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EXPLORING SELF-AUTHORSHIP IN POST-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS:
A NARRATIVE STUDY IN STUDENTS' MEANING-MAKING

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A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Affiliated Faculty of

The College of Graduate and Professional Studies at the University of New England

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the degree of Doctor of Education

Portland & Biddeford, Maine

May, 2017

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EXPLORING SELF-AUTHORSHIP IN POST-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS:
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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explored the narratives of ten post-traditional students enrolled in a degree completion program in a small, regional public university. The narratives provide insight of post-traditional students and their experiences with self-authorship: a way of knowing that empowers people to skillfully navigate life from consciously constructed epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal paradigms. The findings in this study revealed that 6 of 10 of the participants demonstrated decision-making at lower levels of self-authorship, with half those indicating movement toward self-authorship and the other half exhibiting no indication of self-authorship. The participants also demonstrated the same patterns of self-authorship development as that revealed by traditional students. Self-authorship does not automatically generalize across situations or developmental dimensions, and it is not a permanent attribute once attained. Its presence fluctuates throughout life and requires ongoing reflection and exercise to remain active.

The majority of the participants revealed some degree of underdeveloped self-authorship, which reflected the already established research, and demonstrated the same struggles with self-authorship development as traditional students. The findings of this study suggest the need for holistic developmental models of support to the growing post-traditional student population in higher education, specifically in the area of self-authorship development. Extending support for self-authorship development to the growing population of post-traditional students in college can address concerns that many adults do not exhibit self-authored behavior. Lack of self-authorship

may limit successful interaction with complex and/or ambiguous situations in professional and personal settings. Such support can also help students realize the self-development potential in the journey toward earning a degree and hopefully lead them to understand their own self-authorship as an ongoing life-learning project.

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Doctor of Education
Educational Leadership

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you, Dr. Carol Burbank, for lacing your free-spirited soul throughout our advising sessions and reminding me time and again to be good to myself and to remember my research is for bigger purposes than earning a degree. This—these pages bound together—is about transformation, my own as well as others who might benefit from the study. As you are aware, this has been a trying year, but having someone who sensed my heart and led from that knowledge made all the difference in the world. Thank you for being that difference.

Dr. McClure, your input during our meetings was validating and challenging. Even though my work was not in front of you every day, you invested in me by providing additional resources concerning narrative research, and you walked with me through the process of getting my research questions where they needed to be, to the point that they actually asked what I wanted to ask.

I also thank my longtime mentor and friend, Dr. Ballard for serving on my committee but also for introducing me to adult learning 17 years ago. You, along with Dr. Lila Walker, revolutionized my thinking concerning higher education and the role I could play in helping people change their lives for the better. Wow! That's no small thing, right? I will always be beholden to you for opening that door of possibility to me.

For working through this incredible process with me, I thank my research team. I especially thank Justin Beaupre for all our peer-editing and idea-stimulating sessions and for introducing me to Little Lucy.

Throughout this process, my support base has been phenomenal. Rachael Cherry, Esther

Pippins, Katheryn Hartshorne, Kelly Coke, and Dr. Lila Walker have kept our post-traditional adult program healthy and running smoothly as I took a step back to focus on my research.

Without them, I simply could not have done this. In addition to these women who have kept me afloat, I thank my dean, Dr. Del Doughty, for supporting me throughout this process and allowing me the flexibility needed to complete my dissertation.

I also thank one colleague who unknowingly provided me the topic of my research. Following a workshop in which I presented the characteristics of adult learners, Dr. Tom Jordan walked with me back to my office and told me he understood the research about adult students, but his experience with that population did not align with some of that research. He said that he didn't believe adult students were quite as developed as the research suggested. Thank you, Tom. Your hand is in this, too!

To my family, I thank you for supporting me and cheering me along throughout this process. We are a very close family, and while we've never prescribed laughter to one another during difficult times, looking back, it's what we do. We love, we laugh, we struggle, we love, we laugh. It's a great formula, and I love my family for hanging on to me and making sure I didn't forget that formula on this ride.

I thank my daughter, Morgan, for reminding me that I can do this and for switching roles with me and becoming the one telling me, "I'm so proud of you!" Those are encouraging words, but when they come from your daughter, they wield a special kind of power to remind you just how grand your life is. Love you, Sweetheart.

To my husband, Kevin. You have always supported me in my education and have even sacrificed your own desires to make this path possible for me. You always knew the words to say to prod me along when I was ready to quit. More so, you stand proud of me as I continue to grow

in my education and personhood. Not all husbands, and I know this to be true, are so supportive of their wife's personal growth. It is not a small thing, and I love you for it.

Lastly, I thank my mother, or as she insists I call her, Mama. You are the first self-authored person I ever witnessed, and even though I had no knowledge of the concept itself at the time, I knew it was what I wanted to be. Thank you, and I love you.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

According to a growing number of studies surveying influential business and industry leaders in America (Casner-Lotto, Barrington, & Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2006; Millennial Branding, 2012; Stewart, Wall, & Marciniac, 2016), colleges and universities are graduating students who do not possess the skills needed to be successful in today's workplace. These leaders attribute the skill deficit to a lack of instruction and exposure to complex ideas and scenarios that match the complex environments housed within today's organizations, and as a result, graduates come to them lacking the necessary thinking and relating skills (Charonensap-Kelly, Broussard, Lindsly, & Troy, 2016).

Robert Kegan, Harvard developmental psychologist, expressed the same concern in his seminal work, *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life*. According to Kegan, many adults never achieve the cognitive, personal and interpersonal capacities to succeed in today's professional world characterized by complexity and ambiguity (Kegan, 1994; Kegan & Lahey, 2009). Like the business and industry leaders (Casner-Lotto, Barrington, & Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2006; Millennial Branding, 2012; McMellon, 2014; Stewart, Wall, & Marciniac, 2016), Kegan (1994; Kegan & Lahey, 2009) ascribed to formal education a great deal of the burden for addressing students' lack of exposure to complex ideas and contexts. Kegan (2009), in comparing what he believed to be the current practice in American education to a higher purpose and mode for instruction, specified that curriculum focused on amassing quantitative content rather than "qualitative change in the complexity of our minds" (p. 6) fails to understand or match the "curriculum of modern life" (p. 5). Here, Kegan expanded the need for complex ways of thinking and relating to include all of life, not just one's professional world.

Higher education has not discounted these concerns, responding by developing holistic student support initiatives ranging from first year experience programs to all-encompassing

initiatives focused on experiential learning that includes opportunities to hone students' thinking and interactive skills (Charonensap-Kelly et al., 2016; Ruff, 2016; Hunter, 2006; Eyley, 2009). These programs and the research they have produced, however, have largely focused on the traditional student population (Grabowski, Rush, Ragen, Fayard, & Watkins-Lewis, 2016). Based on Kegan's and Lahey's findings (2009), adults beyond the traditional college age could also benefit from similar support programs and systems.

This study, in order to expand research to a new population, focused on post-traditional students (25 years old or older) and the complexities of thought and interaction exercised in the decision to attend college. Reflections on this specific experience, shared in personal narrative form, provided rich and meaningful details that revealed students' decision-making processes, and more specifically, the meaning-making undergirding those processes. In collecting and analyzing these student narratives, a deeper understanding of post-traditional students' self-authorship patterns demonstrated the need for holistic curriculum and programs to support this population. This research suggests the value of developmental support specifically to build the ability to analyze and reconstruct the meaning-making paradigms informing student capacity for complex thinking and interaction, something quite beyond and much deeper than simply providing them a path to a degree.

A Narrative in Meaning-Making

The ability to analyze and reconstruct one's own meaning-making paradigms is essential to self-authorship development because the process of deconstruction/reconstruction (Shields, 2010) is essential for one to move from external influences dictating personal knowing to internal understanding informing one's sense of knowing. The ramifications of relying on external constructs for internal meaning-making structures can be seen in a brief narrative provided by Harry Patterson, the international author who writes under the pseudonym of Jack Higgins and who has produced such espionage thrillers as *The Eagle Has Landed* and *Eye of the Storm*. In an interview with Pamela Coleman of *The Sunday Express Magazine*, he reported,

At 18 I longed for a piece of paper that said I was intelligent. I got it eventually when I was 31 after taking a double honors degree through night-school and correspondence courses. It didn't mean much, apart from involving my career prospects. (J. Soars & L. Soars, 1987, p. 93)

Patterson went on to describe his life as largely unsuccessful, even though he is a renowned author and a millionaire many times over. For such an accomplished person, what could have gone so wrong that he sees very little of value in his life?

Some indicators may lie in how Patterson describes the influences in his upbringing and early adulthood. In the 1982 interview granted to Pamela Coleman of *The Sunday Express* (J. Soars & L. Soars, 1987, p. 93), Patterson spoke of people keeping him down by discounting his gift for writing; his life being void of any significant mentors; his aspirations being squelched due to authorities forcing him to focus on steady day jobs; his talent being squandered; his creativity being robbed of creative outlets; his friends being too afraid to explore life from new perspectives; his upbringing being plagued by an abusive step-father; and his desire to achieve always being clipped by someone reminding him that he was a failure. He ended the interview by stating, "So what? Is [sic] a phrase that has figured rather largely in my life. I'm glad I didn't know at 18 that when you've got to the top of the peak you're left with an emptiness" (J. Soars & L. Soars, 1987, p. 93).

Patterson's description of his life strikes a chord of sorrow and certainly elicits genuine pity for the child subjected to such circumstance and conditions. One has to wonder, however, *why* the famed writer continued to allow external voices and influences to define him so late in adult life. At the time of the interview, he was fifty-three (J. Soars & L. Soars, 1987, p. 93) and had certainly reached the pinnacle of achievement he so desperately fought to attain, yet he clearly stated that he found no value in the victory.

By analyzing how Patterson described the pursuit of his degree and his challenges in life in this short personal narrative (J. Soars & L. Soars, 1987, p. 93), one notices a pattern in the way

he assessed himself and the world around him at that point in his life. His knowledge construction of self and the world seems to be solely based on external foundations—the thinking, words, and actions of others. As a result, he sees himself and behaves as a character in a story who is subject to the conflict and plot development around him instead of the author creating the story. He views himself not as the operator, but the object being operated. In technical terms, Patterson demonstrated in his narrative that he had not achieved, or at least was not currently experiencing, self-authorship: the state of identity development characterized by a person becoming “critically aware of [his or her] own composing of reality, self-consciously participating in an ongoing dialogue toward truth, and cultivating a capacity to respond—to act—in ways that are satisfying and just” (Parks, 2000, p. 6). Patterson is not alone (Kegan, 1994; Kegan & Lahey, 2009); many adults function in everyday life absent of the capacity for self-authorship, what Baxter Magolda (2008) simply defines as “the internal capacity to define one’s beliefs, identity and social relations” (p. 269), the development of the inner voice that equips one for today’s world permeated with complexity and ambiguity (Kegan, 1994; Kegan & Lahey, 2009).

Statement of the Problem

People who work with post-traditional students experience a common phenomenon during the initial meeting with these prospective students. The students tend to refer to a degree in devalued terms, most popularly as “that piece of paper” (Hamid, 1994; Humphreys & Davenport, 2005; J. Soars & L. Soars, 1987). They report the need to earn a degree so they can finally get the promotion they have been passed up for time and again. Sometimes students’ descriptions reveal the belief that a degree will earn them respect or appease a family member or friend. No matter the specific reason offered, the degree’s value lies in its perceived ability to please or satisfy some external influence, which means many of these students perceive something or someone outside of themselves as responsible for the step they are taking toward earning a degree. This type of meaning-making presents a dichotomous situation. While allowing

other people's thinking to mold personal thoughts and actions can largely protect one from the risks that accompany personal responsibility, doing so can also prevent a person from experiencing the satisfaction and joy of personal accomplishment.

Describing a decision-making process as heavily influenced by external foundations or forces is a strong indicator that a student has not adequately developed self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2011; 2014), a state of development in which thoughts and behavior about how the world works, personal identity, and interpersonal relationships are primarily motivated from within (Baxter Magolda, 2004, p. 26). As already introduced, a lack of self-authorship, marked by a tendency to externalize meaning making (Baxter Magolda, 2011; 2014) can lead to a person's inability to be self-directed (Knowles, Holton III, & Swandon, 2014; Taylor & House, 2010) and in turn limit the person's level of professional and/or personal success. More so, underdeveloped self-authorship can also prevent full development of psychological adulthood, even when physical and social adulthood have already been attained (Knowles, Holton III, & Swandon, 2014). This reality alone strongly supports the need for this study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to extend knowledge of self-authorship from the realm of traditional college students to the post-traditional student population seeking four-year degrees. The study explored self-authorship in post-traditional students, which extended the already established observations in self-authorship theory to a new field of study (Jones & Abes, 2016, p. 139). A collection of new observations resulted from the personal narratives of ten students enrolled in a degree completion program at a small regional university in Texas. In order to "follow participants down their *trails*" (Riessman, 2008, p. 24) while still gaining insight through specific, detail-rich stories (p. 23), a semi-structured interview protocol was utilized. Doing so afforded participants supporting boundaries within which to share their narratives. Areas explored included:

1. Reasons for seeking a college degree as a post-traditional student

2. Reason(s) for not attending college right out of high school or for dropping out after an earlier attempt
3. People who hold a significant influence in student's decision-making processes and why the student values their opinion
4. Decision-making process in dealing with conflicting viewpoints
5. Purpose(s) for seeking degree

The resulting narratives stemming from the above discussion points were used to construct a formative baseline of qualitative data that can inform future curriculum decisions for degree completion programs, specifically the development of course enhancements supporting self-authorship in post-traditional student populations.

Research Questions

Because the study intended to explore self-authorship as it is revealed through meaning-making structures that inform the decision-making processes of participating post-traditional students, narrative inquiry was used in the research design. Humans utilize narrative not only to organize complex understanding (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Merriam, 2009; Riessman, 2008), but also to share that understanding with others (Shanahan, Adams, & McBeth, 2013). Therefore, narrative inquiry was utilized to complement the exploration of self-authorship, a complex construct detailing holistic development toward epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal maturity (Baxter Magolda, 2008; 2011), as participants engaged in narrative sharing. In the process, the following questions were explored to gain a better understanding of each participant's capacity for self-authorship as it relates to his or her decision-making processes, specifically the meaning-making leading up to the decision to enroll in college:

1. What indicators of self-authorship dimensions—specifically areas of epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal development—are revealed in the self-narrated experiences of post-traditional students describing their decision to enroll in a degree completion program?

2. Within each of the three dimensions of self-authorship, what characteristics of placement and/or movement along self-authorship’s continuum of phases, ranging from External Formulas to Crossroads to Self-Authorship, are present in students’ decision-making narratives?

Conceptual Framework

This narrative study did not focus on the specific characters or plot details in each student’s stories. Rather, it explored how students characterized knowledge as it related to their meaning-making and how those characterizations aligned with Baxter Magolda’s (2008, 2010a, 2011, 2014) theory of self-authorship, a theory that effectively categorizes meaning making into three developmental dimensions—epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal—and then slides each dimension along a continuum of phases ranging from External Formulas, to Crossroads, and finally to Self-Authorship. As shown in Table 1.1, the movement from one phase to the other is bridged with a person’s dealing with cognitive dissonance.

Table 1.1

Basic Self-Authorship Framework

	External Formulas Phase	Crossroads Phase	Self-Authorship Phase
Epistemological Dimension	Dependent on others for answers, values, identity	Challenging experiences prompt questioning of previous paradigms	Forms own sense of values and views to guide decisions and relationships
Intrapersonal Dimension			
Interpersonal Dimension			

Note. Adapted from “Engaged Learning: Enabling Self-Authorship and Effective Practice” by Hodge, Baxter Magolda, & Haynes, 2009

Assumptions

The purpose, methodology, and theoretical framework of this study explicitly built on the assumption that education is not for the sole purpose of workforce development and/or preparation but encompasses the development of the whole student. This assumption is core to

the motivation driving the study as the researcher adheres to transformational learning theory (Mezirow, 1991), which argues that learning always involves change and is not just an accumulation of information, and transformative leadership (Shields, 2010), which is about creating opportunities and environments supporting personal and social change.

In addition, the researcher assumed that participating students would be forthcoming and truthful in their sharing of narratives. Because the study did not focus on the characters, objects, or actions in the narratives but on *how* the student described those things in relationship to meaning-making and decision-making, the researcher was able to collect sufficiently relevant data despite possible inaccuracies of basic details. The perception of the narrators, and the ways they expressed their narratives revealed a great deal about their levels of self-authorship, attitudes and interpretations of experiences.

Lastly, but most significantly, it was assumed that participants would reflect research that shows most adults lack self-authorship (Kegan, 1994, pp. 188 & 191; Kegan and Lahey, 2008, p. 28). It is this confirmed trend that laid the foundation of the study and inspired the exploration of the specifics supporting the phenomenon. The narrative details, in turn, are not only assumed to support research findings, but are assumed to be valuable in shaping future curriculum in the degree completion program at the study site.

Limitations of the Study

Because this study focused on understanding the level of self-authorship experienced by participants in their decision to seek a baccalaureate degree, and because the number of participants was limited to ten in order to gain a deeper understanding of each person's experience, the findings are limited to the population and site of the study and are not able to be generalized to other settings.

Only students who were enrolled in the degree completion program at the study site were included in the study; therefore, any findings leading to improved support for this program's students will not necessarily extend to post-traditional students enrolled in other programs. In

subsequent research, it would benefit the wider post-traditional student population to include other programs in a similar study and compare findings.

Significance of the Study

Foundational research reveals that most adults do not experience their full developmental potential, which leaves them ill-prepared for life's demands (Kegan, 1994; Kegan & Lahey, 2009; Baxter Magolda, 2011; 2014). In the context of those findings, the number of adults enrolling in college is steadily increasing (Newbaker, 2012). These post-traditional students, while possibly deciding to seek a degree largely based on external influences, could benefit greatly if through a degree completion program they learned to "collect, interpret, and analyze information and reflect on [their] own beliefs in order to form judgments" (Baxter Magolda, 1998, p. 143). By doing so, they would transform themselves into people who experience and enjoy "the internal capacity to define [their own] beliefs, identity and social relations" (Baxter Magolda, 2008, p. 269) and improve their ability to enjoy and value one of life's greatest accomplishments: earning a college degree. The first step in accomplishing such an opportunity for incoming post-traditional students, however, was to gather the necessary data to gain a better understanding of the self-authorship experienced by incoming students, the purpose of this study.

Conclusion

Harry Patterson, the renowned author who described his life and accomplishments with an overwhelming sense of defeat (J. Soars & L. Soars, 1987, p. 93), lacked the ability to reflect upon himself and his life from an internal perspective, and as a result he apparently could not reach the point of transforming how he saw himself, his accomplishments, and the world in which he lived. Transformation, as described by Mezirow (1991), is the power of self-authorship. It empowers people to "understand the world, contribute to it, and reshape [them]selves" (Roth, 2014, p. 195), which is a long-standing purpose of a liberal arts education and a mission upon which this study was based.

The following study is organized into five chapters, the first of which described the problem of post-traditional students demonstrating a devalued concept of the college degree and a tendency to assign reasoning for enrollment to an external influence, a strong indicator of underdeveloped self-authorship and a pattern of thinking that can greatly limit students' capacity to transform themselves into their best selves. Also in the opening chapter, a brief introduction to self-authorship theory was presented. A more thorough discussion is provided in Chapter Two, including an overview of the concept's history, an explanation of self-authorship as a conceptual framework developed by Baxter Magolda, and a discussion of the theory's relevance to the post-traditional student population enrolled in degree completion programs. Following Chapter Two's literature review is a thorough depiction of the methodology that was utilized in the study, specifically a description of the process followed for participant selection, data gathering and analysis, and an explanation of how participant rights and integrity of the study were maintained. Chapters Four and Five, respectively, present the study's results and how those findings might be utilized in current practice and future research that supports the development of post-traditional students in higher education.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter discusses seminal and current literature related to self-authorship as it applies to students enrolled in higher education. Beginning with a brief explanation of self-authorship in context and then an overview of the theory's origins, the chapter moves into a detailed description of self-authorship's dimensions and phases followed by an explanation of how the theory can be used within a narrative framework to gain a better understanding of post-traditional students' meaning-making processes, including those related to enrolling in college.

Self-Authorship in Context

Within the field of student development, self-authorship is understood to begin with recognizing that external formulas and influences, as well as the paths and rules they produce, are “insufficient for success in adult life” (Baxter Magolda, 2014, p. 28). The theory proposes the shift toward Self-Authorship from External Formulas is characterized by a person “becoming critically aware of one's own composing of reality, self-consciously participating in an ongoing dialogue toward truth, and cultivating a capacity to respond—to act—in ways that are satisfying and just” (Parks, 2000, p. 6). A more recognizable indicator that an individual is approaching self-authorship is when he or she recognizes that current meaning structures can no longer truthfully accommodate the complexities and ambiguities experienced in life (Baxter Magolda, 2014; Kegan, 1994). There is little wonder that self-authorship has found its home in higher education, specifically in student services, as college students commonly begin to question their life paradigms as their life experience expands away from home. However, self-authorship began as a much broader concept, and its development in a larger context is important to its expansion to non-traditional students and their experiences.

Origin of Self-Authorship Theory

In the early 1980s, Robert Kegan (1982), Professor of Adult Learning and Professional

Development at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and a renowned author and scholar in the field of adult learning, drew from Piaget's seminal work to pen *The Evolving Self*, a book in which he merged the psychological theories of constructionism and developmentalism to create a constructive-developmental framework through which he studied the phenomenon of meaning-making. Kegan introduced his text by stating the "most fundamental thing we do with what happens to us is organize it. We literally make sense. Human being is the composing of meaning, ..." (p. 11). Kegan's diction, his use of *human being* as a state of being rather than utilizing the words in their usual construct, strikes the ear as wrong, but there is purpose in his odd usage. In his work, Kegan carefully distinguished the action of human beings from the essence of being human. According to Kegan, humans do not so much make meaning as "the activity of being a person is the activity of meaning-making" (p. 11). Wrestling with cognitive dissonance to arrive at some congruence of thought and action, therefore, is at the core of human being; shying away from contextual disequilibrium, on the other hand, is succumbing to mere existence.

