relevant for advancing possible selves goals.

Layous, Nelson, and Lyubormisky (2013) investigated whether a four-week long BPSs task-oriented exercise influenced positive emotion and experiences of relatedness and flow (a mental state wherein a person is fully immersed in an activity; Bressler & Bodzin, 2016), among a sample of 131 undergraduate students. The researchers were also interested in investigating differences between in-person and online intervention modalities, as well as the role of communicating persuasive information about the benefits of future-oriented imagining. As such, four experimental conditions were tested and compared against two control conditions. Participants were randomly assigned to one of six conditions. All of the

in-person conditions were led by facilitators in small group settings (4-10 members per group). Two of the four experimental conditions (BPSs in-person/no testimonial and BPSs online/no testimonial) involved facilitators providing participants instructions to imagine and write about their best possible selves each week for 15 minutes. In the other two experimental conditions (BPSs in-person/testimonial and BPSs online/testimonial), facilitators provided the same writing instructions, in addition to reading a testimonial from a peer who successfully completed this writing activity one year prior (5 minutes). These experimental conditions were compared with two didactic control conditions (control in-person and control online) that required participants to consider and write about mundane activities completed within the last day (15 minutes). Results suggested that participants in all four of the BPSs experimental conditions significantly increased positive emotion and flow, with non-significant improvements in relatedness. Importantly, no differences between the in-person and online intervention modality were found.

Finally, a study by Renner, Schwarz, Peters, and Huibers (2013) examined whether a BPS imaginal writing exercise positively influenced positive and negative emotion, mood, and dysfunctional cognitions, among a sample of 40 undergraduate university students. The intervention contained three key components, including completing self-report measures to facilitate reflection of affect and mood, listening to suggestive music paired with autobiographical recall, and finally, the completion of the BPS task. The BPS task involved participants writing about their best possible self in the future for 15 minutes, in addition to engaging in a mental imagery task about their best possible self for five minutes. This intervention was compared with an imaginal writing control condition wherein participants wrote about a typical day for 15 minutes and engaged in mental imagery about a typical day

for five minutes. Participants were randomly assigned into either condition, both of which were led by a facilitator in a small group setting over one session. This study found that participants in the experimental condition had statistically significant changes in positive mood ratings, including higher positive emotion, in comparison to participants in the control condition.

        Experiential interventions. Four studies reported significant findings for their experiential interventions. A study by Schwartz et al. (2005) evaluated the effectiveness of two types of identity interventions among 90 emerging adult university students. The cognitive-focused intervention was comprised of sharing life problems and collaboratively working through solutions among the group, including identifying resources to assist with decision-making and consideration of alternative options. In the emotion-focused condition, experiential activities (e.g., focusing techniques, emotional disclosures) were used to help participants identify points of contrast between their stated goals. The experimental conditions were comprised of small group sessions (6-8 people per group) that ran over eight weeks by two co-facilitators, with six installments of each intervention (12 in total). A no-intervention comparison control condition was included in the study. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the three conditions. The study found that participants in the cognitive-focused intervention experienced statistically significant improvements in self-constructive identity processes, whereas participants in the emotion-focused intervention experienced statistically significant improvements in self-discovery identity processes. These findings suggest that interventions that aspire to influence identity development processes should include both types of intervention strategies, namely cognitive- and

emotion-focused, as they were both found to improve self-constructive and self-discovery processes, respectively.

Berman, Kennerley, and Kennerley (2008) examined the feasibility of a 15-week experiential intervention that examined pre- to post-test change on identity exploration and identity distress in a sample of 43 students enrolled in an undergraduate psychology course. The intervention was titled the Daytona Adult Identity Development Program ("DAIDP") and was comprised of two core elements: (a) independent activities including weekly readings on identity topics (e.g., vocational, relational) and assigned homework tasks (e.g., journaling, reflection), and (b) interpersonal activities, such as participation in facilitated group discussions. Participants were assigned to small groups of seven to 10 members per group, who met weekly for 1.5 hours over 15 consecutive weeks. Importantly, the facilitators undertook a co-participatory role during group discussions. Session content was generated by group members and was discussed using problem-solving strategies and critical thinking. This study used a quasi-experimental research design; thus, no control condition was incorporated. This investigation found that that participants experienced statistically significant decreases in identity distress and increases in identity exploration.

A study by Meca et al. (2014) examined whether a peer-facilitated intervention titled the Miami Adult Development Project ("MADP") would influence identity consolidation, identity distress, and well-being among undergraduate university students. The MADP was subsumed within a senior level psychology course and was comprised of two core elements: (a) independent activities including weekly readings on identity-related topics and formal instruction about emerging adulthood, and (b) interpersonal activities such as participation in five peer-facilitated group sessions that included reflective journaling exercises. Peer

facilitators served as co-participants during group discussions. This experimental intervention was compared with an educational control group that required participants to receive instruction and read weekly articles about emerging adulthood and identity development only (see part (a) above). Participants were randomly assigned to either condition that occurred once a week for twelve weeks. This study found that participants in the experimental condition experienced decreased levels of identity distress and increased levels of emotional and social well-being, in comparison to the control condition. These findings suggest that MAPD potentially allows emerging adults to work through their emerging identities by engaging in interactive discussion and reflection on current and future life goals.

Finally, a study by Amodeo, Picariello, Valerio, Bochicchio, and Scandura (2017) examined whether a six-week psychodynamic group counselling intervention influenced academic identity and psychological well-being among 49 senior clinical psychology students. The experiential intervention was process-based, meaning that it focused on stimulating participant discussion and connection rather than incorporating structured tasks/content. This intervention was compared with an educational control condition that utilized active learning techniques (e.g., role-playing) for typical daily challenges (not identity-focused). Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions that were facilitated in small groups over six, 1.25-hour sessions over six weeks. The study found that participants in the psychodynamic group counselling intervention experienced statistically significant changes in openness to new experiences, perceptions of a more positive and satisfying life, and interpersonal relationships, as well as achievement of greater self-acceptance, in comparison to participants in the educational control condition.

General Limitations of Included Studies

Several limitations were found across the reviewed studies. The number of group members and the number of intervention installments (how many times the group interventions were run) was not often described in the original studies. In some cases, insufficient detail was provided about the duration of the interventions, and most used modest sample sizes ($M_{sample\ size} = 75$). There are potential drawbacks associated with having peers facilitate group interventions (e.g., lack of professional group facilitation training/experience, dual roles). Possible selection bias may have been elicited when the interventions were subsumed with a broader psychology course. Further, a focus on short-term effects across most interventions was taken, rather than on long-term changes, with a lack of follow-up measurement. Another general limitation pertains to the possibility of conflating the results from the components of the interventions that occurred outside of the group setting (i.e., completing writing exercises independently at home) with those that emerged as a result of the group process (i.e., in the small group setting). Finally, several studies did not measure the effects of group processes (e.g., therapeutic factors) in their studies, which could have helped to explain the interventions' mechanisms of change better.

Discussion

To our knowledge, this paper presents the first review of group-based identity-focused interventions among emerging adults. This investigation aimed to draw a clearer picture of empirically supported group interventions that explicitly addressed identity-related constructs, as well as uncover their defining characteristics and mechanisms through which the interventions purportedly enhanced identity. Several encouraging findings were identified across the didactic, task-oriented, and experiential categories, affording multiple

options for clinicians interested in offering identity-focused group interventions. However, some clinicians may wonder how they should select an intervention amongst the host of alternatives or question whether some interventions may be more suitable to advance emerging adults' identity development. The findings from this review can offer some guidance to clinicians, allowing them to differentiate between qualitatively and strategically select group interventions to address the identity needs of the emerging adults with whom they work.

Didactic interventions utilized formalized instruction and structured learning tasks that were found to enhance emerging adults' unique understandings of personal identity and possibility. Key mechanisms that may foster change pertain to teaching participants about specific identity domains, as well as engaging them in structured, independent learning processes to stimulate reflection about these aspects of identity. The identity domains that were emphasized in the didactic interventions differed (e.g., role identification/goal setting versus social perspective-taking training); yet, the types of learning processes embedded within the interventions were relatively similar (e.g., writing exercises, lectures, small group discussion). Taken together, we expect that some combination of teaching about identity domains and the reflection upon such material within the context of one's own life can effectively enhance an individual's sense of identity. One caveat to this is that gains may be restricted to the specific identity domains that were focused upon during the didactic aspects of the intervention. That is, if the focus of an intervention was on setting identity-related goals, then one should not expect to see improvements in domains beyond this (e.g., deeper awareness of relational identities). Rather, it would be more in line with the evidence gathered in this review to expect improvements that are congruent with the domains covered

in the didactic components of the intervention (e.g., goal setting). Due to their structured

nature and focus on teaching, didactic interventions may be desirable if clinicians are

interested in targeting specific aspects of identity development (versus broad identity gains).

Such interventions may be suitable for individuals who prefer to learn in structured

environments and by using cognitive strategies (versus experiential strategies). Thus,

clinicians considering didactic interventions are encouraged to reflect upon what identity

domains they wish to target in their interventions and to examine whether such domains can

be sufficiently communicated using didactic methods (e.g., available theory, concreteness).

Task-oriented interventions engaged participants in brief, generative tasks that

involved elements of writing and/or mental imagery. Such tasks were found to influence

immediate and state-level changes in identity-related constructs (e.g., optimism), in

comparison to sustained reorganization or insight regarding one's overarching identity. A

strength of these interventions included their future-oriented temporal focus, which enabled

writing about or imagining one's self in the future. Such interventions appeared to promote

thinking about who an individual wanted to become or their "future possible selves" (Markus

and Nurius, 1986), spurring increased motivation and action to advance their identity-related

goals (Cross & Markus, 1991). These findings are consistent with broader possible selves

research that has found that possible selves motivate people to act and to develop strategies

that advance their identity goals (see Oyserman & Destin, 2010, for a review). These

interventions may be of interest to clinicians who wish to enhance participant motivation and

behaviour towards future identity goals.

The tasks in these interventions provided evidence that simple and brief interventions

(e.g., one 15-minute session), which incorporated structured tasks like positive mental

imagery and expressive writing, were useful in assisting emerging adults in envisioning positive future identities, even if only temporarily. This is likely the most compelling feature of the task-oriented interventions – that their modest approach (e.g., brief duration) was associated with participant change across several key identity-related constructs. While the interventions were facilitated in groups, the specific tasks appeared to be completed rather independently (e.g., individual writing and internal imagery). This finding contrasts our earlier conceptualization of identity changes being facilitated through interpersonal processes. Thus, interpersonal processes may enhance group interventions, but they may not be required for short-term participant change.

Task-oriented interventions are in line with broader research investigating the effectiveness of writing and imagery interventions. For example, the helpfulness of disclosive writing interventions is well documented (Pennebaker, 1998), suggesting improvements for mental health and emotional well-being (Frattaroli, 2006). Writing about one's possible selves was thought to enhance identity-related constructs because it fostered learning about one's goals, values, and beliefs. Similarly, studies investigating the effectiveness of mental imagery techniques have found that imagining oneself achieving personal goals is associated with improvements in performance and behaviour to advance such goals (Pham & Taylor, 1999).

Experiential interventions engaged participants in an interactive discussion around broad themes of identity. Group facilitators assumed a co-participatory stance and supported participant discussion by encouraging group members to connect with one another around shared and divergent identity-related experiences. A number of positive changes were demonstrated; participants experienced growth in several identity domains (e.g., increased

identity exploration) and areas related to identity (e.g., well-being). The interpersonal

processes elicited in these interventions are believed to be key mechanisms that influenced

participant change. That is, these interventions appeared to prioritize interpersonal processes

among the group, such as collaborative problem-solving and exchanging social feedback as a

means of enhancing identity. Participants in these studies appeared to refine their identities

by drawing meaning about themselves within the context of the group setting. Thus, these

findings are in line with our original conceptualization of the central role of interpersonal

processes in emerging adult identity development.

One caveat that should be noted regards the incorporation of independent learning

activities (in addition to interpersonal activities such as group discussion) in two

interventions (Berman et al., 2008; Meca et al., 2014) classified in the experiential category.

Unlike the other two interventions (Amodeo et al., 2007; Schwartz et al., 2005) classified

into this category, which included group discussion only, Berman et al.'s (2008) and Meca et

al.'s (2014) interventions cannot be considered "pure" discussion-based (thus interpersonal)

interventions. While the authors of these original studies clearly emphasized the importance

of the interpersonal aspects of the interventions, they ultimately decided to incorporate

independent learning elements into the interventions (their rationales for doing so were not

provided in the original articles). One reason that they may have structured the interventions

in this way involves the possibility of combining elements from diverse types of

interventions to maximize their impact. In this case, it appears that independent learning

activities such as weekly readings and homework tasks may have been borrowed from the

didactic intervention tradition (or something akin to it) and blended with group discussion

(characteristic of experiential interventions) to facilitate the most optimal results possible.

Although it is unclear why the authors made the decision to integrate these different elements, it does highlight the potential benefits of multifaceted interventions. This is a consideration for future research to investigate further.

Synthesis of the Findings

Given the complexity of identity development in emerging adulthood, one might expect that sophisticated interventions (e.g., long-duration) are needed to enhance identity; however, the findings from this review suggest that some modest interventions (e.g., task-oriented) did result in participant change. Thus, we believe that task-oriented interventions may be especially useful for clinicians who are looking to influence immediate, state-level changes (e.g., optimism, positive affect) with clients, particularly when economic resources or time is limited. One caution for clinicians to consider when implementing task-oriented interventions is that comprehensive identity change is unlikely. That is, a 15-minute identity-related task is unlikely to result in sustained or sophisticated identity change. One possibility to affect more in-depth identity-work would be to integrate such tasks into other types of group interventions discussed in this paper. For example, writing and imagining tasks could be incorporated into a didactic intervention and function as a structured learning activity. Ideally, the combination of methods would maximize the intervention's impact.

The degree of identity work enabled in the group interventions appeared to vary across the three categories. Certain types of group interventions enabled broad identity work, which addressed one's overarching identity, while other interventions enabled targeted identity work related to select identity domains (e.g., social identity, ideological identity). For example, the structured format (i.e., curriculum or methodized task) of the didactic and task-oriented interventions seemingly narrowed group members' identity work to specific

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identity domains, such as future identities or affective states related to identity like optimism. This narrowed focus may have been helpful to some participants as it enabled increased attention in specific areas; however, others may have perceived it as restrictive because it limited broader and more personalized identity exploration. In contrast, the experiential interventions were less structured and allowed for more exploratory and open-ended identity work. These interventions encouraged participants to generate session content rather than follow a pre-set curriculum involving structured tasks or lectures.

Moreover, experiential interventions were longer in duration, on average, suggesting the possibility of more in-depth identity-work. It is suspected that some emerging adults may prefer experiential interventions because they enable increasingly personalized, comprehensive, and broader identity-work. On the contrary, others may feel overwhelmed by the lack of structure and focus. These results again point to the possibility of combining interventions to improve their balance of structure. Additionally, the possibility of matching emerging adults to interventions to which they are most suitable could be an effective way of ensuring a fit between participants and interventions (e.g., based on personal traits or interpersonal styles). Indeed, further research to uncover who may be best suited towards certain intervention categories is a consideration for future investigation.

Furthermore, experiential interventions afforded more opportunities for interaction and engagement among group members. Members in these groups were encouraged to connect with and learn from one another, as well as engage in mutual problem-solving. Whereas didactic and task-oriented interventions primarily emphasized instruction, independent activities, or task completion, the experiential interventions' interplay of participant interaction was a seemingly critical and distinct aspect of this approach.

Although this was not specifically examined in the original studies, it is believed that therapeutic interpersonal processes and a sense of cohesion among members were stimulated due to the highly engaging and interactive group setting. This finding is consistent with broader research that has documented the influence of interpersonal processes on participant change (see Burlingame, McClendon, & Yang, 2018, for a review).

For example, one could reasonably expect that interpersonal learning (when individuals develop self-insight and new interpersonal skills through their interactions with others) occurred in the experiential groups. This is because the design of such interventions aimed to provide rich opportunities for self- and other- observation, the exchange of feedback, and trialling new behaviours in a social context. Thus, hearing about the diverse perspectives of other group members, comparing their responses to one's own experiences, and receiving social feedback are a few ways in which participants potentially gained identity-relevant experiences to enhance their identities by virtue of the interventions' interactive design.

Possible selves. An interesting consistency across the intervention categories was the prominence of possible selves interventions. Five studies (Renner et al., 2013; Layous et al., 2012; Peters et al., 2010; Sheldon et al., 2006; and Hock et al., 2006) were classified in the didactic and task-oriented categories and had a focus on possible selves. Possible selves refer to internalized representations of one's self in future states (Markus & Nurius, 1986), which guides present attitudes and behaviours (see Cross & Markus, 1991, for an overview). This orientation towards envisioning one's self in the future is conducive to goal-directed behaviour, enabling emerging adults to identify personal identity goals and take action towards achieving them. The interventions reviewed in this study that maintained a focus on

possible selves present a promising approach for influencing emerging adults' sense of

possibility for the future, with the caveat that more comprehensive identity changes are

unlikely with time-limited interventions. One possibility to facilitate more extensive identity

change may involve drawing upon the established literature on the treatment of identity-

related personality disorders (a discussion of those treatments exceeds the scope of this

paper; for an overview, please see Marcia, 2006). This focus on possible selves seems to be

particularly fitting for emerging adults as they balance identity exploration in various social

contexts with commitments in major life domains, such as permanent employment, marriage,

independent living, and parenthood (Montgomery et al., 2008).

Future Research Directions

This review is not without limitations. Only a small number of studies were included

due to the rigorous parameters set for the review. The evidence available to date is

insufficient for any one intervention category to be deemed "empirically validated," which

precludes strong recommendations for service delivery. Thus, the conclusions drawn from

this review are preliminary, and more investigations are needed to validate and extend the

interventions that have been developed and evaluated thus far.

Various outcome measures were used in the different studies – some measured

elements of identity (e.g., identity distress) while others measured related concepts (e.g.,

motivation, future outlook) - making it difficult to make one-to-one comparisons. Further,

there is a lack of consensus on valid and reliable measures of possible selves, the focus of

many of the above studies, or instruments measuring identity-related constructs. The

implication for future research is that tools must be considerably improved or developed

before further advances in this domain can be made. Future research should also consider

both the duration and timing of an intervention. First, many of the included interventions were rather brief. Because interventions need to be of sufficient duration and frequency to optimally enhance emerging adults' identities (Arskey & O'Malley, 2005; Arskey, O'Malley, Baldwin, Harris, & Mason, 2002), future investigations may examine interventions' duration to evaluate whether a stronger intervention "dose" produces more substantive "effects" or participant changes. Second, the timing of an intervention should align with participant readiness (Ogrodniczuk, Joyce, & Piper, 2009). It is possible that interventions provided at inappropriate times (e.g., when participants already have strong identity commitments) are less impactful than those provided at times when they are strongly needed (e.g., when participants are experiencing high levels of identity distress or confusion). The included studies did not measure participant readiness, nor did they engage in participant selection procedures due to randomization, which may have placed participants into the study who were not sufficiently ready to engage in the groups. Moreover, interventions should clearly document their conceptual basis. As few studies in this review described their theoretical underpinnings, future work could be improved by providing a clear conceptual foundation, detailing how specific procedures/elements intend to address outcomes. Finally, all the reviewed studies utilized university student samples and such findings may not generalize to individuals who do not attend post-secondary institutions. Future investigations should be implemented with a broader range of emerging adults, including those who do not attend higher education (e.g., community samples). Future replication and follow-up studies employing more diverse samples are recommended.

