

## Assessing the Aspirations and Fears of Costa Rican Youth in Long-term Correctional Confinement

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**Abstract:** *This study used the Possible Selves Questionnaire (PSQ) with 30 incarcerated youth in a long term juvenile correctional facility in Costa Rica. The PSQ is a self-administered survey that measures a person's aspirations and fears for the future and strategies to achieve who they wish to become and avoid becoming. Results showed that while participants reported having Expected and Feared Selves, they struggled to identify concrete strategies to reach their goals. This vulnerable, incarcerated, population faces a variety of social challenges that may hinder their ability to avoid the behavior that led to their initial incarceration once they are released from correctional confinement. Limitations of using the PSQ with Costa Rican youth are also discussed.*

**Keywords:** *juvenile incarceration, youth in correctional facilities, expected and feared selves, Spanish possible selves questionnaire.*

Reentry back to the community after being confined in a correctional facility is difficult for youth (Ochoa, 2016). Clark, Mathur, and Holding (2011) believe that understanding and addressing reentry is one of the most neglected aspects of improving services provided to youth sentenced to spend time in custody. Youth in correctional confinement experience a variety of social challenges which may hinder their ability to develop a successful life plan and which may make it difficult for them to identify and develop strategies to avoid the behaviors and conditions which initially led to their initial incarceration. Ochoa, Weller, and Riddle (2019) noted that correctional facilities impose a high level of structure on youth but the structure vanishes the moment the youth returns to his or her community. This sudden lack of structure leaves the youth susceptible to engaging in the same behaviors which led to initial incarceration. Furthermore, it is not only losing the structured environment which makes this population vulnerable, but also not having a concrete plan for life after incarceration which places the formerly incarcerated youth at risk to become adult criminals (Ochoa, Weller, & Riddle, 2019). This article explores the life plans of incarcerated youth in a Costa Rican juvenile correctional facility by examining the strategies they have to achieve their aspirations and avoid their pitfalls of the behaviors they fear might lead them to re-incarceration.



### **Juvenile Crime and Incarceration in Costa Rica**

The United Nations estimates that there are about a million youth below the age of 18 in correctional confinement worldwide (Penal Reform International, 2018). Statistics for juvenile crime and incarceration are difficult to find in Costa Rica, but data about juvenile crime shows that crimes committed by young adult offenders rose from 2.9% to 43.9% in 2016 (Programa Estado de la Nación, 2017). Increases in crime among young adults are related to a combination of economic factors such as a diminishing Costa Rican middle class, low skilled workers from neighboring countries arriving to Costa Rica, as well as educational factors such as an increase in dropping out of school (Ochoa, Ovaras, & Washburn, 2019). This considerable rise in reported crimes committed by young adults in Costa Rica suggests there will be a similar rise in future adult incarcerations, given that incarceration as a youth is a predictor of incarceration as an adult (VanderPyl, 2015). Therefore, it is important to understand the plans incarcerated youth have for life after incarceration, for purposes of determining the support youth will need when released from correctional confinement.

Young adults who had been confined from adolescence show an array of psychosocial vulnerabilities including significantly lower levels of self-esteem (Schaefer & Erickson, 2019). Some youth show a permanently hyperactive nervous system which causes them to be in a constant state of alarm (Jensen, 2009). Others present higher levels of behavioral reactivity (Armstrong, 2010), and still others show disorganized attachment (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2004). These long term neurological and psychological effects of incarceration also affect the capacity to develop a sense of self and the capacity to imagine a better, future self. It is important to understand how incarceration impacts youths' vision of themselves for the future.

### **Incarceration and Possible Selves Literature**

The original work on Possible Selves was conducted in the United States. The term possible self comes from the psychological concept of "self," a complex entity that mediates and negotiates behavior. Possible Selves consist of three parts. The first is a vivid vision of what one wishes or expects to become. Markus and Nurius (1986) proposed that the motivation to carry out all but the most routine and habitual actions depends on the creation of a vision in which an individual sees him or herself in a desired future end-state. Other researchers have indicated that Possible Selves are vivid images of what an individual wants to become, or expects to become in the future (Oyserman, Johnson, & James, 2011). Possible Selves are not general expectations or aspirations (e.g., be rich) nor are they merely thoughts, wishes or desires about the future (e.g., to be happy). The visions of "me with an exciting job" or "me with a happy family" are examples of more specific Possible Selves. The visions of self in the future energize and organize actions in the pursuit of that end state (Oyserman et al., 2011).