The journey as an evolving self, according to Kegan (1982), is marked by six stages of development, stages Kegan referred to as Orders of Consciousness in a later work (Kegan, 1994). Within each stage, Kegan (1982) constructed concepts he called Balances, linking the elements to the goal of balancing the disequilibrium between past and emerging paradigms. Incorporative and Impulsive Balances reside in the first stage, and Kegan characterized this as the point in life when children only sense themselves and make meaning based on that single concept. In the second stage, Imperial Balance emerges and is noted as the point in life when children begin seeing themselves as separate from their parent(s). The third stage consists of Interpersonal Balance, and Kegan describes this stage as the "I am my relationships" stage while describing the fourth stage (Institutional Balance) as the "I have relationships" stage (p. 100). It is in this third stage that Kegan describes the self as evolving from subject to object, or from sensing oneself as part of life's story to realizing oneself as outside of the story and empowered to shape personal reaction to experience, rather than being subject to the experience at hand. It is

also in this stage, however, that people base their empowered action on institutional values to determine their interactions with the world and other people. It is not until the person evolves to the last stage, Inter-individual Balance, that he or she operates from the inner voice to inform institutional values as well as interpersonal relationships, the point of development that would come to be known as self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2011; Kegan, 1994).

In 1994, Kegan wrote *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life*. In this work, he made the case that success in the post-modern world, both personally and professionally, demands highly evolved selves. People who attain and operate within this evolved realm of existence are people he referred to as having attained self-authorship (Kegan, 1994, p.185). These individuals integrate highly evolved cognitive, intrapersonal and interpersonal meaning-making that allows them to experience congruency in the midst of complexity. The vantage point from which they work to navigate life's interactions is no longer formulated by them to respond to varying situations. Their vantage point is from a state of being that informs their meaning-making of all situations as they arise. Kegan described this state of being as follows:

This new whole is an ideology, an internal identity, a *self-authorship* that can coordinate, integrate, act upon, or invent values, beliefs, convictions, generalizations, ideals, abstractions, interpersonal loyalties, and intrapersonal states. It is no longer authored by them, [*sic*] it authors them and thereby achieves a personal authority. (Kegan, 1994, p. 185)

Unfortunately, as Kegan reiterates throughout the book, few adults ever reach that level of being, and as a result, they struggle immensely with coping with life's growing complexities and ambiguities (Kegan, 1994; Kegan & Lahey, 2009).

Baxter Magolda's Theory of Self-Authorship Development

Building on Kegan's (1994) work with self-authorship, in which he defined the "evolution of consciousness [as the] personal unfolding of ways of organizing experiences that

are not simply replaced as we grow but subsumed into more complex systems of mind” (p. 9), Baxter Magolda (2010a) developed a model of self-authorship centered around three very simple questions: “How do I know? Who am I? What relationships do I want?” (p. 25). While the questions are simple in construction, they invite people to journey into the complex makings of self-identity consisting of “epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal dimensions of development” (Baxter Magolda, 2010a, p. 25), dimensions that are rooted in Kegan’s (1994) research, but also are extensions of that work in that Baxter Magolda applied the study of self-authorship to the specific audience of traditional college students.

Within the arena of higher education, Baxter Magolda’s (2011) model of self-authorship was singular in purpose: to guide people into becoming the authors of their own lives (p. 2), not only for academic success but for life success. She defined her self-authorship concept as the ability to collect, interpret, and analyze information and reflect on one’s own beliefs in order to form judgments” (Baxter Magolda, 1998, p. 143) and the ability to do so across the three interlinking dimensions of development: epistemological (how do I know), intrapersonal (who am I), and interpersonal (what relationships do I want) (Baxter Magolda, 2010a, pp. 25-27). Self-authorship is created where these three dimensions of development intersect (p. 25) and is rarely equally representative of each dimension (pp. 25-27).

In addition to the epistemological, intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions of development, Baxter Magolda’s self-authorship model (See Table 2.1) consists of three phases, and the second and third phases share an additional five elements that further define an individual’s activity in and out of the primary three phases and mark the person’s transitioning from a lower phase to a higher one.

Table 2.1

Key Locations in the Journey Toward Self-Authorship

Phases	Descriptions
<i>Elements within phases</i>	
External Formulas	Trust authorities to decide what to believe, follow others' visions for how to succeed. External voices (those of others) in the foreground drown out internal voice.
Crossroads	Torn between following others' versus own visions and expectations.
<i>Listening to Internal Voice</i>	Recognize the importance of hearing one's internal voice and begin work to identify it. Attempt to get internal voice into conversation with external voices.
<i>Cultivating Internal Voice</i>	Use internal voice to sort out beliefs, establish priorities, and put the puzzle of who you are together. Work to reduce reliance on external authorities.
Self-Authorship	Trust yourself to decide what to believe, follow your vision for how to succeed. Internal voice in the foreground coordinates information from external voices.
<i>Trusting the Internal Voice</i>	Realize that reality is beyond your control, but you can control your reaction to reality; use internal voice to shape reaction.
<i>Building an Internal Foundation</i>	Use internal voice to make internal commitments and build them into a foundation or philosophy of life to guide action.
<i>Securing Internal Commitments</i>	Live out internal commitments in everyday life.

Note. Reproduced from *Authoring Your Life: Developing an Internal Voice to Navigate Life's Challenges* by Marcia B. Baxter Magolda, 2011, p. 4.

External Formulas

In the External Formulas phase, all three dimensions—epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal—and their accompanying questions—How do I know? Who am I? What relationships do I want?—are “heavily reliant on external authorities” (Baxter Magolda, 2011, p.

6). It is at this stage that people make decisions based on what they think others expect and the phase in which people trust others' experiences and voices over their own (Baxter Magolda, 2008; 2011; 2014). For example, some post-traditional students who are still following external formulas may decide to return to college because they feel it is what is expected of them. Whether that expectation is perceived to be coming from a boss, spouse, or a friend is not the revealing factor, nor is their demeanor as talk about enrolling in classes. What is indicative of following external formulas is that the students could be making decisions stemming from a conceptual system that says good knowledge comes from those in authority (how do I know), identity devolves from other people's stories about them (who am I), and good relationships are those in which others are in control (what relationships do I want). It is important to note, however, that people who are following external formulas are not always oblivious to the fact they are doing so. Before advancing to Magolda's Crossroads, they begin to experience the disequilibrium described by Kegan's (1982; 1994) earlier work and Magolda's (1998; 2001) subsequent study, but the newly found voice is usually drowned out by the external voices accustomed to being in control.

The Crossroads

Once authoritative, passed-down knowledge about beliefs, self, and relationships begins to be challenged by the realities of lived experience (Baxter Magolda, 2008; 2011; 2014), people are ready to enter the Crossroads phase. At first, as contradictions between belief and reality begin to arise, people accept the contradictions as exceptions to the rule; however, as contradictions continue to challenge a certain mental concept, it becomes impossible to overlook or assimilate the lived experience into the passed down construct (Baxter Magolda, 2008; 2011; 2014). This is the point at which the first two elements, Listening to Internal Voice and Cultivating Internal Voice, come into play as the developing identity acknowledges the inner voice and then begins to utilize the voice to make new meaning structures (Baxter Magolda, 2011). This phase is very similar to Mezirow's (1991) perspective transformation, which he

describes as “an enhanced level of awareness of the context of one’s beliefs and feelings, a critique of their assumptions and particularly premises, and assessment of alternative perspectives” (p. 191).

Mezirow (1991) states that such a paradigm shift, what Baxter Magolda calls the Crossroads, almost always stems from an inciting incident. For example, consider a wife who has happily served her family’s needs for the entirety of her adult life. After her children begin school, however, she begins experiencing dissatisfaction with her life as she notices other women enjoying segments of life devoted to their own growth, health, and satisfaction as an individual. At first, she tells herself these women are living selfish lives and that she should be satisfied with her place in life with her wonderful family. This awakening, or entering the Crossroads, is indicative of a person being “torn between following” other’s visions and expectations and entertaining the idea of following the ones developing in their own thinking (Baxter Magolda, 2011, p. 4).

For this woman, the wrestling with disequilibrium has just begun as she experiences Baxter Magolda’s (2011) element of Listening to Internal Voice. If she continues to work through the process, she will enter and experience the culminating element of the Crossroads, Cultivating Internal Voice (Baxter Magolda, 2011). This is the section of developmental evolution in which she will use her “internal voice to sort out beliefs, establish priorities, and put the puzzle of who [she is] together” while working “to reduce reliance on external authorities” (Baxter Magolda, 2011, p. 4).

Such paradigm shifts are not easy, and people struggle in the Crossroads to move into a new plane or way of thinking (Baxter Magolda, 2011). Following formulas can offer a certain sense of security because of its familiarity. However, the downside of choosing this safe zone, as seen in international author Harry Patterson’s description of his own life (J. Soars & L. Soars, 1987, p. 93), is that “following external formulas guided by others’ visions leaves [a person] feeling unfulfilled” (Baxter Magolda, 2011, p. 6), and living such a life robs one of his or her

human being as described by Kegan (1982).

Self-Authorship

People who push through the Crossroads phase are poised to enjoy Baxter Magolda's (2011) final phase, Self-Authorship. This is the phase in which people trust themselves to be the source of knowledge concerning self and the world in which self operates (Baxter Magolda, 2008; 2011; 2014). It is at this point that perspective is no longer shaped by external factors. Perspective in the self-authored individual is shaped by the inner voice, and the inner voice shapes external influences, just the opposite of what occurs in the External Formulas phase (Baxter Magolda, 2008; 2011; 2014).

In the Self-Authorship phase, three more elements of development remain. The first is Trusting the Internal Voice and understanding that no matter how mature one's identity becomes, reality is beyond anyone's control (Baxter Magolda, 2011, p. 8). Self-authored individuals do not weigh themselves down with that which cannot be changed; they free themselves from those burdens by defining how they react to those things they cannot change (Baxter Magolda, 2008; 2011; 2014). The next element within Self-Authorship is Building an Internal Foundation in which the evolving self uses "the internal voice to make internal commitments and build them into a foundation or philosophy of life to guide action" (Baxter Magolda, 2011, p. 4). The final element, Securing Internal Commitments, further solidifies Self-Authorship as the evolved self lives out the internal commitments in everyday life (Baxter Magolda, 2008; 2011; 2014). It is in Self-Authorship that the three dimensions of development seamlessly intertwine, enabling the evolved self to consciously observe, assess, interact, and transform as needed in any context, without sacrificing the core of human being. It is a place where people happen to life, rather than the other way around, and a place to which adults of all ages should be encouraged to journey.

Wabash National Study (WNS)

The Wabash National Study (WNS), first conducted in 2006, was a longitudinal, multi-institutional study designed to explore how college students' experiences affected their

attainment of liberal arts objectives and self-authorship (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012; Baxter Magolda & Taylor, 2016). Magolda and King (2012) “conceptualized the qualitative portion of the WNS to focus on recursive relationship between experiences and meaning making,” (Baxter Magolda & Taylor, 2016, p. 159), and in that endeavor they developed a “ten-position model of the journey toward self-authorship” (p. 160).

Because WNS offered such a breadth of participants, 315 students in diverse campus settings (Baxter Magolda & Taylor, 2016), and the opportunity to interview each of those participants to gain rich narratives of experience, Baxter Magolda and King (2012) were able to discover subcategories of positions within the original three-position model of self-authorship. Within the External Formulas phase, three subsections of the external voice were added with each subsection relating a weakening of the external voice’s presence. Within the Crossroads phase, four subsections were added showing the movement from the external voice’s dominance to the eventual rising of the internal voice. Lastly, the Self-Authorship phase also gained three subsets of position with each detailing the slow, gradual growth toward internal commitments (Baxter Magolda & Taylor, 2016). The ten-position model provides the unifying concepts needed to extend and compare research, and it was also utilized in this study.

Self-Authorship and Post-Traditional Students

In the early 1970s, Malcolm Knowles introduced andragogy to the world of adult education (Knowles, Holton III & Swanson, 2014). Andragogy was a term Knowles used to stress that adults learn differently from children. Whereas pedagogy is the art of teaching students, andragogy is the art of teaching adults. His theory assumed that adults need to understand and agree with the usefulness and value of material or concepts before they invest in learning; they strongly resist mandated concepts that deny them the opportunity to self-direct toward agreed upon goals; adults bring significant prior-knowledge to the table and expect that knowledge to be acknowledged and well-regarded; they need to understand the link between the concept being taught and real-life situations and/or problems; and adults tend to be better driven

by intrinsic than extrinsic motivation (Knowles, Holton III & Swanson, 2014, pp. 43-47).

It is important to note, however, these andragogical assumptions only apply to those who are adults, not only biologically, legally, and socially, but most importantly psychologically (Knowles, Holton III & Swanson, 2014, p. 43). People reach psychological adulthood, according to Knowles, Holton III, and Swanson (2014), when they “arrive at a self-concept of being responsible for [their] own lives, of being self-directing” (p. 43). It is this psychological definition of adulthood, many times, that entering post-traditional students lack (Askham, 2008; Taylor & House, 2010), not because they do not take care of themselves, but because external factors still guide, at least in part, their thinking and behavior (Askham, 2008; Dobmeier & Moran, 2008; Keegan, 1994; Baxter Magolda, 2008; 2011; 2014). For example, this researcher has witnessed on several occasions post-traditional students enrolling in college because they perceive they are being made to do so by a boss, spouse, parent, or some other person they deem in charge of making important decisions, someone other than self. This type of behavior is not self-directing, a prime tenet linked to adult learning theory (Knowles, 2014; Merriam, 2009) but more importantly it does not reflect self-authorship. Whereas self-direction tends to be a behavior characterized by people making their own decisions and organizing their own work, self-authorship is the presence of knowing enabling the self-directing behavior.

In fact, Baxter Magolda (2011) found that principal to a person’s tendency to shift responsibility for decision-making to others is that the individual has not come to the point of trusting his or her internal voice and feels safer following long-tested external guides and formulas. This is evident in students who enroll in college as a result of perceived external pressure. These students demonstrate little interest in seeking a degree for themselves and indicate they are only doing what everyone wants them to do.

Such acquiescence of personal responsibility in significant life decisions, as well as research showing that many adults entering college have not made the shift toward self-authorship (Askham, 2008; Taylor & House, 2010), suggests a need for self-authorship support

and development for post-traditional students. Even though adults entering college as post-traditional students have advanced beyond the years in which traditional students are expected to make a shift toward self-authorship (Parks, 2000), many of those adults still linger in Baxter Magolda's External Formulas stage (Baxter Magolda & Taylor, 2015), and as a result are allowing others' vision and expectations of them to dictate what they believe, who they are, and what their relationships with others will be (Baxter Magolda, 2008; 2011; 2014). Those living at this stage of development have not only acquiesced the responsibility for decision-making to others, they have also yielded a tremendous tool of empowerment—the ability to craft one's own life story, to become self-authored.

Self-Authorship through the Lens of Narrative

“Narratives—the stories people tell—provide a rich source of information about how people make sense of their lives, about how they construct disparate facts and weave them together cognitively to make sense of reality” (Patterson and Monroe, 1998, p. 315). So begins Patterson and Monroe's (1998) much-cited work describing narrative analysis and how the practice expanded into the social sciences after the literary world realized the beauty of narration was not in its form and structure but in its portrayal of human realities (Patterson & Monroe, 1998; Shanahan, Adams, & McBeth, 2013). Psychologists realized the therapeutic role of narrative, and soon after that, political science began utilizing the persuasive merits of narration for political and policy purposes (Patterson & Monroe, 1998; Shanahan, Adams, & McBeth, 2013). What has been found in these disciplines and more is that narrative elements shape what and how people think about themselves, others, and the world around them.

In 2006, Adam Berinsky and Donald Kinder “demonstrated that framing news as a story influences how individuals cognitively organize concepts and information” (Jones & Song, 2014, p. 447). In their groundbreaking work, they began “to set the foundation for a theory of political understanding” (p. 640), but at the same time, they established that people's way of understanding is strongly linked to narrative structures, much more than it is linked to empirical

data (Patterson & Monroe, 1998; Shanahan, Adams, & McBeth, 2013). People use narrative to “organize, process, and convey information in a way that allows for meaningful existence and an understanding of how the world works” (Jones & McBeth, 2010). In other words, narrative is what humans employ to make and share meaning (Shanahan, Adams, & McBeth, 2013). Therefore, if what humans do is organize and what they organize is meaning (Kegan, 1982), then narrative is the tool with which they organize and share that meaning (Shanahan, Adams, & McBeth, 2013). As such, it would be virtually impossible to separate the study of self-authorship from narrative structures because self-authorship is a journey in meaning-making as understood and conveyed through narratives. This study, then, employed narrative inquiry as the most fitting method for exploring self-authorship in post-traditional students.

Narratives as Constructs of Meaning

Carl Jung, founder of analytical psychology, believed “that every person has a story, and when derangement occurs, it is because the person’s story has been denied or rejected. Healing and integration come when the person discovers or rediscovers his or her own personal story” (Daniels, n.d.). Jung’s thinking is not far from the concepts found in Baxter Magolda’s (2011) journey toward self-authorship in which the internal voice finally subdues the external voices previously in charge of writing the person’s life story. Her theory, in fact, has strong connections with the theory of archetypes, a type of narrative structure, but not in the primal sense advocated by Jung.

Baxter Magolda’s self-authorship framework closely resembles the archetypal theory practiced by Molly Padulo (2006), therapist and executive director of a nonprofit center for women experiencing perinatal mood disorders, and Amy Rees, Assistant Professor of Counseling Psychology at Lewis & Clark College. Padulo and Rees (2006) practice a specific type of integrated therapy for women struggling with eating disorders, a clinical condition stemming from similar destructive narratives shared by some adult learners starting college for the first time or returning to complete after an earlier failure to do so.

Padulo and Rees (2006) utilize narrative and archetypal structures to allow women to construct healthy narratives while deconstructing harmful narratives. The therapy leans heavily upon the hero/heroine's journey toward overcoming struggle, specifically breaking down the journey into a progression through certain archetypes, beginning with the Pre-Contemplation stage (Padulo & Rees, 2006, p. 71), which resembles the External Formulas phase in self-authorship. This stage houses the Idealistic Innocent who is unaware of her own destructive beliefs and the Betrayed Orphan who blames those closest to her for her unsatisfying life (p. 72). With both archetypal characters, the person externalizes the problem in an attempt to maintain safe self-perceptions, much like adult students who externalize their desire to graduate from college as "just getting a piece of paper." As long as the earning of the degree is external, success is not as crucial, and failure is not as daunting.

Contemplation is the next stage, and it is at this point that the person begins acknowledging the problem and starts seeking solutions (Padulo & Rees, 2006), quite similar to the Crossroads in self-authorship. It is at this stage of therapy that the Martyr and Altruist are active and will quickly become shadows of the archetypes if taken to the extreme (Padulo & Rees, 2006, p. 74). The Martyr and Altruist represent the deep conviction that other people are important and should be valued more than self, a calling back to the first phase in self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2011), even though it may be characterized in a more positive light.

The next phase is Preparation (Padulo & Rees, 2006, p. 74), and perhaps it is this phase that resonates with the adult college student experience more than any other as it is archetypally linked to the Wanderer. Padulo and Rees (2006) adeptly describe Wanderers as people who are preparing to "take great risk, often leaving what they know and love behind in order to achieve growth and knowledge (p. 75). As Horbacher describes:

To give up a long-standing eating disorder, one that has developed at precisely the same pace as your personality, your intellect, your body, your identity itself, you have to give

up all vestiges of it; and in doing so, you have to surrender some behaviors so old that they are almost primal instincts. (as cited in Padulo & Rees, 2006, pp. 75-76)

While this is certainly true of women overcoming eating disorders, it is also true of people who are readying to walk away from their current identity built on passed down beliefs about themselves and the world they live in (Baxter Magolda, 2008). Kasworm (2008) suggested that for many adult students, going to college can feel self-destructive. Taking this step toward earning a degree can and probably will change them in ways they cannot imagine.

Padulo and Rees' next stage of therapy exhibits the archetypal Warrior (Padulo & Rees, 2006) as the client goes up against obstacles that threaten to impede her progress. This stage can be quite rewarding for the Warrior, according to Padulo and Rees (2006), not because she has learned how to single-handedly overcome all of life's problems, but because she has equipped herself to utilize healthy support systems to continue toward a fulfilling, productive life (p. 77). In Baxter Magolda's world, this is self-authorship. It is within this support system that the woman learns to overcome nagging doubt, fear of success, and the draw of familiarity from the old way of life. The Warrior fights against these by first expecting them to materialize and defeating them with newfound healthy narratives that are already proving to be positive additions to her life (Padulo and Rees, 2006), much like adult students learn to silence false external narratives that prevent them from achieving self-authorship.

The journey does not end with action, however; maintenance is the last and ongoing stage of therapy, and it is here that the Warrior becomes the archetypal Magician, someone who is quite adept at consciously "transforming fear into courage and desperation into hope (Padulo & Rees, 2006, pp. 77-78) when there is the threat of relapsing into old thinking patterns. Padulo and Rees (2006) caution the Magician that continued connection with support systems is vital, even at this stage of confident ability (p. 78) because old stories never quite disappear; their voices simply become weaker as others become stronger (Roesler, 2012). The Magician strongly resembles Baxter Magolda's secured self-authorship. While Padulo and Rees (2006) served their

clients well through the utilization of archetypal structures, the similarities between their therapeutic archetypal framework and Baxter Magolda's (2008; 2011; 2014) framework of self-authorship are striking and further solidify the connection between self-authorship and narratives as constructs of meaning.

Although this study does not analyze archetypal patterns, the different roles and qualities expressed through archetypes in Padulo and Rees' developmental model support the validity of narrative inquiry in the development of self-authorship. By guiding participants to reflect on their own experiences and to examine their understanding of those experiences, researchers build an opportunity for the deconstruction of false narratives (Shields, 2010) that may be preventing the person from moving toward self-authorship. The interview process also supports the reconstruction of more authentic narratives (Shields, 2010) that hold the power to transform the participant's sense of knowing, specifically the person's ability to discern the validity of knowledge forming perceptions of life, self, and others.

Self-Authorship and Narrative Structures in Post-Traditional Students

Post-traditional students are a growing population, and programs need to build curriculum and processes to reflect their needs and offer as many opportunities for growth as are offered to traditionally aged students. In 2011, approximately one-third of the nation's enrolled undergraduates were 25 or older (Mason, 2014, para. 9). According to reported statistics from the National Center for Education Statistics (Hussar & Bailey, 2011), enrollment projections show a 28% increase for students ranging in age from 25-34 between the years of 2008 and 2019, and a 22% increase for students 35 years old and over for the same time span (p. 21). In the state where this study was conducted, post-traditional undergraduate enrollment is expected to reach 314,040 by the 2019-20 academic year, up from 282,740 in 2015-16 (p. 51). In short, there is no lack of post-traditional student presence on college and university campuses. The time for relying on traditional students' experiences to inform higher education's support of post-traditional students is gone, and to better understand this growing population's experience in higher education, it is

imperative to delve into their narratives of experience, starting at the beginning and exploring their reasons for attending college.

Unfortunately, upon deciding to enroll in college, many post-traditional students in the researcher's program share they are there because they "need that piece of paper" so bosses will give them a promotion or spouses will leave them alone. The way they say "piece of paper" sounds contemptuous and is usually accompanied with a wave of the hand indicating a dismissive attitude toward the value of a college degree.