Conclusion

Group facilitators and scholars might wonder what the best intervention is to enhance identity during the emerging adult years. The evidence at present is insufficient for one group intervention category to be considered above the others. Given that a multiplicity of factors is involved in emerging adults' identity formation, it is probable that no single group intervention will be effective across all individuals or situations. Thus, it is recommended that clinicians attempt to think critically about the objectives of their interventions, thereby informing how they approach intervention selection and implementation.

The following is a summary of the factors discussed in the sections above that can be considered by clinicians when selecting among intervention categories: (a) time and economic constraints; (b) broad vs. narrowed identity work; (c) future-oriented vs. present-oriented temporal focus (i.e., future possible selves); (d) structured vs. semi-structured format; (e) interpersonal processes vs. independent learning; and (f) immediate vs. sustained identity-related changes. The more factors that clinicians take into account, the better able they should be to select and employ interventions that most effectively address the identity development needs of the emerging adults with whom they work. Overall, further attention to this area is necessary to develop the appropriate tools needed to support emerging adults' identity development.

Figures

Figure 2.1 Flow Diagram of Search Decision Process

| Identification | Records identified through database searching: PsycINFO & Academic Search Complete ($n = 111$) | Additional records identified through other sources ($n = 10$) |

Records after duplicates ($n = 12$) removed
(n = 109)

| Screening | Records screened ($n = 109$) | Records excluded ($n = 96$) |

| Eligibility | Full-text articles assessed for eligibility ($n = 17$) | Full-text articles excluded, with reasons ($n = 7$)

1. Did not use an experimental or quasi-experimental design ($n = 2$)
2. Did not include emerging adults exclusively ($n = 2$)
3. Focus of the study was inappropriate ($n = 3$) |

| Included | Articles included in review ($n = 10*$)
1 article contained more than one study |

Studies included in review
($N = 11$)

Tables

Table 2.1 Overview of Extraction Field Results

Authors/Year	Country	Target Population	N	Intervention Condition	Comparison Condition	Outcome Criteria	Key Findings
Amodeo, Picariello, Valerio, Bochicchio, & Scandura (2017)	Italy	University students	49	Psychodynamic identity-focused group counselling ($n =33$)	Educational intervention ($n = 16$)	Psychological Well-being Scale (PWBS) Utrecht-Management of Identity Commitments Scale (U-MICS)	At 6 weeks, intervention condition had higher scores on the personal growth (5.37 vs. 4.45; $p = 0.001$), positive relations (5.05 vs. 4.50; $p = 0.01$), purpose in life (4.87 vs. 4.44; $p = 0.01$), and self-acceptance (4.66 vs. 4.22; $p = 0.01$) subscales, as measured by the PWBS, as well as on the in-depth exploration dimension of the school identity (4.64 vs. 3.67; $p = 0.001$) and relational identity (3.64 vs. 2.91; p = 0.05) domain, and the commitment dimension (3.77 vs. 2.92; $p = 0.001$) of the relational identity domain, as measured by the U-MICS, in comparison to the active control condition.
Meca, Eichas, Quintana, Maximin, Ritchie, Madrazo, Harari, & Kurtines (2014)	United States of America	University Students	141	Miami Adult Development Program ($n = 70$)	Educational intervention ($n = 71$)	Ego Identity Process Questionnaire (EIPQ) Erikson Psychosocial Stage Inventory (EPSI) Mental Health Continuum Short Form (MHSF) Identity Distress Survey (IDS)	After four months, the intervention condition was associated with decreased identity distress (2.58 vs. 2.71; $p = 0.01$), as well as increased emotional (4.33 vs. 4.28; $p = 0.01$) and social (3.46 vs. 3.30; $p = 0.01$) well-being.
Renner, Schwartz, Peters, & Huibers (2013)	Netherlands	University Students	40	Best Possible Selves writing/imagery intervention ($n = 20$)	Typical writing/imagery intervention ($n = 20$)	Dysfunctional Attitude Scale (DAS) Positive And Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS)	After 1 day, there was a statistically significant difference between conditions on change in positive affect ($F(1, 38) = 5.19$, $p = 0.03$), indicating that positive affect increased in the intervention condition in comparison to the control condition.

Authors/Year	Country	Target Population	N	Intervention Condition	Comparison Condition	Outcome Criteria	Key Findings
Layous, Nelson, & Lyubomirsky (2012)	United States of America	University Students	131	Best Possible Selves In- Person/Peer Testimonial (writing) intervention ($n = 25$) Best Possible Selves In- Person/No Testimonial (writing) intervention ($n = 25$) Best Possible Selves Online/Peer Testimonial (writing) intervention ($n = 16$) Best Possible Selves In-Person/No Testimonial (writing) intervention ($n = 15$)	In-person rumination/writing intervention ($n = 23$) Online rumination/writing intervention ($n = 15$)	Affect-Adjective Scale (AAS) Need Satisfaction Scale (NSS) Flow Scale (FS)	After 4 weeks, the intervention conditions significantly increased positive affect [$t_{contrast}(115) = 1.85$, $p = .03$, $r_{contrast} = .17$.][3] and flow [$t_{contrast}(117) = 1.83$, $p = .03$, $r_{contrast} = .17$], and marginally increased feelings of relatedness [$t_{contrast}(117) = 1.47$, $p = .07$, $r_{contrast} = .13$]. No differences were found between participants who completed the positive activity online versus in-person (all $t_{contrasts} < 1$, ns).
Peters, Flink, Boersma, & Linton (2010)	Sweden	University Students	82	Best Possible Self writing/imagery intervention ($n = 44$)	Typical writing/imagery intervention ($n = 38$)	Life Orientation Test (LOT) Eysenck Personality Questionnaire Revised Short Scale (EPQ-RSS) Positive And Negative Affect Schedule – Short Form (PANAS-SF) Subjective Probability Test (SPT)	After 1 day, the intervention condition had higher scores on positive affect ($t = -6.92$, $p < 0.001$), in contrast to the comparison intervention ($t = 0.18$, $p = 0.86$). A significant difference was not found in state optimism for the coming week (imagery $\bar{x} = 7.6$; writing $\bar{x} = 7.7$), nor for the future in general (imagery $\bar{x} = 8.3$; writing $\bar{x} = 8.1$).
Berman, Kennerley, & Kennerley (2008)	United States of America	University Students	43	Daytona Adult Identity Development Program	No comparison condition	Ego Identity Process Questionnaire (EIPQ) Identity Distress Survey (IDS) Multi-Measure Agentic Personality Scale (MAPS)	At 15 weeks, tests of within-group comparison revealed that identity exploration increased significantly, $F(1, 41) = 6.13$, $p = .018$, $\eta^2 = .13$, and identity distress decreased significantly, $F(1, 41) = 25.70$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .39$.

Authors/Year	Country	Target Population	N	Intervention Condition	Comparison Condition	Outcome Criteria	Key Findings
Sheldon & Lyubomirsky (2006)	United States of America	University Students	67	Best Possible Selves writing/imagery intervention ($n = 23$) Counting One's Blessings (gratitude) intervention ($n = 21$)	Life Details (rumination) Intervention ($n = 23$)	Positive And Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) Self-Concordant Motivation (SCM)	After 4 weeks, both the gratitude and imagery interventions significantly increased in positive affect (from 3.63 to 3.78; $t(43) = 2.19$, $p < 0.05$), in comparison to the comparison intervention (from 3.72 to 3.60, ns).
Hock, Deshler, & Schumaker (2006)	United States of America	University Student-Athletes	32	Possible Selves Program	Educational intervention	Non-standardized measures of role identification and goal-setting	After 12 weeks, the intervention condition significantly differed from the comparison condition on measures of role identification and goal setting in the areas of athletics, academics, and personal life. Participants in the intervention group identified significantly more self-roles, as well as more goals for themselves as athletes, learners, and persons, and the goals they identified were more specific than the goals identified by participants in the control group.
Schwartz, Kurtines, & Montgomery (2005)	United States of America	University Students	90	Cognitively-focused identity processes intervention Emotionally-focused identity processes intervention	No-intervention comparison	Identity Style Inventory (ISI) Critical Problem-Solving Scale (CPSS) Personal Strivings Inventory (PSI) Self-Actualization Scale (SAS)	After 10 weeks, cognitively-focused intervention was effective in promoting self-construction identity processes, Roy's $\Theta = .23$, $F(6, 746) = 2.84$, $p < .02$, $\eta2 = .19$, while emotion-focused intervention was effective in promoting self-discovery identity processes, Roy's $\Theta = .12$, $F(3, 76) = 3.11$, $p < .04$, $\eta2 = .11$.
Markstrom-Adams, Ascione, Braegger, & Adams (1993a)	United States of America	University Students	50	Social training intervention ($n = 18$) Individuation training intervention ($n = 17$)	Didactic control comparison ($n = 15$)	Extended Objective Measure of Ego-Identity (EOM-EIS) Rasmussen's Ego Identity Scale (EIS)	After 4 weeks, the social training intervention ($\bar{x} = 35.25$, $SD = 0.92$) and the individuation training intervention ($\bar{x} = 35.49$, $SD = 0.95$) differed significantly from the didactic control intervention ($\bar{x} = 33.33$, $SD = 1.01$) on social and ideological identity formation.

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Authors/Year	Country	Target Population	N	Intervention Condition	Comparison Condition	Outcome Criteria	Key Findings
Markstrom-Adams, Ascione, Braegger, & Adams (1993b)	United States of America	University Students	50	Individuation training intervention ($n = 17$)	Didactic control comparison ($n = 17$) Waitlist control comparison ($n = 16$)	Extended Objective Measure of Ego-Identity (EOM-EIS) Rasmussen's Ego Identity Scale (EIS)	After 4 weeks, the individuation training intervention ($\bar{x} = 36.58$, $SD = 1.21$) and the didactic control intervention ($\bar{x} = 35.68$, $SD = 1.19$) differed significantly from the waitlist control group intervention ($\bar{x} = 32.83$, $SD = 1.23$) on ideological identity formation.

Note. P values were not reported in all the original studies.

Table 2.2 Intervention Categories

Intervention Category	Intervention Description			N	Study
	Degree of Structure	Role of Facilitator	Focus		
Didactic	High structure	Directive	Educational activities	3	Markstrom-Adams et al. (1993a); Markstrom-Adams et al. (1993b); Hock et al. (2006);
Task-oriented	High structure	Directive	Task completion	4	Sheldon et al. (2006); Peters et al. (2010); Layous et al. (2012); Renner at al. (2013);
Experiential	Low structure	Co-participatory/ Non-directive	Interactive discussion	4	Schwartz et al. (2005); Berman et al. (2008); Meca et al. (2014); Amodeo et al. (2017)

Bridging Summary

Study 1 reviewed types of identity-focused group interventions that have been empirically tested with emerging adults, progressing our understanding of the current state of the literature, as well as the core characteristics of and mechanisms by which such interventions purportedly enhanced emerging adults' identity. Study 1 uncovered an interesting consistency across the intervention categories about those interventions that were oriented around possible selves. As such, it was proposed that group interventions oriented around possible selves held particular promise for emerging adults as they can assist with navigating the wide array of life trajectories and identity choices available during this developmental period. However, Study 1 indicated that different types of possible selves group interventions have seldom been compared to one another. Thus, the objective of Study 2 was to compare the effectiveness of two different kinds of possible selves group interventions.

Chapter 3: Study 2

Possible Selves in Emerging Adulthood: A Group Intervention Study

Introduction

An adaptable sense of one's future self is an important aspect of identity that contributes to both personal meaning and motivation (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Oyserman & James, 2011). This is particularly salient during emerging adulthood—the period between late adolescence and adulthood—since an envisioned future self allows individuals to make sense of their current context, develop motivation for personal aspirations, and take steps towards achieving their future goals (Dunkel, 2000; Oyserman, Bybee, Terry, & Hart-Johnson, 2004; Oyserman & Destin, 2010). Thus, possible selves provide a pathway for addressing an essential task of emerging adulthood: identity integration and synthesis (Erikson, 1950, 1968; Schwartz, Kurtines, & Montgomery, 2005). Identity integration and synthesis during emerging adulthood are important because they are associated with long-term health and social benefits, such as the promotion of mental health and well-being (Montgomery, Hernandez, & Ferrer-Wreder, 2008; Pulkkinen & Ronka, 1994) and positive interpersonal functioning (Morgan & Korobov, 2011). One way in which emerging adults' sense of personal possibility may be strengthened is through brief group-based interventions that focus on enhancing possible selves.

Possible Selves

Possible selves are an individual's internalized ideas about "what they might become, what they would like to become, and what they are afraid of becoming" in the future (Markus & Nurius, 1986; p. 954). They are valenced; each person has both positive selves they desire to become and negative selves they want to avoid becoming (Oyserman & James, 2011).

Possible selves serve a number of functions such as exerting motivational influence on behaviour (Oyserman & Destin, 2010) and serving as schemas that inform and guide judgments about behaviour (Frazier, Hooker, Johnson, & Kaus, 2000). They can be developed in relation to various life domains, such as one's relationships and career (Markus & Nurius, 1986). A robust capacity to identify and develop possible selves can enhance psychosocial functioning (Dunkel, Kelts, & Coons, 2006), self-knowledge and motivation (Oyserman & James, 2011) and action towards goals (Hamman, Gosselin, Romano, & Bunuan, 2010).

Moreover, possible selves function as a cognitive link between past and future expectancies, enabling a strong incentive for action and change (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Possible selves have been shown to motivate people to take action; people employ strategies to advance their preferred and feared selves goals (Oyserman & Destin, 2010). Future-oriented representations of the self thus mobilize emerging adults' motivation to act toward their desired goals. This is especially important during the emerging adult years as young people transition away from adolescence to navigate the multitude of possibilities and enduring commitments of adulthood (Arnett, 1998; Schwartz, Côté, Arnett, 2005). Hence, focused attention on developing possible selves can help position emerging adults in striving towards their future goals.

Possible Selves Group Interventions

Group interventions are believed to be particularly relevant for enhancing emerging adults' possible selves. Emerging adulthood involves heightened interpersonal activity wherein establishing significant relationships are crucial developmental tasks (Arnett, 2000; Douglass, 2007). Further, relational experiences are considered key contexts for identity

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development, especially during the emerging adult years (Morgan & Korobov, 2011). As young people interact with one another, they are simultaneously gaining identity-relevant information through social feedback (Adams & Marshall, 1996; Morgan & Korobov, 2011). Refining an individual's sense of self can influence the development of possible selves, which, in turn, can motivate one's strivings towards future goals. Thus, group interventions are believed to utilize emerging adults' heightened patterns of interpersonal activity and orientation towards social relationships, enabling members to engage in the interactive processes of the group to enhance possible selves.

Beyond providing opportunities for relationships and interaction, group interventions afford other experiences that can positively impact emerging adults. Evidence from the group psychotherapy literature has found that non-specific factors that cut across all (or most) interventions can facilitate participant change in group settings (Crouch, Bloch, & Wanlass, 1994; Yalom, 1995). These factors are known as group processes and refer to the elements of group interventions that facilitate participant improvement resulting from group member/group leader interactions (Bloch & Crouch, 1985). Group scholars have long hypothesized that group processes contribute to group member change, regardless of the type of group intervention, the underlying theoretical approach, or the problems that are being addressed (DeLucia-Waack & Bridbord, 2004).

An engaged group climate is a group process theorized to help emerging adults explore and enhance their possible selves. Group climate refers to the "general emotional atmosphere of the group" (McClendon & Burlingame, 2010, p. 165), which can be affected by group member interaction. Of particular interest to the present study is the dimension of engagement (hereafter referred to as "group engagement") because of its relevance to time-

limited interventions. Theories of developmental stages in group psychotherapy suggest that group engagement is most relevant during the early stages of group development or in interventions that are relatively brief (less than 10 sessions; MacKenzie, 1997).

Group engagement refers to perceptions of "an atmosphere of interaction and therapeutic work within the group, including members' efforts to interact with, understand, and address group members' concerns" (Kealy, Joyce, Weber, Ehrenthal, & Ogrodniczuk, 2018, p. 27). There is research evidence to suggest that group engagement is positively related to intervention processes and outcomes (Kivlighan & Tarrant, 2001; MacKenzie, 1983). For example, Ogrodniczuk and Piper (2003) noted that group engagement strengthens self-disclosure, a felt-sense of membership in the group, and understanding about mechanisms that propel group member behaviour. Universality and the generation of hope have also been linked with an engaged group climate (MacKenzie, 1983; Ogrodniczuk & Piper, 2003). As such, emerging adults' identity work is more likely to occur within an engaged interpersonal milieu.

Accordingly, group interventions have been developed to enhance emerging adults' possible selves (Giannone, Cox, Kealy, & Ogrodniczuk, 2019). "Enhancing" possible selves is defined in this paper as positive shifts in one's motivation, future expectancy, or initiative for behaviour that advances possible selves goals. To facilitate such enhancement, emerging adults can engage in adaptive exploration of possible selves, eliciting group experiences (e.g., interpersonal learning, group cohesion) that allow members to reflect upon and consider the selves they wish to become in the future.

A recent review found that several different types of identity-focused group interventions had been investigated and reported in the literature, particularly regarding those

oriented around enhancing possible selves (Giannone et al., 2019). A common intervention

type identified in the review was the didactic approach that maintained a focus on teaching

about possible selves topics. Another intervention type was the task-oriented approach that

emphasized the completion of future-oriented tasks, such as imagining or writing about

possible future identities. Finally, another intervention type was the experiential approach

(hereafter referred to as "interpersonal-experiential") that emphasized exploratory and

interactive discussion about possible selves. The authors highlighted that all of the reviewed

interventions were found to be effective when studied independently or when compared with

a control. While their research suggests promise for these types of groups, they have seldom

been compared to one another. The present investigation seeks to address this gap in the

literature by examining the relative effectiveness of possible selves interventions. Doing so

can help clinicians make empirically informed decisions among these types of group

interventions to best support the emerging adults with whom they work.

The Present Study

The present study was developed to compare two types of brief, possible selves group

interventions among emerging adults. One intervention was based on an interpersonal-

experiential group model (see MacKenzie, 1996; Yalom, 1995; Yalom & Leszcz, 2005, for

overviews) that aimed to foster interactive and engaging conversations about possible selves

among small groups of emerging adults. The other intervention combined elements from the

didactic and task-oriented interventions (hereafter referred to as "didactic") identified in

Giannone et al. (2019), wherein emerging adults learned about vocational exploration and

action planning through didactic presentations and independent activities. The interpersonal-

experiential intervention was designed to provide opportunities for interaction and discussion

regarding possible selves in diverse life domains, whereas the didactic intervention was designed to facilitate skills building and knowledge acquisition about vocational possible selves topics.

The study was designed to evaluate potential changes in several constructs related to possible selves. First, self-efficacy, or emerging adults' confidence in their abilities to envision and actualize personal goals, was believed to increase due to participation in the interventions. Self-efficacy is thought to be particularly relevant in two life domains associated with emerging adulthood: interpersonal relationships and vocation/career. Second, it was believed that the interventions could positively impact emerging adults' general outlook or hope for the future. Finally, emerging adults' sense of motivation to pursue personal development goals was also considered to improve upon completion of the interventions.

The primary objective of this study was to compare the effectiveness of two types of possible selves interventions on outcomes pertaining to possible selves, including self-efficacy concerning relational and vocational possible selves, future outlook, and personal growth initiative. Given the relational nature of the interpersonal-experiential intervention, we hypothesized that participants in the interpersonal-experiential intervention would experience a greater degree of change in relational possible selves. In contrast, due to the instruction and activities pertaining to vocation in the didactic intervention, we hypothesized that participants in the didactic intervention would experience a greater degree of change in vocational possible selves. Next, we explored whether participants would experience improvement in future outlook and personal growth initiative following the group

intervention and whether change in these domains would differ between the type of intervention.