The second component of Possible Selves is what one wishes to avoid becoming, or the Feared Self. Feared Selves are a necessary component of the Possible Selves' construct. Feared Selves represent what an adolescent wants to avoid becoming. Feared Selves, according to Zhu and Tse (2015), deter adolescents away from possible future negative selves. Oyserman and Markus (1990) found that youngsters who achieved a balance between Expected and Feared Selves were less likely to engage in delinquent behavior. In other words, success requires having goals as well as having the related fears of not achieving those goals and the fear of becoming that imagined negative feared self. An example of a Feared Self would be failing in school. Thus, a balanced Possible Self would likely have a vision of passing from 10th grade to 11th grade as well as a vision of what would happen if there was failure to pass to the 11th grade. According to research on Possible Selves, reaching one's vision is much more likely if the Expected Self has a matching Feared Self (Oyserman & Markus, 1990).

Finally, it is necessary to have a strategy or plan for achieving one's goals and vision for the future. A strategy, according to Zhu and Tse (2015), is a plan to achieve the desired goal. This plan is an important factor that increases the likelihood a youth will be able to achieve

their future vision of themselves. Concrete and specific strategies are better than vague strategies. Vague or abstract strategies do not appear to provide sufficient structure to achieve an Expected Self or avoid a Feared Self (Zhu & Tse, 2015). Oyserman, Johnson, and James (2011) found that youth from disadvantaged neighborhoods generated fewer strategies compared to their counterparts from higher socio-economic neighborhoods. Researchers studied 284 students in 8th grade (138 males and 146 females) and found that participants who had parents with higher socioeconomic status, tended to have more strategies to achieve school-focused Expected Selves, compared to peers with parents with fewer financial resources. This finding means that populations in confinement who come from high poverty neighborhoods, who also have parents with low socioeconomic status, will need more intense interventions to develop effective behavioral strategies to achieve successful academic Expected Selves.

Delinquent and incarcerated youth differ from youth not involved with the criminal justice system in the development of Possible Selves. Research on incarcerated youth indicates that this population has less conventional goals, fewer strategies, and less concrete strategies than those not involved in the criminal justice system. Oyserman and Markus (1990) administered the Possible Selves Questionnaire (PSQ), a measure designed to assess goals, fears, and strategies of 238 participants (141 males and 97 females) ranging in age from 13 to 16. Of the 238 participants, 175 were Black and 63 were White. Participants came from public schools and three different custodial settings: 108 were in public school (average age 14.3); 40 were in a community placement program (average age 14.9 years); 31 were in group homes for delinquents (average age 15.1); and 59 were in residential state training school (average age 15.6) where the average stay was 13.8 months. Oyserman and Markus (1990) found that youth in public schools and across restrictive settings were readily capable of indicating what they wanted to do in the future. Both youth in public schools and youth in restrictive settings reported wanting to be happy, to have friends, and hold a job. It is important to mention that youth in restrictive settings also indicated more unconventional expectations such as expecting to be in more trouble, being involved in crime, breaking out of training school, using drugs, and abusing alcohol. The most common Feared Self in the public-school population was not getting along with peers in school. For the populations in custody, the most common fears were being a thief or murderer. The researchers also found that youth in public schools had complementary Expected and Feared Selves in the same domain and thus achieved a greater balance between Expected and Feared selves compared to similar groups in custody. They found that most delinquent youth had less balance between Expected and Feared Selves, meaning that the Expected and Feared Selves were in different domains. Furthermore, Oyserman and Markus (1990) found that only 37% of youth in long term correctional confinement indicated a balance between their Expected and Feared Selves, compared to 81% of their non-incarcerated counterparts.

Strategies are the behaviors that link Expected and Feared Selves and which motivate youth to engage in specific actions in order to help them reach their possible selves and which help them avoid developing into their Feared Selves. However, there is a limited amount of research on the strategies incarcerated youth possess to pursue their Expected and avoid their Feared Selves (Clinkinbeard & Zohra, 2012). Clinkinbeard and Zohra (2012) administered the PSQ to 548 incarcerated youth (387 males and 159 females) in the United States ranging in age from 12 to 22 years (average age 16.49). The highest education level completed ranged from fourth to 12th grade school levels (average grade ninth). The ethnicities of the participants were 38.1% White; 19.1% mixed ethnicity; 16.3% Hispanic; 8.7% Native American or Alaskan; and 2.8% Pacific Islander. The average length of incarceration was 7.5 months for males and 4.7 months for females. The researchers found that most youth reported between two and three Expected Selves and between two and three Feared Selves. The most common Expected Selves were in the lifestyle (59%) school (54%), and holding a job (48%) domains. Results also showed that the most commonly Feared Selves were in the risky behavior (56%),

drugs and alcohol (52%), and interpersonal (42%) domains. The number of balanced selves ranged from 0-3 for males and 0-2 for girls, which was a similar percentage (36%) to those in the Oyserman and Markus (1990) sample. However, the balance between Expected and Feared Selves was in the incarceration domain. For example, a youth saw himself meeting behavioral expectations and avoiding getting into a fight for fear of extending his incarceration. That is to say, youth reported expecting to be released from incarceration (Expected Self) and wanted to avoid returning to correctional confinement (Feared Self).