This type of negative disposition toward earning a degree perfectly demonstrates behavior as described by Padulo and Rees (2006). Adult students who externalize the purpose for earning a degree could be based on Innocent/Orphan characteristics that tend to occur when people experience discomfort, fear or doubt (Pearson & Marr, 2003; 2007). Askham (2008) documented such negative feelings of adult students in a longitudinal case study examining the learning experiences of 22 adult students attending college for the first time. Askham's (2008) findings revealed that many adults who enter college as an older adult experience severe anxiety and sense they do not belong. Askham (2008) suggests that the students' fears are due to the unfamiliar territory of higher education juxtaposed to the self-perceived identity of the student. The student senses the incongruence and utilizes the defense mechanism of externalizing discomfort to cope with the schism. The degree is "other," the student is "other," and as long as the two stay separate from "self," all is safe. This behavior perfectly aligns to Kegan's subject-object framework (Kegan, 1982; 1994) contained within Baxter Magolda's self-authorship theory (2008; 2014). The behavior also demonstrates Baxter Magolda's (2011) description of people being pulled back into External Formulas when they feel insecure in their own decision-making, proving again the need to gain a better understand of self-authorship development in post-traditional students in order to provide better support for those instances when students feel pulled back into the lower stages of development.

Self-Authorship as Narrative-based Conceptual Framework

While some narrative studies may explore the content of participants' stories, this study explored the context in which students place the content. For example, while most students have experienced significant obstacles in making it into college, the fact that they have experienced obstacles or even that their obstacles are different, harder or easier than those experienced by others was not the focus of the study. The analysis examined indicators of external or internal influence as students shared their stories describing their decision to enroll in college. The indicators were derived from Baxter Magolda's criteria for development in External Formulas, Crossroads, and Self-Authorship. By way of example, a student in the BAAS program at A&M- Texarkana, shared the following story about his decision to go to college:

I've always considered myself to be a successful man. I work at a local factory, but it didn't take me long to advance to management, maybe five years or so on the floor. I wanted to go to college out of high school, but it did not work out for me at the time.

Through the years and on several occasions, the men I work with would end up hanging around after work, shooting the breeze, talking about hunting, and more times than not, the conversation would drift toward alma maters and the days of college. For a couple of years, I was able to hide my secret—my secret was that I had never gone to college.

One night, the banter in the group moved to specific questions having to do with favorite pranks in college. I listened and laughed along with the others until everyone had shared their favorite story, and then all eyes and grinning faces turned to me. There was no way out, and I finally had to admit to these men who thought of me as their equal that I did not go to college and did not have a degree.

None of them made a big deal out of it and even laughed and made light of it by joking about how much more I knew than they did. Still, I was embarrassed.

I went home that night and felt something I did not expect: anger. I was angry that my family did not have the money to send me to college when I graduated high school. I was angry

with my family for needing me to go to work as a young man to support them. I was angry that my high school counselor did not do her job and get me a scholarship to school. I was angry.

My wife, bless her heart, waited until I calmed, and then she asked me a simple question, “What’s keeping you from going to school now?”

“I can’t go now! I’m too old?”

“What makes you too old? You can’t learn anymore?”

It wasn’t that I couldn’t learn anymore; it was that I would be embarrassed to walk into a classroom full of eighteen and nineteen year olds who probably knew more than I did. My pride would not let me stoop to that.

I muddled around in that state for two years before finally realizing that I wanted to get a degree, not to get a better job, but for myself. I finally realized that the only person insisting on a certain timeframe in which to earn a degree was me, and I was finished keeping myself from accomplishing a lifelong goal. I could do it, and I would do it. (Myers, 2014, pp. 54-55)

The above narrative is true, and the student did go on to earn his degree. The story also is an excellent example of the rich data that can be collected when utilizing an integrated framework of exploring self-authorship through narratives as constructs of meaning. The student’s story reveals that his development stretched from the early stages of External Formulas to the later stages of the Crossroads, possibly even taking a step in self-authorship, something that could be better determined with follow-up questions in the interview session.

Conclusion

Post-traditional students enter college many times on the cusp of recognizing their current ways of seeing and experiencing life cannot accommodate the complex, nuanced life going on around them (Baxter Magolda, 2014; Kegan, 1994). Unfortunately, broaching the Crossroads is as far as many of them go in the journey toward attaining self-authorship; they fall short in developing “the internal capacity to define one’s [own] beliefs, identity and social relations” (Baxter Magolda, 2008, p. 269). In today’s complex world full of ambiguities in professional and

personal life, self-authorship is a must if one is to fully enjoy human being (Kegan, 1982, 1994). Those who work with post-traditional students in higher education, therefore, have a responsibility to support and encourage self-authorship development along with academic and technical skill development. Not to do so would be abandoning the commitment to the holistic development of all students, including post-traditional students (Baxter Magolda, 2016; Baxter Magolda & Taylor, 2016).

While this study's findings do not offer the benefit of broad generalizations, they do offer a snapshot of the developmental needs of post-traditional students upon which to build more research focused on post-traditional students' holistic growth through degree attainment. In a time when states are exploring ways for adults to attain some type of post-secondary credential, research such as this can help keep higher education's focus on the whole-student development approach, rather than forsaking the more involved journey toward self-authorship for a shorter, less rewarding path. Through the study's recognizing and exploring the cognitive qualities of narrative analysis and the transforming empowerment of self-authorship, adult students and those who lead them have the beginnings of a framework upon which to build future research promoting holistic student development for post-traditional students.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to explore self-authorship in post-traditional students as revealed through the personal narratives of adult learners enrolled in a Northeast Texas regional university's degree completion program. The study's focus was to collect student narratives describing their meaning-making processes involved in their decisions to seek a baccalaureate degree as a post-traditional student. Included in this chapter is a description of narrative inquiry as a method of study and why it was selected for this study, as well as relevant information pertaining to setting, participants, data collection and analysis, participant rights, and potential limitations of the study.

Narrative and its role in meaning making dates back to Aristotle (Reissman, 2008, p. 4), and it can be argued that stories are, in fact, the "oldest and most natural form of sense making" (Jonassen & Hernandez-Serrano, 2002, p. 66). There is little argument concerning the utility of narrative in the role of cognitive understanding and organization (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Merriam, 2009; Riessman, 2008); however, not until the early 1990s did narrative inquiry become a popular method of research (Merriam, 2009, p 32). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explained the rationale for extending narrative's utility to include systematic study as a natural progression by proposing "if we understand the world narratively, as we do, then it makes sense to study the world narratively" (p. 17).

Narrative inquiry as a method of study examines "how [a subject's] story is constructed, what linguistic tools are used, and the cultural context of the story" (Merriam, 2009, p. 33). More specifically, Bruner (2002, as cited in Riessman, 2008) contends that narratives "structure perceptual experience, organize memory," and work as constructive forces in "individuals... becom[ing] the autobiographical narratives by which they tell about their lives" (p. 10). In other words, narrative inquiry is not only about better understanding participants' experiences; it is

about better understanding the on-going, constructive role of narrative in shaping the individual who is sharing the story. Narrative is not only a meaning-making tool; it is also a meaning-shaping tool, which lends transformational value to narrative inquiry in general and more specifically to this study that sought to build a foundation of understanding about the development of self-authorship in post-traditional students.

Setting for Study

Because the study focuses on post-traditional students who mostly work during traditional hours and attend classes online or in the evenings, the study took place after hours and on weekends at the study site, a small regional university in Texas, and was housed within a degree completion program that serves post-traditional students aged 25 and older. Interviews were conducted on campus in a reserved conference room dedicated to the needs of the study, including being equipped with comfortable seating and the technology required to record the interviews. The conference room, as well as the time of day, was conducive to conversation and privacy. Because the researcher currently serves as the coordinator of the university's degree completion program, she had full access to the chosen setting and had no problems procuring the room for the study.

Participants of Study

After receiving the IRB approval to proceed with the study, participants were selected using purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2013, p. 155) based on the following criteria: Participants must

1. Be twenty-five years old or older
2. Be an enrolled student in the degree completion program
3. Be in his/her first or second semester as an enrolled student
4. Not a current student in one of the researcher's courses

Because this study's purpose is to gain a better understand of self-authorship experience in post-traditional students, specifically their meaning-making processes in determining to enroll in

college, and to use the gained knowledge to inform future curriculum and program development, the above criteria helped narrow the field of study to post-traditional students who are beginning their degree-seeking journey. As such, they were able to provide a window into the timeframe in which program and curricular enhancements should be provided.

The university's institutional data office assisted in providing a pool of students meeting the above criteria to whom emailed invitations were sent. Interested students were instructed to email the researcher if they were interested in participating in the study. To encourage interested students to respond, the program specialist of the degree-completion program contacted each prospective participant in the generated pool to make sure he or she received the email and understood the process for expressing interest in joining the study.

Upon receiving the email stating a student's interest, the researcher emailed consent forms for research by the University of New England as well as the study site. In addition to the consent forms, interested students also received an overview of the purpose of the study; what to expect in the interviews; the procedures followed to protect their privacy, including the use of pseudonyms; and what topics they could expect to discuss. Participants were determined by the order in which informed consent was finalized, resulting in ten participants.

Data Collection

Data collected in the study was in narrative form and compiled within the setting of semi-structured interviews with questions designed to give participants relative boundaries in the stories they shared while also allowing freedom to share details as they chose. Each interview, lasting approximately 90 minutes, was recorded for the purpose of providing the transcription service an audio file. The interviewer refrained from taking notes so as not to distract from the conversational atmosphere supporting the participants' sharing their stories.

The interview room was reserved for the researcher and the participant only, and the researcher's role was to prompt the participant as little as possible during the storytelling. Interjections by the researcher were limited to clarifying questions such as, "Why do you think

you reacted that way, what makes you think that, or why do you think they did that?” Other guiding questions available for use were, “What struggles did you have in this experience, have you had those types of struggles before, would you do anything differently now or in the future?” Each participant required a different level of interjecting questions from the interviewer, but all questions were based on the purpose of collecting narrative data that explored the following:

1. What indicators of self-authorship dimensions—specifically areas of epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal development—are revealed in the self-narrated experiences of post-traditional students describing their decision to enroll in a degree completion program?
2. Within each of the three dimensions of self-authorship, what characteristics of placement and/or movement along self-authorship’s continuum of phases, ranging from External Formulas to Crossroads to Self-Authorship, are present in students’ decision-making narratives?

The following questions and requests were utilized to help guide the participants’ narratives and to better ensure the type and depth of responses to assist in the study’s exploration of self-authorship:

1. Tell me a little about yourself: your background, work, family, etc.
2. If you were to construct a story of your life, who would play the role of the good guys in the story? You can use pseudonyms or even omit names and relationships altogether if you prefer.
 - a. Why do you think you see them in this way?
 - b. Are these people aware of your perceptions of them? Why or why not?
3. Who would play the role of the bad guys in your story? The same freedom to use names and relationships or not still applies.
 - a. Why do you think you see them in this way?
 - b. Are these people aware of your perceptions of them? Why or why not?

4. Did you attend college right after high school?
 - a. If not, what is the story behind choosing not to go?
 - b. If you did attend college right after high school, what is the story of your deciding to drop out in that initial attempt?
5. What made you decide to earn your bachelor's degree at this point in your life?
 - a. When did you first start thinking about it?
 - b. What encouragement—from yourself, others, and your personal situation—did you experience?
 - c. What challenges—in your thinking, actions, and relationships—did you experience as you considered enrolling in college?
 - d. How did you deal with the support you received as well as the challenges you experienced?
 - e. What people in your life held the most sway in your decision to become a college student?
 - i. Did they encourage your going to college or discourage it?
 - ii. What makes their opinion so valuable to you?
 - f. Now that you are an official college student, what would say is the reason for your being here?

Because the interview was semi-structured, the degree to which the listed questions were utilized was determined in each interview by the details of each participant's stories and whether or not those details sufficiently supported the purpose of the study.

Analysis of Findings

As each interview was completed, the audio recording of the participant's stories were submitted to REV.com, a professional transcription service. When each transcription was completed and returned, the researcher read through the transcript several times to identify significant statements that illustrated Baxter Magolda's (2011) self-authorship dimensions

(Epistemological, Intrapersonal, and Interpersonal) and phases (External Formulas, Crossroads and Self-Authorship).

To assist with the analysis, assessment guides based on the coding designed by Baxter Magolda and King (2012; Baxter Magolda & Taylor, 2016) for the Wabash National Study (WNS) qualitative measure were utilized to differentiate participants' positions along the journey toward self-authorship. The coding is represented in Table 3.1 and includes Baxter Magolda's self-authorship phases along with a brief description of subsets and accompanying coding.

Table 3.1

Self-Authorship Assessment Framework and Coding

Coding	External			Crossroads			Internal or Self-Authorship		
	Ea	Eb	Ec	E(I)	E-I	I-E	I(E)	Ia	Ib
	Ea: Unquestioningly rely on external authorities			E(I): Awareness of need for internal voice			Ia: Trust internal voice to refine beliefs, identity, relationships		
	Eb: Tensions with relying on external authorities			E-I: Actively work on constructing internal voice			Ib: Use internal voice to build philosophy of life		
	Ec: Recognize shortcomings of relying on external authorities			I-E: Listen to internal voice			Ic: Live out internal commitments		
				I(E): Cultivate internal voice to mediate most external sources					

Note: Adapted from *Student Services: A Handbook for the Profession* edited by Susan R. Jones, John H. Schuh, and Vasti Torres, 2016, p. 156. (Permission to adapt table requested from John Wiley & Sons on 1-16-17)

The coding illustrates the presence and strength of the External (E) and Internal (I) Voices, respectively, and indicates dominance or equality by encapsulating the code in parentheses to show when it is inferior to the other voice and removing the parentheses to indicate dominance. In addition, the External and Internal Voices are depicted as having three levels of strength in the External and Internal dimensions with the level of strength indicated by lowercase letters. For example, Ea is the External Voice at its strongest within the External phase, and Ib is the Internal Voice at mid-strength in the Internal phase of development.

For each narrative provided by the participants, the coding matrix was used to assess students' positions along the journey to self-authorship. The codes, however, were not used to quantify the results because the purpose of the study was to gather rich stories to inform future curriculum development utilizing self-authorship theory. Furthermore, as Creswell (2013) states, "a count conveys that all codes should be given equal emphasis, and it disregards that the passages coded may actually represent contradictory views" (p. 185). Therefore, while coding was utilized for assessment purposes, it was not used to quantify results. It was used to construct a vocabulary with which to discuss the findings in a qualitative manner and to keep that discussion more precise. In addition to these benefits, utilizing *a priori* codes developed by Baxter Magolda and King (2012), will enable any future research stemming from this study to have a foundational assessment method allowing extension of findings and facilitating comparison of those findings with similar studies.

Participant Rights

Because qualitative research, specifically narrative inquiry, inherently deals with the core of the human experience and utilizes the precious and sometimes private stories people keep close to their hearts, ethical consideration must undergird all phases of the research project. In this study, all participants were provided an informed consent form identifying the participating parties, including the University of New England and the study site, which included a thorough explanation of the study and its purpose and procedures. Confidentiality was protected through location and scheduling of interviews as well as by using pseudonyms for participants in the study. All collected data and related products were stored on the researcher's private computer and protected by password.

Potential Limitations

Because this study focused on understanding the level of self-authorship being experienced by participants, and because the study limited the number of participants to ten to gain a deeper understanding of each person's experience, the findings in the study are limited to

the population and study site and cannot be generalization to other settings. Also, only students who were enrolled in the degree completion program at the study site were included in the study; therefore, any findings that lead to better support for this program's students will not necessarily extend to post-traditional students enrolled in other programs. In subsequent research, it would benefit to study these other student populations to compare findings, and to expand participant selection to more equally represent men and women to explore issues of gender as they may affect self-authorship.

In addition, as the coordinator of the degree completion program at the study site, the researcher has anecdotally experienced what was expected as an outcome of this study: adult students enter college with low levels of mature development in terms of self-authorship. The possibility of this pre-conceived idea was guarded against as interviews are conducted. The researcher refrained from asking leading questions, and made a conscious effort to listen for and identify any and all evidence that would refute this supposition. This approach was important, especially since analysis opened up a more complex understanding of self-authorship in post-traditional students.

Lastly, the researcher decided not to fully disclose to the participants the nature of self-authorship and its role in the study. If students had been made aware of those details, it is possible that they might have structured stories in inauthentic ways in order to align with a perceived goal. Instead, participants were informed about the purpose of the study in more general terms, as suggested by Creswell (2013). The reported purpose, then, was to explore adult learner development, rather than to explore self-authorship development. The broadening of the purpose to its topical, superlative category honored the researcher's ethical responsibility while protecting the authenticity of the participants' narratives.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

As already discussed, the intent of this research was to extend the study of self-authorship to the post-traditional student population, specifically within a small, regional university's degree completion program so that future curriculum and program development can benefit from the gained knowledge. This study focused on the single experience of ten post-traditional students deciding to enroll in a degree completion program to earn their bachelor's degree as that decision relates to the meaning-making components found in the theory of self-authorship. After offering a brief description of participant data, this chapter will present an overview of the study's analysis methodology and deliver findings as they relate to the following research questions:

1. What indicators of self-authorship dimensions—specifically areas of epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal development—are revealed in the self-narrated experiences of post-traditional students describing their decision to enroll in a degree completion program?
2. Within each of the three dimensions of self-authorship, what characteristics of placement and/or movement along self-authorship's continuum of phases, ranging from External Formulas to Crossroads to Self-Authorship, are present in students' decision-making narratives?

The chapter will conclude with a summary of the findings and how they relate to the overall purpose of the study: to begin gathering the necessary data to increase understanding of post-traditional students, beginning with their meaning-making processes in deciding to enroll in a degree completion program. Findings will be utilized to inform program planning and curriculum design to enable better support systems for adult learners coming into higher education, specifically the program represented in this study.

Participant Data

Ten students enrolled in a degree completion program at the research site participated in the study and were selected according to the following IRB-approved criteria:

1. Be twenty-five years old or older
2. Be an enrolled student in the degree completion program
3. Be in his/her first or second semester as an enrolled student
4. Not a current student in one of the researcher's courses

As declared in the invitation to participate (Appendix A), the first ten eligible students to reply to the emailed invitation and return their signed consent form were selected as participants of the study. The process of selection encouraged timeliness in response but resulted in a largely homogenous research group (See Table 4.1). Nine out of ten participants were female, and all but four of the group fell into the 31 to 40 age range.

Table 4.1

Participant Information

Pseudonym	Male/Female	Age Range	Years in the Workforce
Paul	Male	31-40	19
Patty	Female	51-60	20
Wanda	Female	61-70	25
Debbie	Female	51-60	18
Kaitlin	Female	31-40	20
Corina	Female	31-40	9
Janice	Female	41-50	25
Angie	Female	31-40	12
Evelyn	Female	31-40	10
Vanessa	Female	31-40	15

To protect the confidentiality of the study and its participants, students will be referred to by their researcher-assigned pseudonym for the remainder of this and any subsequent study-related documents.

Analysis Methodology

One-on-one interviews were conducted over a three-day period, and participants provided narrative responses to questions pertaining to their life story as well as how and when the decision to enroll in college fit within that journey. The interviews were recorded, and the audio files were transcribed through REV.com, a professional transcription service.

While participants checked their transcripts for accuracy, the researcher listened to each recorded interview twice and read through each transcript a minimum of three times. The goal of each listening and reading was to become familiar with the content and to begin recognizing significant statements that aligned with Baxter Magolda's (2011) self-authorship phases as illustrated by *a priori* codes (See Table 4.2) developed by Baxter Magolda and King (2012) to assess self-authorship's three dimensions of development: epistemological, intrapersonal and interpersonal (Baxter Magolda, 2008; 2011).

After participants reported no corrections to the transcripts, the researcher downloaded each transcript and conducted a three-step color-coding process. First, each significant statement was color-coded to indicate which dimension of development each statement reflected. The color coding was as follows: green for Epistemological, blue for Intrapersonal, and yellow for Interpersonal Dimension development. Next, each significant statement was also coded according to Baxter Magolda's (2011) three phases of growth: External Formulas, Crossroads, and Self-Authorship. Finally, each phase was coded as it aligned to Baxter Magolda's and King's (2012) *a priori* codes (See Table 4.2). The three cycles of coding followed a general to specific process, resulting in a deductive system of analysis that yielded the following findings as they relate to the study's research questions.

Presentation of Results

The following narrative analysis presents information garnered from the above-described three-step deductive coding system while adhering to Baxter Magolda's (2011) self-authorship framework. Each section details one of the participant's narratives as it relates to the student's

overall self-authorship experience and then presents findings specific to the participant's decision to enroll in college and how that decision reflects placement and/or movement along self-authorship's continuum of phases. In addition, each participant's degree of demonstrated self-authorship is discussed as it aligns to the following *a priori* codes created by Baxter Magolda and King (2012). The codes serve to further delineate levels of self-authorship within Baxter Magolda's (2008; 2011) three main phases and enhance the model's ability to not only define growth from phase to phase, but to also reveal incremental growth between phases.

Table 4.2

Self-Authorship Assessment Framework and Coding

	External			Crossroads			Internal or Self-Authorship			
Coding	Ea	Eb	Ec	E(I)	E-I	I-E	I(E)	Ia	Ib	Ic
	Ea: Unquestioningly rely on external authorities			E(I): Awareness of need for internal voice			Ia: Trust internal voice to refine beliefs, identity, relationships			
	Eb: Tensions with relying on external authorities			E-I: Actively work on constructing internal voice			Ib: Use internal voice to build philosophy of life			
	Ec: Recognize shortcomings of relying on external authorities			I-E: Listen to internal voice			Ic: Live out internal commitments			
				I(E): Cultivate internal voice to mediate most external sources						

Note: Adapted from *Student Services: A Handbook for the Profession* edited by Susan R. Jones, John H. Schuh, and Vasti Torres, 2016, p. 156.

In the following narrative excerpts and analyses, phases of demonstrated self-authorship are coded according to the above *a priori* codes and marked in italics.

Participant #1

“Paul,” who is in his upper thirties, holds three associate's degrees and only started working toward his bachelor's degree in the last year. When in junior high, he wanted to be an EMT and maybe even a doctor, but by the time he graduated high school, he was settled on EMT school because he was “not going to be in college 'til he [was] 30!” He added, “Well, now I look

back on that, 30 came and went a long time ago, and here I am now. Basically, finally graduating with my bachelor's degree."