The secondary objective of this study was to examine participants' experience of group engagement during the two types of intervention. First, we sought to examine whether experiences of group engagement differed between the two interventions. Next, we examined whether group engagement was associated with improvement in any of the above-mentioned outcome domains across the two intervention types. In other words, we examined the interaction between engagement and the type of intervention in predicting possible selves-related outcomes.

Methods

Participants and Procedures

Ethics approval was obtained from the University's Behavioural Research Ethics Board. The current study included emerging adults who were recruited through posters (see Appendix A) and online recruitment postings at the university (e.g., student union building) and within the local community (e.g., coffee shops). Advertisements presented the study broadly ("we are investigating how participants can enhance future possibilities") while minimizing differentiation between the two intervention conditions. Prospective participants were invited to contact the research team for a pre-screening telephone interview to establish the eligibility criteria (see Appendix B). To be included in the study, participants had to be between 18 to 25 years of age and have verbal and written proficiency in English. Participants were excluded from the study if they presented potential risk issues or if they were unable to effectively participate in the group due to severe psychological health concerns (e.g., were actively psychotic, expressed severe suicidal ideation). A mental health

resources list was available to participants, if requested (see Appendix C). Eligible

participants were scheduled for an in-person meeting to complete the informed consent

process (see Appendix D). After consent was obtained, assessment batteries were

administered at baseline and following the completion of the four-week intervention. The

pre-intervention survey package included a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix E).

Participants in both interventions completed identical survey packages. Participants received

modest honoraria for providing pre- and post-intervention assessment data.

A total of 120 emerging adults commenced participation in the study and were

randomly assigned to one of the two intervention types using a randomization tool

(GraphPad). Emerging adults were considered to have completed the study if they finished

the pre-intervention and post-intervention measures and attended three or more of the four

intervention sessions. The final sample consisted of 86 participants (interpersonal-

experiential group = 47; didactic group = 39). There were seven interpersonal-experiential

groups and six didactic groups in total. The number of participants ranged from four to 11

participants per group, with an average of eight participants per group. Thirty-four

participants who were initially admitted into the study withdrew prior to the completion of

the study, with nine withdrawing after completing the pre-intervention assessment, thirteen

withdrawing after the first session, and an additional twelve withdrawing during the

remaining sessions. Participants who completed the study did not significantly differ from

participants who did not complete it with respect to age (completers' M_{age} = 20.85, SD =

1.93; non-completers' M_{age} = 20.71, SD = 2.33; $t(118)$= .329, p = 0.166), gender ($F(2,117)$ =

.399, p = .672), sexual orientation ($F(3,116)$ = .245, p = .865), or ethnicity ($F(6,113)$ = 1.199,

p = .312).

The average age of participants in the final sample was 21 years old ($SD = 1.93$), with a range from 18 to 25 years. Seventy-four percent of participants identified as women, 23 percent identified as men, and two percent of participants identified as gender non-conforming. Seventy-eight percent of participants identified as heterosexual, while the rest of the participants identified as bi-sexual (11%), gay or lesbian (5%), or "other" (7%). Forty-seven percent of participants identified their ethnic origin as Asian, 30 percent of participants identified as European-Caucasian, and the remainder of participants identified as being of mixed ethnicities (7%), "other" (11%), Hispanic (4%), or African (2%). See Table 3.1 for further information on demographic characteristics.

Two experienced group facilitators (the first and second author) led each intervention condition. The group facilitators discussed the intervention protocol before and after each session to ensure fidelity to the distinct intervention types. The groups were four sessions long (1.5 hours duration per session), occurring once per week over four consecutive weeks.

Measures

      Possible-Selves Efficacy Scale (PSES). Participants' self-efficacy to develop and actualize relational and vocational self-goals was measured by a series of items based on Bandura's (1982) self-efficacy work. Since current assessments of possible selves are largely descriptive (Oyserman, 2004) and do not tap self-efficacy for developing and actualizing future self-goals, we created a short quantitative measure for the present study. These items were developed to assess the degree to which the respondent felt confident in developing and achieving future-self goals in several areas salient to emerging adulthood: education, career, intimate relationships, and social/peer relationships. Two items, one reflecting the development of goals and the other reflecting achievement of goals, were

created for each domain and scored on a scale of 10 (*cannot do at all*) to 100 (*highly certain can do*). Prior to analysis, we conducted a principal component analysis with varimax rotation to evaluate the factor structure of this scale. As shown in Table 3.2, a two-factor structure was found. Four items loaded on a factor we labelled "relational possible selves" (total variance explained = 49%) and four items loaded on a factor we labelled "vocational possible selves" (total variance explained = 16%). Relational possible selves refer to self-efficacy in developing and achieving future-self goals in interpersonal and social relationships. Vocational possible selves refer to self-efficacy in developing and achieving future-self goals regarding one's career and education. Factor loadings and sample items for each subscale are presented in Table 3.2. Item 8 on the relational possible selves subscale was included to capture participants' sense of efficacy regarding achieving social relationship goals, despite a relatively equivalent factor loading on the vocational possible selves subscale. Cronbach's alpha was .82 for relational possible selves and .78 for vocational possible selves. A mean score for each subscale was calculated, with higher scores indicating greater efficacy for relational or vocational possible selves. The scores ranged from 10-100 on each subscale. The PSES was administered to participants during the pre- and post-intervention assessments (see Appendix F).

Herth Hope Index (HHI). The HHI was used to measure participants' general orientation towards the future or "future outlook" (Herth, 1992). It is a 12-item, self-report measure to which respondents indicated 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). A sample HHI item includes, "I have a positive outlook towards life." The responses were keyed in positive and negative directions. Negatively worded items were reverse coded before scoring. The HHI provides a total score, with higher scores indicating greater overall

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hope. Scores ranged from 0 to 48. Cronbach's alpha in the present study was .81. The HHI was administered to study participants during the pre- and post-intervention assessments (see Appendix G).

Personal Growth Initiative Scale-II (PGIS-II). The PGIS-II was used to measure individuals' motivation for pursuing personal development goals (Robitschek, Ashton, Spering, Geiger, Byers, Schotts, & Thoen, 2012). It is a 16-item, self-report measure to which respondents rated items using a scale of 0 (*disagree strongly*) to 5 (*agree strongly*). A sample PGIS-II item includes, "I can tell when I am ready to make specific changes in myself." The responses were all keyed in a positive direction. Confirmatory factor analysis supports the use of the total score to reflect overall personal growth initiative (Weigold, Weigold, Russell, & Drakeford, 2014). A total mean score was calculated by summing the scores and dividing by two, with higher overall scores indicating greater personal growth initiative. The scores ranged from 0-80. Cronbach's alpha in the present study was .92. The PGIS-II was administered to participants during the pre- and post-intervention assessments (see Appendix H).

Group Climate Questionnaire – Engagement Scale (GCQ-ES). The engagement scale of the Group Climate Questionnaire (MacKenzie, 1983) was used to measure participants' perceptions "of an atmosphere of interaction and therapeutic work within the group, including members' efforts to interact with one another and to understand and address their concerns" (Kealy et al., 2018, p. 27). The GCQ-ES is a 5-item, self-report measure to which respondents indicated 0 (*not at all*) to 6 (*extremely*). A sample item from this subscale includes, "The members revealed sensitive personal information or feelings." A total mean score was calculated by summing the item scores and dividing by five, with higher scores

indicating stronger group engagement. The scores ranged from 0-30. An average

engagement score was calculated across all sessions and was used in this study to reflect

participants' overall perceptions of group engagement. Cronbach's alpha in the present study

was .78. The GCQ-ES was administered to participants following the completion of each

group session (see Appendix I).

Interventions

Group interventions were developed for the purposes of this study, which reflected

the two intervention approaches described above. Identity Matters (IM) reflected the

interpersonal-experiential approach and Planning Ahead (PA) reflected the didactic

approach.

Identity Matters. IM consisted of four semi-structured sessions that included an

interactive discussion about possible selves among participants such as personal identity,

possibilities for the future, and potential obstacles. The foci of each session were participant

generated. That is, the group leaders invited participants to create the content of the sessions

within the broad themes named above. In doing so, the group leaders followed guiding

principles, including prompts to facilitate and direct discussion around possible selves; utilize

follow-up questions inviting participants to expand, clarify, or further explore their

disclosures, and; encouragement to interact with and provide feedback to one another.

Furthermore, the group leaders created opportunities for participants to feel understood,

heard, and validated, utilizing empathic responses to bolster group members' understanding

of their possible selves. See Appendix J for a more detailed description.

Planning Ahead. PA consisted of four structured group sessions that were

comprised of didactic seminars about career planning and personal development, as well as

pre-determined, independent learning activities presented in the form of a workbook.

Adapted from the groups described by Dagley and Calhoun (2013), all sessions focused on

career exploration and planning. The primary topic addressed in Session 1 introduced career

development and vocational planning frameworks while educating participants about

relevant personal domains such as interests, values, personal styles, skills, and needs.

Session 2 involved identifying career options and associated resources, in addition to

teaching career exploration techniques. Session 3 overviewed decision-making styles and

goal-setting strategies, offering opportunities for participants to work independently to set

personal and professional goals. Finally, Session 4 examined action-planning methods and

identified common barriers to the career development process. See Appendix K for a more

detailed description.

Data Analysis Strategy

Statistical analyses were performed with Statistical Package for Social Sciences

(SPSS) Version 25. Descriptive statistics were used to characterize the sample of

participants. Comparisons of socio-demographic variables were employed using t-tests and

between-groups analyses of variance (ANOVA), including age, gender, sexual orientation,

and race-ethnicity. ANOVAs were conducted to compare participants' baseline scores on

relational possible selves, vocational possible selves, future outlook, and personal growth

initiative, across intervention types. Due to multiple statistical tests, the Bonferroni

significance level was set at $p = .01$.

Four separate repeated-measures between-groups ANOVAs were conducted on

relational possible selves, vocational possible selves, future outlook, and personal growth

initiative, with time as the within-groups factor and intervention type as the between-groups factor in each analysis, to compare the effectiveness of the interventions.

A t-test was conducted on group engagement and intervention type to examine the role of group engagement in the interventions. Further, to examine whether group engagement was associated with each measured outcome in one intervention and/or the other, four separate moderation analyses were performed with the average group engagement score as the independent variable (IV), the randomly assigned intervention type as the moderator (M), and the residual change score for each of the measured outcomes as the dependent variable (DV). Residual change scores consisted of post-intervention scores with the effect of the pre-intervention scores removed on each of the measured outcomes. Moderation analysis conducted using the PROCESS macro for SPSS (Hayes, 2013) was employed that included predictor and outcome variables and an interaction term. Significance was determined by calculating the change in $R^{2,}$ with the significance level set at $p = .01$. Regression coefficients were mean-centred to facilitate the interpretation of the coefficients. All data met the assumptions of normality and homogeneity of variance.

Results

Baseline Characteristics

Participants who were randomized to each intervention did not differ with respect to age (IM $M_{age} = 20.48$, $SD = 1.82$; PA $M_{age} = 21.15$, $SD = 2.02$; $t(84) = -1.60$, $p = 0.79$) or on baseline scores on relational possible selves, vocational possible selves, future outlook, and personal growth initiative (all p values > 0.05). Gender ($F(2,83) = .847$, $p = .432$), sexual orientation ($F(3,82) = .756$, $p = .522$), and ethnicity ($F(5,80) = .819$, $p = .540$) were equally distributed across the two intervention conditions.

Effects of the Interventions

Four separate repeated measures between-groups ANOVAs were conducted to compare the effectiveness of the interventions. While a main effect (time effect) was not found on relational possible selves ($F(1,84) = .098$, $p < .755$, $\eta_p^2 = .001$), a significant interaction effect (time x condition effect) was found ($F(1,84) = 11.22$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = .118$), suggesting that IM was associated with improving participants' self-efficacy to envision or actualize future relational goals. The effect size of this difference, measured with partial Eta-squared, was moderate. In contrast, no main effect ($F(1,84) = .2.51$, $p < .117$, $\eta_p^2 = .029$), or interaction effect ($F(1,84) = 0.875$, $p = 0.35$, $\eta_p^2 = .010$), was found on vocational possible selves, suggesting that neither intervention was associated with changes in participants' self-efficacy to envision or actualize future vocational goals.

A main effect was found on future outlook ($F(1,84) = 6.73$, $p < 0.011$, $\eta_p^2 = .074$) and the effect size of this difference was medium. However, an interaction effect was not found ($F(1,84) = 0.97$, $p = 0.33$, $\eta_p^2 = .011$), indicating that participants' future outlook improved overall from pre- to post-intervention, but did not differ between type of interventions. Similarly, a main effect was found on personal growth initiative ($F(1,84) = 14.51$, $p < 0.01$, $\eta_p^2 = .147$) and the effect size of this difference was large. However, an interaction effect was not found ($F(1,84) = 0.20$, $p = 0.66$, $\eta_p^2 = .002$), indicating that participants' personal growth initiative improved overall from pre- to post-intervention, but did not differ between type of intervention. See Table 3.3 for a summary.

Group Engagement

An independent samples t-test was used to examine differences in group engagement in the two types of interventions. A significant difference was detected in group engagement

between the IM ($M = 4.35$; $SD = 0.58$) and PA ($M = 3.00$; $SD = 0.85$) interventions, t(84) = -8.75, p <.01, suggesting that participants in the IM intervention experienced a more engaging group climate than participants in the PA intervention. Four separate moderation analyses were performed to examine whether the type of intervention moderated the relationship between group engagement and each of the measured outcomes. As shown in Table 3.4, regression analyses revealed no significant interaction effects. However, given that our sample size may have been too small to reveal differences between interventions with regard to engagement predicting outcome, we undertook a subgroup analysis by splitting the sample by intervention type and examining correlations between group engagement and residual change scores. The only significant association found was between group engagement and relational possible selves ($r = .37$, $p = .01$) in the IM intervention, suggesting that group engagement was associated with enhancing participants' self-efficacy for relational self-goals in the context of an interpersonal-experiential intervention. However, no associations were found between group engagement and vocational possible selves ($r = .23$, $p = .12$); between group engagement and future outlook ($r = .04$, $p = .79$); or between group engagement and personal growth initiative ($r = .24$, $p = .10$). Group engagement was not associated with any of the measured outcomes in the PA intervention. See Table 3.5 for a summary of the correlational analyses.

Discussion

The primary objective of this study was to compare the effectiveness of two types of interventions that target possible selves among emerging adults: didactic and interpersonal-experiential. The secondary aim was to examine emerging adults' experience of group engagement within these interventions, including whether engagement differed by

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intervention type and was associated with any outcome variables. Results suggested that both interventions improved participants' future outlook and personal growth initiative; however, only the interpersonal-experiential intervention was associated with improvements in relational possible selves. Interestingly, no changes in vocational possible selves were observed in either type of group intervention. Further, intervention type did not moderate the relationship between group engagement and the measured outcomes, although follow-up tests found that group engagement was associated with relational possible selves in the interpersonal-experiential intervention. Overall, these findings suggest that both types of groups can enhance constructs related to possible selves, with the interpersonal-experiential intervention affording the modest advantage of enhancing relational possible selves. Increased levels of group engagement, coupled with the opportunity to reimagine future relationships as a function of the interactive nature of the interpersonal-experiential group, likely contributed to this effect. These findings, as well as their implications for practice and future research, are discussed in further detail below.

Two Helpful Interventions

In line with our exploratory hypotheses, the results from the present study found that both interventions were useful for increasing two important constructs related to possible selves: future outlook and personal growth initiative. Improvements in future outlook are important because they can influence both the valence and quality of emerging adults' possible selves goals (Oyserman & James, 2011). For example, being able to envision a positive future can be associated with the development of increasingly ambitious or meaningful personal goals, enabling emerging adults to strive towards their ideal selves. Accordingly, holding hope for one's future can also motivate the behaviour needed to

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advance such goals. In contrast, a person who envisions a negative future may develop

impoverished possible selves, resulting in the underutilization of their potential.

Improvements in emerging adults' growth initiative are also important because they

can better equip individuals to act in accordance with their possible selves goals (Frazier et

al., 2000). For example, having increased personal growth initiative can evoke strategies to

accomplish such goals, like planning and utilizing resources (Luyckx & Robitschek, 2014).

On the contrary, having reduced initiative may lead emerging adults to struggle with

cultivating the intentional behaviour or readiness needed to pursue their possible selves.

These findings are critical because they highlight two distinct ways of fostering

improvements, both in future outlook and in personal growth initiative that, together, have

relevance for enhancing emerging adults' possible selves.

One explanation for these findings is that both interventions stimulated future-

oriented thought, allowing participants to envision who they would like to become in the

future. They also provided opportunities for personal reflection and introspection about

one's identity and goals, albeit in different life domains (i.e., the didactic intervention

focused on vocation, whereas the interpersonal-experiential intervention had a broader

focus). These elements, which were characteristic of both intervention approaches, are

believed to have influenced positive shifts in participants' motivation and outlook towards

the future. Other non-specific elements that cut across all interventions may also account for

participants' change in future outlook and personal growth initiative.

Research evidence suggests that different types of group interventions are fairly

equivalent to one another because of the "common factors" that are present in all approaches

(Burlingame, Strauss, & Joyce, 2013; Mahon & Leszcz, 2017). Common factors are aspects

that shared across all interventions, including those that are relatively unique to group interventions, such as social feedback, group cohesion, and interpersonal learning (Ogrodniczuk & Piper, 2003). Research suggests that common factors account for most of the positive change in psychotherapy, in contrast to specific factors that are unique to particular intervention approaches (e.g., homework in cognitive behavioural therapy; see Wampold, 2015, for a review). The results from the present study are consistent with broader research that has found equivalence among bonafide interventions, regardless of their specific components (Elliot, Bohart, Watson, & Greenberg, 2011). Thus, the factors common to the approaches examined in this study can potentially account for participants' improvement in future outlook and personal growth initiative in both the interpersonal-experiential and didactic interventions.

Vocational Possible Selves

Decisions related to choosing and preparing for one's vocation are considered a critical component of emerging adulthood (Chavez, 2016). We hypothesized that the didactic intervention would be associated with positive changes in participants' self-efficacy to envision and actualize future vocational goals because of its focus on career exploration and planning. Contrary to our hypothesis, results indicated that neither intervention facilitated improvements on vocational possible selves. One explanation for this null finding may be that most of the emerging adults in the sample were enrolled in post-secondary education and may have already engaged in vocational exploration, planning, and training as a function of being a university student. For example, many higher education institutions require students to declare a major within the first two years of study, which may accelerate students' decision-making about an area of study or a career path. After declaring a major, it

is possible that university students engage in vocation-specific training (e.g., a practicum placement in an undergraduate social work program) that may further consolidate vocational possible selves. Participants in both interventions had relatively high mean scores on vocational possible selves at baseline (PA: $M = 78.1$; S$D = 12.9$; IM: $M = 78.2$; $SD = 14.2$ [out of a maximum of 100]), suggesting that they may have engaged in such work prior to the intervention. Hence, it is possible that these interventions, especially the didactic one, may better enhance vocational possible selves when implemented with individuals who have less vocational exploration and planning experience (e.g., non-university students) or with individuals who are experiencing a greater degree of career uncertainty, indecision, or dissatisfaction with their current or prospective career choice.

Relational Possible Selves

While both groups were found to elicit positive changes, one modest difference emerged between the two interventions. Consistent with our hypothesis, participants in the interpersonal-experiential intervention experienced increased confidence to envision and actualize future relational goals in comparison to participants in the didactic intervention. Differences in the levels of relational possible selves between the two interventions are likely the result of basic differences in their nature. That is, the interpersonal-experiential intervention was designed to offer participants opportunities to talk about future relationships (among other possible selves topics) in an interactive and supportive group setting, whereas the didactic intervention was designed to offer participants a structured experience that focused on teaching and completing tasks related to one's future vocation. Thus, the opportunity to discuss relationships, coupled with the interactive and nurturing environment,

may have been responsible for the significantly higher levels of relational possible selves in the interpersonal-experiential intervention.