Most importantly, Clinkinbeard and Zohra (2012) found that incarcerated males reported having 0 to 9 strategies to pursue their Expected Selves (average 2.43) and 0 to 5 strategies to avoid their Feared Selves (average 1.87). Females reported having 0 to 6 for Expected Selves (average 2.41) and 0 to 6 for Feared Selves (average 1.94). Approximately 91% reported at least one strategy to pursue their Expected Self or avoid their Feared Self. However, only 60% of the strategies for Expected Self were concrete and 52% for Feared Self were concrete. Oyserman et al. (2011) reported similar results among youth from disadvantaged neighborhoods. They described youth as having a destination but not knowing the path to take in order to get to that destination. Since correctional confinement is intended to be rehabilitative and help youth desist from further crimes when they return to their communities, it is critical to ascertain not only what they wish to do or avoid doing, but more importantly, whether incarcerated youth have acquired strategies for change while being incarcerated.

The purpose of this research was to determine the utility of the PSQ with Costa Rican youth in long-term correctional confinement. We explored four questions: 1) What Expected and Feared Selves do incarcerated youth in Costa Rica have for their future? 2) What strategies do these incarcerated youth have to accompany their Expected and Feared Selves? 3) What, if any, differences exist between incarcerated males and females in Expected and Feared Selves? 4) Are there differences between incarcerated males and females in terms of the strategies to achieve their future goals?

## Method

### Description of Juvenile Facility in Costa Rica

*Centro de Formación Juvenil Zurquí* (CFJZ, Zurquí Juvenile Correctional Facility) is the only long-term juvenile correctional facility in Costa Rica. As such, youth from different regions of the country sentenced to long term correctional confinement are committed to this juvenile facility. Male and female residents are housed on the same grounds but separated into units. Units for males and females are separated by a wire fence. Males and females are assigned to units depending on the type of crime they committed. There are fewer female youths incarcerated in the facility, and unless they are pregnant or have children, they are housed together regardless of crime. If a female enters the facility while pregnant, she has a cell of her own within the female unit, if space allows. Once she gives birth, she is transferred to the *Casa Cuna* (*Nursery House*) where women with their children are separated from other incarcerated females.

Costa Rica's Justice System also places individuals ages 18 to 25 who they consider young offender population with minors (ages 14 to 17) in CFJZ to ease the problem of overcrowding in the adult facility, which is called *Centro de Atención Institucional La Reforma* (Programa Estado de la Nación, 2017). The total size of the incarcerated population in CFJZ at the time of the study was 90 (82 males; 8 females). Sixty seven of the 90 were between the ages of 18 to 25 (60 males; 7 females). The length of sentences in CFJZ range from 2 to 10 years. A small number of sentences were due to parole violations. The most common crimes for both male and female were identified as crimes against life or property, armed assault, and drug trafficking. Some incarcerated individuals, depending on the crime, transfer to an adult correctional facility when they reach the age of 18. Participants for this study were recruited from among the larger incarcerated population in CFJZ.

## Participants

Thirty participants (22 males and 8 females) who were incarcerated in the CFJZ took part in the study. All male minors (22 males) and all females (8 females) in the facility were invited to participate. Twenty-three were aged 14 to 17 years (22 males, 1 female). Seven female participants were between the ages of 18-23. One female was pregnant at the time of the study and two females that participated in this research gave birth while incarcerated and were residing in the Nursery House.

## Procedures

The *Possible Selves Questionnaire* (PSQ) was used to measure Expected and Feared Selves. The PSQ and coding instructions were retrieved from a free link (Oyserman, 2018). This instrument was developed to identify expectations of who youth imagine they might become, who they fear becoming, and the strategies which they imagine employing to achieve their expected goals and avoid their feared goals (Oyserman & Markus, 1990). The PSQ was validated in the United States (US) with youth who both engaged in and did not engage in risky social behavior (Oyserman & Markus, 1990), incarcerated youth in the US (Clinkinbeard & Zohra, 2012), youth from China (Zhu & Tse, 2015) and youth in Argentina (Molina, Raimundi & Gimenez, 2017).

The PSQ is a sheet of paper with three columns and consists of two parts (See Appendix B for the Spanish version). In the first part, participants are given four blank lines in the first column to list who they wish to become in the following year. The second column is a binary yes/no question asking users if they are doing anything towards achieving their goal. If the response in the second column is yes, then in the third column, subjects are asked to describe the strategy they will use to achieve their goal.