Paul said he always wanted to go to college but "school was something that was never pushed on [him]." He credited this lack of "pushing" as possibly the reason he "didn't really pursue [school]." According to Paul, his father taught him that "you work with your back; you don't work with your mind" to provide for your family. Paul conveyed that he holds tremendous respect for his father, a man "who has worked hard all his life," and was quick to point out that he admires his dad even though he does not always agree with him. One such point of disagreement was when Paul decided to return to school in his late thirties to earn his bachelor's degree. His dad told him, "You're a grown man. You're almost 40 years old. It's time to grow up and just be what you are."

In addition to his father, there was another person in Paul's life who thought his decision to return to school was a bad idea. That person was his brother whom Paul described as a big "naysayer" who thinks "education is stupid." Recalling the day when he told his brother that he was going back to college, Paul said his brother looked at him and asked, "Why don't you just be content where you're at?" Paul responded, "I am content where I'm at, but I know I can never go further if an opportunity presents itself. If a door opens, I want to know that I have it."

Even though Paul has two people very close to him discouraging his current educational path, he does not seem to hold their comments and behaviors against them. Assessing the situation between he and his father, he smiled and said, "That's just him; that's his generation that he grew up in, and I don't fault him for that." Speaking of his brother, he recalled a time in his own life that he did not think further education was necessary. He then projected hope that his brother would go back to school one day, too, and added, "He'll learn that. It's just I can't tell him nothing because I'm his brother." Without a hint of resentment toward the opinions of his father and brother, Paul reiterated his commitment to earn his bachelor's degree. He simply stated he had "decided that's what [he] was going to do. It just felt right."

Paul's story demonstrates presence in all three of Baxter Magolda's dimensions of development. In the epistemological dimension (How do I know what I know?), he seems to be in the crossroads in that he has begun to *listen to his own internal voice* to make decisions, which places him at the third level of the Crossroads Phase. However, he also demonstrates some indication that he simultaneously lingers in the External Formulas phase when speaking about his experience in college. He says he enjoyed his EMT school, but the courses he is currently in were too focused on "psychology stuff and all of the different types of how do you learn and why do you do this." Paul says he has "no interest in" that kind of thinking "at all," which indicates he prefers the comfort of *relying on externally established knowledge* over the challenging work of using his *internal voice to build a philosophy of life*.

This avoidance of introspection also speaks to Paul's intrapersonal development (How do I understand myself?). In the interview, he was comfortable speaking about his life journey in terms of his work and his interaction with others along the way. He evaded, however, expounding on matters requiring introspection. For example, when describing turning points in his career history, he preferred to speak in general terms, and when prompted to share his thinking process leading up to those decisions, he replied, "It just wasn't a place for me to be. I just didn't feel like I was supposed to be there." His description of why he decided to pursue a bachelor's degree was similar in depth. His goal was to gain the credentials necessary to advance within his career, and while he added that advancing his education was "growing [him] as a person," he quickly moved the conversation back to how the degree would "open doors" within his field of practice. Paul's reluctance to self-examine in situations in which he experiences *tensions concerning external authorities*, suggest that he currently operates from External Formulas in the Intrapersonal Dimension.

Paul has learned to cope relatively well, however, in the Interpersonal Dimension (How do I understand others). When describing how he dealt with his father's and brother's objections to his returning to college in his late thirties, Paul stated that he did not fault them. He understood

his father's objections as coming from "his generation that he grew up in" and added that he did not "fault him for" his opinion or his expressing it. He demonstrates the same trust in his *internal voice concerning the return to school when dealing with the relationship with his brother* and his brother's lack of support for Paul's decision to return to college. All of this indicates that Paul has crossed over into the first level of Self-Authorship in the Interpersonal Dimension of development. He is actively engaging in interdependent relationships even during conflict.

Paul's overall journey toward self-assessment is varied across the dimensions of development as well as the phases across those dimensions. As Figure 4.1 shows, his most advanced area of development is in the Interpersonal Dimension, but even within that dimension there is still room for growth in the self-authorship journey. Paul's epistemological development

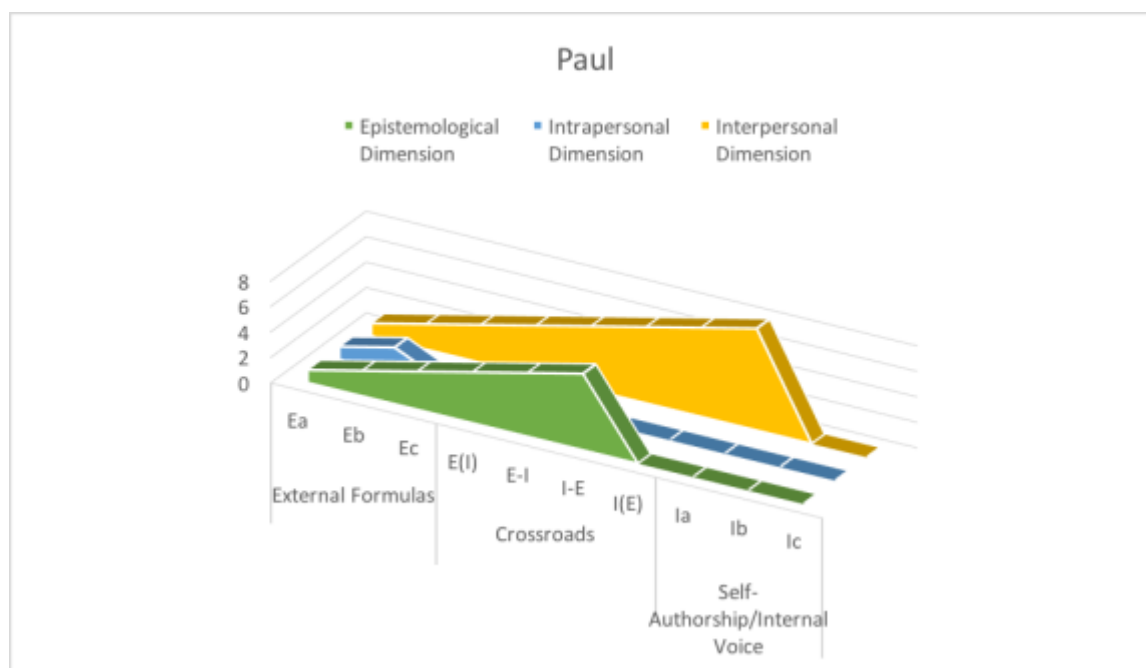


Figure 4.1. Paul's overall Self-Authorship development

is at a productive level even though it does not reach the level of his interpersonal development. At this advanced stage of the Crossroads, the internal voice shows momentum toward self-authorship and has already gained significant strength over external voices of authority, although the tendency to fall back into earlier phases may continue as the sense of self develops. The area

showing the lowest level of development, according to the participant's shared narrative and the researcher's interpretation of that narrative, is in the area of intrapersonal development. Paul, himself, indicated that he was uncomfortable with and disinterested in actively pursuing exercises to develop this area; therefore, the low-end intrapersonal result is not unexpected.

In the specific area of meaning-making as it relates to the decision to return to school, Paul showed a strong leaning towards Self-Authorship in the Interpersonal Dimension. He clearly demonstrated that he was *listening to his internal voice* when talking to influential people who exhibited strong opposition to his decision. He also, *managed the relational conflict* surrounding that decision by defining others' reactions within the context of their experiences and belief systems without feeling the need to condemn them or alter his decision based on their expectations. In the same decision-making scenario, however, Paul demonstrated a less-developed level of self-authorship in the Intrapersonal and Epistemological Dimensions. His reasoning for returning to school from an epistemological perspective stemmed from the desire to meet the requirement of having a bachelor's degree to advance at work. While there is nothing wrong with such a pragmatic reason, it is still linked to external formulas and therefore does not rise to the level of self-authorship that is more aligned with the development of *beliefs, identity, and relationships*. Paul's demonstration of self-authorship, then, exhibits that self-authorship exercised in one dimension does not necessarily mean it is exercised in other dimensions.

Participant #2

"Patty" is in her sixties and earned an associate's degree at her local community college before entering the degree completion program at the study site. Her father was a doctor who always encouraged her to pursue her education after high school graduation, but a family tragedy took her father away from her just before her sixteenth birthday. The death of her father has played a significant role in the choices she has made in life, the first being the decision to marry her high school sweetheart her senior year in high school. Soon after marrying, her husband's controlling tendencies surfaced, beginning with his refusal to allow her to take the college

entrance exam she had scheduled before marrying him. She recounted the story of her senior year as the bedrock for a very troubled life ahead:

My senior year, I took, well, I signed up to take my SATs in [name of city]. The day before, I decided not to go because my ex-husband said I wasn't going to need it. I knew when I decided not to do it, it was going to be one of the biggest mistakes I ever made. Well, anyway, my senior year, probably three months before I graduated, my mom moved to a different state. So I was thinking, "Okay, where am I going to live? What am I going to do?" Well, my ex-husband, "Let's just get married." Right there, two months before I graduated, I got married. Pretty much in the back of my mind I was trying to think, "How am I going to be able to do college?" I thought, "Well, he'll let me go to..." Because [local community college] had started. No, he would not. Even though his mother and his sister took a couple of little computer classes, I could not even go with them. Anyway, I put that out of the back of my mind because I knew it wasn't going to happen because he was the one working. He controlled the money, I didn't.

Patty was a high performing student in high school, demonstrated marked promise in the field of accounting, and was recognized for her intellect, skill, and work ethic at every job she worked. Unfortunately, as she reports, her husband refused to allow her to build on those competencies through workshops, certificate programs, or continuing education hours outside those provided through work. He only "let [her] go to work" because they were in debt due to medical bills resulting from chronic health issues with their two children.

After being married to her husband for 27 years, Patty made the decision to leave. Her husband's threatening to make her quit her job, her only outlet where she did not feel suppressed, was the impetus for leaving and filing for divorce. Patty's divorce was final in December, and she immediately began seeking information on how to begin school at her local community college and was an enrolled student by the fall semester. She was forty-five years old. Patty has

been a steady student throughout the years, first earning her associate's degree and now earning her upper division hours toward a bachelor's degree at the study site.

Patty's journey toward Self-Authorship demonstrates a classic progression through Baxter Magolda's dimensions and phases. In the Epistemological Dimension, Patty yielded her desire to attend college to an External Formula that dictated that wives should submit to their husband's decisions. *Relying on external authority* eventually led to *tension* as Patty began *recognizing the shortcomings of such reliance*, specifically her husband's recent demand that she quit her job. She was at a Crossroads and became *aware of the need to not only develop her own internal voice but to listen to and cultivate that voice to lead her when interacting with external authorities*. Patty describes this phase as the point at which she became someone new. She further explained, "I am not the same woman I was ten years ago. That woman would not be sitting here telling you these things." The new Patty had grown into *trusting her own voice to examine, deconstruct, and reconstruct an understanding of who she was and wanted to be, a life philosophy* designed to lead her in her thinking and behavior. Today, she *lives from that philosophy*.

Patty's intrapersonal development has followed along the same path toward Self-Authorship. She began thinking of herself in terms of her husband's story about her. She was a housewife and mother who did not need to extend her education. That perception of herself continued up to the time she attended her first college course. She had to overcome her fear that she would not "be able to keep up with [the] younger kids" in the class. They had just graduated high school, and the information was fresh in their minds. She had "just been a wife and mother" and would certainly be "the oldest person in the class." Still, she quieted the external voices and instead *listened to her internal voice* that said she could do this. By doing so and continuing to heed her internal voice, Patty has *developed a sense of self from within*. She emphatically states that she now "knows what she wants," and external distractions do not "bother" her any longer.

Lastly, in the area of interpersonal development, Patty also demonstrates a high level of self-authorship, specifically in how she characterizes her ex-husband now that she is out of the marriage. While speaking of her first husband, Patty said, "My first husband, he was the father of my kids...He did not go to college either. In fact, he dropped out of high school his senior year. He got a GED. He really did not believe that a wife should have better education, bring in more money, than he did." Her tone was gracious without being excusing of his behavior. She realized his system of beliefs was the only context from which he could make decisions. In the language of self-authorship, her first husband lived in the opening phase of External Formulas, and she *perceived him within that paradigm when contextualizing her relationship* with him. She continues to *live out her internal commitments* in the realm of interpersonal development, going as far as saying she would not have married her current husband if he had not supported her educational goals.

As Figure 4.2 shows, Patty's self-development is demonstrated at its fullest extent in all

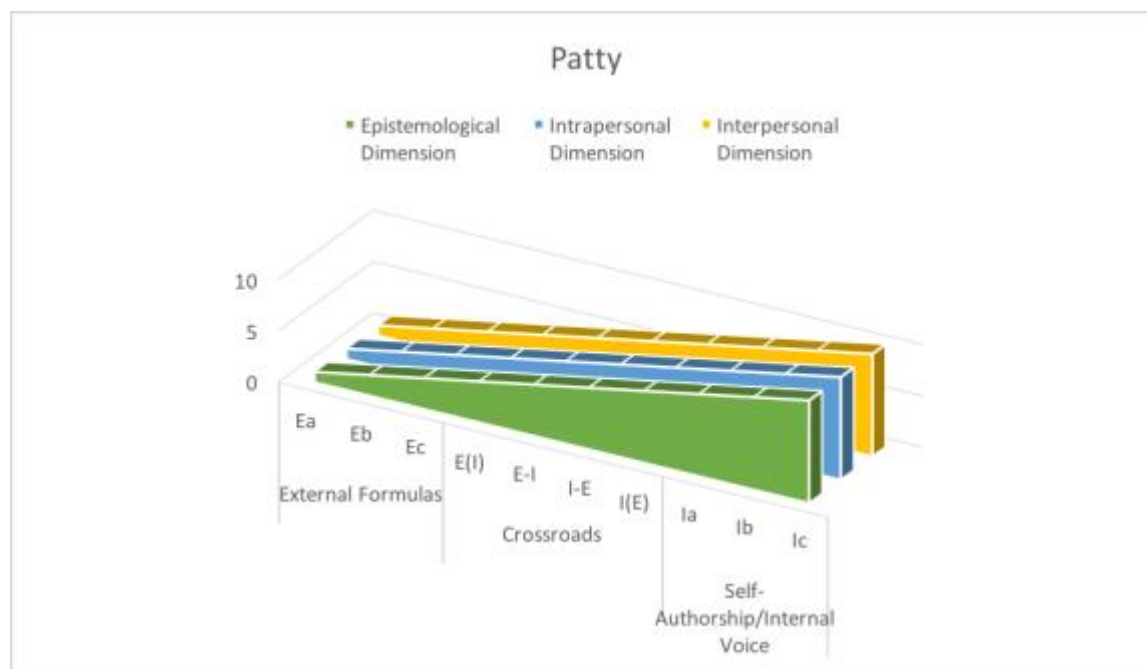


Figure 4.2. Patty's overall Self-Authorship development

three dimensions; however, the incline of growth is also important to note. Patty did not go from External Foundations to Self-Authorship in a single step. Growth is a progression, and in Patty's case, she lived from External Formulas for the first several years of her adult life, specifically from her husband's way of life. In Patty's estimation, she existed in that developmental dimension up until 10 years ago. When asked if there were a specific incident that elicited the change, Patty said, "Yes, it was my divorce. That was the turning point." She went on to explain that when she first started thinking about divorce, she was scared. She thought, "If I leave, how will I make it on my own?"

While Patty certainly would not have recognized it then, those preliminary thoughts of ending her marriage were the beginnings of her internal voice taking shape; she was in the Crossroads between External Formulas and Self-Authorship. The farther into the Crossroads she traveled the louder her internal voice became until she reached the point of knowing what she wanted and the steps she would have to take to get there. She would leave her husband, and she would go to college.

Patty stepped from the Crossroads phase into the Self-Authorship phase and described her thinking as follows:

The day I got divorced, ... I found out that I did not have to be dependent upon someone else to make me happy, give me money, buy me food, put a roof over my head. I could do that myself.

Here was the reconstruction of Patty's beliefs, identity, and relationships based on her own story about herself.

In the context of this study's research questions concerning students' meaning-making in deciding to return to college, it appears Patty's experience in deciding to go to college operated in tandem, or at least in sequence, with her decision to divorce her husband. Because the divorce came before enrolling in college, it may be that Patty attained self-authorship through the journey toward independence from her husband, and her enrollment in college extended from the

self-authorship already established by the earlier event. Important to note, however, is that Patty's narrative indicated the driving force behind leaving her husband was the longtime desire to attend college, something that would not happen if she remained in the marriage. Either way, Patty's meaning-making undergirding her decision to enroll in the degree completion program demonstrates a self-authored person *living out her internal commitments* based on her own *internal voice* and *philosophy of life*, which means her decision was not due to external voices pushing her toward that decision. It was her desire, her decision in full.

Participant #3

"Wanda's" story, similar to Patty's, included chapters of oppression and abuse that Wanda described as years of "domestic violence." Wanda was married to a "physically abusive husband" for 23 years and had two children with him. She is now in her late sixties and works at a domestic violence center where she is also a founding board member.

When describing her marriage to her first husband, Wanda explains,

I'd always thought I would be with him 'til I died. That was just the way I was brought up, and I loved him, and no matter what he did, I believed he would change, and then I learned that we can't change other people; we can only change ourselves.

The words "then I learned" encapsulate the energy that moves a person from one developmental stage to another, but with self-authorship, *what* is learned determines the developmental phases involved in the learning event.

In the Epistemological Dimension of Self-Authorship, Wanda began her story describing her younger self as someone who did what was expected of her. She explained, "When you graduated from high school...the thing expected was to get married and have kids." That is exactly what she did, based on the belief that external authorities—whether older adults, societal norms, or family expectations—were the best source for good knowledge. Like most high school seniors, Wanda was operating from External Foundations in the Epistemological Dimension

characterized by her *unquestioning reliance on external authorities*, even in matters as important as marriage.

Wanda began moving toward the Crossroads and even ventured into the Crossroads after seeking help from a counselor about her domestic situation. She said, “I learned that I’m stronger than I thought I was, and that I have courage. I learned that I can make my own decisions.” She was describing a point at which she *began listening to her internal voice as a valid source for decision-making*. This growth, however, did not guarantee that she would remain at this level of epistemological development for the rest of her life or even with all decisions.

For example, years after divorcing her first husband and beginning a relationship with a man who would later become her second husband, Wanda, when explaining the reason for seeking a bachelor’s degree, initially stated, “I checked on the BAAS because [name of husband] wanted me to,” showing that it is possible to revert to External Formulas even after operating from the Self-Authorship Dimension. She returned to operating from the higher levels of Self-Authorship, however, once she began seeking her degree. When speaking of her pre-college self, Wanda noted, “I always listened to everybody else and never really used my own thoughts in my brain.” Describing her herself in the present, she smiled and declared, “I’ve learned that I can research anything and find it out, that I have opinions.” This kind of meaning-making strongly indicates a *developing understanding of the internal voice as the source for good knowledge*.

How Wanda understands herself, the Intrapersonal Dimension of identity development, can also be described as a before and after scenario, and like Patty, the incident forming the dividing line was the decision to end her first marriage, or as she stated, “leaving the abuse.” Before that departure, she thought of herself as “scared” and unable to “take care of herself or her children.” After *listening to her internal voice and acting from that voice*, or moving into the Crossroads of Self-Authorship, Wanda grew into a woman who sees herself as competent, smart, and valuable. Again, when talking about how she faces challenges now, her new sense of self is evident.

Challenges before, I probably would have been very, very, maybe more frightened to get into it and to do it. Now, I just go, “Okay, we've got to get this done. Let's see, what's the best way to get to point C if it's A, B, C.” Before, it frightened me and sometimes I might have tried anything because I was probably afraid to do it, and now I'm not.

Here, Wanda’s voice is confident, and that confidence does not stem from someone else’s plan. She believes in her ability to come up with a good plan, and sets out to execute that plan expecting success. Her old understanding of herself, the one based on external authorities and opinions, has been refined by the inner voice. Her new self-identity, *how she understands herself*, is self-constructed by her own inner voice.

Perhaps Wanda’s high level of self-authorship is most evident in the Interpersonal Dimension. She stated that there was a time—before the divorce, before counseling, and before going to college—that she simply did what others said to do. She avoided conflict by being obedient and said, “the before-me, whatever they said, I did.” Again, living from this type of meaning-making strongly suggests that a person is living from External Formulas, yielding to the authority of others to shape and determine one’s own being, and in this case how that being exists in relationship with others.

Wanda reported that she has a wonderful relationship with her parents. She credited them with being the “good guys in [her] life journey because they raised [her] in an environment that was abuse-free.” She also said, “They taught me the values of life. I constantly go back to those.” She added a comment, however, that separates her earlier interpersonal relationship behavior from her current way of interacting with others, in this case with her parents. Wanda stated, “Even though I have different opinions than [my parents] have now, I always go back to those [values they taught me].”

Here, Wanda is demonstrating not only a consciousness of being a separate person from her parents, but an understanding that her relationship with her parents, nor her identity within that relationship, has to be threatened by one another’s opposing ideas. She explained as follows:

I love my mom and dad. They have their opinions, and now, I have mine, and sometimes they're not the same, but that's okay. For instance, my mother. I will say, "Mother, I know that is your opinion; I respect your opinion, but this is mine. Also, if you say things that are going to hurt me, I'm going to tell you. If I say something that hurts you, I want you to tell me, but I have my own opinions." When I first started doing that, of course, they looked at me like, "Wow, where did she come from?"

This type of interaction with others is not limited to Wanda's relationship with her parents. She further clarified her level of commitment and added, "I've even had to have discussions with other people, too, because they want to make you believe the way they believe. I don't, I have my own." This type of interaction with others, the kind that accepts diverse thinking and expects diverse thinking to be accepted, indicates high-functioning self-authorship in the Interpersonal Dimension.

Even though Wanda demonstrates self-authorship in all three dimensions of development (See Figure 3), her narrative reveals at least one instance in which her self-authorship in the Epistemological Dimension reverted to External Formulas. This slipping from placement is normal and can be expected (Baxter Magolda, 2011) as with any growth model. In Figure 4.3, growth in each dimension is represented by an inclined bar, and if Wanda's digression were to be represented in the graphic, her attained self-authorship bar would not be erased when she fell back into an earlier phase. She has built a path to self-authorship, which means when she is ready to travel there again, the path is clear for her to do so.

Wanda's development of self-authorship as it relates to the research questions of this study is evident in that she initially stated she entered the program because her second husband wanted her to. While other areas in her life demonstrate a clear identification with self-authorship, the decision to seek her bachelor's degree seems to be more solidly linked to the External Formulas phase than the Self-Authorship phase in that her meaning-making stemmed from the desire of an external source. This is not to say, however, that Wanda is not seeking the

degree based on her own voice guiding her to do so; it is only to say her narrative did not directly indicate that the college decision was made within the realm of Self-Authorship.