Moreover, group engagement was found to be positively associated with improvements in relational possible selves in the interpersonal-experiential intervention. An engaged group climate reflects participants' efforts to understand, share with, and challenge one another (Ogrodniczuk & Piper, 2003). Perceptions of group engagement may have buffered feelings of interpersonal vulnerability by providing conditions for safety, helping participants to disclose and share about their relationships. Hearing other people reflect upon relationships and expose their insecurities in the group may have emboldened individuals to feel more confident about sharing their vulnerabilities. Thus, the engaged group climate may have encouraged participants to take more risks in the group, like opening up about uncomfortable emotions or trying new ways of interacting with others. Further, positive group engagement ratings may reflect a sense of encouragement and reinforcement from peers regarding attempts to envision and actualize possible selves. This may have facilitated optimism and the expectation for improvement, which has been found to favourably influence intervention outcomes (Joyce & Piper, 1998; Ogrodniczuk & Piper, 2003).

Discussion about relationships in an engaged group setting may also have prompted participants to reimagine the relationships they would like to have in the future. The diverse perspectives provided by group members may have led individuals to reconsider their internal schemas of relationships – a person's cognitive framework for understanding themselves and their relationships in the world (Young, Klosko, Weishaar, 2003). Given differences in personal histories and patterns in relationships, participants likely entered the group with varying expectations about the interpersonal experiences that they would

encounter in the group. It is possible that individuals who entered with less positive

expectations (e.g., fears of being ridiculed) may have experienced the accepting group

climate as a "corrective." Corrective experiences are defined as those in which "a person

comes to understand or experience an event or relationship in a different and unexpected

way" (Castonguay & Hill, 2012, p. 5). Those group members may have been surprised and

comforted when they were met with acceptance and support rather than rejection, allowing

them to form new positive interpersonal experiences with group members. Consequently,

new interpersonal experiences may have enhanced emerging adults' future relational selves.

Practice Considerations

Although the findings of the present study require replication by others, they may be

of interest to group facilitators who work with emerging adults in university/college settings

like counselling centres or career development services. An implication of this work is that

both types of group interventions can enhance constructs related to possible selves, indicating

that either approach would be beneficial for emerging adults' development. The decision to

implement one intervention over the other may partially depend on the specific experiences

required to address emerging adults' needs. For example, group facilitators may elect for an

interpersonal-experiential approach if emerging adults wish to expand their conception of

future relationships. Intervention selection may also depend on the skillset and preferences

of the group facilitator. That is, a didactic intervention may be preferable if a group

facilitator is an effective teacher, prefers to take on an active role in the intervention, and can

serve as a subject-matter expert by transferring knowledge to participants.

In contrast, an interpersonal-experiential intervention may be more beneficial when a

group facilitator has process-oriented group skills, can stimulate interaction among group

members, and prefers assisting the group in doing their work in the here-and-now rather than by providing psychoeducation. Finally, selection may be contingent on a group facilitator's perceptions of emerging adults' willingness or ability to engage with one another. Participants who feel more comfortable interacting with one another and who can withstand the ambiguity of an exploratory process may be better suited for the interpersonal-experiential intervention. On the other hand, participants who are more introverted or who learn better through structured lectures and activities may be a better fit for the didactic intervention. Future research examining who can benefit the most from each intervention is needed.

Moreover, facilitators should pay special attention to group members' perceptions of engagement to facilitate optimal outcomes. For example, encouraging empathy and acceptance among group members, as well as linking group members' disclosures to one another, can help facilitate increased group engagement (Levine & Moreland, 1990). Decreasing attention to individual members of the group by employing "group-as-a-whole" interventions, as well as setting norms and goals for the group, might also foster an increasingly engaged group climate (Kivlighan & Tarrant, 2001). Lastly, group facilitators may consider integrating elements from both intervention approaches to produce optimal levels of group engagement. For example, the interpersonal-experiential intervention may benefit from employing greater structure and teaching regarding particular possible selves topics, whereas the didactic approach may benefit from incorporating more opportunities for interactive group discussion.

Findings from this study further suggest that there are different mechanisms at play in both types of interventions and that intervention integration can offer the opportunity to

maximize the effectiveness of such mechanisms with diverse samples of emerging adults.

By combining elements of each intervention, we can increase the chances that such elements

will connect with a greater number of people considering their individual preferences and

characteristics. An integrated intervention can offer opportunities for participants who

benefit from instructive and independent learning processes *and* for participants who benefit

from exploratory and interpersonal processes (instead of one or the other as reflected in the

current design of the interventions). Future research is needed to explore these possibilities

better.

Limitations and Future Directions

The above findings should be considered in light of several limitations. First, while

the brevity of the interventions may be considered a strength of the study, these time-limited

interventions may have precluded pertinent group development processes such as the

progression through group stages (e.g., forming, norming, storming, performing, and

adjourning; Tuckman, 1965). The "dose-response" relationship may also be relevant because

the "amount" of the intervention in the current study may not have been sufficient to

influence the strongest effect possible (Hansen, Lambert, & Forman, 2002). It is noted that

the same interventions with a longer duration or with additional sessions may have produced

different patterns, trends, processes, or outcomes. Second, while the randomization

procedure was essential to the experimental research design, it may have precluded important

participant selection procedures, negatively affecting group composition. Research suggests

that well-functioning groups require careful participant selection based on criteria that set the

stage for a healing and engaged group climate (Bernard et al., 2008; Mahon & Leszcz, 2017).

It is possible that the absence of participant selection procedures by virtue of the study design

may have resulted in less cohesive groups, thereby impacting study results. Third, there was significant attrition in the study. Because 70% of participant attrition occurred prior to Session 2, it is possible that those who discontinued their participation did so because they had already received the bulk of their remuneration, with the remaining remuneration being paid after the post-intervention assessment. Alternatively, it is possible that attrition occurred because of the moderate time commitment needed to complete the group program, scheduling conflicts, or the group program fell short of their expectations. Finally, the sample was relatively homogenous in terms of participants' educational and functional status. Most participants were well-adjusted university students; other emerging adult groups (e.g., community samples) in various levels of care (e.g., outpatient/inpatient facilities) were not adequately represented. While the current study did not target distressed emerging adults, doing so may be an important next step to advance research in the area. Future research with greater participant diversity may also facilitate a better understanding of the effects of these interventions on the overarching population we refer to as emerging adults.

Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that both types of intervention helped emerging adults enhance their future outlook and personal growth initiative, two elements closely related to possible selves. Compared to the didactic/task-oriented group, our interpersonal-experiential group held a modest advantage of increasing participants' relational possible selves. Results further highlighted that group engagement was associated with improvement in relational possible selves in the interpersonal-experiential intervention. Future investigation should continue to investigate the associations between intervention types, group engagement, and intervention outcomes within the context of emerging adults'

possible selves development. Perhaps such examination will lead to a better understanding

of how group facilitators can select from group intervention approaches, enhance

engagement and other group processes within the groups they lead, and improve the utility of

group interventions in helping young people cultivate possible selves.

Tables

Table 3.1 Demographic Data Across Intervention Conditions.

Variable	Identity Matters (*n* = 47)		Planning Ahead (*n* = 39)	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Age	20.48	1.82	21.15	2.02
	n	*%*	*n*	*%*
Gender				
Male	11	72.3	9	76.9
Female	34	23.4	30	23.1
Gender Non-conforming	2	4.3	0	0.0
Sexual Orientation				
Heterosexual	36	76.6	31	79.5
Bi-sexual	6	12.8	3	7.7
Gay or Lesbian	1	2.1	3	7.7
Other	4	8.5	2	5.1
Ethnic Origin				
Asian	22	46.8	18	46.2
Caucasian	16	34.0	10	25.6
Hispanic/Latinx	0	0.0	3	7.7
African	1	2.1	1	2.6
Mixed	3	6.4	3	7.7
Other	5	10.6	4	10.3
Relationship Status				
Single, Not Interested in Dating	10	21.3	9	23.1
Single, Interested in Dating	11	23.4	15	38.5
Dating Casually	5	10.6	4	10.3
Committed Relationship	21	44.7	11	28.2
Married	0	0.0	0	0.0
Employment Status				
Full Time Employment	2	4.2	2	5.1
Part Time Employment	20	42.6	23	59.0
Not Employed	25	53.2	13	3.3
Disabled, Not Able to Work	0	0.0	1	2.6

Table 3.2 Summary of Factor Loadings for Possible Selves Efficacy Scale.

	Factor Loadings	
Item	Vocational Possible Selves	Relational Possible Selves
Develop a sense of what you want for your education (if applicable).	**.621**	.251
Achieve your desired educational goals.	**.754**	.202
Develop a sense of what you want for your career.	**.702**	.279
Achieve your desired career goals.	**.853**	.032
Develop a sense of what you want in an intimate relationship.	.141	**.901**
Achieve your desired intimate relationship goals.	.105	**.839**
Develop a sense of what you want in your social relationships.	.386	**.721**
Achieve your desired social relationships.	**.514**	**.594**
Eigenvalues	3.92	1.26
% of Variance	49.05	15.80

Note. Factor loadings over .40 appear in bold. *(N = 86).*

Table 3.3 Summary of Repeated Measures Between-Groups Analyses of Variance.

	Identity Matters		Planning Ahead		Overall					
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post				
Time Effects	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)	df	F	η	p
Relational Possible Selves	73.4(14.5)	77.1(14.3)	74.9(17.9)	71.9(15.9)	72.1(16.1)	74.8(15.2)	1	2.50	.029	.117
Vocational Possible Selves	78.1(12.9)	80.9(10.8)	78.2(14.2)	78.9(13.7)	78.2(13.4)	80.1(12.2)	1	.098	.001	.755
Future Outlook	36.9(4.5)	38.3(4.9)	36.6(5.3)	37.3(5.3)	36.8(4.9)	37.9(5.1)	1	6.72	.074	<0.01*
Personal Growth Initiative	3.4(0.7)	3.6(0.7)	3.5(0.8)	3.8(0.6)	3.5(0.7)	3.7(0.7)	1	14.51	.147	<0.01*
Time x Condition Effects							df	F	η	p
Relational Possible Selves							1	11.21	.118	<0.01*
Vocational Possible Selves							1	.875	.010	0.35
Future Outlook							1	.97	.011	0.32
Personal Growth Initiative							1	.20	.002	0.65

Note. *The mean difference is significant at the .01 level.

Table 3.4 Results of Moderation Analyses.

Model	β	se	t	p
Relational Possible Selves				
Group Engagement	.17	.17	.96	.34
Intervention Type	-.1.30	1.14	-1.14	.26
Group Engagement x Intervention Type	.41	.29	1.42	.16
Vocational Possible Selves				
Group Engagement	.33	.19	1.79	.08
Intervention Type	-.38	1.23	-.31	.76
Group Engagement x Intervention Type	.04	.35	.16	.91
Future Outlook				
Group Engagement	.09	.19	.48	.63
Intervention Type	.29	1.26	.23	.82
Group Engagement x Intervention Type	-.04	.31	-.13	.89
Personal Growth Initiative				
Group Engagement	.20	.19	1.08	.28
Intervention Type	-1.46	1.24	-1.18	.24
Group Engagement x Intervention Type	.23	.31	.74	.45

Model Summaries	R^2	F	df	p
Relational Possible Selves	.19	6.65	3,82	0.01
Vocational Possible Selves	.08	2.23	3,82	0.09
Future Outlook	.02	.50	3,82	0.68
Personal Growth Initiative	.06	1.64	3,82	0.18

Note. $N = 86$. $p < .01$. Outcome scores are based on residual change scores.

Table 3.5 Relationships Between Group Engagement and the Measured Outcomes by Intervention Condition.

| | Group Engagement | | | |
| | Identity Matters | | Planning Ahead | |
Outcomes	*r*	*p*	*r*	*p*
Relational Possible Selves	.37	.01*	.15	.35
Vocational Possible Selves	.23	.12	.26	.11
Future Outlook	.04	.79	.08	.67
Personal Growth Initiative	.24	.10	.23	.16

Note. *Correlations are significant at $p < .01$. Outcome scores are based on residual change scores.

Bridging Summary

Study 2 compared the effectiveness of two possible selves group interventions for emerging adults and examined the role of group engagement as a mechanism of change, allowing us to investigate key process and outcome variables. These findings, however, did not provide a nuanced understanding of emerging adults' experiences of each type of intervention. Therefore, an examination of participants' qualitative responses regarding the interventions was undertaken. The objective of Study 3 was to explore participants' subjective experiences of the aforementioned group interventions, including group members' perceptions of change and the aspects of the interventions that they found helpful and unhelpful.

Chapter 4: Study 3

Emerging Adults' Experiences of Brief Group Interventions: Two Approaches to Possible

Selves

Introduction

Both clinicians and scholars have taken a specific interest in group interventions

because they provide unique opportunities for interpersonal processes that may be

particularly relevant for supporting the development of emerging adults' possible selves.

Possible selves, which are defined as an individual's schemas about who they would like to

become, are especially important during emerging adulthood, the period between late

adolescence and adulthood (Markus & Nurius, 1986). This is because possible selves can

elicit the motivation and behaviour required to advance personal goals during a period of

development when identifying and refining one's sense of identity is a critical life task

(Oyserman & Destin, 2010; Oyserman, Bybee, Terry, & Hart-Johnson, 2004).

Possible selves group interventions can help support emerging adults' development in

a number of important ways. They have been found to improve emerging adults' role

identification and goal setting (Hock, Deshler, & Schumaker, 2006), positive affect (Peters,

Flink, Boersma, & Linton, 2010; Renner, Schwarz, Peters, & Huibers, 2013; Sheldon &

Lyubomirsky, 2006), and flow and relatedness (Layous, Nelson, & Lyubomirsky, 2012).

Furthermore, group interventions that focus on enhancing self-representations for the future

have been linked with long-term health and social advantages, such as the promotion of

mental health and well-being (Montgomery, Hernandez, & Ferrer-Wreder, 2008; Pulkkinen

& Ronka, 1994) and positive interpersonal functioning (Morgan & Korobov, 2011). The

experiences provided in group interventions can, thus, influence short- and long-term benefits for emerging adults.

Further, group interventions can strengthen emerging adults' sense of identity and personal possibility. Through social interactions, people obtain identity-relevant information in the form of verbal and non-verbal feedback (Adams & Marshall, 1996; Morgan & Korobov, 2011). Other elements that cut-across different types of group interventions, known as group processes, have been found to contribute to change in group members' behaviour (DeLucia-Waack & Bridbord, 2004). For example, research has found that group processes like cohesion (the quality of relationships that develop among group members) are associated with positive intervention outcomes (MacKenzie, 1983; Marziali, Munroe-Blum, & McCleary, 1997).

A range of possible selves group interventions have been developed and tested among emerging adult populations. A recent review found differences in the types of group interventions oriented around possible selves (Giannone, Cox, Kealy, & Ogrodniczuk, 2019a). A common intervention type identified in the review was the didactic approach that maintained a focus on teaching about possible selves topics. Another intervention type was the task-oriented approach that emphasized the completion of future-oriented tasks such as imagining or writing about future possibilities. Finally, an additional intervention type was the experiential approach (hereafter referred to as the "interpersonal-experiential approach") that emphasized exploratory and interactive discussion about possible selves. The authors highlighted that all the reviewed interventions were found to be effective when studied independently or when compared with a control. Different types of possible selves interventions, however, have seldom been compared to one another.

Giannone, Kealy, and Cox (2019b) compared two types of possible selves interventions to address this gap in the literature. One intervention that was evaluated was based on an interpersonal-experiential group model (see MacKenzie, 1996; Yalom, 1995; Yalom & Leszcz, 2005 for overviews), which aimed to foster interactive and engaging conversations about possible selves among small groups of emerging adults. The other intervention combined elements from the didactic and task-oriented interventions identified in Giannone et al. (2019a; hereafter referred to as "didactic"), wherein emerging adults learned about vocational exploration and action planning through didactic presentations and independent activities. The outcomes studied in the investigation included relational possible selves, vocational possible selves, future outlook, and personal growth initiative. The authors found that both interventions were associated with increased future outlook and personal growth initiative; however, only the interpersonal-experiential intervention was associated with increases in relational possible selves. Additionally, the authors evaluated the relationships between group engagement on intervention type and the measured outcomes noted above. A significant difference was found between group engagement and intervention type, with greater group engagement reported by participants in the interpersonal-experiential group. Further, follow-up tests found that group engagement was associated with relational possible selves in the interpersonal experiential intervention, only. This article seeks to build upon the work of Giannone et al. (2019b) by exploring emerging adults' subjective experiences of their participation in the group interventions. Doing so can contribute a new understanding about the processes and subsequent effects of the interventions, which has relevance for further intervention development and implementation.

The Present Study

The present study used thematic analysis to explore participants' subjective experiences of two group approaches examined in Giannone et al.'s (2019b) quantitative investigation to enhance emerging adults' possible selves. Thematic analysis was used because it is "a useful method for examining the perspectives of different research participants, highlighting similarities and differences, and generating unanticipated insights" (Norwell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017, p. 2). The research questions that guided the present investigation included: "What changes did participants experience as a result of their participation in the group interventions?", "What aspects of the interventions did participants find helpful?" and "What aspects of the interventions did participants find unhelpful?"

This work will contribute to the developing literature on possible selves group interventions by exploring participants' subjective experiences of being in these kinds of groups. Furthermore, because there has been no qualitative research to date exploring emerging adults' experience of these types of possible selves groups, this study will help to "fill in the gaps" of the existing quantitative study.

Methods

Participants

Participants were recruited through posters and online recruitment postings at the university and within the local community. Advertisements presented the study broadly and minimized differentiation between the two intervention conditions. Prospective participants were invited to contact the research team for a pre-screening telephone interview to establish their eligibility. Participants were included in the study if they were between 18 to 25 years of age and had verbal and written proficiency in English. Participants were excluded from

the study if potential risk issues were present or if participants reported being unable to effectively participate in the group due to severe psychological health concerns (e.g., active psychosis, severe suicidality). Eligible participants attended an in-person meeting to complete the informed consent process.

A total of 120 emerging adults commenced participation in the study and were randomly assigned to one of the two intervention types using a randomization tool called GraphPad. Participants completed the study if they attended three or more of the four intervention sessions. Thirty-four participants who were initially admitted into the study withdrew prior to completing the study, with nine withdrawing before the first session, thirteen withdrawing after the first session, and twelve withdrawing during the remaining sessions. The final sample consisted of 86 participants, with 47 participants in the interpersonal-experiential group and 39 participants in the didactic group. There were seven interpersonal-experiential groups and six didactic groups in total. An average of eight people participated in each group (range = 4-11 participants per group). There were no significant differences between conditions with respect to age, gender, sexual orientation, and ethnicity. See Table 4.1 for a summary of participants' demographic characteristics.

Interview Protocol

Each participant was invited to respond to four open-ended questions that asked them to share their subjective experiences of the group interventions (see Appendix L). Participants were provided time during the post-intervention assessment to indicate their response to each question by written text in the space following the item. These questions included:

1. What was your overall experience of the group sessions you attended?

2. Were the sessions helpful or unhelpful? Why?

3. How have these sessions helped you to contemplate possibilities for your future?

4. Are there any changes you would recommend for the groups that you participated in?

Procedures

Ethics approval was obtained from the University's Behavioural Research Ethics Board. Prospective participants were recruited and screened using the methods described above and provided informed consent to participate. Two experienced group facilitators led each intervention condition (the first and last author) and met regularly to ensure fidelity to the distinct intervention types. It was a four-session, closed group program that lasted 1.5 hours (per session) over four consecutive weeks. Modest remuneration was provided for participation in the study at three points: after completing the pre-intervention screening, after the first session, and following the completion of the post-intervention assessment.