The second part of the PSQ is similar in format to the first with the exception that it directs users to indicate who they want to avoid becoming in the next year. The second column is a yes/no column asking if the subject is doing anything to work towards not becoming their feared self. Finally, the third column asks participants to indicate the strategy being used to avoid becoming the feared self. This second section identifies the user's feared self. Although the PSQ was used with a Spanish speaking population (Molina, Raimundi & Gimenez, 2017) the Spanish version of the PSQ was not available at the time of the current research which led us to develop a Spanish translation of the version described by Oyserman, Bybee, Terry, and Hart-Johnson (2004).

The translation team consisted of four native Spanish speakers. Three members of the team were Costa Rican and possessed fluency in English comprehension, one team member possessed fluency in written English expression. The fourth researcher was Mexican, was a native speaker of Spanish, and was educated and raised in the United States and therefore also possessed reading and written fluency in both English and Spanish. The Spanish translation of the PSQ was piloted in August 2018 with a population of 12 males between 14 to 17 years of age who had a history of conflicts with law enforcement, incarceration, and whose home life was economically deprived. The pilot population was enrolled at the *Instituto de Educación Integral* (Center for Integral Education) located in Las Nubes de Coronado, Costa Rica. The Spanish version of the PSQ is included as Appendix B, the English version is available from Oyserman, 2018 (Appendix A).

Human Subjects Approval for Research was obtained from the *Universidad de Costa Rica* (University of Costa Rica) and from the juvenile correctional facility. Informed consent was signed by each person who agreed to volunteer to participate in the research study after the purpose of the study was explained to them in language understandable by a layperson. Directions to complete the self-administered questionnaire were provided by the second and third authors.

Once the PSQ was distributed in paper and pencil format, participants completed the

PSQ in small groups within a classroom or in their cells. Two researchers were present to proctor the administration of the PSQ and to answer any technical questions from participants. The administration of the PSQ was untimed, but it took approximately five minutes per individual to complete the questionnaire. It required ten visits to the facility to complete administration of the PSQ for the entire population of this study. Monetary incentives were not provided to participants. However, participants did receive written acknowledgment in the form of a thank you card after completing the survey.

### **Data Management, Coding and Analysis**

Oyserman's instructions for coding the PSQ (Oyserman, 2018) were followed. Responses for Expected Selves and Feared Selves were categorized into five pre-established categories: 1) Achievement; 2) Interpersonal Relationships; 3) Personality Traits; 4) Physical Health; and 5) Material Lifestyle. Coding instructions for the feared selves indicated that responses worded in negative form were categorized as negative, for example: "I hope to not get back on the streets." Responses which referred to risky and/or criminal behaviors were coded as Non-Normative. Following the instrument's instructions, goals which were not possible to accomplish within a year were not coded and were excluded from analysis. Strategies were coded as abstract or concrete. According to PSQ directions, duplicate strategies were counted as one. Also, if the same strategy was repeated it was coded as just one strategy.

We employed a combination of qualitative and descriptive methodologies to analyze results. A qualitative data analysis method by Taylor and Bogdan (1987) was used as part of the analysis. This analysis affirms that there is no division between data collectors and data coders, given that data analysis is a dynamic and creative process. Taylor and Bogdan (1987) stated that data analysis follows three phases: (1) discovery, by making sense of the observed subject; (2) coding information, which means systematizing, developing and refining data interpretation; and finally (3) relativizing data, which implies interpreting the information within the context in which it was collected. In order to analyze the information, a matrix was created using the Excel spreadsheet program. All responses were transcribed and assigned a number.

Given that this was an interdisciplinary study, with researchers trained in the disciplines of counseling, special education and psychology, each researcher reviewed and coded all answers individually, categorizing all Expected Selves and Feared Selves according to Oyserman's (2018) categories, and reviewed all reported strategies to determine whether they were concrete or abstract. Afterwards, each participant's responses were analyzed by the whole research team together, case by case. All differences in coding were discussed until consensus was achieved and, whenever necessary, we established a systematic amplification and/or clarification of the Expected and Feared Selves and the strategies. Because the researchers were from different disciplines, there were differences of opinion on how to analyze and code some responses of the youth on the PSQ. These differences of opinion were discussed until interdisciplinary consensus was achieved. In addition, we used descriptive statistics to describe the results and employed a T-test to measure the significance between Expected Selves and the Feared Selves and between Expected Selves Strategies and Feared Selves Strategies given that we had a relatively small sample of participants.

### **Results**

Possible Selves, including expectations and fears, are believed to serve as motivators for individuals to engage in behaviors targeted toward reaching their visions of their futures. Previous scholars have approached possible selves research as cumulative, meaning that when the Expected Selves and the Feared Selves are in the same life domain, there is an increased motivational capital to achieve their future-oriented selves (Clinkinbeard & Zohra, 2012). That is, when an adolescent both has a vision of who he or she would like to become and who she or he would not like to become, they are more likely to achieve their goals. Results for each question explored are provided below. Table 1 provides results indicating the average number

of Expected and Feared Selves for the participants of this study and the strategies they reported to reach their Expected and Feared selves.