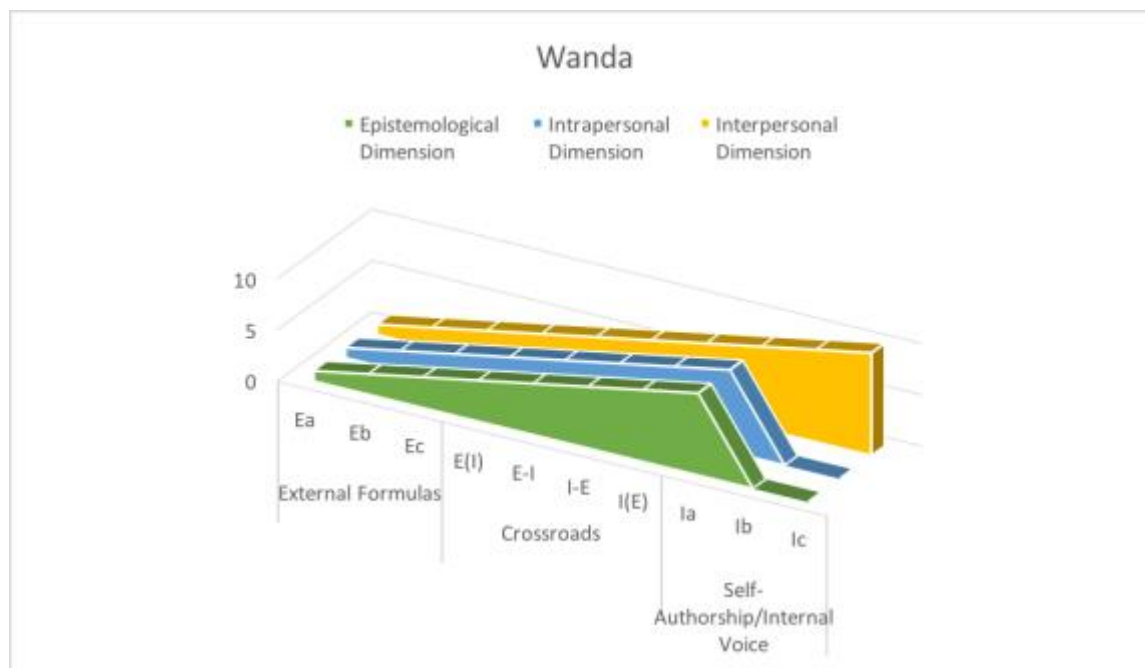


Figure 4.3. Wanda's overall Self-Authorship development

Participant #4

"Debbie" is a para-professional at her local school district and is earning her bachelor's degree in her fifties. While she does not have an associate's degree, she did transfer into the degree completion program with three years of college credit earned right out of high school. In many ways, Debbie's self-authorship story falls into the gap between those three years in college and her return to school as a post-traditional student.

Epistemologically, Debbie has evolved to the point that she realizes knowledge comes from diverse perspectives, and that her own knowledge should stem from her own conclusions rather than the conclusions reached by others. For example, when speaking about her mother, Debbie described her thinking concerning her mother's knowledge this way:

My mother's very intelligent. She never really went to college. She knows a lot, but she doesn't know everything. I used to worry about what she thought and I do. I still honor

my mother greatly. I really do, but I don't really make decisions anymore based on that type of approval. Although she approves, but she doesn't know everything, and she certainly doesn't understand everything.

Debbie demonstrates here that she realizes the limitations of operating from other people's knowledge. She knows that her mother's knowledge cannot guide her in her decisions because that knowledge lacks understanding specific to Debbie's experience of life.

In another area of life, however, Debbie seems to rely heavily on an outer voice of authority in her decision making, specifically with decisions surrounding her attending college and continuing to work.

He's given me permission to quit my job next year and just finish my degree and then see. He's actually given me permission to not work at all if I don't want to. If I just want to substitute teach or tutor, I have permission because we really don't need the daily income. This is Debbie's meaning-making framework when deciding the best path forward with her education, and the person she is referencing in the comments is her husband. While Debbie describes their relationship as being "healthy" and "in a good place," her use of the word "permission" in three consecutive sentences describing her decision-making strongly suggests she is relying on her husband's expertise and knowledge to determine her actions, which indicates that while she understands her knowledge is valuable and valid, her husband's knowledge is still viewed as a little more valuable and valid than her own. She admitted to this herself when she shared, "I always kind of think I'm not quite as smart as he is." She added, "Battled that for a long time. It's gone now, but it took a while." Her words indicate that she is *aware of the need to develop her internal voice*, but her behavior suggests she is *not prepared to act from that voice*, at least in this specific area.

As a young child and up until Debbie was a teenager, she followed typical individuation patterns and relied on exterior authorities to shape how she understood herself, her Intrapersonal Dimension. Her first recollection of self-worth came from her first-grade teacher. Debbie

acknowledged, “Miss [teacher’s name] made me believe in myself back in grade school.” Her self-image suffered, however, in the fifth grade when another teacher did not exhibit warm support toward Debbie. “She wounded me pretty badly, actually,” recalled Debbie as she relayed her memories of her time with that teacher.

She actually told my mother that she and I just didn't get along. We had a personality thing. My mom could still tell you the story. I got a C in deportment, and I'm not a C in deportment kind of kid. I would just do things that rubbed her the wrong way, and I mean it's been a long time. I still kind of remember that ouch feeling.

Again, in high school, Debbie’s sense of self stemmed from someone else’s assessment of her. This time, it was a history teacher, and Debbie described her this way:

She was another one who instilled that sense of you've got something. You're a leader, and I took everything she had, and she kind of helped shape me in high school for when I got off to college. When I did do well, a lot of times it was stuff she taught me how to do, how to write a paper.

She went on to say, “I found myself trying to reach higher and higher to write better papers for her.” Epistemologically, Debbie exhibited *unquestioning reliance on external authorities for her own sense of self*, which aligns her with the Exterior Formulas phase. Again, this is not out of the ordinary or what would be expected from someone in pre-adulthood. Her recall of the memories, however, is in the present, and in the present Debbie described others as “making” her believe in herself, wounding her in ways that she not only remembers but experiences the initial pain with the remembrance, and being the reason for her high performance as a student.

This lingering in the External Formulas phase further evidences itself in Debbie’s description of her interaction with her superintendent upon being hired for her current para-professional role in the district.

I remember her telling me in my interview, "There's no way I would hire a home schooling mom, but I've met your children, and I've seen how they succeed and what

leaders they are, and I know that you did an awesome job of raising them and teaching them, so that is why I am looking at you because I have seen your children.” It really impacted me that even though my kids are my kids, they're themselves, but she saw that I had done a good job in home schooling. I was enough to draw her attention. That began to give me a little bit more of a sense of okay, I have done well.

Hearing such a compliment from a respected figure would no doubt make anyone feel good about himself or herself. It is the last part of the statement, however, that separates experiencing positive feelings from such a comment and *drawing knowledge about one's self from external sources*. Debbie verified that she still operated from the External Formulas phase into her forties when she commented, “I was enough to draw her attention. That began to give me a little bit more of a sense of okay, I have done well.”

Interpersonally, Debbie demonstrates active self-authorship in how she understands others and interacts with them. In describing the people with whom she is more likely to form relationships, she said:

I value someone who's educated. That doesn't mean I don't value people who aren't educated, but I do value people who are willing to look at things with an open mind. Now, I'm not saying throw your brains out, but I would value a person's opinion who'd actually be willing to look at someone else's opinion more than I would someone who has just made up their mind this is how it is.

Debbie, then, is looking for people who have some sense of self-authorship, people who operate from a *philosophy of life that allows and welcomes other perspectives* even when they do not share those perspectives.

Debbie demonstrates this philosophy in her own practice as an educator. In describing a student she works with now, Debbie explained:

I have a Muslim student in my school, and nobody talks to him about his religion or his background, or anything like that. I love it because he came, and I can talk to him and ask

him about things. I'm not afraid of him or what he believes or that it's different. He really connects with me because I do that.

She also expressed enjoyment in participating in a racial unity group on campus:

Sitting there in a diverse group of people who actually are willing to look at the race problem and actually admit that there is one, admit that they're white, and don't have any idea what it's like to be afraid to drive after 10 o'clock on [name of street] for fear they might get pulled over, has been so refreshing. I realized that there are people in [name of town] that I might be able to identify with.

Debbie's identity in the Interpersonal Dimension exhibits a firm commitment toward *living out her philosophy of life* as it relates to how people should interact with one another, and she is leading by example—even when that means being in the minority.

As related in Figure 4, Debbie's self-authorship development is varied across dimensions. While her narrative indicates a strong presence of self-authorship in the Interpersonal Dimension, her story also reveals that the exercise in self-authorship in this dimension does not extend to all relationships, most notably her relationship with her husband. Because Debbie seems to successfully *work from an established, self-directed philosophy for interpersonal relationship* in selected relationships.

Debbie's understanding of herself, the Intrapersonal Development, is not nearly as developed as the Interpersonal Dimension (See Figure 4.4). While she exhibits a *desire to construct her own voice* and sense of self from that source, she still relies on others' ideas about her to validate her self-image, which places her both in the External Formulas and Crossroads phases of the Intrapersonal Dimension of development. In addition, Debbie has begun to hear and *listen to her own thinking* when determining how she knows what she knows. She is beginning to draw more from her own thinking and less from exterior authorities as evidenced by her thoughts concerning her mother's knowledge as it relates to her own thinking.

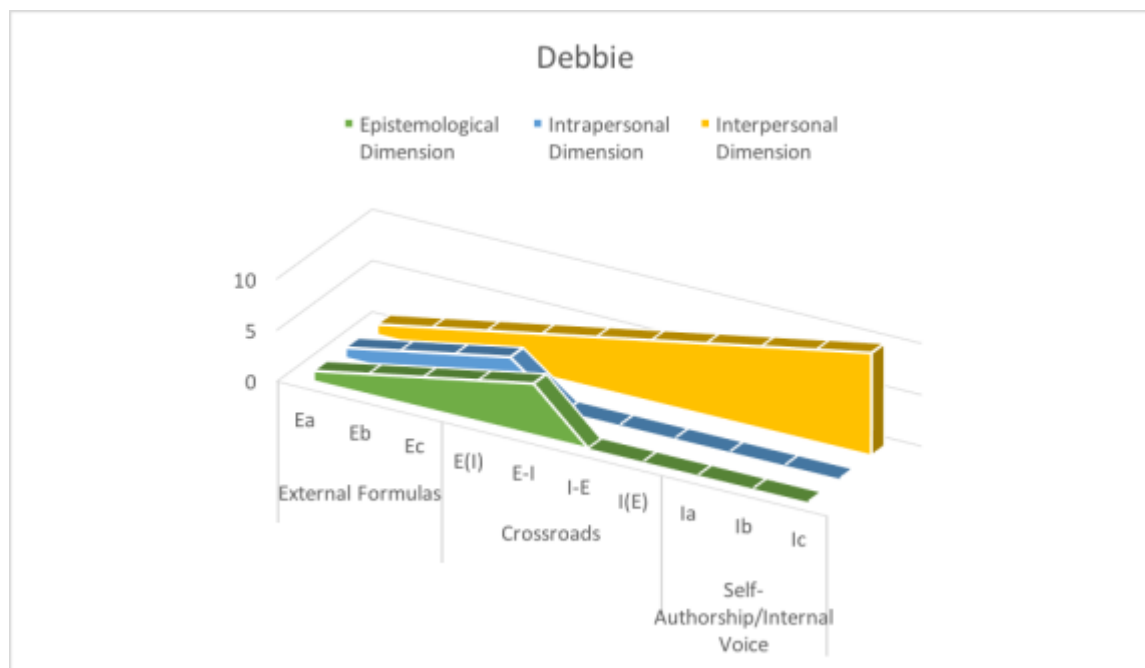


Figure 4.4. Debbie’s overall Self-Authorship development

Like with the rest of Debbie’s narrative, her decision to enroll in college as a post-traditional student in her fifties cannot be assigned to one phase of development. She reported that she initially decided to go back to college as a result of her co-workers saying that she “should go back to school” based on their assessment as a high performer in the classroom setting, which indicates that External Formulas helped inform her decision. However, by the end of her interview, she said earning the degree was more about completing “unfinished business” in her own thinking about herself:

I want to do it. I really want to do it. It's always bothered me that I didn't finish. I mean, I had, I think I transferred in with 84 hours. It's always bothered me that I didn't finish. I know I can.

This places Debbie in the Crossroads with *listening and acting upon her internal voice*, but because she quickly followed the above comment with statements indicating her purpose for seeking a degree is to get the “piece of paper” that will lead her to a “higher pay-grade,” it is doubtful her decision to return to college stemmed from active self-authorship.

Participant #5

“Kaitlin” is the typical “adult learner,” a term she assigned to herself, who went to college right after high school but dropped out before completing because “life happened.” In Kaitlin’s case, the life that happened was meeting and marrying her husband. She does not regret marrying her husband, but in recalling that time in her life, she said:

I didn’t have enough time with my husband. I was young and wanted to spend all that time with him. I regretted it over the years, not going back [to school], but then I had a child. He was a preemie. He had a lot of complications, so it kept getting farther out of my reach.

Kaitlin did return to college 11 years after she left. She is in her thirties now and reported that this time around she is “addicted” to education. Even so, Kaitlin stated that she deals with self-doubt each semester, in each class, with each paper—this, despite her being an honor student who works full-time, raises her son with her husband, and takes on average 18 semester credit hours per semester.

Exploring Kaitlin’s Epistemological Dimension of development, how she knows what she knows, involved getting to know her thinking concerning her upbringing because so much of what she grew up with is still very present in her life today. When describing her background, she simply reported growing up in a very happy family with both parents involved and in which she was the youngest of three daughters. Her narrative also included some detail about her schooling, mainly that she attended private church school and the experience was wonderful. She explained, “I actually loved the private school...I loved learning. I loved sciences...I loved it. I did really well.”

Moving along the timeline, Kaitlin described her parents as not only completely supportive of her as she was growing up but also when she dropped out of college:

They told us we could do anything we ever set our minds to. Whenever I decided to leave school the first time, they didn't discourage me or try to talk me into staying. They knew

at some point that I would go back to that path or find that path. They're very encouraging. They encouraged all three of us you know, do whatever makes you happy. Of course, they preferred school, but just whatever that made us happy, and that's what they pushed us for. Just find your dream and go for it.

These two areas of support, her family and her church, are still very active in shaping Kaitlin's epistemological knowledge. When she described her decision-making processes, Kaitlin shared the following:

I'm always thinking about what would my parents think of this or remembering to pray for God's will and just everything that they...all of those good influences have kind of instilled in me. I always have that in my mind at some point and try to reflect it. My parents would be proud of this, or my pastor would be proud of this. I always try to stay as close to that as I can.

Specific to her mother's influence on her decision-making, Kaitlin described her own behavior as linked to her mother's approval:

I'm always asking her, "Do you think I should do this?" or "What should I do here?" I was just asking her yesterday, "Should I go ahead and just enroll in a regular master's program and not do the ACP, and then do the [state program]?" She'll be 76 this year, and I'm still right there. I need Mommy's advice for stuff, so I can press on.

While Kaitlin shares a close relationship with her mother, it appears that she gains her understanding of her own thinking and opinions largely by drawing from external authorities, in this case, from her mother and her church leaders. Because there appears to be no processing of her own thinking along with the external sources, and she seems *very comfortable with relying on external authorities*, Kaitlin most likely operates from the earliest stage of External Formulas in the Epistemological Dimension of growth.

Within the Intrapersonal Dimension, Kaitlin admitted that she struggles with self-doubt. To explain her perspective of herself, she said, "I'm self-doubting myself all along the way, but I

just don't think I'm good enough." When asked what the source of the doubt may be, she replied:

I don't know, because I've had encouragement my whole life, honestly. I'm not sure where it comes from. It's just something that stays in here somewhere. A little piece in there that just rears its ugly head, yeah. Just constantly, and it seems like one area I'll pick, "Oh I can't do that," and I'll get it in my head, and yeah.

Later on in the interview when discussing why she may not walk at graduation, she said, "I'm nervous ...it's that fear. I have a lot of self-confidence issues"

While it never became clear as to what exterior voice, if any, Kaitlin was listening to concerning her self-image, it was clear that there were some exterior authorities that motivated her to move past her fear, specifically the voices of her professors. She described her reliance on those voices in the following scenario:

I find that some of the greatest inspirations now are the professors, who kind of...when I start my emails, I'm so sorry, I'll write a... any essay I write, I don't consider myself a writer, so I always apologize for it beforehand, before I submit it. I'm so sorry. And they encourage me, and it keeps me going.

In addition to her professors' voices, Kaitlin also seems to thrive on other people's voices cheering her own. When describing an encounter with someone in student services who bragged on her GPA and full-time status, Kaitlin characterized her reaction by stating, "I was just...I'm like, oh that...you know that helped me. Little, small things like that along the way have helped me, because I'm... 'Okay, get excited for me! Yay! I can do this!'"

Again, while these statements within Kaitlin's narrative do not indicate a "cause" for her issues with low self-esteem, they do indicate that she *gathers her understanding of herself as a successful student from external authorities, rather than from her internal voice* based on her own experiences as a student. Also, at this point in her life, Kaitlin does not demonstrate any unease with exterior voices assisting her in this way, which means she is *not at the point of*

recognizing the shortcomings of relying on external authorities.

As with the other post-traditional students, Kaitlin is most developed in the Interpersonal Dimension, even though her growth does not quite extend beyond the Crossroads into Self-Authorship. The relationship in which Kaitlin demonstrates behavior based on her own internal voice is with her mother-in-law. One conflict arising in that relationship had to do with Kaitlin going back to work after the birth of her son. Kaitlin detailed the scenario as follows:

Of course, you have people in your life that may not always encourage you unfortunately. I have my mother-in-law who's one of those people. She's just...wasn't happy because I was a stay-at-home mom up until a few years ago. She wanted to raise our child, so she wasn't the most encouraging. She wasn't thrilled with the situation. She wanted me to go back to work, so she could raise him, and I fought her on that—nicely. I didn't fight her, I mean, but you know, I explained that I wanted to see all my son's milestones and be there for all of that.

Within that same relationship, Kaitlin described a more contentious exchange, once again concerning her child.

She constantly used to try to overmine [*sic*] me. Even little small things like, he was one, and she wanted to give him popcorn. That's a choking hazard. I said, "That's a choking hazard." We were at their house, and she decided to pop him a bag regardless, so I picked him up, and I was telling my husband, "It's time to go," and I walked out the door.

She went on to explain her thinking behind the decision to leave her mother-in-law's home.

I try to remove myself from it, because you don't really win in a situation where it gets heated, and words are said, so other than having words, I decided it's best if I remove myself and just try to let everything simmer down.

Here, Kaitlin has clearly *cultivated her own voice and is acting from that voice*. There is no indication, however, that Kaitlin purposely interacts with her mother-in-law based on any *exercise of refining her understanding of the relationship or how that relationship fits within her*

own philosophy of life. Therefore, Kaitlin's development in the Interpersonal Dimension probably extends to the latter stages of the Crossroads stage without actually crossing into Self-Authorship.

As illustrated in Figure 4.5, Kaitlin's development in the Epistemological and Intrapersonal Dimensions is much less pronounced than in the Interpersonal Dimension.

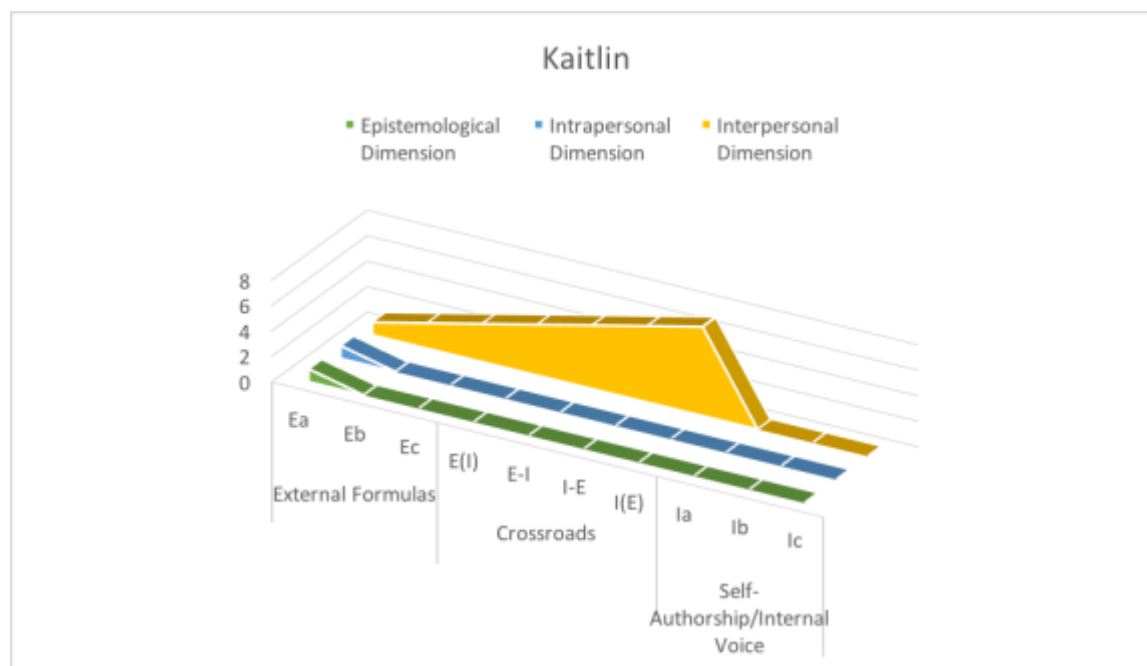


Figure 4.5. Kaitlin's overall Self-Authorship development

The narrative, from the researcher's point of view and analysis, did not reveal a specific cause for such disparity among the dimensions. The overall analysis, then, reflects the developmental growth of Kaitlin in her thirties, well ahead of the time Kegan (1994) suggested that some adults start to reach and practice self-authorship. Even so, Kaitlin is on her way to attaining self-authorship in the Interpersonal Dimension as she has already begun using her internal voice to *mediate some external sources*, specifically her interaction with her mother-in-law. At the time of the interview and based on her narrative response, Kaitlin remains in the External Formulas phase of both the Epistemological and Intrapersonal Dimensions, characterized by her *reliance*

on external authorities to understand herself and supply good knowledge.

Concerning the research questions of this study, Kaitlin demonstrated some level of growth from the beginning of her interview to its end. Initially, Kaitlin described her reasoning for enrolling in the degree-completion program as a means to an end. She stated on several occasions that the degree would enable her to enroll in an alternative teacher certification program, which in turn would allow her to become a teacher. In other words, the seeking of the degree was linked to satisfying an occupational goal. By the close of the interview, Kaitlin's description of her reasoning changed. This time, when asked to identify why she returned to school, she replied:

Self improvement. You know I think everyone should always continue to learn, there's always chances out there to further your knowledge, you know and grow, and I want to be better. Even though that little voice is in there, I want to push that voice aside and get to where I want to be and be the best that I can be. For just myself.