Group Interventions

Group interventions were developed that reflected the intervention approaches described above. Identity Matters reflected the interpersonal-experiential approach and Planning Ahead reflected the didactic approach.

Identity Matters. Identity Matters consisted of four semi-structured sessions that consisted of an interactive discussion about possible selves among emerging adults. Group facilitators invited participants to create the content of the sessions within the broad themes of personal identity, possibilities for the future, and potential obstacles. They followed guiding principles, including prompts to facilitate and direct discussion, follow-up questions to expand or clarify participants' disclosures, empathetic reflections to enhance participants'

cognitive and affective experiencing, and encouragement to interact and exchange feedback with one another.

Planning Ahead. Planning Ahead was adapted from the vocational exploration and planning groups described by Dagley and Calhoun (2013). It was a didactic intervention in which group facilitators taught a series of possible selves topics, such as career planning and personal development, which emphasized learning about the self in the context of one's vocation. Each session had a corresponding topic (e.g., Session 2 involved identifying career options and associated resources, in addition to teaching career exploration techniques). Participants also engaged in structured independent learning activities or "tasks" in a workbook. These tasks consisted of worksheets that participants completed on their own or with the group leaders. Due to Planning Ahead's didactic nature, inter-group discussion among participants was limited.

Data Analysis Strategy

Data was collected from open-ended questions that solicited participants' experiences in the groups. We chose to gather qualitative data via open-ended questions because of the moderate sample size, which made participant interviews infeasible. The research team consisted of one doctoral psychologist-trainee, two assistant professors who are licensed social workers in British Columbia, and an associate professor. Thematic analysis was conducted using the analytic phases described by Braun and Clarke (2006). Coding and identification of candidate themes were completed independently by the first and second authors. The analysis was completed by three coders who engaged in an iterative process of constant comparison within and across the individual open-ended questions, participants, and

intervention conditions to identify themes. The fourth author served as a tiebreaker on candidate themes when the primary coders could not reach consensus.

We began by inductively familiarizing ourselves with the data and by categorizing it based on recurrent themes that emerged from the data. Then, we refined the themes by examining patterns of commonality and anomaly, both within and across the four open-ended questions. Preliminary codes were generated from initial data patterns and collated into candidate themes. These codes identified features of the data that the researchers considered integral to the research questions. Candidate themes were scrutinized on two levels to ensure that they reflected a reasonable and meticulous analysis.

Regarding the first level, all data extracts for each theme were reviewed to demonstrate pattern coherence, and extracts that did not align with candidate themes were reworked or transformed into new themes. Data extracts that did not subsequently fit within original or newly generated themes were discarded from the analysis. After the themes had been reviewed, a "thematic map" of candidate themes was created. The thematic map helped the researchers visualize the links and relationships between themes. This second level of analysis considered the themes within the context of the entire data set to ensure that the data set as a whole was accurately captured.

The researchers met to discuss independently generated codes and themes. These meetings were highly reflective, allowing the researchers to refine our understanding of the data. Consensus was established regarding the identified themes by all members of the research team. Once the themes were finalized, descriptions of the themes were produced in a codebook to best articulate the essence of each theme and subtheme. The codebook also

contained participant quotes that reflected the nature of the corresponding theme. These extracts presented explicit examples of the theme.

        Trustworthiness criteria. It was important to the researchers to employ a replicable and transparent methodology (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Various steps were taken to meet the trustworthiness criteria outlined in Norwell et al. (2017). Credibility, the fit between participants' responses and researchers' interpretation of such responses, was addressed by extensive engagement with the data, as well as peer debriefing among researchers to provide external checks on the research process. Transferability, or the capacity to explore the findings' applicability in other contexts, was met by providing thorough descriptions to ensure that those wishing to transfer the findings to their site could accurately assess this possibility. To meet the criteria for dependability, or documentation of the research process, researchers documented the decision-making process through the creation of an audit trail. Finally, confirmability, or ensuring that the researchers' interpretations of the findings were derived from the data, was addressed by recording the reasoning behind the theoretical, methodological, and analytical choices that were made throughout the research process.

<div align="center">

Results

</div>

        Themes were organized into three overarching categories that corresponded with our research questions for ease of interpretation. The three categories included psychosocial changes (four themes), helpful factors (nine themes), and unhelpful factors (five themes). The emergent themes were associated with one or both interventions. Presented below are frequencies that correspond with each theme. It is noted, however, that although frequency is not necessarily a measure of significance, it provides an indication of the degree to which a particular theme was common across the participants' responses (Torien & Wilkinson, 2004).

All participants received aliases that to preserve privacy. See Table 4.2 for the categories and themes.

Psychosocial Changes

The psychosocial changes category addressed the first research question that investigated changes that participants experienced as a result of their participation in the group interventions. One theme that emerged was relevant to both interventions (new emotions), whereas two distinct themes emerged in relation to Identity Matters (new possibilities and enhanced self/identity), and one distinct theme emerged in relation to Planning Ahead (new strategies/resources).

Both interventions.

New emotions. This theme referred to changes in participants' emotional experiences as a result of their participation in the group. New or improved emotional experiences were reported in one-fifth of the participants' responses including increased positive emotions (e.g., optimism) and reductions in negative affect (e.g., anxiety), as suggested by Hiroshi from the Identity Matters group:

> *"I learned to become more open and positive about my future in terms of vocation, goals, relationships, and overall living standards."*

A similar message was expressed by Michelle from the Planning Ahead group:

> *"I am now less anxious and obsessed about achieving a certain defined goal in my future life, which helps me to think more positively."*

Participants highlighted that enhanced future outlook would contribute to other psychological factors, like readiness to pursue personal goals and overall well-being.

Identity Matters.

New possibilities. One-third of the participants' responses indicated novel or revised understandings about what is possible in the future in various life domains, such as career or relationships. Participants described developing both new conceptualizations about the future and new ways of approaching these possibilities. For example, Katherine indicated developing a clearer understanding of the steps she needed to take to pursue her desired future:

> *"They [the groups] were very helpful because I now have a better idea of what I need to do to significantly improve aspects of my life and future."*

Participants noted that new understanding about future possibilities would contribute to behaviour that could advance such goals.

Enhanced self/identity. Half of the participants' responses noted increased self-awareness or understanding of oneself; emerging adults felt that they had become more reflective about who they were, furthering their abilities to identify key personal strengths and limitations. Tyrone highlighted that the groups provided clarity about who he is currently and also about who he wishes to become:

> *"It made me more reflective of who I am as a person and who I want to be."*

Participants described gaining increased self-insight that helped them better understand the features that make them distinct from other people.

Planning Ahead.

New strategies/resources. This theme referenced improvements in thinking about or enacting strategies, tools, or resources related to one's career or personal development. Acquiring strategies to cope with difficulties, to set goals, and to engage in vocational planning was described as key benefits in three-quarters of the participants' responses. For

example, Cait discussed how she gained tools to better manage her apprehension about the future:

> *"…The sessions have actually given me tangible tools to deal with career uncertainty and anxiety."*

The strategies or resources that participants gained were "concrete and tangible"; participants reported feeling like they had gained something practical that could easily be applied in their lives.

Helpful Factors

The helpful factors category addressed the second research question that investigated aspects of the interventions that participants found particularly useful. Two themes emerged that were relevant to both interventions (positive attributes of group members and personal exploration), whereas four distinct themes emerged in relation to Identity Matters (interpersonal learning, universality, self-expression/disclosure, and positive group climate) and three distinct themes emerged in relation to Planning Ahead (didactic learning, task-based learning, and positive qualities of group facilitators). Most of the emerging adults who participated found the groups to be a positive and pleasurable experience that was beneficial and rewarding.

Both interventions.

Positive attributes of group members. One-fifth of the participants' responses suggested that group members possessed numerous favourable characteristics, such as patience, understanding, and non-judgment, which allowed them to feel comfortable, supported, and at ease. For example, Hae Min from the Identity Matters group identified that

members with caring and trustworthy attributes allowed her to feel increasingly connected to the group:

> *"...Everyone here is patient and judgement-free. They want to give you advice as they would to a friend. It feels very close and heartwarming."*

A similar point was made by Zane in the Planning Ahead group:

> *"Everybody was very kind and listened to my words and what I had to say."*

Participants reported that group members' positive qualities were essential to a pleasant and enjoyable experience.

Personal exploration. One-quarter of the participants' responses indicated that both groups provided opportunities for the examination or observation of one's own mental and emotional processes, as suggested by Adisa from the Identity Matters group:

> *"They [the groups] were helpful because they helped me parse through my own experiences and interpersonal relationships."*

Theo, from the Planning Ahead group, reflected a similar message:

> *"The sessions allowed me to look into myself and identify the barrier that is preventing me from achieving my career goal."*

Many participants also reported being better able to attach meaning to their experiences and identify future goals as a result of the opportunities for self-reflection and introspection provided in the group.

Identity Matters.

Interpersonal learning. This theme referred to interpersonal learning, or the social processes of the group, which involved coming to know oneself better through listening or comparing one's own experience with the experiences or behaviours of other group

members. Nearly all of the participants' responses described Identity Matters as a source of interpersonal learning, which promoted the development of new or refined interpersonal skills. The group composition was perceived as diverse, affording a wide range of perspectives to consider in light of one's own experiences. For example, Alejandra highlighted her increased understanding of other group members, in addition to the new lens through which she could view her own experiences:

> *"...The ideas and experiences that people brought up helped me understand them*
>
> *better and helped me evaluate my own experiences from new perspectives."*

 Participants further shared that interpersonal learning was facilitated through processes such as observing other group members, the exchange of feedback, and experimenting with new behaviours in the group setting.

Universality. One-quarter of the participants' responses reported that they learned that their problems were not unique to them because many group members experienced similar difficulties. This realization allowed emerging adults to feel less alone with their identity-related concerns, providing a sense of normalcy, comfort, and connectedness. For example, Zahara explained that she felt reassured by learning that she was not the only one experiencing personal challenges:

> *"They were helpful in the fact that I understand that my personal problems are not*
>
> *unique, and others experience similar emotions and situations as well."*

Participants shared that it was helpful to learn that other group members had similar thoughts, feelings, and behaviours, allowing them to find comfort in their shared experiences.

Self-expression/disclosure. This theme involved responses that referred to the act of verbally expressing one's self in the presence of other group members. Half of the

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participants' responses identified instances of speaking up or disclosing sensitive information that might otherwise be kept private/internalized. They described feeling a sense of catharsis when divulging identity-related concerns with group members, as indicated by WeiChao's comment:

"It was mostly cathartic to express my worries and concerns."

Participants noted that expressing one's self in this manner allowed them to feel empowered, as well as to be seen, understood, and validated by other group members.

Positive group climate. One-third of the participants' responses indicated that the group climate (the social and emotional atmosphere wherein group work takes place) was beneficial and enjoyable. Participation in these groups felt secure and comfortable for participants who reported a sense of belonging, as described by Emir:

"The group sessions provided me with an open and inclusive space to talk about some personal issues and thoughts on my mind, and it is generally supportive."

Moreover, participants consistently highlighted the strong sense of community that was felt among group members.

Planning Ahead.

Didactic learning. This theme described didactic learning or participants' perceptions that teaching about possible selves topics facilitated the acquisition of knowledge. One-third of the participants' responses suggested that the Planning Ahead group enabled advanced understanding of career and personal development and enhanced preparedness to attain future possibilities. For instance, Milos expressed increased readiness due to the instruction he received in the groups:

"I felt supported and more prepared with information that was provided in these sessions."

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Task-based learning. One-tenth of the participants' responses noted the positive

effect of independent learning activities (e.g., worksheet completion), suggesting that such

activities afforded a new way of understanding, engaging, and applying the session content in

their own lives. For example, Olivia highlighted her enthusiasm for task-based learning:

> *"...It was helpful -mainly the activities- because it had us asking ourselves valid*
>
> *questions and a lot of the activities were really formatted well."*

Participants described task-based learning as "thought-provoking," helping them to "nail

down" and implement the ideas that they considered within the group.

Positive qualities of group facilitators. One-sixth of the participants' responses

identified the group leaders as a vital component of the intervention process. They were

described as having several professional (e.g., respectful, informative) and personal (e.g.,

engaging, openness) qualities that guided discussion and established a positive and

participatory environment, as indicated by Jamal:

> *"The facilitators were approachable, understanding, and non-judgmental."*

Participants highlighted that the group facilitators tried to ensure that everyone had a chance

to participate and that they valued the contributions of every group member.

Unhelpful Factors

The unhelpful factors category addressed the third research question that investigated

aspects of the interventions that participants found unhelpful. One theme emerged that was

relevant to both interventions (group size), whereas one distinct theme emerged in relation

to Identity Matters (unstructured format), and three distinct themes emerged in relation to

Planning Ahead (impersonalization, familiarity/experience with content, and limited group

participation).

Both interventions.

Group size. This theme involved responses that indicated a preference for a specific group size. One-tenth of the participants' responses expressed that larger groups produced less meaningful discussion. These individuals stated a preference for smaller groups, suggesting that more comprehensive discussion and equal participation among group members could be achieved, as suggested by Daria from the Identity Matters group:

> *"Smaller groups...I felt that not everyone had a chance to participate, nor was discussion as meaningful."*

Noelle from the Planning Ahead group expressed a similar sentiment:

> *"Have smaller groups because I felt that they were too big and people were hesitant to talk and make connections…"*

Participants agreed that decreasing the number of people in the group could enhance engagement and spur more comprehensive discussion, while also reducing apprehension about participating.

Identity Matters.

Unstructured format. One-third of the participants' responses conveyed uncertainty about the unstructured nature of the group intervention. Some participants described not knowing what to focus on because the discussion was too open-ended. At times, they grappled with prolonged silences and were unsure of what to say. Many participants stated a preference for increasing the structure of the groups by providing participants with clearer topics for each session, by educating participants about how to best contribute within the group setting, and by incorporating questions to prompt thinking and group discussion. For example, Dakotah highlighted how set questions could prompt further discussion:

"I might suggest a little more structure: Having set questions to address for each

session…"

Participants noted that providing explicit guidance on how group members could best

function and work in the groups could also promote increased participation and engagement.

Planning Ahead.

Impersonalization. One-quarter of the participants' responses found that the group

sessions were generic, impersonal, and did not address individuals' nuanced concerns.

Participants described wanting to focus more on their emotions and to tailor the session

discussion around group members' unique needs and desires, as indicated by Sergei:

"I would have enjoyed it a lot more if we could say what we wanted help with and

then do more detailed sessions on that."

Familiarity/experience with content. One-quarter of the participants' responses

indicated familiarity or prior experience with the session content. Participants described

already possessing a strong sense of future possibility before commencing the groups,

knowing the materials, and previously engaging in discussion/exploration around future

goals. For instance, Gianni described being unaffected by the session content due to having a

strong sense of self prior to starting the intervention:

"My personalities for the future are completely unchanged. I had a strong sense of

my future before the sessions and I have the same outlook and confidence now."

Other participants suggested that further consideration should be taken about when the

groups are offered and to whom.

Limited group participation. Over half of the participants' responses described

 feeling disappointed with the lack of initiative, disclosure, and sharing in the group from

select members. They reported that limited participation from quieter members made more talkative members feel less open to the discussion process, as indicated by Samira:

> *"Despite the encouragement [from group leaders], sometimes people would still not participate and there would be an awkward silence, so…I think more participation would be great when asked for."*

Participants also noted that increased participation from quieter group members would likely result in more extensive group discussion around the exploration of possible selves.

Discussion

Three overarching categories emerged from a thematic analysis of emerging adults' experiences of an interpersonal-experiential group and a didactic group oriented around possible selves, including psychosocial changes, helpful factors, and unhelpful factors. The psychosocial changes category consisted of four themes, the helpful factors category consisted of nine themes, and the unhelpful factors category consisted of five themes. The emergent themes were associated with one or both group interventions. The discussion below compares the interventions based on their corresponding themes, highlighting both shared and distinct aspects of the interventions. Moreover, it deepens our understanding of participants' subjective experiences of the interventions' processes and subsequent effects, prompting implications for practice and science.

Psychosocial Changes

Participants from both intervention conditions reported experiencing positive changes due to their participation in the groups, a result that is consistent with broader research exploring the effect of possible selves interventions (Giannone et al., 2019a). One change that participants consistently described in both interventions involved improvements in their

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emotional functioning. This finding highlights how intricately tied one's possible selves are with emotion. That is, talking about who one can become may have evoked salient emotions, including fear, excitement, or dread, because of the potential pressure that comes along with 'succeeding' in various life domains during the developmental crossroads of emerging adulthood. We speculate that factors like group cohesion or "the therapeutic relationship in group psychotherapy emerging from the aggregate of member-leader and…member-member relationships" (Burlingame, Fuhriman, & Johnson, 2001, p. 373) may have helped participants' access and work with such emotions by buffering feelings of interpersonal vulnerability and enabling conditions for safety, helping them feel more at ease when divulging sensitive information with the group.

Participants in each type of intervention also reported experiencing distinct psychosocial changes. Participants in the interpersonal-experiential intervention described developing a new understanding of one's self/identity and sense of future possibility, whereas participants in the didactic intervention talked about acquiring new behavioural strategies and resources. These results may help guide group facilitators' decision-making between the two types of interventions. Intervention selection may depend on which of the above aspects group facilitators wish to address, as well as on participant preferences for the type of group experience they wish to have. Thus, the didactic intervention may be more appropriate if a group facilitator's aim is to teach skills and have emerging adults walk away with tangible tools and resources to implement in their lives and if a participant prefers to be taught such skills. In contrast, the interpersonal-experiential intervention may be more beneficial when a group facilitator wants to expand emerging adults' perceptions of

themselves, what is possible in the future, and when a participant prefers to learn through interactive group discussion.

Helpful Factors

Participants noted two aspects that were helpful in both intervention conditions. First, participants in both groups perceived their fellow group members as possessing several positive qualities that contributed to a safe and cohesive group climate. This theme connects with the broader literature on group composition, which refers to the mixture of member qualities within the group (Kealy, Ogrodniczuk, Piper, & Sierra-Hernandez, 2016). Optimal group composition has been linked with therapeutic progress, including the development of positive group climate (Marmarosh, Markin, & Spiegel, 2013). Our findings are in line with such research in that the blend of group member characteristics in the present study was perceived by participants to be a helpful part of both interventions.

Second, participants in both groups reported that the opportunities for personal exploration were helpful in allowing them to develop a more in-depth understanding of their psychological processes and goals for the future. Facets of personal exploration, like self-reflection and introspection that are oriented around possible selves are considered especially important for emerging adults. This is because such facets enable the evaluation one's current context and the steps needed to attain goals, allowing emerging adults to identify any discrepancies between the two that and change course, if indicated (e.g., Bandura, 1991; Tougas, Hayden, McGrath, Huguet, & Rozario, 2015). Such awareness can be cultivated through personal exploration, as reported by participants in the present study.

Participants also identified helpful components that were specific to their particular intervention condition. Participants in the interpersonal-experiential intervention described

four factors, including interpersonal learning, universality, self-expression/disclosure, and positive group climate that allowed them to develop new interpersonal skills, experience a sense of normalcy and connectedness and share personal information within a safe and engaged group setting. These themes connect with the broader literature on group processes that refer to the elements of group interventions that facilitate participant improvement resulting from group member/group leader interactions (Bloch & Crouch, 1985). Several group processes have been identified in the literature that closely reflects the above themes, including interpersonal learning, universality, catharsis, and group cohesion (see Yalom, 1995; Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). Indeed, evidence from the group psychotherapy literature is in line with participants' experiences in the present study as it suggests that group processes are likely connected with positive participant change (Crouch, Bloch, & Wanlass, 1994; Yalom, 1995).