**Table 1**

*Averages of Expected and Feared Selves, Strategies and Percentages of Balance Between Selves and Strategies by Sex*

| Average   | Males (n=22) | Females (n=8) |
|---|--------------|---------------|
| Expected Selves                                   | 2.50         | 2.62          |
| Strategies for Expected Selves                    | 1.86         | 2.62          |
| Feared Selves                                     | 2.13         | 2.12          |
| Strategies for Feared Selves                      | 1.54         | 2.12          |
| Percentage  |              |               |
| Balance between Expected Selves and Feared Selves | 22%          | 9%            |
| Balance between Expected Selves and Strategies    | 60%          | 80%           |
| Balance between Feared Selves and Strategies      | 4%           | 64%           |

In the paragraphs below we provide results for the questions: What, if any, differences exist between incarcerated males and females in Expected and Feared Selves? and Are there differences between incarcerated males and females in terms of the strategies to achieve their future goals? Results show that females reported more Expected Selves (average = 2.62) compared to the slightly fewer Expected Selves reported by males (average = 2.50). Females reported having more strategies for their Expected Selves (average = 2.62) compared to males (average = 1.86). Males reported an average of 2.13 Feared Selves, while females reported an average of 2.12 Feared Selves. Females reported having more strategies to avoid their Feared Selves (average = 2.12) compared to males who reported an average of 1.54 strategies for Feared Selves. It appeared that males and females had a similar number of Expected and Feared Selves, but women had slightly more strategies to reach their Expected Selves and, on average, to avoid their Feared Selves. The *t*-test between Expected Selves and Feared Selves for males was 0.92. The *t*-test between Expected Selves and Feared Selves for females was 0.86. Both results were statistically significant. In addition, the *t*-test for Expected Selves strategies and Feared Selves strategies, indicated a significance level of 0.73 for males. Similarly, the *t*-test for Expected Selves strategies and Feared Selves strategies indicated a significance level of 0.86 for females.

Table 1 also shows that males had a higher balance between Expected and Feared Selves (22%) compared to females who only had 9% balance between Expected and Feared Selves. However, with regards to strategies for Feared Selves, the reverse was true. Females had more balance (64%) in strategies for Feared Selves compared to males who had only 4% balance in strategies for Feared Selves. Results show that males had 60% balance between Expected Selves and the strategies to reach the Expected Selves, and females had a balance of 80% between the Expected Selves and strategies.

Table 2 shows that Expected Selves in the Achievement domain were the most common among both sexes: males (32%) and females (52%). The next two highest for men were Personality Traits (23%) and Uncodable responses (19%) while for women the next highest were Interpersonal Relations (33%) and Material Lifestyle (9%).

**Table 2***Percentage of Expected Selves and Feared Selves in Male and Female Participants by Domain*

|                          | Percentage<br>Expected<br>Selves for<br>Males (22) | Percentage<br>Expected<br>Selves for<br>Females (8) | Percentage<br>Feared Selves<br>for Males (22) | Percentage<br>Feared Selves<br>for Females<br>(8) |
|--------------------------|--|---|---|---|
| Achievement              | 32%  | 52%   | 2%  | 18%   |
| Interpersonal relations  | 11%  | 33%   | 17%   | 18%   |
| Personality traits       | 23%  | 0   | 21%   | 0   |
| Physical Health          | 0  | 5%  | 0   | 6%  |
| Material Lifestyle       | 11%  | 10%   | 12%   | 24%   |
| Negative / Non-normative | 3%   | 0   | 48%   | 35%   |
| Cannot be coded          | 20%  | 0   | 0   | 0   |

Table 2 also shows that the highest response for Feared Selves for both male and female was Non-normative: males (48%) females (35%). The next three highest responses for males were Feared Selves in the Personality Traits domain (20%), Interpersonal Relationships (17%), and Material Lifestyle (12%). The next three highest responses for females were in the Material Lifestyle domain (23%), Achievement (17%), and Interpersonal Relationships (18%). Notably, both males and females had a similar number of responses regarding Feared Selves in Interpersonal Relationships. However, males and females differed in Material Lifestyle. Females had more fears in the Material Lifestyle domain (23%) compared to males who had 12%.