Within an hour's time, and after reflecting on her return to college in the context of reflecting on her life experiences, Kaitlin moved from her degree's purpose being to satisfy an external goal to fulfilling an internal desire, which places her decision-making in the initial steps of the Crossroads phase, *awareness of the need for internal voice actively working on constructing that voice.*

Participant #6

“Corina” is in her late thirties, a wife and mother of two, and she described her life as “boring.” As she began to share her story, however, the details painted anything but a “boring” narrative. To begin, Corina shared the following when reflecting on her birth:

When I was little, my mom actually had me when she was 15. So, right out the gate, I was born to a child, basically. My grandmother helped quite a bit, so that my mom could go back and finish school.

Her father was 23 when Corina was born, and before she was five, her parents had divorced. As she recalled her memories, many of Corina's adult decisions seemed to tie back to her beginning circumstances, including her epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal development, as well as her decision to return to college after dropping out fifteen years earlier.

Corina describes herself as an old soul, someone who has been making her own decisions for most of her life, which she tracked back to her mother's young age when she gave birth to Corina.

I feel like because my mom had me so young that we didn't always have the best relationship. I felt she was so young sometimes and to be honest it was...She's 15 years older than me, and then I'm 12 years older than my sister. It felt like sometimes we were just all three sisters instead of mother and daughters. I always, from the time I was young, had this sense of right and wrong. I always wanted to do what was right. I never really wanted to do something that was going to get me in trouble. Looking back at the mistakes my mom made, I knew her life was not a life I wanted for myself.

Epistemologically, it appears Corina began relying on her own internal voice for knowledge while still a child, probably due to her unique familial structure. She described a practice of drawing upon her own "sense of right and wrong," specifically upon her own assessment and conclusions concerning her mother's choices. Further explaining her childhood thought processes, she said she "[didn't] want to be the kid that [sold] herself short." This sentiment, or way of thinking, reveals someone who is *relying upon her self-created knowledge and listening to that knowledge to plan her own future*, which places Corina at the young age of 12 in the Crossroads of the Epistemological Dimension. Of course, as already shown, this placement is not one of permanency, and Corina's unfolding narrative further supports that supposition.

Corina continued *cultivating her inner voice* throughout high school as indicated by her self-description.

All through high school, I was very active. I did sports, I did cheerleading, I did student counsel, I did FHA, I did...I mean anything I could do, I did it. I also was very active in theater. When I was a sophomore, we started theater, and I excelled at theater. It was right when UIL started for theater. So we did it, and it was just a handful of us that did it, and actually my husband was one of them in there with me. We did it, and I got my senior year, I got best actress. A couple of the judges were actually from colleges. I remember that they asked me to come audition for their theater department.

As Carina recollected her experience with theatre in high school, she spoke louder, sat up taller, and smiled throughout the description. As indicated by her demeanor, she *saw the person she was describing as someone quite valuable in her own eyes*. Intrapersonally speaking, Corina seemed to hold a *strong sense of identity* in her senior year of high school as indicated by her self-reflection.

After high school, however, things abruptly changed for Corina. She explained that after auditioning for and receiving a “full scholarship” for theatre at [name of college], her “mom didn’t want [her] to go off.” At this point in the story, Corina’s head sunk down into her slumped shoulders, and both corners of her mouth pulled down as she lifted both brows. Visibly deflated, she continued.

My mom didn't want me to go off. She was attached and didn't want me to go off to college. I really wanted to pursue...I really believed that I wanted to pursue a career in acting, and I wanted to go to Broadway. That was what I wanted to do.

Corina reported that she went to her local community college instead of the college offering her the theatre scholarship. She had hoped the theatre program would offer her a similar scholarship to the one offered by the other school, but to her dismay, the program director would not grant her an audition. After he heard about the other school’s offer to her, he told her he could offer her a small scholarship, much less than what the other school was offering. When asked to describe her thinking surrounding the conflict, Corina said:

I just really remember thinking that I felt like, in the beginning, he didn't want me, and then he only wanted me because he found out someone else wanted me. I just felt like he just didn't put any value in me, as an actress, and so I felt like that was real shallow. I just thought, I don't want to be a part of a team that your director doesn't even want to hear anything from you until someone else wants you.

Corina made her decision, and she walked away from theatre. Instead, she decided to major in journalism and went from being a high performing student to making Cs and Ds. She dropped out of college after four semesters.

Note that Corina continued to demonstrate blaming behavior towards her mother and the theatre instructor for their part in her not following through with theatre, which indicates a continuing *reliance on external authorities*, not for acceptance, but for responsibility. The core of the behavior is the same: shifting accountability from self to other, which indicates Corina may be operating from External Formulas in the Interpersonal Dimension of development within this particular, ongoing situation.

Corina's desire to act has not diminished. When discussing her future goals, she said her intent was to become a high school teacher and maybe get the opportunity to teach theatre along with history or English. Again, she expressed her disappointment that she did not "get" to go to [name of college] and pursue acting.

[Acting] was something that I felt that I was really good at, and that maybe I could have made a career out of it. Maybe I couldn't have. Then I also think there was a part of me that maybe was scared to move on. In high school I was a big fish, and then moving on...I believe that if I had went to [name of college], I would have done it. I would have stayed with it, because I got up in front of the instructors and probably 75% of his theater class and read my monologue and did it. I felt like I probably would have, I would have stuck with it, had I went to [name of college]. Then when I got [name of community college], I

never got the opportunity to do it, and so I thought...In my mind I was thinking, he already didn't like me, because he didn't want to see me at all.

A voice of regret is definitely laced throughout the reflection, but in the middle of the story, Corina begins looking at her own role in not continuing a path in acting, something she has not indicated throughout the rest of the narrative. Before completing that journey, however, she slips back into External Formulas, relying on her perceived rejection by the community college theatre instructor to explain the detour in her dream. Again, this suggests that there is at least one significant area in Corina's interpersonal development that still operates from External Formulas.

Corina's overall development (See Figure 4.6) as described in her narrative is unlike the previously discussed participants in that her epistemological and intrapersonal areas of development have reached more advanced levels of development than her interpersonal development. However, as already mentioned, Corina's unusually high levels of development in the Epistemological and Intrapersonal Dimensions in her early years, did not seem to carry forward into her adult years. For example, Corina described her decision to return to school as follows:

Everybody kept saying, "Oh, you should go back to school," because we lived across the street in apartments from the college. Yeah, and so everybody was like, "You should go back to school. You could totally get a grant, you wouldn't even have to worry about it. You should totally do it." There was a part of me, though, that always felt like maybe I wasn't smart enough because right at the end, I made such terrible grades in school. Most of my grades were Cs and Ds, and I had a couple classes that I withdrew from or that I failed, and so I just...When you stay at home and you're not doing anything that's actually, I guess, intellectual, you don't feel like you're using, you're watching cartoons and doing laundry and doing dishes and all that all day long, I feel like a part of you gets lost. Maybe that part that, for me it felt that way that that academic part of me got just pushed away and so when people talked to me about it, I was just like, "I don't think I

could do it. I don't think I could do it."

This self-description does not reflect the earlier voice described as existing in childhood and the teen years. The voice is self-doubting and *draws from external voices* the strength and assurance needed to make the decision to enroll in college. After years of listening to others encourage her to go back to school and doubting her ability to do so, however, she made up *her mind* to “just [bite] the bullet” and give it a try.

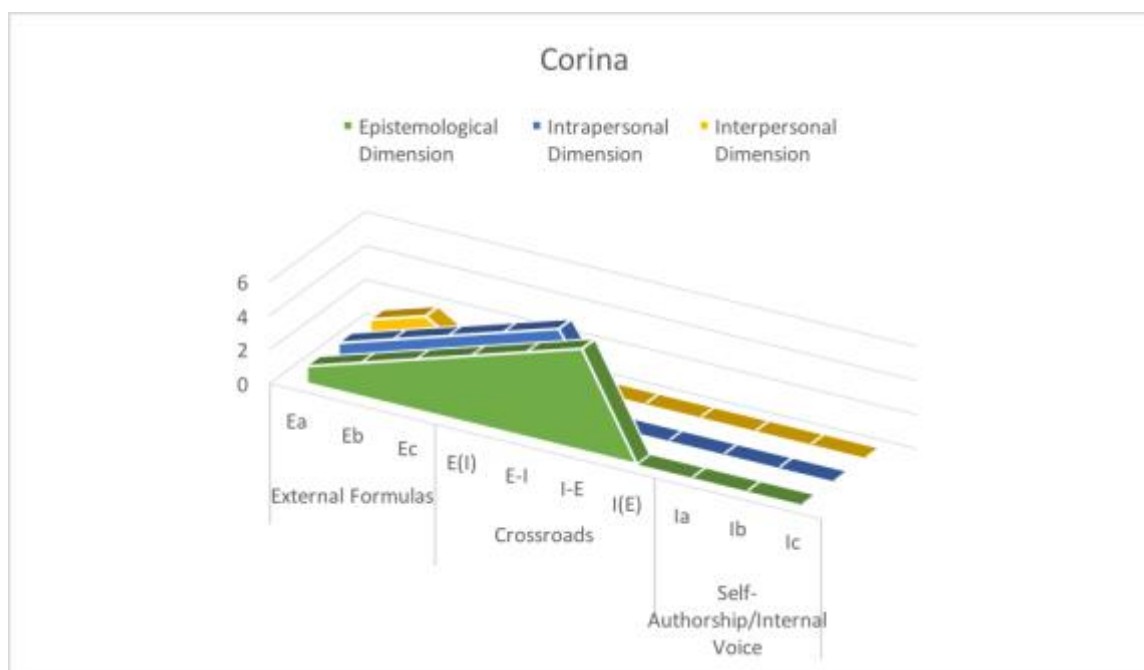


Figure 4.6. Corina's overall Self-Authorship development

In addressing the research questions of this study, Corina's current self-authorship development can be seen in her response to the question of why she is seeking her degree. She responded:

One, I want to prove to myself that I can do it. Two, I want to show my kids how important college is. How important it is to not sell yourself short, and that when it gets hard, you don't think you can do something, just keep doing. Keep pushing yourself to do something because you're stronger and braver and smarter than you really think you are.

In this proclamation, Corina demonstrates a self-authored voice, one that has learned from experience and the reflection on that experience. Her words describe someone who *trusts her internal voice to supply knowledge about herself* and to inform her *construction of a foundational philosophy of life*, one she is willing to utilize now in her interaction with her children.

Participant #7

“Janice,” who is now in her forties, married at 17, spent her first 10 years in the workforce as an X-ray technologist, had two children at 25 and 27, left the workforce at 28, divorced at 30, married her current husband at 32 and is now working as a paraprofessional at her local school district as she attends college as a post-traditional student. Looking back over her life, Janice began her narrative explaining why she married at such a young age.

Getting married at 17 was not something I would recommend for anybody. I was still in high school. Was I pregnant? No. It's just, I was quite rebellious, and I guess finally my parents just gave in, and because they had to sign for me to get married, and I'm not sure why they did that. Sometimes I wonder, would I do that for my own? No way. No way.

So I'm not sure why they did that, and we don't talk about it.

Janice explained that she would not talk with her parents about their signing for her to get married because it was no longer relevant due to the marriage ending in divorce. She continued, however, to wonder aloud at their decision.

But I have kinda wondered, that is a thought I've carried as I've gotten older because I cannot see myself. I mean my kids are 20 and 22. I cannot see myself having done that to them...I also wonder if they had a fear because there were so many small town unmarried pregnant girls, and they did not want me in that position. But they also was not gonna hand over a package of birth control pills and say please take these and keep me safe. They wanted it done the right way. And so, I can respect that. And, we were married 13 years.

This shared reflection on a significant event in Janice's journey reveals meaning-making in all three dimensions of development. Epistemologically, Janice is in the Crossroads having already *experienced the tensions of simply relying on external authorities* and trusting that their knowledge is good because of their position. She senses the need to understand the event from her own perspective and is *aware of her internal voice* pushing her toward resolving the conflict. She is not, however, at the point of her internal voice being strong enough to *mediate the external sources of knowledge*. Her continued focus on the rationale behind her parents' action suggests she will not be satisfied with the Crossroads' level of knowing forever.

Janice's shared reflection also reveals that she is in the Crossroads of the Intrapersonal Dimension as well. She has evolved to the point of being *aware that her own values and sense of identity* is distinct from that of her parents, and this realized knowledge is *pushing her internal voice forward* in her meaning-making. The same is true for Janice in the Interpersonal Dimension. She is in the *process of constructing her internal voice*, but *not yet at the point of trusting that voice* to mediate this recurring question related to her getting married at 17.

Considering the unresolved nature of the above narrative and the demonstrated meaning-making informing Janice's decisions concerning this relational event, it is probable that Janice's overall development (See Figure 4.7) is relatively balanced. Her narrated meaning-making demonstrated a firm presence in the Crossroads phase in all three dimensions: Epistemological, Intrapersonal and Interpersonal, with her Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Dimensions slightly further developed at the *listening to the internal voice* phase sub-category, and her Epistemology Dimension just below that at the *actively working on constructing the internal voice* phase sub-category.

Janice's developmental journey is also evident in the meaning-making that informed her decision to return to college. As is often the case, her desire for a degree stemmed from the need for a good job. Her divorce was final, and she was returning to the workforce. The problem,

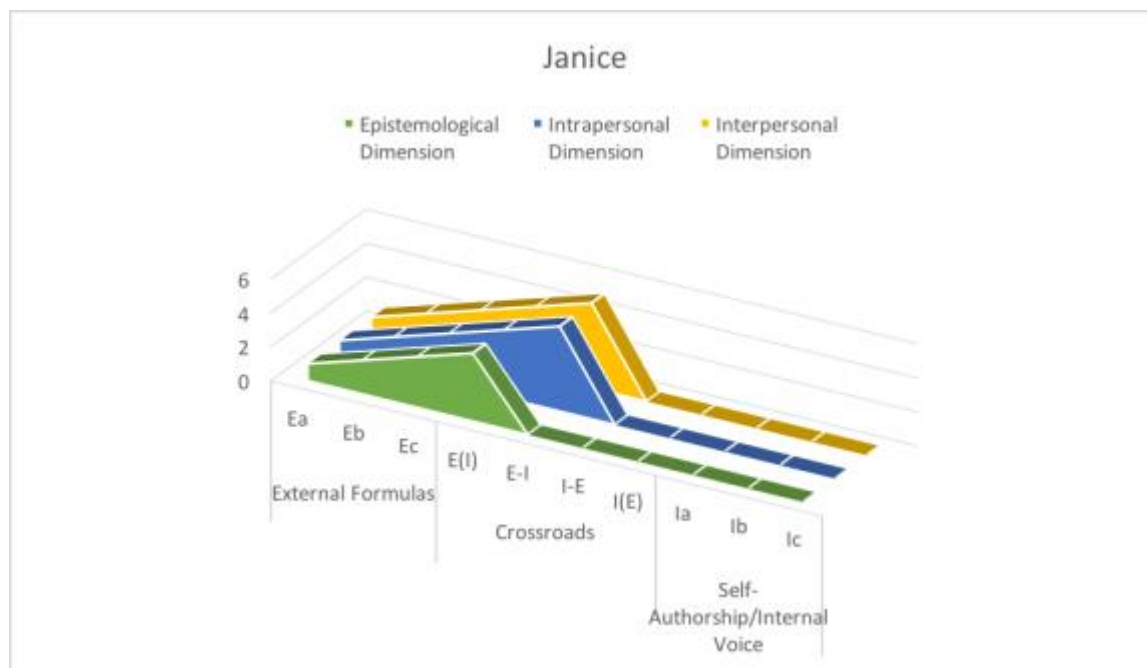


Figure 4.7. Janice's overall Self-Authorship development

however, was that she had no idea what she would like to do for a living.

I got to thinking, well what kind of job do I want? And so my mama said, "Well hey, they're getting ready to look for substitute teachers and they're having this meeting at the school," right before school started, you know, during that summer. I did that coding class in the spring, and so it was that same year and I said, "Okay, I'll give it a try. I don't want to be up there around kids, but it works for my schedule. . . . so I tried it."

After getting the position, Janice began working at the school and reported that in the process of working there, she realized what she wanted to do in the future after subbing for what she described as a very ineffective teacher.

I'd had one really rough day in that classroom. . . . I don't think she even left anything for me to do that day, so I was having to come up with things on my own. Her idea was to do videos and teach lessons through some of those. Well, you know, I don't know what you're implying in this lesson, but I did not get it, and I just was having to ask for

different teachers in that pod to give me some stuff to do. I knew right then that I could do a better job, or I felt like I could do a better job.

Janice revealed that she had already started thinking about returning to school even before her placement at the elementary school, and as she continued telling her story, she shared another reason for enrolling in college.

I have questioned why I wanted to come for another reason. Yes, it was to get a job, it's to get a better job, because my husband and I have talked about it. I need him to work in a different place for health reasons. He works 12-hour days at Cooper, and the older we get the worse it gets. I said, "I think I've got us a plan." I said, "I'm fixing to go back to school. I'm fixing to commit myself." I've pushed myself extremely hard to finish in a quick amount of time and will continue to do so until I'm done because I want him to get into a different place, and so that we can have a happy retirement.

As Janice continued reflecting on her own meaning-making in deciding to return to college, she seemed to realize something for herself in the telling of her story. She said, "There's a certain amount of self-satisfaction in doing this, and my husband has even seen that in me." She went on to explain that, in truth, this was her "sole purpose" in deciding to enroll in the degree completion program.

Within the scope of an hour of reflecting on her personal experience and how that experience informed her own decision-making concerning a return to college, Janice went from reporting her decision as one entirely based on practical reasons to one emanating from a much deeper call from within: personal satisfaction. She was uncomfortable with "self-satisfaction" being her motivating factor, however, and when asked why she felt that way, she explained:

Because I feel like in some ways, that's selfish. I want to be, I don't want to say "glorified" for doing [well in school and earning a degree], but it makes me feel good about myself that I can accomplish, and the things that I can accomplish. Because if you think about it, going back through what we've just talked about, I've gone from being

married in a different frame of mind, and working, it's been a long time since I've probably felt good about who I am, in some ways, now that you're making me think. While this certainly may not have been the first time Janice considered a deeper reason for working toward her degree, it appeared to be a thought she was processing in the moment as evidenced by her closing comment. Either way, Janice demonstrated in her narrative that the meaning-making surrounding her decision to return to school drew from External Formulas.

Even though the external authorities in her story are not human beings, they are externally derived ideas of what should work for Janice in her situation. She needed a job, she saw one that she could probably do well, so she should take the necessary steps to attain the job, which happened to be earning a bachelor's degree. Practically speaking, there is nothing wrong with this type of reasoning, but it does not reflect meaning-making that is indicative of self-authorship. From the practical point-of-view, the earning of the degree was not linked to Janice's internal development; it was simply the means to an end, an external means to an external end.

Janice entertaining the idea of earning a degree as an avenue toward personal satisfaction, especially in her declaration of returning to a point of feeling good about herself, indicates that she may be exiting the Crossroads, the point at which she is *cultivating her internal voice to mediate her thinking and actions* concerning college, and preparing to enter the Self-Authorship phase of development, the place in which she is comfortable with *trusting her own voice to shape her beliefs and identity* without experiencing the guilt she described in her narrative.

Participant #8

“Angie,” a post-traditional student in her thirties, opened her narrative with a straightforward introduction leading up to an event she credited with being at the core of her struggles in life.

Oh you have no idea how broad that is. Well I am married, in my second marriage. I have two children, a 17-year-old and a 13-year-old. . . . I personally love, I'm very religious, by the way. . . . When I was 14 years old, I lost my stepfather. He passed away from having

a heart problem. My biological father, I love him, but he was not a very good dad. He wasn't in my life a lot. . . . There was a point when I was 14 that I did live with him, and he was a cool dad when I lived with him. My step-mom was the enforcer, and she did not like the competition. She kind of viewed me as competition. I did not have a lot of respect for her because of that, and I felt like she took Daddy away. He started having foreign exchange students, and he would call them, because he always called me his favorite daughter, but when they came in the picture he would say, "Oh, well she's my favorite daughter from Germany," but that still kind of stung. He gave them stuff instead of giving me stuff, so I had a lot of daddy issues. . . . To get a personal note, I had something very traumatic happen when I was 15, and that kind of set me up to where I viewed men. It was July 4th and basically, it was a date rape.

While this introduction does not point to any specific assessment of Angie's self-authorship in and of itself, her framing of the events as causal factors in her current struggles does suggest that Angie works from Baxter Magolda's early phase of development, the External Formula phase, because she relies on external influences and events to provide knowledge about her circumstances, herself, and others.

More specifically, in the Epistemological Dimension of development, Angie relies on external authorities to provide relevant knowledge for her decision making. In her first marriage, she described her decision to attend college as a group decision, but not in the sense of two people discussing and agreeing on a particular action. In describing the background, Angie said, "I was 18 when we got married, and then I turned 19, and then I had [our daughter] a month later. When [our daughter] was about 2 years old . . . we decided for me to go to college." Later in the narrative when reflecting on the good times in her first marriage, she explained, "Those two years were the best. We went to Germany, and we decided for me to try college again." When asked to clarify what she meant when she said "we decided," Angie replied, "Well, he gave me permission."

Because Angie characterized her first marriage as abusive, her seeking permission from her husband before enrolling in college does not seem out of the ordinary of what one would expect within that environment. She uses the same phrase to describe decision-making, however, within the context of her second marriage. She said, “He made us wait about a year before we actually got married” without ever mentioning her role in the decision. When describing the desire to return to school, Angie said, “We revisited me going to college,” and when trying to decide whether to quit her job due to chronic health issues, she reported, “We decided for me to go ahead and quit.” Throughout the narrative, Angie demonstrated a tendency to *rely on external authority* in decision making, indicating that *she valued and trusted the knowledge of external authorities over that of her own*. This places Angie in the External Formulas phase in the Epistemological Dimension, and the fact that she seemed comfortable with such an arrangement places her at the entry level of that phase.

Intrapersonally, Angie’s development also seems to rest within the External Formula phase. When reflecting on her role as a young wife and mother, Angie explained her conception of herself at that time. She said, “I wasn’t known as me. I was known as his wife. I liked it though. I did. I liked being [my daughter’s] mom; I liked being his wife. I loved who I was at that time.” In describing a relationship she had between her first and second marriages, Angie characterized the break-up with these words, “I can’t even get an idiot to love me. No one’s going to ever love me.” Probably, the most telling comments were those related to her being raped in high school.