In turn, participants in the didactic intervention reported that learning about possible selves topics through structured lectures and by completing associated tasks helped them develop new knowledge and behaviours in relation to one's vocation. It appeared that participants in the didactic group engaged in processes involving less group member interaction (as compared to the interpersonal-experiential group) and more facilitator-led teaching and independent learning about possible selves. This is likely connected to the third theme that participants in the didactic group found helpful: the positive qualities of the group facilitators. In comparison to the interpersonal-experiential intervention where group leaders played a more co-participatory and supportive role, group facilitators in the didactic intervention were much more active and involved, and thus, were perceived to have a facilitative effect on the intervention process.

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Unhelpful Factors

Several participants from both interventions found that the size of the groups was suboptimal. This theme is likely related to an issue with group safety, which refers to a trusting environment wherein group members can comfortably work through their concerns (Burlingame et al., 2001). Research on group size in psychotherapy has found that smaller groups (between six to ten people) can offer more time to focus on each individual, whereas larger groups (ten or more people) can offer greater breadth and diversity of perspectives (DeLucia-Waack, Gerrity, Kalonder, & Riva, 2004). It is possible that participants in the present study felt that having more people in the room was daunting and that the established group safety was insufficient. Thus, having fewer group members to 'worry' about or 'impress' may have felt more manageable for them. Overall, this finding reiterates the importance of establishing sufficient trust and safety within the group, enabling participants to feel increasingly secure, thereby promoting more comprehensive participation in the group.

One theme that uniquely emerged in relation to the interpersonal-experiential group involved its lack of structure. Some participants found that the group was too open-ended and did not contain enough structure to focus the discussion in a meaningful way. These participants made reasonable suggestions that incorporating pointed questions and prompts, as well as providing guidance about effective participation, could have enhanced the discussion and mitigated their feelings of uneasiness. Research evidence supports these recommendations such that group facilitators' who set and reinforce clear norms and expectations for participation are more likely to have cohesive groups (DeLucia-Waack et al., 2004). One way of interpreting this perceived shortcoming is by connecting it back to the

intervention's fundamental nature that was exploratory by design. That is, the interpersonal-experiential approach enabled group members to personalize the session content within the broad themes of possible selves. It is possible that some participants felt hesitant with the increased autonomy to determine which topics were important to them and worthy of discussion. This points to the idea that some individuals may be better suited towards one intervention approach over the other, based on qualities like personality traits such as introversion/extraversion and interpersonal style. Alternatively, incorporating more preparation for participation (e.g., a pre-group session) and structure into the interpersonal-experiential group could broaden the range of people that may potentially benefit from the intervention.

In contrast, participants in the didactic intervention reported that the groups were too impersonal, overly structured, and did not enable opportunities for them to identify and discuss topics that were personally meaningful. Participants offered a number of suggestions that would help to address the didactic group's perceived shortcomings, including stimulating increased interaction among group members and promoting the development of facilitative relationships, both of which have been found to be associated with effectively functioning groups (Corey, 2016; Yalom, 1995). Our finding is likely related to the intervention's fundamental nature, which was structured and instructive by design. Thus, because the didactic groups were lacking the exploratory components of the interpersonal-experiential groups, participants may have felt that the session topics were not tailored to them or their unique life circumstances.

Moreover, because the didactic intervention focused on teaching and independent learning rather than on interactive group discussion as reflected in the interpersonal-

experiential intervention, it is likely that participants were less able to establish and utilize key group processes, like group cohesion or interpersonal learning, resulting in reduced or less effective group participation. For example, participants reported a lack of participant initiative, disclosure, and sharing in the didactic intervention. To address these unhelpful factors, group facilitators should work more effectively to increase participation in the didactic group. Although representing only a small sample of possibilities, interventions such as drawing out (directly inviting comments or involvement from one or more group members), linking (connecting what one group member is saying or doing with the concerns of one or more group members), and facilitating feedback (promoting the exchange of feedback among group members), may further energize and engage group members (DeLucia-Waack et al., 2014).

Further, because of its focus on pre-determined lectures, the didactic intervention runs the risk of being repetitive or redundant for those participants who have already engaged in vocational exploration and planning, especially in contrast to the interpersonal-experiential intervention wherein topics emerge organically based on the interests and needs of the group members. One way to remedy this challenge is by screening participants prior to admitting them into the groups. For example, participants could be asked if they already possess extensive knowledge or experience with vocational development. Assessment regarding participants' readiness and expectancies for such an intervention could also be a part of the screening process. However, it is noted that matching participants with their preferred type of intervention was not possible in the present study due to random assignment. That is, participants who were randomly assigned to the interpersonal-experiential group but who held a strong preference for teaching and structured learning processes might have felt out of

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place given the unstructured and exploratory nature of the group. The same may be true for participants who were randomly assigned to the didactic group, despite holding a strong preference for interactive group discussion. Thus, the suggestion to implement participant selection and screening procedures may only be appropriate in practice settings versus future research endeavours.

Overall, the factors that participants found unhelpful in both interventions are due to the most distinct features of their designs. That is, the unstructured nature of the interpersonal-experiential intervention was perceived as a limitation by virtue of the intervention's exploratory design, while the overly structured nature of the didactic intervention was perceived as a shortcoming by virtue of the intervention's instructive design. One possibility to address these unhelpful factors includes creating a better balance of structure within both intervention conditions. According to participants, the interpersonal-experiential intervention could benefit from employing greater structure and didactics around set possible selves topics. The didactic approach could benefit from incorporating more opportunities for interactive group discussion. This way, the interventions would reflect more of the helpful factors that participants reported in both interventions, which might lead to more robust intervention processes and outcomes. Given participants' individual preferences and characteristics, intervention integration can increase the chances that the interventions will appeal to and be effective for a greater number of people.

Study Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations are noted. First, as participant experiences were only assessed using open-ended questions, it is possible that different evaluation methods, such as interviews or focus groups, may have provided more comprehensive accounts of participants'

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experiences in the groups. Further, quantitative instruments that directly measured constructs

of interest (e.g., helpful factors with the Therapeutic Factors Inventory; Lese & MacNair-

Semands, 2000), may have complemented the qualitative findings. Second, there was

significant attrition from the study. As 70% of participant attrition occurred prior to Session

2, it is possible that those who discontinued their participation did so because they had

already received the bulk of their remuneration, with the remaining remuneration being paid

at post-intervention. It is also possible that participants withdrew from the study because of

the moderate time commitment needed to complete the group program, scheduling conflicts,

or the group program fell short of their expectations.

Conclusion

Participants' subjective experiences of two possible selves group interventions

resulted in three overarching categories: psychosocial changes (four themes), helpful factors

(nine themes), and unhelpful factors (five themes). Learning about participants' subjective

experiences was an important undertaking because it enabled an advanced understanding of

how one's individuality influenced perceptions of the group interventions. Furthermore,

comparing the themes of each intervention resulted in implications for practice, including

further intervention development and selection. This juxtaposition also holds significance for

future research as it can shape investigations exploring participants' accounts of group

interventions oriented at enhancing possible selves during the emerging adult years.

Tables

Table 4.1 Demographic Data by Intervention Type.

Variable	Identity Matters ($n = 47$)		Planning Ahead ($n = 39$)	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Age	20.48	1.82	21.15	2.02
	n	*%*	*n*	*%*
Gender				
Female	34	72.3	30	76.9
Male	11	23.4	9	23.1
Gender Non-conforming	2	4.3	0	0.0
Sexual Orientation				
Heterosexual	36	76.6	31	79.5
Bi-sexual	6	12.8	3	7.7
Gay or Lesbian	1	2.1	3	7.7
Other	4	8.5	2	5.1
Ethnic Origin				
Asian	22	46.8	18	46.2
European-Caucasian	16	34.0	10	25.6
Hispanic/Latinx	0	0.0	3	7.7
African	1	2.1	1	2.6
Mixed	3	6.4	3	7.7
Other	5	10.6	4	10.3
Relationship Status				
Single, Not Interested in	10	21.3	9	23.1
Dating	11	23.4	15	38.5
Single, Interested in Dating	5	10.6	4	10.3
Dating Casually	21	44.7	11	28.2
Committed Relationship	0	0.0	0	0.0
Married				
Employment Status				
Full Time Employment	2	4.2	2	5.1
Part Time Employment	20	42.6	23	59.0
Not Employed	25	53.2	13	3.3
Disabled, Not Able to Work	0	0.0	1	2.6

Table 4.2 Categories and Themes with Corresponding Participant Quotes.

Category	Theme	Group(s)	Example
Psychosocial Changes			
	New Emotions	IM/PA	*"[The groups] made me feel more confident about my current career choices and secure about my future.* [b]*"*
	New Possibilities	IM	*"I am now better able to think about what I need to do to broaden my schema of future possibilities.* [a]*"*
	Enhanced Self/Identity	IM	*"I've started to be more conscious about my own identity- how I perceive myself vs. how others perceive me.* [a]*"*
	New Strategies/Resources	PA	*"It [the groups] also suggested resources for me, which I think would be helpful to me in my future.* [b]*"*
Helpful Factors			
	Positive Attributes of Group Members	IM/PA	*"I enjoyed the group sessions that I attended because everyone was really open and not judgemental.* [a]*"*
	Personal Exploration	IM/PA	*"Helpful, because the questions were thought provoking and made me examine my own life experiences.* [a]*"*
	Interpersonal Learning	IM	*"I enjoyed hearing about other people's perspectives and comparing and contrasting their views to my own.* [a]*"*
	Universality	IM	*"Helpful to know I am not alone. My peers were also experiencing the same issues.* [a]*"*
	Self-Expression /Disclosure	IM	*"Helpful- anytime I am given an opportunity to express my inner world in a social context, I consider that as personal growth.* [a]*"*
	Positive Group Climate	IM	*"The community feel was essential.* [a]*"*
	Didactic Learning	PA	*"These sessions provided really good information.* [b]*"*
	Task-based Learning	PA	*"Helpful. The exercises provided interesting new ways to organize planning of goals that I would not think of creating by myself.* [b]*"*
	Positive Qualities of Group Leaders	PA	*"They [the group facilitators] were great at providing information, establishing a positive environment, and encouraging participation.* [b]*"*
Unhelpful Factors			
	Group Size	IM/PA	*""Maybe have less people in the group. I found it easier to talk in small groups.* [a]*"*
	Unstructured Format	IM	*"Please give us clear topics for each session, I don't know what to focus when I am talking.* [a]*"*
	Impersonalization	PA	*"I wish sessions had more focus on what participants were struggling with.* [b]*"*
	Familiarity/Experience with Content	PA	*"Some new info was presented but most of the stuff I already knew.* [b]*"*
	Limited Group Participation	PA	*"Some people did not talk/barely spoke, so I wonder how it may be possible to encourage more participation from other members.* [b]*"*

Note: The group(s) column identifies the intervention(s) from which the associated themes predominately emerged. IM = Identity Matters. PA = Planning Ahead.

[a]Identity Matters group.
[b]Planning Ahead group.

Chapter 5: General Discussion

Three studies were conducted to advance understanding of identity-focused group interventions in emerging adulthood. Study 1 reviewed the types of identity-focused group interventions that have been empirically tested with emerging adults to uncover their defining characteristics and purported mechanisms of change. Study 2 examined the effectiveness of two group interventions oriented around possible selves and examined the role of group engagement as a mechanism of change. Lastly, Study 3 explored participants' subjective experiences in the possible selves group interventions examined in Study 2 to uncover their perceptions of change and the aspects of the interventions that they found helpful and unhelpful. Findings from these studies suggest that group interventions can contribute to emerging adults developing enhanced hope, personal growth initiative, and possible selves efficacy.

The following sections bring together the findings of this dissertation and connect them to the larger body of knowledge on the topic. The empirical and theoretical contributions of the undertaken research are discussed. Other ways in which this dissertation advances the field of study are considered, including practical implications of the findings, strengths and limitations, and proposed directions for future investigations.

Empirical and Theoretical Contributions

The overall aim of this dissertation was to contribute an expanded knowledge of identity-focused group interventions among emerging adults. The following contributions were made to address gaps in the literature: consolidating and interpreting the disparate literature; investigating the effectiveness of and participants' perceptions of change in two possible selves group interventions; examining group processes in the above interventions,

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and; exploring participants' perceived limitations and suggestions for improving the aforementioned interventions.

Consolidating and interpreting the literature. One gap in the literature that this dissertation addressed involved bringing together the disparate nature of the broader knowledge base related to identity-focused group interventions among emerging adults. Initial observations of the field indicated the presence of group interventions that used diverse methods of promoting identity development among emerging adults. What did the different interventions do? How were they similar/distinct from one another? In order to consolidate and interpret this literature, Study 1 was conducted to bring together and evaluate the interventions that had been developed and tested among samples of emerging adults. The eleven intervention studies that were included in the review were subsequently classified based on their defining characteristics into three categories: didactic, task-oriented, and experiential.

Didactic interventions used educational activities (e.g., reading), were highly structured, and emphasized facilitator-led activities (e.g., teaching). Task-oriented interventions used brief tasks (e.g., imagery, writing), were highly structured, and emphasized facilitator-led procedures (e.g., provision of specific task instructions). Experiential interventions used interactive and exploratory discussion, were minimally structured, and emphasized the facilitator's co-participatory role (e.g., content/discussion generated by group). All the reviewed interventions were found to be effective when studied independently or when compared with a control.

Categorizing the interventions based on their defining characteristics provided clues as to the prospective mechanisms through which the groups enhanced emerging adults'

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identities or, in other words, *how* the interventions affected changes in identity-related

constructs among groups of emerging adults. For example, it is possible that small group

discussions in the experiential interventions elicited key group processes, such as group

cohesion and interpersonal learning, influencing the intervention outcomes. In contrast,

completing brief exercises in the task-oriented interventions or listening to group facilitators

lecture on a topic in the didactic interventions likely evoked independent learning processes

associated with intervention outcomes. Improved understanding of the interventions'

conceptual foundations provided an important first step for future investigations to test and

refine the generated intervention categories.

An interesting consistency that emerged across the intervention categories pertained

to those interventions that were oriented around possible selves. Five of the eleven studies

included in the review focused on enhancing possible selves versus broader identity

constructs, reflecting how emerging adults think about their potential and future. This

finding connects with the broader literature, which suggests that possible selves are

modifiable and have been shown to motivate emerging adults to take action toward their

identity-related goals (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Oyserman & Destin, 2010). As such, it was

proposed that group interventions oriented around possible selves held particular promise for

emerging adults as they can assist with navigating the wide array of life trajectories and

identity choices available during this developmental period. Indeed, Study 1 found that

possible selves interventions enhanced identity-related constructs in time-limited settings. It

further discerned that the degree to which these interventions prioritized the interpersonal

processes of the group as a means of enhancing identity differed across the intervention

categories. Specifically, the experiential interventions appeared to prioritize interpersonal

processes as a method of stimulating identity work, whereas the didactic and task-oriented interventions emphasized instructive and independent learning processes. Thus, Studies 2 and 3 were conducted to understand the role of such processes better, as well as to compare the effectiveness of possible selves group interventions.

Investigating effectiveness and participants' perceptions of change. Another gap in the literature that this dissertation addressed involved the lack of comparison between types of possible selves group interventions. Comparing the intervention approaches was an important undertaking because it helped address the question of relative effectiveness, as well as uncover participants' perceptions of the interventions themselves and the changes they experienced thereafter. Studies 2 and 3 compared two types of brief, possible selves group interventions among emerging adults. One intervention was based on an experiential group model (hereafter referred to "interpersonal-experiential") that aimed to foster interactive and engaging conversations about possible selves among small groups of emerging adults. The other intervention combined elements from the didactic and task-oriented interventions identified in Study 1 (hereafter referred to as "didactic"), wherein emerging adults learned about vocational exploration and action planning through didactic presentations and independent activities (as outlined in Dagley & Calhoun, 2013). Both quantitative (Study 2) and qualitative (Study 3) methods were used to examine these interventions.

In line with Study 1 that found that all the reviewed interventions were effective, results from Studies 2 and 3 demonstrated that both types of interventions were helpful at enhancing aspects of participants' possible selves. Study 2 found that the didactic and the interpersonal-experiential interventions were useful for increasing two important constructs

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related to possible selves: future outlook and personal growth initiative. Likewise, Study 3 found that participants in the didactic and the interpersonal-experiential interventions reported experiencing improvements in related constructs, such as increased hope and optimism for the future. Taken together, the results of Studies 2 and 3 provide complementary evidence of two distinct ways of fostering improvements in participants' orientation towards the future, which has relevance for emerging adults' possible selves development.

These results are consistent with the broader psychotherapy research literature that has found equivalence among bonafide interventions (Wampold, 2015). Diverse types of groups are considered fairly equivalent to one another because of the common factors that are present in all (or most) approaches (Burlingame, Strauss, & Joyce, 2013; Mahon & Leszcz, 2017). Thus, the factors common to the approaches examined in Studies 2 and 3 (e.g., contemplation about possible selves) can potentially account for participants' improved future-orientation in both the interpersonal-experiential and didactic interventions. This line of research further supports one of the major implications of this work: both types of group interventions were found to be effective, assuring group facilitators that either approach would be beneficial for emerging adults' possible selves development.

The qualitative findings further complemented the quantitative results by enabling a more nuanced understanding of the changes that participants experienced in each intervention condition. Participants in the interpersonal-experiential condition reported acquiring new knowledge of one's identity/future possibilities, whereas participants in the didactic condition reported experiencing behavioural changes, such as developing new strategies or resources. As a result, it was learned that the interventions not only enhanced

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future outlook and personal growth initiative, as demonstrated in Study 2, but they also produced two distinct types of change: the didactic intervention taught skills and provided tangible tools and resources, and the interpersonal-experiential intervention expanded emerging adults' perceptions of their sense of identity and what is possible in the future.

Furthermore, Study 2 found that neither intervention was associated with improvements in vocational possible selves. This finding is inconsistent with participants' subjective accounts of the interpersonal-experiential intervention provided in Study 3 that revealed that they had developed an enhanced sense of future possibility in various life domains, including vocation. One possibility for this finding is that quantitative measurement of vocational possible selves was insufficient to detect changes in this domain; open-ended questions allowed for a broader range of responses regarding future vocational outlook.

Examining group processes. Group engagement was a group process that was theorized to help emerging adults explore and enhance their possible selves. Study 2 included a preliminary investigation of group engagement as a potentially salient process contributing to outcomes related to emerging adults' possible selves, including relational possible selves, vocational possible selves, future outlook, and personal growth initiative. Results found that group engagement was positively associated with improvements in relational possible selves in the interpersonal-experiential intervention only. It was theorized that participants' perceptions of group engagement might have contributed to a sense of interpersonal safety and a capacity to reimagine the relationships they would like to have in the future.

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The results from Study 3 further illuminated helpful processes experienced by participants in these group interventions. For example, two themes that were perceived as helpful within both intervention conditions included "positive participant attributes" and "personal exploration." These themes may reflect other group processes relevant to possible selves interventions that were not measured in Study 2. Thus, the emergence of these themes in our qualitative work suggests the presence of additional group processes that could be examined further in future qualitative and quantitative investigations.

Moreover, findings from Studies 2 and 3 both highlight the importance of an engaged group climate, particularly within the context of an interpersonal-experiential intervention. For example, Study 2 found that group engagement was associated with higher levels of relational possible selves in the interpersonal-experiential intervention, whereas Study 3 highlighted the helpfulness of "positive group climate" in relation to the interpersonal-experiential intervention. These findings are in line with the broader literature that has found that group engagement can facilitate increased sharing and interconnection among group members (Ogrodniczuk & Piper, 2003). A related phenomenon, the working alliance, which reflects the collaborative and therapeutic relationship between facilitators and group members (Flückiger, Del Re, Wampold, & Horvath, 2018), may also contribute to participants' experience of engagement within the group. Hence, results from Studies 2 and 3 emphasize the importance of an engaged group climate in stimulating key interpersonal processes as a means of enhancing possible selves.