**Table 3***Concrete vs. Abstract Strategies for Expected Selves and Feared Selves by Sex*

| Strategy | Expected Selves<br>Strategies<br>Males (22) |         | Expected Selves<br>Strategies Females<br>(8) |         | Feared Selves<br>Strategies<br>Males (22) |         | Feared Selves<br>Strategies Females<br>(8) |         |
|----------|---|---------|--|---------|---|---------|--|---------|
|          | Number                                      | Percent | Number                                       | Percent | Number                                    | Percent | Number                                     | Percent |
|          | Concrete                                    | 21      | 46%  | 11      | 52%                                       | 16      | 46%  | 7       |
| Abstract | 20  | 43%     | 9  | 43%     | 17  | 49%     | 9  | 53%     |

Table 3 provides information about the type of strategy associated with Expected Selves. Results show that the number of concrete versus abstract strategies was close to being evenly split. Males indicated 46% concrete strategies and 43% abstract strategies for Expected Selves. Likewise, results for females indicate 52% concrete versus 43% abstract strategies for Expected Selves. Results show slightly more concrete strategies for females (52%) compared to males (46%). Of note, approximately 11% of males and 5% of females indicated explicitly that they had no strategy for reaching their Expected Selves whereas the others simply left blank spaces.

Table 3 also provides information about the type of strategy associated with Feared Selves. Males indicated 45% concrete strategies and 48% abstract strategies for Feared Selves. Results for females indicated 41% concrete versus 52% abstract strategies for Feared Selves. Results show slightly more abstract strategies for females (52%) compared to males (48%). Approximately 6% of male and female participants indicated explicitly that they had no strategies for avoiding their Feared Selves.

## Discussion

According to Clinkinbeard and Zohra (2012), goals are cognitive resources which when

accompanied with strategies lead to pro-social behavior. Thus, strategies are the mechanisms to reach future goals. Individuals who can see what they want to become and what they want to avoid have a higher likelihood of achieving their goals (Oyserman & Marcus, 1990). According to Clinkinbeard and Zohra (2012), individuals who have goals with concrete strategies in the same domain increase the likelihood of reaching their possible self and avoid becoming the feared self. Oyserman et al. (2011) describe possible selves as the destination and strategies as the path to that destination. Concrete strategies are those strategies that can be replicated by another person (Clinkinbeard & Zohra, 2012). Concrete, achievable, and detailed strategies are more likely to lead to actual behavior outcomes (Oyserman et al., 2004). For example, the strategy "I go to school every day" is a concrete strategy. In contrast, the strategy "learn" is abstract and unlikely to lead to actual behavior.

Notable differences between males and females were observed. Males had a higher balance between Expected and Feared Selves compared to females (22% for males and 9% for females). Differences also showed in the number of concrete strategies reported by participants. Females had a higher percentage (52%) of concrete strategies for the Expected Selves compared to males who had a lower percentage of concrete strategies for Expected Selves (46%). However, males listed a higher percentage of concrete strategies for Feared Selves (46%) compared to the 41% of concrete strategies females reported for Feared Selves. This may suggest that males have a better sense of who or what they want to avoid in the future and less about who they want to become or what they want to accomplish. According to Clinkinbeard and Zohra (2012) the differences may be developmental because the females included in this research were older than males (18-23 years vs. 14-17, respectively). Also, their increased responses regarding Feared Selves on the category of Material Lifestyle (23% in females vs. 12% in males) might be related to the fact that some of them were pregnant or had children, making those fears especially relevant. These results contrast with Clinkinbeard and Zohra's findings (2012) regarding males having more average strategies than females to pursue Expected Selves and avoid Feared Selves.

Another gender difference present in the responses was related to physical health. Males did not respond at all on the category of physical health, whereas females focused on the physical health domain. Salas (2005) had described the correlation between toxic masculinity, aggressive behaviors, and self-care. It is important to consider what is expected of males and how this socialization shapes what they focus on in the development of their life plan. For example, males might be encouraged to take more risks and to prove their strength. Their strategies towards Feared Selves seems to have to do with managing their own reactivity and aggressive behaviors. However, things that could point out their weakness are considered "less manly" (Salas, 2005), so healthcare is less of a valid concern to young men, since they associate strength with being invulnerable. Females, on the other hand, might be expected to be more vulnerable and relatable, so it makes sense that they would focus their responses on strategies to take care of themselves and others. Women in this study were less direct than men regarding their Feared Selves, approaching their Feared Selves with more abstract strategies than males.

Interpersonal relationships appear to be more important future goals for females than they are to males (33% vs. 11%, respectively). A possible explanation for this is that a number of females were pregnant or had young children living with them in the CFJZ. In addition, some of them had children who are in the care of their relatives while they finish their sentence, reflecting an urgency for acting in ways which would meet their Expected Selves. This explanation is further supported by the finding that females' strategies were more focused on interpersonal relationships. Females are socialized to consider and foster interpersonal relationships more than males (UNESCO, 2016). The domain of the strategies listed by males focused on avoiding aggressive behaviors. Females, on the other hand, listed more strategies in the relationship domains with a romantic partner or improving relationships with their children. However, oddly, males appear to fear not having interpersonal relations almost at the same

level as females (17% vs. 18%, respectively). Females identity is probably based more on their relational association with a man and with motherhood. These gender differences are relevant because, although access to education is supposed to be equal in Costa Rica for both boys and girls, boys are more likely to drop out of school (UNESCO, 2013), and violence against women, starting in adolescence, is a widespread practice and therefore an important issue in Costa Rica (UNESCO, 2016; United Nations, 2018).