[Daughter’s name] doesn't know all of my challenges. She knows that I was raped when I was 15. I didn't tell her the extent of it. I told her because it was my fault I got raped because I chose to...It was a date rape. I chose to go out in the tent to make out with the guy. I didn't choose...Once I said no, I can now look back. It took me years to come to the conclusion that it wasn't all my fault because no means no. Blah, blah, blah, all that jargon.

These kinds of descriptions, ones that seem to signify a *lack of social identity* and others that *degrade one's own personal value*, are significant indicators that Angie has a strong presence in the earliest stages of Baxter Magolda's Intrapersonal Dimension and that she prefers *relying on external authority* in decision-making as well as assessment of truth.

Angie's interpersonal interactions are also externalized, indicating that she also operates from the External Formula phase in Baxter Magolda's Interpersonal Dimension. For example, when reflecting on her experience in being pregnant with her daughter, Angie said, "When I got pregnant with her, it was no longer about my dreams. Everything I wanted, I wanted for her." Even during the most abusive times in her first marriage, she reported that she did not consider leaving until her husband threatened to abuse their children. She said, "That right there changed everything because before then all the abuse, all the everything, he wasn't like that to the kids." While a mother protecting her children from harm is certainly a good thing, what Angie seemed to miss was that her life, within the context of a relationship with another person, is also valuable and worthy of her protection. Instead, her understanding of herself in relation to others seemed to squarely align with the other person's opinion of her. According to Angie, that person called her "stupid for 11 years."

Angie's overall development, as seen in Figure 4.8, is still in the very early stages of Baxter Magolda's External Formulas phase in all three dimensions of development. She seems to draw comfort in *relying on external authorities*. There was no mention of *growing tension* or *recognizing shortcomings in the formula of relying on others* to suggest movement even within the first phase of development.

However, because Angie expressed that she is still dealing with very serious issues in her past and that those issues continue to affect her current thinking and behavior, an exploration of her self-authorship development may be skewed due to those issues she revealed in her narrative, mainly those dealing with perceived childhood neglect, rape, and spousal abuse. With that in mind, caution must be exercised to view the data within the context of those issues.

Angie's decision to attend college as a post-traditional student and the meaning-making behind that decision reveal similar results of those already discussed. When asked why she is seeking her bachelor's degree, she replied,

I have failed in so many ways. The failures have led me up to here, but I failed marriage, I failed you know, I failed at times parenthood, I failed at being able to stay in Germany, to stay at that... In the past I have set goals for myself, you know, even if they were just my goals, my internationalizations, I failed them. I needed to get out of that marriage, but I failed at it. . . . regardless I still failed at it.

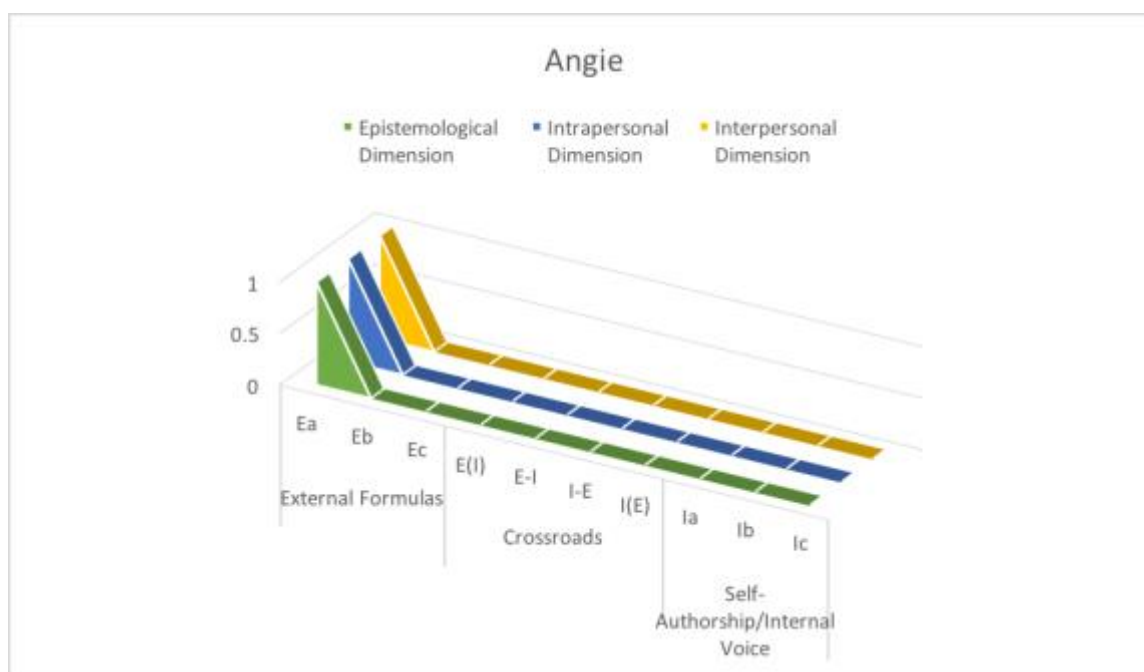


Figure 4.8. Angie's overall Self-Authorship development

She went on to describe the expectations others are putting on her to graduate with a four-year degree.

But I'm so scared of that goal because I've been such a failure, and I'm gonna be the first person on both sides of my family, and I have been, everybody feels the need to tell me this all the time, putting that pressure, I'm the first one to graduate with a bachelor's. . . . and everyone is making this big deal out of it, so if I don't, I'm gonna have a lot to pay

for, so I really think I will. But I'm so scared of that moment right now. But you know, because if I fail, I won't be able to, I won't be able to face my kids. I won't be able to look at [daughter's name] and tell her, "Hey, you got something to work for," because she'll see me as a failure, so I can't fail.

Angie is clear in disclosing her meaning-making supporting her decision to be in school. She sees herself, up to this point in her life, as a failure, and she views the action of earning a bachelor's degree as an opportunity to reframe other's perception of her. Other people's perception of her seems to be the dominating factor, even more so than her own self-perception. Again, the narrative supports the assessment that Angie functions from the External Formulas phase in her development concerning *how she knows what she knows, how she understands herself, and how she understands herself in relationship with others*. The source for all these questions—epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal, respectively—*rests within the power of external authorities*.

Participant #9

"Evelyn," also in her thirties, began her narrative by declaring she was one of seven children in her family, the mother of two sons, someone who never quite connected with her mother, and a daughter who shared a close bond with her father. Explaining the connection she had with her father, she said, "All my life I grew up as a Daddy's Girl, and I figured that was just the only job I had to do." Later on, as she reflected on her father's death, Evelyn expounded on her thinking during that time.

I was lost, and it's like what am I supposed to do now because it's like my purpose in life was being his daughter, and it's like okay, now what do I do, and now, you know, who's going to, you know, be that voice to encourage me?

At this point in Evelyn's life, she demonstrated a dependency or reliance on her father's knowledge to guide her, a clear indicator of living from Baxter Magolda's External Formulas

phase in the Epistemological Dimension. Evelyn *knew what she knew based on her father's knowledge. She trusted him and what he knew to mediate the components in her life.*

Evelyn further clarified her perception of her relationship with her father by reporting, "Whatever went wrong, I went to Daddy, and he was just, 'Oh, it'll be okay.'" In fact, Evelyn described her father as being her problem-solver in some ways. When sharing how she dealt with failure or doing something she thought to be wrong, she said her father would calmly tell her, "Hey, let's figure out why you did it, and let's figure out how to get you out of it, and don't do it anymore."

Evelyn's father passed away when she was 26, and as already mentioned, she struggled to find her identity absent of his presence. Describing that transitional period as a time of personal reflection and self-doubt, she said,

It's basically, you've doubted yourself and you've tried it. . . . I was like, I never just did anything and just stuck with it because I always felt like I could...my daddy was there to, you know, catch me if I fell, so it's like now it's like, "Hey, you gotta do it!" you know?

Evelyn acknowledged that she struggles with self-doubt, but she "psyches herself out" with thinking like she described above. The process resembles a transaction between her father's voice and her own voice, with her own voice rising to authority in the end, not to erase her father's voice, but to assume responsibility for her own knowledge and voice. This exchange represents not only an epistemological transition from the External Formulas phase to the Crossroads, but also an evolution in the Intrapersonal Dimension of development. In both dimensions, Evelyn demonstrated an *awareness of her own voice, action toward constructing that voice, listening to the voice, and using it to shape her actions and interactions*, all of which are sub-categories found in the Crossroads phase.

Self-doubt seems to be the area in which Evelyn struggles the most in solidifying her Intrapersonal development. When asked to explore her thinking on her doubting of herself, Evelyn said,

I think that's a lot of my mom's fault because it's like she's...Now, we've talked and which I noticed she's trying to do a bit better, because I went to school for like a year, and she didn't even know what I was going to school for. She didn't even know that I was making the grades that I was making. I just felt like...I'm like, "Why even share it with her?" I just felt like she didn't care, but then, I was like, "Well, you know what? Share it with her. Show her "Hey, I can do this.""

As Evelyn works to gain her mother's approval, her self-doubting does not seem to wain with each academic success. When asked how long it took her to feel successful in college after first enrolling, she replied, "December." She quickly added, though, that the fear of failure returns "every semester" no matter how successful she was in the previous semester.

The recurring self-doubt suggests Evelyn is not functioning from the Self-Authorship phase in the Intrapersonal Dimension of development. Her seeking and appearing to need her mother's approval indicates she is still experiencing *tensions from relying on external authorities* (External Formulas) to understand her own being, while her demonstrated ability to overcome her insecurities through "self talk" shows she operates from the Crossroads phase in that she is actively *constructing* and then *acting from her own internal voice*.

Evelyn demonstrated in her narrative a similar pattern of development in Baxter Magolda's Interpersonal Dimension. While she reported her understanding of others based on a need for affirmation within relationships, specifically with her father and later with her mother, Evelyn also reported the capacity to recognize the need to extract herself from harmful, dependent relationships based on her evolving inner voice.

Evelyn shared that after she enrolled in college, she made a conscious effort to change her social circle, something she admitted was very difficult.

Once I started going [to college] and meeting people, and you know, and kinda going away from the people that I had been around, which were not good people and good influences you know, to them sitting at home is okay, not doing anything is ok . . . but

man, you know I didn't want to do that. It was hard because. . . . it was my kids' father's side of his family. I just, I don't know. . . . I just woke up one morning, and I was like regardless if I speak to these people or if I go around these people, I'm like they not the ones that determine if I wake up each morning, or they don't give me breath, so if I don't talk to them again, it's not, you know, it's not up to them to, you know, to make me something.

In this description of her meaning-making, Evelyn demonstrates an awakening to a new understanding of relationships and how they work. She articulated an understanding of the limitations of relationships and the need for her own authoritative voice to shape her decision-making. Her identity was not enmeshed in what she viewed as an unhealthy relationship; her identity could be shaped by her own thinking and behavior, outside of dependent relationships. This type of meaning-making in Baxter Magolda's Interpersonal Dimension of development indicates an active presence in the highest level of the Crossroads phase. Evelyn is *cultivating her internal voice to mediate significant external sources*, in this case, her extended family. However, as has already been shown, operation at this level in this situation does not mean Evelyn operates at this level in all other situations. In fact, as indicated by her comments concerning her relationship with her mother, Evelyn has not advanced to the Crossroads in how she understands her relationship with her mother.

As Figure 4.9 illustrates, Evelyn has progressed to the highest level of the Crossroads phase in her journey toward Self-Authorship. According to the evidence provided by Evelyn in her narrative, however, activity in the Crossroads does not mean she no longer functions at the External Formulas phase. In fact, she actively functions in both phases simultaneously within all three dimensions of development: Epistemological, Intrapersonal, and Interpersonal.

Within the context of Evelyn's overall development, her decision to return to college as a post-traditional student did not mirror her meaning-making displayed throughout the rest of her narrative. In that decision, her comments only indicated activity within the External Formulas

phase. When discussing her meaning-making behind the decision, she did not mention or indicate an inner voice of her own, only the presence of exterior voices providing reasoning for the decision.

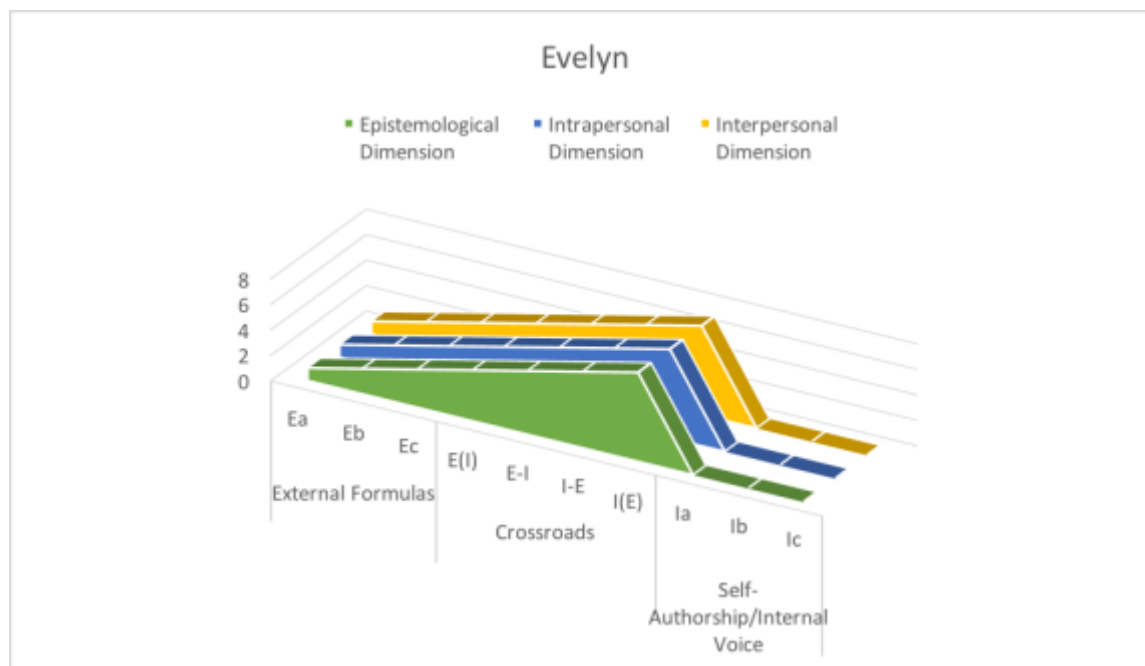


Figure 4.9. Evelyn's overall Self-Authorship development

Evelyn's father, someone she mentioned 37 times during the interview, is profoundly linked to her meaning-making, and even today, 16 years after his death, Evelyn reported that it was her father's voice that convinced her to return to school, and to some degree it is his voice that continues to motivate her to do well in her classes. She explained his influence on her decision to return to college and her desire to do well as follows:

“Stuff, I really wish you would, you know, go back to school.” And you know, “Stuff, I really wish you would get you, you know, a good job.” And I'm like, “Yeah, okay Daddy, okay I will, I will.” But you know I never did. . . . But I don't know, it's just like I want to do it to just [to] be like, “Okay, Dad, I did it,” you know. “You wanted me to do it, it might took a little bit longer than when you wanted it, but I did it.”

Unlike in the earlier exchange between her father's voice and her own voice, the father's voice is the only one heard in Evelyn's narrative surrounding her return to school. At one point in the narrative, when discussing her father's influence in her decision enroll in college, she definitively stated, "Really, that's the reason why I came back to school." The comments indicate Evelyn was probably functioning from External Formulas in deciding to return to school based on her father's desire (external voice) for her to earn her degree.

In addition, when asked to share any other purposes that might have contributed to her decision to enroll, Evelyn responded, "To make my kids proud." This response, as with the first, expresses a continued *need for external affirmation*. As such, Evelyn's decision to go back to college seems to be rooted in External Formulas.

Participant #10

"Vanessa" is 35 years old, has been married for seven years, is the mother of two children, and currently works at a public middle school in the ESL department. She has been in the workforce since she was 17 but acknowledged that she did not "start adulting" until she was 30. She said, "That's when my light went on." Soon after, Vanessa enrolled in her local community college and graduated with her associate's degree. The following fall, she enrolled in the degree completion program to begin the journey toward earning her bachelor's degree.

Despite Vanessa's claim that she did not start behaving like an adult until she was 30, her narrative indicates otherwise, not in the choices she made, necessarily, but in the way she responded to those choices. When Vanessa was 19, she became pregnant. She admitted getting pregnant that early in life was not what she had planned for her life, but as she shared her story, it was evident that she did not allow the circumstance to overwhelm her sense of self.

I ended up getting pregnant by a really good-looking firefighter that was five years older than me and had a son with him, and we ended our relationship when I was three months pregnant. And coming from a very traditional family where my mother was really like, "You have to get married, and do this and that." I was definitely not the traditional...my

father was very disappointed, and my father for the first time was actually very verbally abusive my whole entire pregnancy.

Vanessa's face while recalling this difficult time in her life did not show shame, anger, or bitterness. She appeared confident and calm throughout the telling of her story.

So my father actually gave me the option, as to, "I will provide an apartment for you and [boyfriend's name], and I'll help you guys." My dad helped him get a car. My dad encouraged us living together. And I opted out of it. I remember sitting in the living room, and my dad . . . saying, "This is what you want? You can build a life with him."

And I was like, "No. I don't. That's not what I want."

Because the situation presented a detour in what Vanessa wanted for her life and because it made the relationship with her parents uncomfortable, she might have taken the opportunity offered by her father. That was what was expected of her, she reported. Instead, she chose to listen to her own voice.

I remember that I just didn't want to be a housewife. I guess because I saw my mom. . . . My mom didn't work. My mom had to ask my dad for money. And my dad would sometimes shut it...like if it was just nonsense, like we're going to go here, and my mom would come home, it's like, "You don't need that stuff." So my dad was definitely the breadwinner. However, he was a smart breadwinner because he was a businessman. So I knew that if I did that, I was going to be trapped, and I was only 19 at the time.

At 19 and in a precarious situation, Vanessa had other voices of knowledge upon which she could have leaned. She chose, instead, heed her own voice that told her if she traveled the path set before her by other people, she would end up where she did not want to go. Because she *recognized her own voice as a valid source of knowledge in the context of other contrasting voices, and because she, listened to and trusted that voice to guide her action*, it appears that Vanessa was exhibiting, at least to some degree, Self-Authorship in the Epistemological Dimension even as a young adult.

Vanessa's narrative suggests she has known herself for quite some time. After deciding not to continue her relationship with her son's father, Vanessa decided it was time to advance in her field of work. She was in the automotive industry and described her thinking in the following manner:

I started looking at people in the automotive industry in different positions, and I knew I never wanted to be a car salesman. I knew I'm not good in math, so I couldn't do finance. I knew I didn't want to be a general manager because you're there all the time, but they had a legal department. There was this guy [co-worker's name], that would come into work, and I started kind of picking his brain, and he's like, "The law field is where it's at because it's an industry where no matter where you go, you're always gonna..." So I thought, "Well, I'm already good at the administrative things."

In this brief section of her narrative, Vanessa said, "I knew" when speaking about herself and ends the section vocalizing her knowledge that she is "good at the administrative things." She is speaking about her own knowledge about herself, her intrapersonal development, and speaking from that knowledge with confidence. In other words, she trusts and operates from her own knowledge about herself, which places her in the Self-Authorship phase of the Intrapersonal Dimension of development.

More recently, Vanessa experienced a setback in her education that might have taken her off course had she allowed it. After participating in commencement and thinking she had completed her associate's degree, Vanessa received news that she did not pass her math class and would have to retake it in order to receive her diploma. She admitted that it "kind of set [her] back a little bit," but not for long. She knew where she wanted to go, so she took the hard knock and said, "Well, what's next?" Again, Vanessa's story revealed a person who is confident in the knowledge she holds about herself and operates from that sense of self to make decisions.

In the same manner as described for the Epistemological and Intrapersonal Dimensions, Vanessa's development in the Interpersonal Dimension seems to rise to the level of Self-

Authorship. At 19, she was able to mediate a difficult situation using her own voice of reason to navigate in the midst of authoritative, external voices. In reflecting on that time, she said, “I knew subconsciously that I had done a wrong thing, and I knew that I didn’t...I would be stuck there, and with somebody that didn’t share the same values as I did.” This is the voice of someone who does not appear to need exterior affirmation. She exists in relationships without those relationships dictating her own thinking or behavior, which demonstrates that she *trusts her internal voice to refine her beliefs, identity, and relationships*, a characteristic of someone who is exercising Self-Authorship.

As Figure 4.10 illustrates, Vanessa exhibits Self-Authorship in all three of Baxter Magolda’s developmental dimensions: Epistemological, Intrapersonal, and Interpersonal.



Figure 4.10. Vanessa’s overall Self-Authorship development

Her narrative suggests that she has been operating from these levels at least to some degree from young adulthood. This is not to suggest that Vanessa never regressed to other phases, but it is possible that her strong sense of voice at 35 is a result of the length of time she has functioned

from Self-Authorship.

Vanessa reported that she felt like she began adulthood at 30, and possibly that is because that is the time at which she became serious about earning her degree. Even the decision to enroll in college, however, seemed to spring from self-authored meaning-making. In explaining her work with ESL students at the middle school where she works, Vanessa said, “Maybe I was brought into this world to be this person that is just gonna change the way [of ESL education] and offer resources.” She shared one story about tutoring a student who had failed the state assessment test and called that experience “transformational.”

He was devastated. So, last summer I tutored him for [the state assessment test], and I would do things different. I don't know if you're familiar with [name of city], but there's an old cotton mill. When I was trying to explain to him about the Great Depression, I'm just like, “You know what, let's take a drive to the cotton mill, and so I can show you how that worked, factories like these during industrialization. He connected the two, and he did really well. He took the [state assessment test] again and only missed it by one.

That was super rewarding to me to be able to do that.

Vanessa’s purpose for earning a degree does *not seem to be linked to earning approval from external authorities of any type*. She appears to have a *personal goal she intends to fulfill, not for the purpose of succeeding, but for the purpose of extending what she already enjoys doing*. In other words, the degree is not just a “sheet of paper” for Vanessa; it is part of the journey toward building herself into the person she intends to be, epistemologically, intrapersonally, and interpersonally.

Summary

This chapter presented qualitative data collected from ten post-traditional students enrolled in a degree-completion program via private face-to-face interviews. The information gathered in the interviews supports the literature’s claim that many adult learners do not exhibit

Self-Authorship in their decision-making, which leaves them compromised in their ability to be successful in life and work.