Results from Study 3 are consistent with the findings from Study 1 such that the didactic intervention also emphasized instructive and independent learning processes. For example, two themes that emerged in relation to the didactic intervention pertained to the

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helpfulness of task-based and didactic learning opportunities. Multiple participants indicated

that the content taught in the didactic groups enabled advanced understanding of vocation

and personal development, as well as increased preparedness to attain future goals.

Participants also noted benefiting from independent learning activities, such as completing

worksheets, because they afforded new ways of coping with common challenges of the

emerging adult years. These findings support the idea that the strength of didactic

approaches involves their ability to transfer knowledge and to foster skills related to personal

and vocational development.

      Participants' perceived limitations and suggestions for improvement. Finally,

participants' suggestions for improvement were obtained.   What did participants dislike?

What would they change about the groups? Qualitative inquiry generated further

understanding about the unhelpful aspects of the interventions, providing participants with a

"voice" to further shape possible selves intervention research and practice.

Participants offered a number of suggestions to improve the interventions going

forward; those in the interpersonal-experiential group recommended incorporating pointed

questions and prompts and offering further guidance about effective participation.

Participants in the didactic intervention suggested increasing interaction and the development

of facilitative relationships among group members. Participants in both interventions

recommended reducing the size of the groups and establishing greater trust and safety to

enhance participants' sense of security and appetite for participation.

An additional idea proposed in Studies 2 and 3 included creating a better balance of

structure within both intervention conditions. For example, participants in Study 3 reported

that the interpersonal-experiential intervention could benefit from employing greater

structure and didactics around set possible selves topics, and the didactic approach could benefit from incorporating more opportunities for interactive group discussion. Thus, creating an intervention with a better combination of structured/unstructured elements may lead to more robust intervention processes and outcomes. Overall, participants' suggestions should be considered for future iterations of the groups to maximize research and practice efforts with samples of emerging adults.

Practical Implications

The findings from this dissertation have practical implications for group facilitators who may wish to use these interventions with the emerging adults with whom they work. Applications in university/college counselling centres, career centres, and other settings, as well as guidance for intervention selection, the promotion of group engagement, and considerations for intervention timing, are discussed in further detail below.

University/college counselling centres. University/college counselling centres serve as the primary psychological health service providers that are sought by emerging adults, many of which offer robust group intervention programming to address the growing need for prevention and remediation (Denton, Gross, & Wojik, 2017). Due to the overlap between the typical age of university/college students and the developmental task of consolidating an identity, students may present at university/college counselling centres with problems related to identity development in diverse life domains. Problems with identity may interfere with adaptive functioning (Meca et al., 2014). To address such difficulties, group facilitators may offer possible selves groups to boost identity integration, positive development towards goals, and overall functioning.

Group intervention programs in the context of university/college counselling centres have been a long-standing and helpful intervention modality for richly diverse student populations and problems (Denton et al., 2017). A meta-analysis by Burlingame, Fuhriman, and Mosier (2003) found that university/college counselling centres were the primary provider of group intervention services for emerging adults. Denton and colleagues (2017) surveyed 74 university counselling centre directors across Canada and the United States and found that 92% of survey respondents indicated that their centre offered group counselling. While various types of groups were found to be offered at the post-secondary institutions (e.g., skills groups for depression, process groups for sexual violence survivors), the respondents did not highlight the provision of identity-focused group interventions as a prominent service for emerging adults in these settings. Given the need for positive identity development among emerging adults and the apparent infrastructure currently in place for group programming, university/college counselling centres reflect a promising setting in which such interventions can be further developed and implemented.

Career centres. Group facilitators in career centres may be especially interested in the didactic possible selves group intervention examined in Studies 2 and 3 because of its emphasis on vocation and possible selves. A recent, mixed-methods study by Dietche and Lees (2018) examined the provision of career development services at publicly funded universities and colleges in Canada ($N = 67$ responding institutions). These authors found that most Canadian colleges and universities offered a significant number of services related to career exploration, career planning, and advising, either individually or in groups. Of those services, those that were offered most frequently included: individual career advising (81% of respondents), workshops for resume and cover letter writing (75% of respondents),

and interview technique workshops (75% of respondents). While 12% of respondents indicated that they offered "other" career services, none of them specified the provision of group programming oriented around possible selves or broader vocational identity development. This was surprising, especially given the salience of developing possible selves in relation to one's (prospective) career during emerging adulthood. In line with this dissertation's findings that the didactic intervention promoted improved future outlook and personal growth initiative, it is possible that such an intervention can offer a new or different approach that may be of benefit to both the university/college career centres and the emerging adults with whom they work.

      Other settings. It is noted that group facilitators in other settings may also be interested in this work. While the present dissertation did not examine intervention effects in more advanced levels of care (e.g., outpatient/inpatient psychiatric contexts), it is plausible that emerging adults in those settings could also benefit from group-based identity-focused interventions. For example, individuals who experience severe psychological distress or psychopathology related to identity dysfunction (e.g., those with borderline personality disorder) may find it helpful to target such challenges in a social context that can address the interpersonal challenges often implicated in their identity-related problems. Further, identity difficulties can cut across various kinds of emotional problems, which have implications for a broader range of emerging adults (Neacsiu, Herr, Fang, Rodriguez, & Rosenthal, 2015). For example, challenges with codependency (reliance on others' opinions to inform one's sense of identity) may also encompass common difficulties with identity, not limited to diagnosable psychological disorders.

One potential application of the present research involves modifying the interventions for individuals who experience a greater degree of identity-related distress. This may involve taking further steps to create greater safety and trust among the group to ensure facilitative discussion about identity concerns (e.g., increasing group leader intervention), discussion about developing healthy personal boundaries in interpersonal relationships (including those within the group), and enabling more opportunity to address interpersonal challenges in the here-and-now with other members of the group. Future research should explore if/how such individuals may benefit from interventions that specifically target identity/possible selves in a structured and formalized group setting.

Another potential application of this research pertains to interventions for individuals who hold distinct (and often marginalized) group identities, such as ethnic, racial, cultural, gender, sexual, disability, religious, socioeconomic status, and age/generational identities. While group or collective identities were not specifically addressed in this dissertation, multiple viewpoints hold that such identities inform one's broader understanding of themselves and their experience in the world (Bussey & Bandura, 1998). Social cognitive theory, specifically, suggests that a significant part of an emerging adult's identity relates to their identities in the above domains (among others). For example, ethnicity is often considered an essential part of identity, but the salience of one's ethnic identity (self-identification with an ethnic group) varies depending on the situation (Alberts & Durrheim, 2018). Interventions that address these specific identity domains, in addition to other intersecting identities (see Crenshaw, 1989), may be particularly beneficial for emerging adults to supplement identity exploration and commitments to their specific group identities. Moreover, a modified intervention approach to address marginalized persons' unique identity

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needs must be considered. This consideration connects with the broader literature on identity interventions addressing specific sociodemographic variables that have been found to strengthen, for example, sexual identities (King & Smith, 2004) and racial-ethnic identities (Day, Borkowski, Punzo, & Howsepian, 1994). Indeed, future research is needed to understand better how the present interventions can be adapted to meet the needs of diverse, emerging adults.

Guidance for intervention selection. In addition to the settings to which these findings can be applied, this dissertation offered practical guidance for group facilitators when selecting among the options of identity-focused group interventions supported by research evidence. Three key aspects were highlighted as factors to consider, including intended intervention outcomes, group facilitator skills, and group member characteristics/preferences.

First, Study 1 highlighted several factors that should be considered when selecting an identity-focused group including (a) time and economic constraints; (b) broad vs. narrowed identity work; (c) future-oriented vs. present- or past-oriented temporal focus; (d) structured vs. semi-structured format; (e) interpersonal processes vs. independent learning; and (f) immediate vs. sustained identity-related changes. More specifically, the decision to implement one intervention over the other may partially depend on the specific experiences required to address emerging adults' needs. For example, group facilitators may elect an interpersonal-experiential approach if emerging adults wish to expand their conception of future relationships. Studies 2 and 3 suggested that, while both the didactic and interpersonal-experiential interventions facilitated important improvements in constructs related to possible selves, they produced fundamentally different experiences. That is,

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participants in the interpersonal-experiential condition acquired new understandings about one's identity/future possibilities, whereas participants in the didactic condition experienced behavioural changes, such as developing new strategies or resources. Given this, a group facilitator who wishes to help emerging adults develop skills or strategies to advance possible selves goals related to vocation may elect for a didactic approach, whereas a group facilitator who desires to help emerging adults expand their conception of future relationships may elect for an interpersonal-experiential approach.

Second, intervention selection may also depend on the skill set of the group facilitator. For example, a didactic intervention may be preferred if a group facilitator is an effective teacher, prefers to take on an active role in the intervention, and can serve as a subject-matter expert by transferring knowledge to participants. In contrast, an interpersonal-experiential intervention may be more beneficial when a group facilitator has process-oriented group skills, can stimulate interaction among group members, and prefers assisting the group in doing their work in the here-and-now rather than by providing psychoeducation.

Third, intervention selection may be contingent on a group facilitator's perceptions of emerging adults' characteristics and preferences, such as their willingness or ability to engage with one another. That is, participants who appear more comfortable interacting with one another and who can withstand the ambiguity of an exploratory group may be better suited for the interpersonal-experiential intervention. On the other hand, participants who appear more introverted or who learn better through structured lectures and activities may be a better fit for the didactic intervention. Future research examining who can benefit the most from which type of intervention is needed.

Promoting group engagement. Findings from this dissertation suggest that an engaged group climate may help facilitate participant outcomes. A number of suggestions were provided in Studies 2 and 3 to further promote engagement within groups, such as encouraging expressions of warmth and acceptance among group members, linking group members' disclosures to one another, decreasing attention to individual group members by employing "group-as-a-whole" interventions, and setting norms and goals for the group. Furthermore, it was proposed that group facilitators might consider integrating elements from both intervention approaches to produce optimal levels of group engagement.

Considerations for intervention timing. The timing of when emerging adults experience the most readiness for the interventions is also an important consideration for group facilitators. Ogrodniczuk, Joyce, and Piper (2009) suggested that readiness involves the participant "being psychologically prepared to undertake the tasks associated with engaging in, and utilizing the provisions (the therapeutic alliance, the therapist's interventions) of psychotherapy" (p. 427). A person's readiness for a group intervention may be influenced by different factors, such as motivation or preparedness to change (Ogrodniczuk et al., 2009). As reflected in Study 3's theme "familiarity/experience with session content," it is possible that interventions are less impactful when provided at inappropriate times or when people demonstrate less readiness (e.g., participants already have familiarity with session content or have already engaged in sufficient identity-work).

In contrast, interventions that are afforded when they are most "needed" can contribute to greater improvement or growth (e.g., when participants are highly motivated or have engaged in little formal exploration of future possibilities). Steps to ensure participant readiness may include participant pre-screening or selection. Selection processes may

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involve asking prospective participants about their degree of identity work to date, as well as administrating psychometric instruments to assess readiness better (e.g., an identity status instrument to better determine an individual's degree of identity exploration and commitment or the readiness for psychotherapy index; Ogrodniczuk et al., 2009).

Strengths

This dissertation contained a number of strengths. The strict selection criteria used in Study 1 was considered a strength of this work as it enabled a rigorous review of the literature. Additionally, the different research methods used to investigate the phenomena of interest were integral to this research endeavour. Quantitative and qualitative approaches were employed to complement one another and to provide different ways of learning about participants' experiences of the interventions.

Due to the dynamic nature of intervention research, it was helpful to investigate both between- and within-participant effects. This was important because it enabled not only the examination of participants' change across the interventions but also the examination of participants' personalized experiences in the groups. Thus, we gained further insight as to how the interventions fostered change in specific identity-related constructs, while also providing highly contextualized accounts of what was helpful or unhelpful in the group interventions.

Moreover, the randomization procedure used in Studies 2 and 3, wherein participants were assigned to groups by chance alone, was considered a key strength of the undertaken research. This is because randomization helped to prevent bias, which can occur when results are affected by human choices or other factors not related to the interventions being tested. Finally, the brevity of the interventions was a strength of this work because it

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demonstrated that very brief interventions could affect changes in the measured outcomes among emerging adults. This is significant because participants experienced improvements regardless of the interventions' modest approach (e.g., brief duration, low intensity).

While various conclusions were drawn in the present work, there are two conclusions that the author highlights with confidence: (a) multiple types of interventions exist that use diverse methods to enhance identity and possible selves-related constructs among emerging adults; and (b) both possible selves interventions examined in this dissertation were found to be effective and were experienced by participants as helpful. These conclusions are significant because they affirm the promise of identity-focused group interventions and suggest that future research that builds from the preliminary knowledge base on such interventions is a worthwhile endeavour.

Limitations

The limitations of this dissertation research must be noted. First, there was a lack of consensus on valid and reliable measures of possible selves, the focus of many of the interventions included in this dissertation, or instruments measuring identity-related constructs, more generally. As a result, a possible selves measure was developed for the purposes of this dissertation, which currently lacks estimations of convergent and discriminant validity and test re-test reliability. These tools and others like them should be improved or developed further before advances in this domain can be made. For example, a self-report instrument that measures the content of emerging adults' possible selves may be especially indicated given the emphasis placed on the valence and salience of diverse types of possible selves (Erikson, 2007; Markus & Nurius, 1986).

Furthermore, emerging adulthood theory lacks construct validity in the broader literature, reflecting a key limitation of this dissertation and the scholarship in this domain more generally. Scholars must continue to generate research evidence to support the notion that emerging adulthood is a distinct developmental period that is separate from the adolescence that precedes it and the adulthood that follows it. Moreover, an assumption was made in this dissertation that participants between the ages of 18-25 represented samples of emerging adults. A potential limitation of this approach is that participants simply fell within this age range but did not resonate with the subjective experience of being an emerging adult. Future research should explicitly ask participants whether they identify as emerging adults as this may be a critical inclusion criterion that could substantially add to our understanding about who gets to "experience" emerging adulthood (Hendry & Kloep, 2007).

Second, there is no way of knowing if participant changes were maintained over time because this research did not contain follow-up assessments. Moreover, whether the interventions ultimately facilitated the attainment of possible selves goals is also unknown. To this end, future research should consider gathering longitudinal data with multiple post-intervention data collection points.

Third, while the brevity of the interventions is considered a strength of the study, these time-limited interventions may have precluded relevant group development processes, such as the development of a shared understanding of group norms or group cohesion (Tuckman, 1965). Relatedly, the interventions may not have elicited the most robust "dose-response" because the duration of the interventions may not have influenced the strongest effect possible (Hansen, Lambert, & Forman, 2006). Additionally, potential confounding variables like group leader effects and group-level effects may also be considerations for

researchers to evaluate in future investigations, enabling more precise understandings of the unique effects of the leaders, participants, and the group at large.

Finally, the sample was relatively homogenous in terms of participants' educational and functional status. Most participants self-identified as university students, which is consistent with a broader criticism of the research literature on emerging adult populations (Arnett, Kloep, Hendry, & Tanner, 2011). Future research with greater participant diversity, including identity distressed individuals, may also facilitate a better understanding of the effects of these interventions among emerging adults.

Future Directions

Considerable research remains to be done to strengthen the knowledge base of identity-focused group interventions among emerging adults. Replication of the examined didactic and interpersonal-experiential interventions is needed to further determine the reliability and validity of the results, as well as their generalizability and real-world applications. Further, future research investigating who may benefit the most from the different types of identity-focused interventions can help elucidate important individual differences. For example, it was proposed that group member characteristics, like extraversion-introversion, might impact an individuals' ability to benefit from the interventions maximally.

Additionally, investigations examining group processes can shed further light on the mechanisms at play in the interventions. Increased research about such processes will also enable a more comprehensive understanding of how they are related to intervention outcomes. Another area for future investigation involves studying group leader effects (group facilitator characteristics that are related to intervention processes and outcomes;

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Chapman, Baker, Porter, Thayer, & Burlingame, 2010) that were not examined in the current research. Finally, as alluded to in earlier sections of this chapter, future research that explores the integration of the helpful aspects of the interventions, as well as the incorporation of participants' suggestions for improvement, can foster interventions that better address the identity needs of emerging adults.

Conclusion

Overall, the research undertaken in this dissertation provided a helpful first step to address the challenges associated with this nascent field of study, offering evidence in support of group-based identity-focused interventions for emerging adults. Although two possible selves interventions were examined that afforded seemingly different experiences, a conclusion that is well supported in this work is that both interventions were associated with positive changes in constructs related to possible selves. These group interventions provided a pathway for helping members envision future possibilities as they undertake the essential task of emerging adulthood: identity integration and synthesis.

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Appendix A **- Recruitment Poster**

Telephone Screening

Participant ID	XXX
Eligible	Y or N
Scheduled	Date YY, 2017
Condition Randomization	A or B

- Thank you for your interest in the study.
- This conversation will take anywhere between 5-10 minutes – is now an appropriate time for you?
- Purpose: We are interested in investigating how emerging adults can enhance future outlook and well-being.
- The study will entail: Attending four sessions (1.5 hours each) over 4 weeks and the completion of questionnaires that will take 30-60 minutes at two time points: before and after the program.
- There is a slight risk that some of these questions in the study may evoke some uncomfortable feelings. If it does, please let us know and we would be happy to send you the proper resources.
- We want to assure you that your confidentiality will be maintained at all times.
- Please remember that all participants will receive $25 after the 1st assessment and $50 after the post-assessment, and an added 25$ after a follow-up assessment that will happen six months from now.
- Does this make sense? Do you have any questions?

1.Are you between the ages of 18 and 25?	YES	NO
2. Do you have written and verbal proficiency in English?	YES	NO
3. Are you able to travel to UBC Point Grey campus?	YES	NO
4. Are you currently experiencing significant distress?	YES	NO
4a. Would your distress hinder your ability to engage in a group setting?	YES	NO
5. Are you available for the next 4 _____ from _____ to _____	YES	NO

- If participants are eligible to continue: Provide information about when the sessions will be held and email the directions.
- If participants are not eligible: Unfortunately, you are not eligible to continue with this study. Thank you so much for your interest!

Appendix C - **Mental Health Resources List**

UBC

Identity Matters

MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCE LIST

Assessment / Treatment / Counselling Services

Vancouver Coastal Health Mental Health Services
Intake: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

Mood Disorders Association of BC
▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

Fraser Health Mental Health & Substance Use Services
Burnaby: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮   New Westminster: ▮▮▮▮▮▮   Surrey: ▮▮▮▮▮▮

Scarfe Free Counselling Clinic
▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

UBC Psychology Clinic
▮▮▮▮▮▮

Crisis Telephone / Online Support

Vancouver Crisis Line
▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

Fraser Health Crisis Line
▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

Crisis Online Chat
▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

Mental Health Emergency Line
▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

Informational websites

www.heretohelp.bc.ca

www.mindcheck.ca

www.keltymentalhealth.ca

September 26, 2016

Page 1 of 1

Appendix D - Consent Form

Identity Matters

UBC DEPARTMENT of Psychiatry

INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

Identity Matters: A possible selves intervention for emerging adults

Who is conducting the study?

Principal Investigator: ███████, PhD; Assistant Professor
Institute of Mental Health; Psychotherapy Program
Department of Psychiatry
Tel: ███████

Graduate Student
Researchers: ███████, MA, PhD Student
███████, BA, MA Student

Who is funding this study?
The study is being funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), and supported by the UBC Psychotherapy Program.