In this study, the responses of youth show that both males and females struggle to identify concrete strategies for developing into their future selves. Because they do not have concrete strategies to achieve their goals, these youth in confinement are unlikely to reach their expected future aspirations. The current study shows that the majority of males and females reported having only vague strategies to avoid their Feared Selves. As such, they are less likely to succeed in school or avoid drugs, goals which were consistent with the population studied by Clinkinbeard and Zohra (2012). This is also consistent with Oyserman and Markus (1990), when they affirm that students in restrictive settings have a higher tendency to hold unconventional expectations regarding non-normative behavior. To be sure, incarceration changes youth.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

The population in CFJZ from which participants were drawn was different from the incarcerated youth populations studied in the US in previous research (e.g., Oyserman & Markus, 1990, Clinkinbeard & Zohra, 2012). Youth incarcerated in CFJZ were committed to significantly longer sentences ranging from 2 years to 10 years compared to the shorter sentences common in US juvenile correctional facilities. In Costa Rica, it is not uncommon that a youth of 13 years of age would complete his or her sentence at the age of 20. As such, the specification in the PSQ focused on short term goals for next year were limiting because youth in CFJZ are not likely to be released within a year or even two. In addition, there was only one minor female who participated in this study, resulting in limited ability to compare results between sexes. Several of the female participants had children in prison or were pregnant. It is very possible that other uncontrolled variables influenced the results. For example, motherhood might have heightened females' awareness of their health, physical wellbeing, and desire to get along with children and romantic partners.

There were also limitations in the PSQ. Two limitations are discussed in order to offer suggestions to improve the PSQ. Currently, subjects complete questions related to expected self on one page then turn the page to list the corresponding feared self. Unless there is a theoretical reason why they are disconnected from each other, the researchers propose that the Expected and Feared Selves be listed sequentially. This change might address some of the possible working memory problems we suspected are present in the population of students in correctional confinement in CFJZ. Research in the US has consistently shown that a high number of youths in correctional confinement have identifiable learning disabilities. Another limitation of the PSQ was in the coding instruction. Answers that were negative (that is to say, which started off with "I don't want to...") were to remain uncounted. According to Table 2, the highest responses for Feared Selves for both males and females were non-normative responses: 48% for males and 35% for females. Three of the researchers noted this as a significant limitation because the Spanish language, and more specifically in Costa Rica, makes use of negatives. For example, a sentence like "No quisiera pelear" [I don't want to fight] was discarded because it contained the word "No." In Costa Rica, the use of the negative is common to communicate that the person wants to avoid fights. Costa Rica's language style meant that some responses were un-codable and had to be excluded from the analysis based on coding instructions. Despite these limitations, there is value in modifying the format of the PSQ by aligning the proximity of the Expected and Feared Selves. We think this modification can have significant implications in determining how it can be used with youth who have working memory deficits.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the aspirations and fears among youth in correctional confinement in Costa Rica can be ascertained through use of the PSQ by incorporating changes which, as mentioned above, consider possible educational needs and language nuances. At the service delivery level, it is important that correctional facilities for youth attempt to determine the educational needs of the incarcerated population to ensure that basic academic skills are provided should students need academic support because they have undiagnosed disabilities. An interdisciplinary assessment of the PSQ was fundamental to determine whether abstract responses had to do with limitations of the instrument, with educational needs, undiagnosed conditions, or with an individual's lack of personal strategies to develop a life plan. Identifying these particular educational needs from an interdisciplinary perspective will contribute to a better understanding of how incarcerated youth can prepare for a better future. Finally, because the sentences in Costa Rica are significantly longer, it is important that education and treatment programming while in confinement foster and nurture active engagement between educational and treatment staff given that many of these youth will have only these adults as role models in a very critical phase of their human development.

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### Appendix A

#### Possible Selves Questionnaire

Who will you be next year? Each of us has some image or picture of what we will be like and what we want to avoid being like in the future. Think about next year -- imagine what you'll be like, and what you'll be doing next year.