Why should you take part in this study?
The purpose of this study is to examine short-term group programs that focus on future possibilities among young adults. We want to know whether participating in these groups will enhance wellbeing. Therefore, we are inviting adults aged 18 – 25 to take part in these groups and in the research study.

What happens in the study?
If you agree to participate, you will be invited to take part in a series of four 2-hour group sessions with other young adults. This program will focus on developing possibilities for your future. You will be randomly allocated to one of two different types of groups. Both types of group will be led by an experienced group facilitator, and will promote ideas and strategies for your future potential. You will be asked to complete a series of assessment questionnaires before, during, and after the program. This will help us understand whether the different group interventions are effective. A modest payment will be offered for completing the assessments. The study procedures consist of:

1. Pre-group assessment questionnaires; estimated time of 1 hour; $25 payment
2. Random allocation to one of two types of groups
3. Participate in series of group sessions: once per week for 4 weeks; time of 2 hours per week
4. Post-group assessment questionnaires; estimated time of 1 hour; $50 payment
5. Participate in a follow-up assessment; estimated time of 1 hour; $25 payment

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How will the study findings be shared?

The results of this study will be published in journal articles, presented at conferences, and shared with the public through online / social media outlets.

Are there any potential <u>risks</u> to participating?

We do not think there is anything in this study that could harm you or be bad for you. There is a slight possibility that some of the questions we ask might upset you, or that some of the topics in the group sessions might evoke uncomfortable feelings. Some of the questions or topics might seem sensitive or personal. You do not have to answer a particular question if you do not want to. Please let one of the study staff know if you have concerns; staff can recommend helpful resources if you feel distressed.

Are there any potential <u>benefits</u> to participating?

The group sessions in our program are designed to enhance participants' orientation toward future possibilities. Although no benefits can be guaranteed, participation may potentially contribute to psychological wellbeing. While it may have the potential to enhance wellbeing, our program is not intended to provide treatment for psychological difficulties. Study staff can recommend other resources if you have serious mental health concerns.

Confidentiality and privacy

Your confidentiality will be respected. Information that discloses your identity will not be released without your consent unless required by law. All documents will be identified only by code number and kept in a locked filing cabinet. Computer records will be password-protected. We encourage participants not to discuss the content of our group sessions to people outside the group; however, we can't control what participants do with the information discussed. Published reports of the study will not contain identifying information.

Will you be paid for taking part in this study?

We will pay you for participating in the study: one $25 payment following completion of the pre-group assessment, and one $50 payment at the completion of the assessment after the 4 group sessions. We will also pay you $25 for returning to complete a follow-up assessment three-months after the completion of the group sessions.

Who can you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

We will answer any inquires you may have about the study; participants may contact the principal investigator or one of the study staff. If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, contact the Research Participant Complaint Line in the UBC Office of Research Ethics ███████████ or if long distance e-mail ███████████ or call toll free ███████████.

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Consent to participate in the study

Taking part in this study is entirely up to you. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to take part, you may choose to pull out of the study at any time without giving a reason. Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records. Your signature below indicates that you consent to participate in this study.

_____

Participant Signature   Date

_____

Printed Name of the Participant signing above

Appendix E - **Demographic Questionnaire**

UBC

Identity Matters   **Demographic Questionnaire**

1. What is your age? _____ years

2. Please indicate your gender:
    □ Female   □ Male   □ Other:_____

3. Please indicate your sexual orientation:
    □ Heterosexual   □ Gay or Lesbian   □ Bisexual   □ Other:_____

4. Please indicate your ethnic origin using the following categories:
    □ Aboriginal   □ African   □ Asian   □ Hispanic
    □ White   □ Multiple ethnicities   □ Other:_____

5. What is the highest level of education you have <u>completed</u>?
    □ Less than high school   □ Technical diploma or trade qualification
    □ High school or equivalent   □ Undergraduate degree
    □ Some college but no degree   □ Graduate degree

6. Are you currently enrolled in post-secondary education?
    □ Yes   □ No

7. Do you consider yourself an athlete?
    □ Yes   □ No

    8. If yes, please select the highest level of sport competition you have participated in:
        □ Recreational level
        □ High school level
        □ Provincial level
        □ College/university level
        □ National level
        □ Professional level

    8a. Which sport did you participate in at the <u>recreational</u> level: _____

    8b. Which sport did you participate in at the <u>high school</u> level: _____

    8c. Which sport did you participate in at the <u>provincial</u> level: _____

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9. If you are currently playing competitive sport, please indicate when you plan to retire:

☐ In less than 1 year   ☐ In 1-2 years

☐ In 3-4 years   ☐ In 5-10 years

☐ I have already retired ☐ Other _____

10. Do you participate in online social networking sites?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

10a. If yes, which ones?   _____

_____

_____

11. On average, how much time per day do you spend on social networking sites?

☐ Less than 1 hour per day☐ Between 1 hour and 4 hours per day

☐ Between 4 – 8 hours per day   ☐ More than 8 hours per day

12. How many contacts / friends do you have on social networking sites?

☐ Less than 10   ☐ 10 – 50   ☐ 50 – 99☐ More than 100

13. Which of the following categories best describes your current employment?

☐ Full time employment   ☐ Not employed, looking for work

☐ Part time employment   ☐ Not employed, not looking for work

☐ Disabled, not able to work

14. Which of the following categories best represents your personal annual income?

☐ Less than $20,000 ☐ $20,000 to $34,999 ☐ $35,000 to $49,999 ☐
$50,000 to $74,999 ☐ $75,000 to $99,999 ☐ $100,000 or more

15. In general, how would you rate your money management abilities?

☐ Excellent   ☐ Very good   ☐ Good   ☐Fair   ☐Poor

16. Which category best describes your current relationship status?
    ☐ Single, not interested in dating   ☐ Committed relationship, not living together
    ☐ Single, interested in dating☐ Committed relationship, living together
    ☐ Dating casually   ☐ Married

17. Do you have any children?   ☐ Yes   ☐ No

18. In general, how would you rate your physical health?
    ☐ Excellent   ☐ Very good   ☐ Good   ☐ Fair   ☐ Poor

19. In general, how would you rate your mental health?
    ☐ Excellent   ☐ Very good   ☐ Good   ☐ Fair   ☐ Poor

20. Have you ever been diagnosed with an eating disorder? ☐ Yes   ☐ No

    20a. If so, which one: _____

21. Do you currently have an undiagnosed eating disorder? ☐ Yes   ☐ No

22. Are you currently struggling with problematic alcohol or drug use?
    ☐ Yes   ☐ No

23. When you were growing up, did either of your parents have depression or mental illness?
    ☐ Yes   ☐ No

24. When you were growing up, did either of your parents have problem alcohol or drug use?
    ☐ Yes   ☐ No

25. Before age 18, were you ever severely beaten by an adult and badly bruised or injured?
    ☐ Yes   ☐ No

26. Before age 18, were you ever sexually molested / abused?
    ☐ Yes   ☐ No

27. When you were growing up, did a parent call you names, swear at you, or make you feel stupid or worthless?
    ☐ Yes   ☐ No

28. Have you ever received counselling or psychotherapy for mental health concerns?
    ☐ Yes   ☐ No   ☐ Currently in treatment

28a. If <u>yes</u>, how satisfied were/are you with the counselling / psychotherapy?
    ☐ Very satisfied   ☐ Moderately satisfied   ☐ Not satisfied at all

Appendix F - **Possible Selves Efficacy Scale**

Identity Matters

PSE

This questionnaire inquires about your confidence in developing and achieving certain life goals. Please consider each of these areas **over the next five years**, and think carefully about how confident you feel. Please rate your level of confidence by recording a number from 1 to 100 using the following scale.

10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
Cannot do at all				Moderately can do				Highly certain can do	

1. **Develop a sense of what you want for your education (if applicable)**   Level of confidence: _____

2. **Achieve your desired education goals**   Level of confidence: _____

3. **Develop a sense of what you want for your career**   Level of confidence: _____

4. **Achieve your desired career goals**   Level of confidence: _____

5. **Develop a sense of what you want in an intimate relationship**   Level of confidence: _____

6. **Achieve your desired intimate relationship goals**   Level of confidence: _____

7. **Develop a sense of what you want in your social relationships**   Level of confidence: _____

8. **Achieve your desired social relationship goals**   Level of confidence: _____

9. **Develop a sense of what you want in your lifestyle and in your recreation activities**   Level of confidence: _____

10. **Achieve your desired lifestyle / recreation goals**   Level of confidence: _____

Appendix G - Herth Hope Index

Identify Matters

HHI

Please use the following scale to indicate how much you agree with each statement **right now**:

0 = strongly disagree
1 = disagree
3 = agree
4 = strongly agree

		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
1.	I have a positive outlook toward life	1	2	3	4
2.	I have short and/or long range goals	1	2	3	4
3.	I feel all alone	1	2	3	4
4.	I can see possibilities in the midst of difficulties	1	2	3	4
5.	I have a faith that gives me comfort	1	2	3	4
6.	I feel scared about my future	1	2	3	4
7.	I can recall happy / joyful times	1	2	3	4
8.	I have deep inner strength	1	2	3	4
9.	I am able to give and receive caring / love	1	2	3	4
10.	I have a sense of direction	1	2	3	4
11.	I believe that each day has potential	1	2	3	4
12.	I feel my life has value and worth	1	2	3	4

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Appendix H - **Personal Growth Initiative Scale - II**

UBC

Identity Matters

PGIS – II

For each statement, please mark how much you agree or disagree with that statement, using the following scale:

0 = Disagree Strongly
1 = Disagree Somewhat
2 = Disagree a Little
3 = Agree a Little
4 = Agree Somewhat
5 = Agree Strongly

1. I set realistic goals for what I want to change about myself.	0	1	2	3	4	5
2. I can tell when I am ready to make specific changes in myself.	0	1	2	3	4	5
3. I know how to make a realistic plan in order to change myself.	0	1	2	3	4	5
4. I take every opportunity to grow as it comes up.	0	1	2	3	4	5
5. When I try to change myself, I make a realistic plan for my personal growth.	0	1	2	3	4	5
6. I ask for help when I try to change myself.	0	1	2	3	4	5
7. I actively work to improve myself.	0	1	2	3	4	5
8. I figure out what I need to change about myself.	0	1	2	3	4	5
9. I am constantly trying to grow as a person.	0	1	2	3	4	5
10. I know how to set realistic goals to make changes in myself.	0	1	2	3	4	5
11. I know when I need to make a specific change in myself.	0	1	2	3	4	5
12. I use resources when I try to grow.	0	1	2	3	4	5
13. I know steps I can take to make intentional changes in myself.	0	1	2	3	4	5
14. I actively seek out help when I try to change myself.	0	1	2	3	4	5
15. I look for opportunities to grow as a person.	0	1	2	3	4	5
16. I know when it's time to change specific things about myself.	0	1	2	3	4	5

Identify Matters

GCQ

For this page, please focus on your impressions of **the group as a whole** during this session.

Use the rating scale to the right to respond
to each of the following items.

0 = not at all
1 = a little bit
2 = somewhat
3 = moderately
4 = quite a bit
5 = a great deal
6 = extremely

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. The members liked and cared about each other.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. Group members tried to understand why they do the things they do, tried to reason it out.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. The members avoided looking at important issues going on between themselves.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. Group members felt that what was happening was important, and there was a sense of participation.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. The members depended upon the group leader for direction.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. There was friction and anger between the members.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. Group members were distant and withdrawn from each other.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. The members challenged and confronted each other in their efforts to sort things out.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
9. The members seemed to do things the way they thought would be acceptable to the group.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
10. Group members distrusted and rejected each other.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
11. The members revealed sensitive personal information or feelings.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
12. Group members appeared tense and anxious.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6

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Appendix J **- Description of Identity Matters**

Identity Matters is a group-based intervention designed to bring together emerging adults to engage in exploratory and interactive group discussion about possible selves. The group program consisted of four sessions offered over four consecutive weeks in a large office space at the University of British Columbia. Each session was 1.5-hours long, resulting in a 6-hour group experience. There were seven installments of the group program that ran across two years of data collection. Groups were scheduled to avoid busy academic periods (e.g., final exams) and holidays. Groups were typically held on weekdays during the daytime. Steps were taken to make the groups accessible and convenient for participants.

Participants in the group were comprised of young people between 18-25 years of age. These individuals were assumed to represent a sample of emerging adults within a university context. Participants had diverse academic backgrounds, with a broad range of academic programs and disciplines represented in the groups. There was a mix of domestic and international students, with richly diverse demographic characteristics. All participants were proficient in written and spoken English. Participants were expected to engage in personal reflection, actively participate in group discussions, and connect with one another through the exchange of feedback, while upholding participation agreements like ensuring mutual respect and confidentiality.

Multiple chairs were set up in a circle formation to promote contact among group members. Each group featured the same two facilitators – a doctoral psychologist-trainee with six years of group intervention experience and a licensed clinical social worker with over two decades of group intervention experience. Group facilitators sat across from each

other in the circle. They met regularly to review the group protocol to ensure fidelity to the specific intervention and to debrief their experiences in the group.

The primary role of group facilitators was to guide the group's exploratory and interactive discussion and to ensure healthy group functioning, such as participant safety and a positive and warm group climate. The group facilitators' interventions contributed to the development of important "processes" within the group.

In terms of specific interventions used, group facilitators followed guiding principles drawn from the group psychotherapy literature, including prompts and open-ended questions to facilitate and direct discussion around possible selves topics; utilizing follow-up questions inviting participants to expand, clarify, or further explore their disclosures; using linking interventions to connect participants as a way to compare or contrast their experiences; and encouraging participants to interact with and provide feedback to one another. Furthermore, the group facilitators created opportunities for participants to feel understood, heard, and safe, utilizing empathic responses to bolster group members' understanding of their possible selves and associated affect.

The structure of the group program sessions was semi-structured, meaning that group facilitators offered broad, guiding topics to facilitate interactive discussion about possible selves. This discussion formed the intervention's "content". Examples of guiding topics include personal identity, possibilities for the future, and potential obstacles to achieving possible selves goals.

There was a temporal sequence to the topics such that the groups started with an introduction and ended with a discussion about termination. The specific content that emerged relative to the broad guiding topic was participant generated. That is, the group

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facilitators invited participants to speak about their unique concerns and perspectives regarding the broad themes named above. The content of each group installment shared a common framework, although it took on unique meaning depending on the group composition. For example, when discussing a guiding topic like identity and relationships, one group may have focused on formative familial relationships while another group may have talked about friendships developed and maintained solely on the internet. More information about the group session content and processes is found in the table below.

Identity Matters Summary

	Topic	Outline of Session Content and Process
Session 1	Overview and introduction	Guiding topic: Introduction to identity; Introduction to possible selves Process: Facilitate interactive discussion among group members
Session 2	Identity influences	Guiding topic: The role of social and development influences on identity; Attending to beliefs about the self; Identity foreclosure and constricted possibilities Process: Facilitate interactive discussion among group members
Session 3	Emotions and relationships	Guiding topic: Introduction to emotion and self-regulation; Interpersonal relationships and identity/possible selves Process: Facilitate interactive discussion among group members
Session 4	Elaborating possible trajectories	Guiding topic: Exploring vocational possibilities; Exploring barriers to successful future self-development Process: Facilitate interactive discussion among group members

Appendix K - Description of Planning Ahead

Planning Ahead is a group-based intervention designed to bring together emerging adults to participant in psychoeducational seminars about possible selves within the domains of career planning and personal development. The group program consisted of four sessions offered over four consecutive weeks in a large office space at the University of British Columbia. Each session was 1.5-hours long, resulting in a 6-hour group experience. There were six installments of the group program that ran across two years of data collection. Groups were scheduled to avoid busy academic periods (e.g., final exams) and holidays throughout the year. Groups were typically held on weekdays during the daytime. Steps were taken to make the groups accessible and convenient for participants.

Participants in the group were comprised of young people between 18-25 years of age. These individuals were assumed to represent a sample of emerging adults within a university context. Participants had diverse academic backgrounds, with a broad range of academic programs and disciplines represented in the groups. There was a mix of domestic and international students, with richly diverse demographic characteristics. All participants were proficient in written and spoken English. Participants were expected to actively participate in the instructional modules and engage with the session content when completing workbook activities. It was also expected that participation agreements were upheld, like ensuring mutual respect and confidentiality among group members.

The space was set up board room-style. A long, rectangular table was set up in the centre of the room, with multiple chairs surrounding it. A projector screen was set up at the head of the table and was located just behind and above the facilitators' heads. There was a

laptop placed on the table in front of the facilitators that controlled the PowerPoint presentation. In front of each participant was a workbook.

Each group featured the same two facilitators – a doctoral psychologist-trainee with six years of group intervention experience and a licensed clinical social worker with over two decades of group intervention experience. Group facilitators sat next to each other at the head of the table. Chairs were removed from the table if participants were absent from the session. Group facilitators met regularly to review the group protocol to ensure fidelity to the specific intervention and to debrief their experiences in the group.

The group facilitators' primary functions were to run the group through the instructional modules and to assist participants in completing independent learning activities in the form of a workbook. The facilitators' interventions contributed to the development of important "processes" within the group. Such interventions included: teaching/lecturing about pre-determined possible selves topics; incorporating audio-visual components like video clips to diversify instructional methods; guiding participants through independent learning tasks like goal-setting or action planning work sheets; and responding to any questions, comments, or concerns that participants raised.

The Planning Ahead group program sessions were structured, meaning that the group facilitators did not diverge from the PowerPoint presentation, its associated script, and the activities found in the participant workbook. Thus, the information conveyed through the instructional modules and the independent learning activities comprised the intervention's "content".

Each session had a topical focus that was consistent across all six group installments. There was a temporal sequence to the instructional modules such that the groups started with

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an introduction and ended with a discussion about anticipating and overcoming barriers that may arise. Session 1 introduced career development and vocational planning frameworks, in addition to educating participants about relevant personal domains such as interests, values, personal styles, skills, and needs. Participants completed several workbook activities, including a career wheel and interests, values, and personality inventories.

Session 2 identified career options and educational resources, in addition to teaching career exploration techniques. Participants completed two workbook activities, including identifying interesting career cluster domains and developing an elevator pitch.

Session 3 overviewed decision-making styles and goal-setting strategies, offering opportunities for participants to work independently to set personal and professional goals. Participants completed a decision-making activity and set S.M.A.R.T. goals in their workbook.

Finally, Session 4 examined action-planning methods and identified common barriers to the career development process. Participants completed an action-planning worksheet and an envisioning worksheet in their workbook.

More information about the group session content and processes is found in the table below. A copy of the PowerPoint presentations and the participant workbook are available by request from the author.

Planning Ahead Summary

	Topic	Outline of Session Content and Process
Session 1	Overview and introduction	Instructional module: Introduction to career development and vocational planning frameworks; and reviewing relevant personal development domains such as interests, values, personal styles, and skills Process: didactic instruction; address questions, comments, and concerns
Session 2	Planning strategies	Instructional module: Identifying career options and educational resources; teaching career exploration techniques; and anticipating future needs Process: didactic instruction; address questions, comments, and concerns
Session 3	Setting goals	Instructional module: Presenting decision-making styles and goal-setting strategies; and developing SMART goals: specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, timely in personal and professional domains Process: didactic instruction; address questions, comments, and concerns
Session 4	Review and integration	Instructional module: Discussing action-planning methods; and identifying challenges associated with action planning and goal setting, including common barriers to future development Process: didactic instruction; address questions, comments, and concerns

Appendix L - Open-ended Qualitative Questions

Identity Matters

Post-group questions

1. What was your overall experience of the group sessions you attended?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

2. Were the sessions helpful or unhelpful? Why?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

3. How have these sessions helped you to contemplate possibilities for your future?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

4. Are there any changes you would recommend for the groups that you participated in?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____