- In the lines below, write what you expect you will be like and what you expect to be doing next year.
- In the space next to each expected goal, mark NO (X) if you are not currently working on that goal or doing something about that expectation and mark YES (X) if you are currently doing something to get to that expectation or goal.
- For each expected goal that you marked YES, use the space to the right to write what you are doing this year to attain that goal. Use the first space for the first expected goal, the second space for the second expected goal and so on.

| Next year, I expect to be | Am I am doing something to be that way |     | If yes, What I am doing now to be that way next year |
|---------------------------|--|-----|--|
|                           | NO                                     | YES |  |
| (P1) _____                |  |     | (s1) _____   |
| (P2) _____                |  |     | (s2) _____   |
| (P3) _____                |  |     | (s3) _____   |
| (P4) _____                |  |     | (s4) _____   |

In addition to expectations and expected goals, we all have images or pictures of what we don't want to be like; what we don't want to do or want to avoid being. First, think a minute about ways you would **not** like to be next year -- *things you are concerned about or want to avoid being like*.

- Write those concerns or selves to-be-avoided in the lines below.
- In the space next to each concern or to-be-avoided self, mark NO (X) if you are not currently working on avoiding that concern or to-be-avoided self and mark YES (X) if you are currently doing something so this will not happen next year.
- For each concern or to-be-avoided self that you marked YES, use the space at the end of each line to write what you are doing this year to reduce the chances that this will describe you next year. Use the first space for the first concern, the second space for the second concern and so on.

| Next year, I want to avoid | Am I doing something to avoid this |     | If yes, What I am doing now to avoid being that way next year |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------|-----|---|
|                            | NO                                 | YES |   |
| (P5) _____                 |                                    |     | (s5) _____  |
| (P6) _____                 |                                    |     | (s6) _____  |
| (P7) _____                 |                                    |     | (s7) _____  |
| (P8) _____                 |                                    |     | (s8) _____  |

**Appendix B**

**Cuestionario de los “Posibles Yo”**

**¿Quién soy? ¿Quién quiero ser?**

**Traducido y adaptado al español por Ochoa, Ovares, Meza y de Mezerville (2019)**

Edad: \_\_\_\_\_ Género: \_\_\_\_\_ Grado escolar: \_\_\_\_\_

¿Quién serás el próximo año? Todos tenemos una imagen de lo que nos gustaría ser y qué queremos evitar en el futuro. Piensa en el próximo año, imagina cómo serías y qué estarás haciendo el próximo año.

- Cuadro 1: En el espacio de abajo, escribe cómo esperas ser el próximo año (propósitos)
- Cuadro 2: Al lado de cada propósito, marca con “X” en el SÍ si actualmente estás haciendo algo para alcanzarlo, o en el NO si actualmente no estás haciendo nada para alcanzarlo
- Cuadro 3: Para cada SÍ, utiliza el espacio del Cuadro 3 para escribir lo que estás haciendo en este año para alcanzar ese propósito.

| <p><b>Cuadro 1</b><br/>El próximo año, espero ser:</p> | <p><b>Cuadro 2</b><br/>Estoy haciendo algo para ser así</p> |    | <p><b>Cuadro 3</b><br/>Si es así, ¿qué estoy haciendo ahora, para ser así el siguiente año?</p> |
|--|---|----|---|
|  | NO  | SI |   |
| 1. _____<br>_____                                      |   |    | 1. _____<br>_____   |
| 2. _____<br>_____                                      |   |    | 2. _____<br>_____   |
| 3. _____<br>_____                                      |   |    | 3. _____<br>_____   |
| 4. _____<br>_____                                      |   |    | 4. _____<br>_____   |

Ahora, piensa por un minuto en quién no te gustaría ser el próximo año -- aspectos que te preocupan o que quieres evitar ser.

- Cuadro 1: Escribe en el Cuadro 1 lo que no te gustaría ser el próximo año.
- Cuadro 2: Al lado de cada frase, marca con “X” en el SÍ, si actualmente sí estás haciendo algo para que esto no ocurra el próximo año, o en el NO, si actualmente no estás haciendo nada para evitarlo.
- Cuadro 3: Para cada SÍ del Cuadro 2, escribe en el Cuadro 3 qué estás haciendo este año para evitar lo que no te gustaría ser el próximo año.

| <p><b>Cuadro 1</b><br/>El próximo año, quiero evitar:</p> | <p><b>Cuadro 2</b><br/>Estoy haciendo algo para evitar esto</p> |    | <p><b>Cuadro 3</b><br/>Si es así, ¿qué estoy haciendo ahora, para evitar ser así el próximo año?</p> |
|---|---|----|--|
|   | NO  | SI |  |
| <p>1. _____<br/>_____</p>                                 |   |    | <p>1. _____<br/>_____</p>  |
| <p>2. _____<br/>_____</p>                                 |   |    | <p>2. _____<br/>_____</p>  |
| <p>3. _____<br/>_____</p>                                 |   |    | <p>3. _____<br/>_____</p>  |
| <p>4. _____<br/>_____</p>                                 |   |    | <p>4. _____<br/>_____</p>  |