According to the findings of this study, the ten participants exhibited varying levels of self-authorship across Baxter Magolda's three dimensions of development. In the Epistemological Dimension, 40% of the participants demonstrated Self-Authorship (See Figure 4.11). In the Intrapersonal Dimension of development, 30% of the participants included elements in their narratives that indicated some degree of Self-Authorship attainment (See Figure 4.12). Finally, whereas the findings for the first two dimensions aligned with Kegan's (1994) report that most adults do not operate from Self-Authorship, the percentage of participants in this study demonstrating some degree of Self-Authorship in the Interpersonal Dimension of development reached 50% (See Figure 4.13).

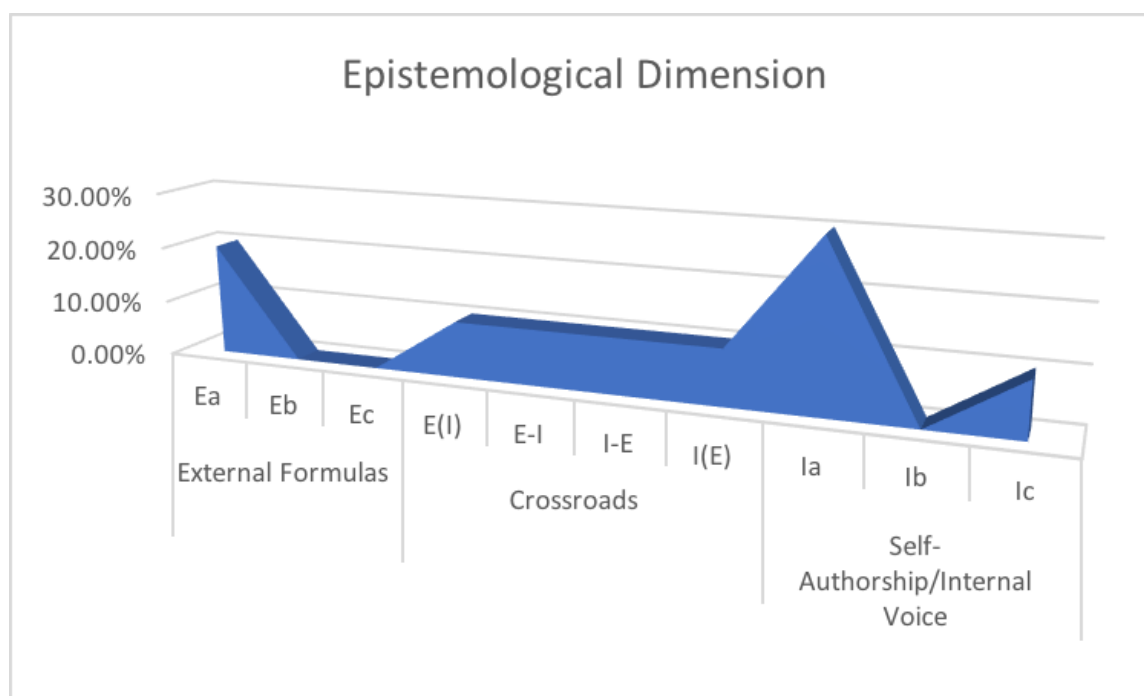


Figure 4.11. Percentage of participants demonstrating Epistemological Self-Authorship

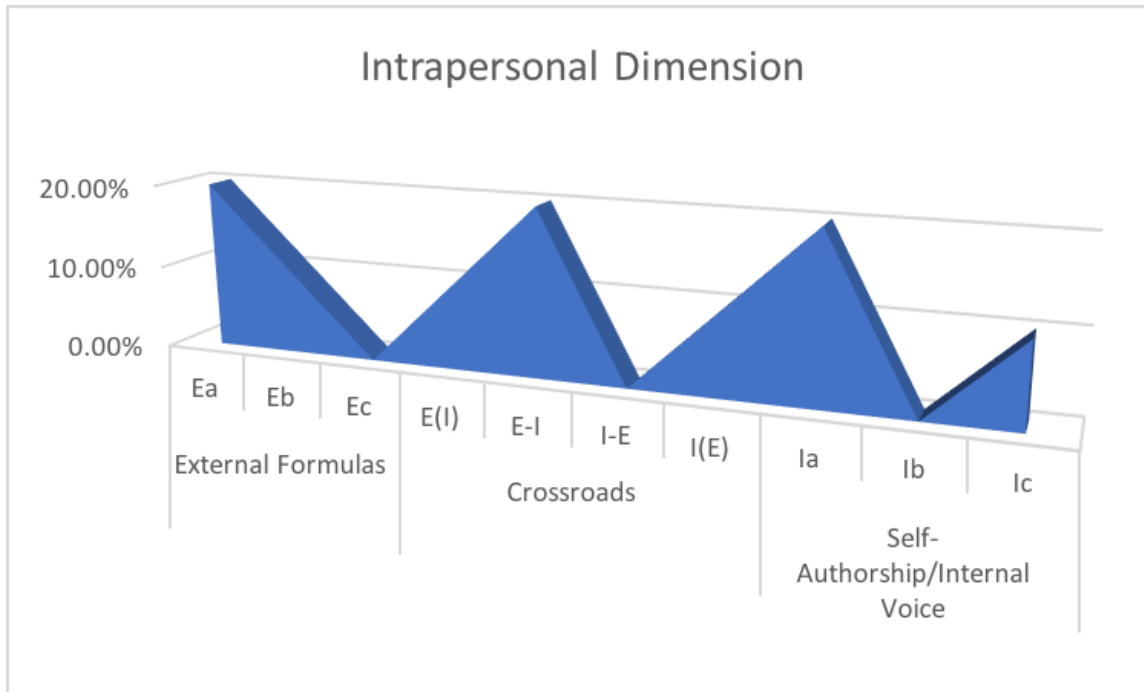


Figure 4.12. Percentage of participants demonstrating Intrapersonal Self-Authorship

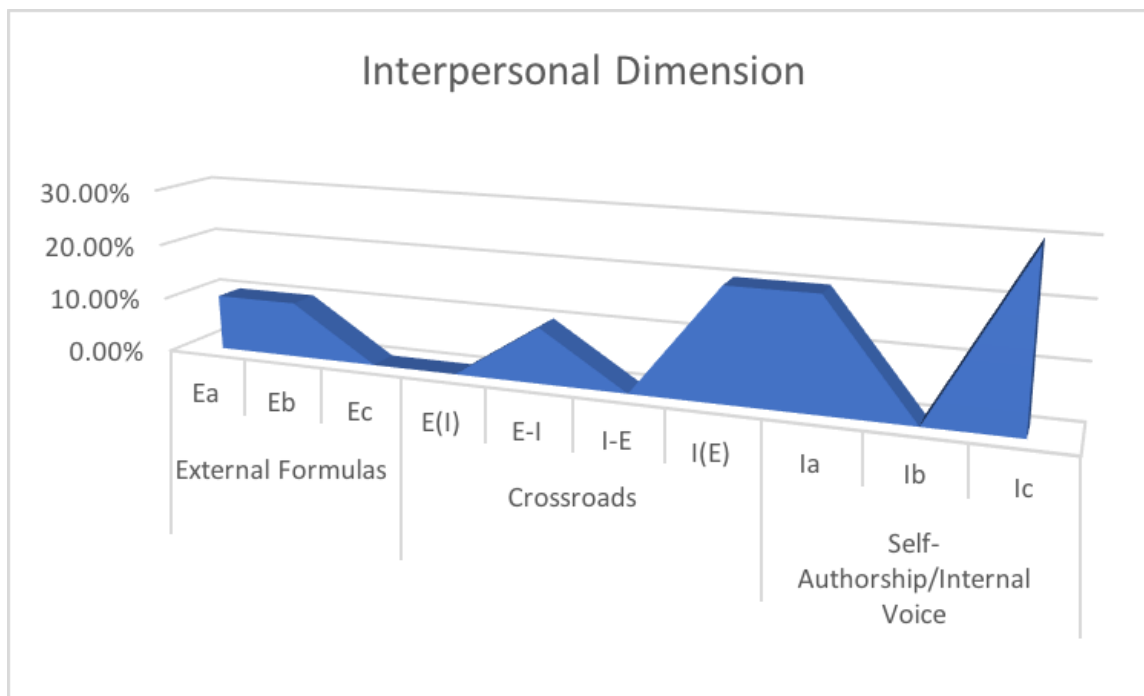


Figure 4.13. Percentage of participants demonstrating Interpersonal Self-Authorship

Findings related to participants' meaning-making leading to their decision to enroll in the degree-completion program also demonstrated marked variance (See Figure 4.14). However,

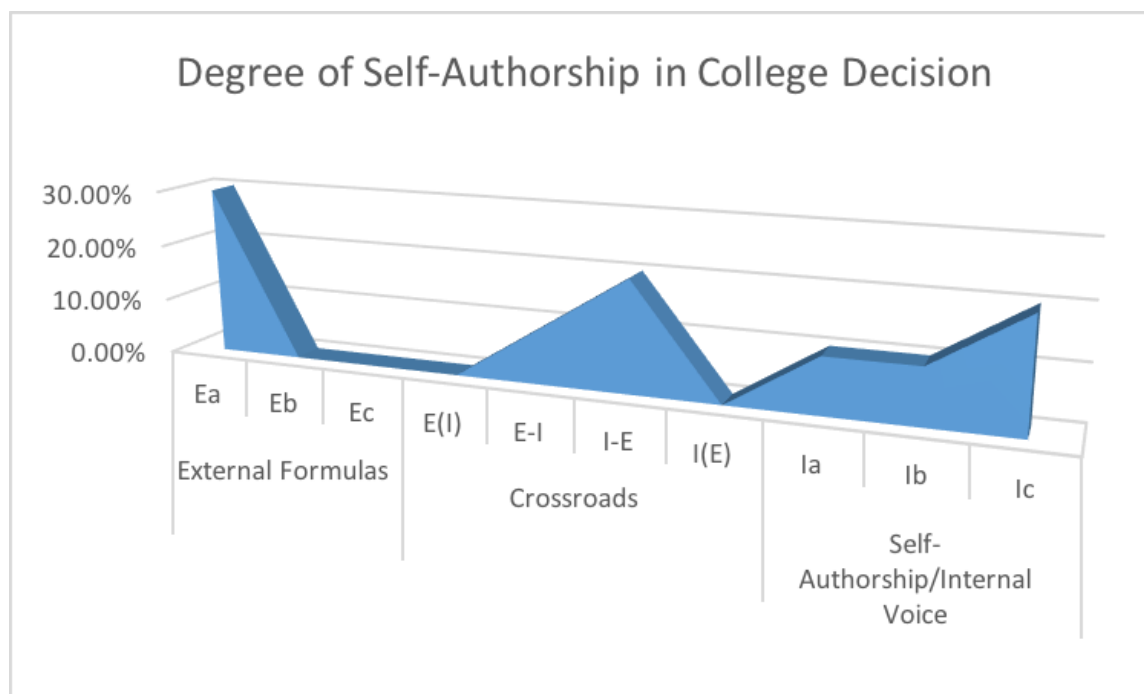


Figure 4.14. Percentage of participants demonstrating Self-Authorship in college decision according to the results from this particular group of students, most of the participants operated from Self-Authorship in making their decision to return to college. The percentages were 30% in External Formulas, 30% in Crossroads, and 40% in Self-Authorship, a finding that did not align with the supposition presented by the researcher at the study's commencement.

As the purpose of this study was to explore the degree of Self-Authorship demonstrated by ten post-traditional students in order to increase understanding and improve program support, these findings supply a solid baseline of data to support that effort. The findings indicate that stronger program support is needed in all three dimensions of Self-Authorship development; however, greater focus is needed in the areas of Epistemological and Intrapersonal development.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This research study explored the meaning-making utilized by post-traditional students in their decision to enroll in college. By studying this specific decision within the overall meaning-making patterns demonstrated by ten participating post-traditional students, the researcher learned that the study's participants exhibited many of the same self-authorship tendencies as those reported by Kegan (1982) and Baxter Magolda (2011) concerning traditionally-aged college students. Higher education, however, mainly focuses its holistic development programs and initiatives on the traditional student population (Grabowski, Rush, Ragen, Fayard, & Watkins-Lewis, 2016), leaving this fast-growing post-traditional student population (Hussar & Bailey, 2011) largely unsupported in their growth toward fully developed self-authorship.

The study's findings increased the researcher's understanding of the participants' practice of self-authorship and provided an initial set of narratives to inform program design and assessment. More significantly, however, the results demonstrated the need for higher education to extend holistic developmental models of support to post-traditional students. Just as traditional-age students present complex and diverse displays of self-authorship, so did the participants in this study, despite the small number of people participating in the study. In short, no matter the age of the student, self-authorship is never a completed product. It fluctuates throughout life, and as such should not be reserved for one age in life. Post-traditional students, if they are to be empowered to live in today's world of complexity and ambiguity, must also receive self-authorship support in their journey toward earning a college degree, and the goal of that support must be to lead them into understanding self-authorship as the ultimate life-long learning project.

In this chapter, the study's findings are discussed within and beyond the context of the established research in order to demonstrate the need to extend self-authorship theory and

practice to post-traditional student populations. The chapter also includes an interpretation of the study's findings as well as several implications leading from those interpretations as they relate to post-traditional student programs. Following the discussion of findings, the chapter considers the role of transformative learning and leading in the context of self-authorship development and closes with recommendations for future action and study.

Interpretation of Findings

This study was guided by the following research questions focused on the self-authorship development exercised by ten participants enrolled in a degree completion program at the study site.

1. What indicators of self-authorship dimensions—specifically areas of epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal development—are revealed in the self-narrated experiences of post-traditional students describing their decision to enroll in a degree completion program?
2. Within each of the three dimensions of self-authorship, what characteristics of placement and/or movement along self-authorship's continuum of phases, ranging from External Formulas to Crossroads to Self-Authorship, are present in students' decision-making narratives?

Following a qualitative narrative approach to address the research questions, the study revealed that 4 of 10 (40%) of the participants demonstrated self-authorship practices in their meaning-making leading up to their decision to enroll in college. Another 2 of 10 (30%) appeared to mediate their decision while in the Crossroads phase, and the remaining 3 of 10 (30%) illustrated in their narratives that they made their decisions based on external influence and showed no indication of internal voice in their decision.

While the findings somewhat support the researcher's anecdotal experience with incoming students, the data does not suggest the problem is as wide-spread as to support the initially stated problem based on the belief that an overwhelming number of post-traditional

students rely on external authorities or expectations in their decision to go to college. In fact, the data collected from the ten participants in this study suggest the opposite: 7 of 10 (70%) of the participants demonstrated some degree of internal voice activity—epistemologically, intrapersonally, and interpersonally—when reflecting upon and describing their decision to enroll in the program. This is not to say that 70% exhibited self-authorship; only four participants demonstrated presence at that level, and only two participants ranked at the highest level of self-authorship. It does indicate, however, that the three students operating from the Crossroads have moved far enough along Baxter Magolda's continuum of self-authorship phases to have recognized their own internal voice and its role in self-authored meaning-making.

To further clarify, Kegan (1994) argued that many adults never reach the point of living from a self-authored position, but he spoke within the context of self-authorship's most developed level, not from the Crossroads in which Baxter Magolda described the beginning steps toward optimal Self-Authorship in her model. With that clarification in mind, the study's finding that 6 of 10 (60%) of the participants did not demonstrate self-authorship in their decision to enroll in college supports Kegan's argument about the scarcity of self-authorship in the adult population as a whole.

Adding Baxter Magolda's (2011) Crossroads to the understanding of self-authorship's process further illuminates the study's findings. When including the Crossroads as a pre-Self-Authorship transition, an additional 30% of the students showed progress toward self-authorship, even though they did not demonstrate full self-authorship. Still, as this study claims and its findings support, many post-traditional students have not achieved full self-authorship in one or more developmental dimensions and would, therefore, benefit from program-embedded support in the journey toward a college degree.

Because the nature of the interview allowed for a flow of ideas stemming from the decision to enroll in college, the participants' narratives yielded a broader context of stories from which to consider self-authorship development. Some stories traveled back to pre-school days,

while others focused on interconnected elements surrounding the decision to return to school. All, however, offered additional data that enabled a greater understanding of each participant's self-authorship development and a better understanding of the complexities of self-authorship itself.

In addition to the study's findings concerning the limitations and possibilities of attaining self-authorship, the results also revealed a need for caution in interpreting and/or assessing the qualitative data surrounding self-authorship. Baxter Magolda and King (2012), characterize the process of assessment as complex and complicated due to "meaning-making structures" not being "in full use at any given point and may ebb and flow in multiple ways" (p. 22). Kegan, offering his explanation of the complexity of self-authorship's growth leading to its complexity in assessment, explained it as follows:

So [there are] two ways to be thinking about becoming more fully self-authoring. One way is that I am pretty fully self-authoring in some areas of my living—say work—and I have sort of put some of these other arenas on hold because to maintain my self-authoring self in those is a higher art, a more complicated demand such as intimacy . . . there is some arena in which it is most easy for you to get the new structure together, then out of the comfort of that you risk applying it to other arenas—bringing along sides of yourself that haven't yet fully been reclaimed at the new more complex order of consciousness. . . . Another way you can think of becoming more fully self-authoring is the process of gradually exercising one's new structure from a more tentative to a more solid way of being, across all the arenas of one's living. For example, there may be a time when I have to use my self-authoring capacity largely to remain self-authoring. I use it to be on my guard for those situations where I might be likely to cave in again. (Baxter Magolda, 2010b, p. 278)

Kegan's description of self-authorship growth indicates that a person's level or degree of self-authorship is fluid in nature and, as reflected in this study, does not tend to generalize from arena

to arena or situation to situation. In addition, his comments suggest that self-authorship development is more of a purposeful extension from arena to arena, which supports the need for some degree of conscious self-authorship before self-authorship can be strengthened in one arena or extended to another.

Building upon that research, this study's data analysis revealed that demonstrated self-authorship in one situation did not necessarily mean the practice would generalize to other situations. For example, Wanda and Evelyn demonstrated a high development of self-authorship in their personal life; however, their decision to enroll in college was based on external foundations. For Wanda, the external source was her husband's desire for her to earn her degree. For Evelyn, the decision to attend college stemmed from her need for approval from external sources. Both rationales are reasonable, but they do not indicate the presence of self-authorship. Operating from the opposite direction, Corina's highest self-authorship development in her personal life was at the Crossroads, yet her decision to enroll in college demonstrated practices at the Self-Authorship level.

Therefore, within the population of participants in this study, the exercise of self-authorship in one set of circumstances did not guarantee participants would operate from self-authorship in every situation, just as reported by Baxter Magolda and King (2012) in their study of traditionally-aged students. This low level of cross-situational application in post-traditional students supports the need to extend self-authorship programs beyond their current placement among the traditional student population to the post-traditional student population. Both segments house a significant number of students who demonstrate inconsistent levels of self-authorship across situations; therefore, both segments should be supported toward gaining cross-situational consistency in self-authorship practice.

Not only did the post-traditional data mimic that of its counter population concerning low level cross-situational self-authorship, it also followed traditional-student-based research (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012) in showing that the presence of self-authorship in one dimension of

development did not guarantee similar performance in other dimensions of development. For example, Paul demonstrated a firm presence of self-authorship in the Interpersonal Dimension of development, but his narrative also revealed a low level of self-authorship in the Intrapersonal Dimension. In fact, his performance in that dimension indicated that he operated from External Formulas, the opposite extreme to his level of self-authorship in the Intrapersonal Dimension. Debbie presented similar findings in that she demonstrated a much more sophisticated self-authorship presence in the Interpersonal Dimension as compared to the other two, as did Kaitlin. Corina excelled in the Epistemological and Intrapersonal Dimensions, but faltered in the Interpersonal Dimension.

Baxter Magolda and King (2012) cautioned those who conduct self-authorship research that people do not usually operate from Self-Authorship levels in all dimensions. For example, “people might use a self-authoring structure in the cognitive [epistemological] domain but not in the interpersonal domain” (p. 22). Just as the participants in this study showed variation in their self-authorship development across the dimensions of development, Baxter MaGolda and King reported the same tendency in their findings related to self-authorship in young adults.

Extending the findings of established research to a new research population, this study found that self-authorship in one developmental dimension did not necessarily generalize to another. Again, the results reveal the need for self-authorship curriculum and practices in programs for post-traditional students. Even though these students have lived more years and have garnered more experience within which to recognize, develop and practice self-authorship, the reality is that most do not demonstrate fully developed self-authorship across developmental dimensions. That type of cross-development requires a conscious, reflective practice on the part of each student (Baxter Magolda, 2012). In order for that to happen, higher education programs need to develop supportive opportunities specifically designed to support students in learning to utilize the strength in one dimension of development to strengthen another.

Not only did the study's findings reflect already established research concerning self-authorship's limitation to generalize from situation to situation and from one dimension to another, the findings also revealed that self-authorship is not a permanent presence and must be exercised and maintained to remain active. The results echo Kegan's words as reported by Baxter Magolda (2010b), "[People may] use [their self-authoring capacity] to be on [their] guard for those situations where [they] might be likely to cave in again" (p. 278). Not only did he indicate that people may fall back into earlier phases of self-authorship, but he also implied this may happen on multiple occasions.

The self-authorship demonstrated by the study's participants followed Kegan's assessment of self-authorship permanence as well as Baxter Magolda's and King's (2012) finding that self-authorship does not reside in constancy. In the study, even though a participant achieved a higher level of practice along the continuum of phases, that attainment did not always hold that position. Debbie seemed to move back and forth between the External Formulas and Crossroads phases as she reported listening to and acting from her own internal voice at times and accepting external voices of authority without pause at other times. This seemed especially true for her within the Intrapersonal Dimension. Wanda, like Debbie, presented the same sliding effect along the continuum of phases, reporting a strong sense of self-authorship in one part of the narrative and a total lack of self-authorship later in the same narrative sequence. For example, while explaining her decision to return to school, she reported her main reason as being her own "sense of personal satisfaction," but within a few sentences, she reported her prime reason rested with her husband's desire for her to earn a degree. Significant to the interpretation of findings within this population, then, is self-authorship's lack of permanent presence.

Because self-authorship development tends to ebb and flow throughout life, as demonstrated in the literature and in this study, program design leading to healthy self-authorship must extend across all student populations and focus on developmental activities providing opportunities to reflect upon and articulate personal meaning-making, identify any currently

practiced self-authorship, and strengthen the current practice of self-authorship in depth and breadth. In addition, curriculum and practices created for the purpose of promoting self-authorship must follow a scaffolding strategy with the intent of graduating students who understand how to monitor, develop, and maintain self-authorship across time. Lastly, this type of support must be available to all students because, just as traditional students experience sliding degrees of self-authorship across time, so do post-traditional students.

In summary, the following interpretations resulted from an analysis of the collected data from the ten post-traditional student participants and support the argument to extend self-authorship programs to that underserved student population:

1. 6 of 10 participants did not demonstrate Self-Authorship level of development in their meaning-making leading up to the decision to enroll in college.
2. 3 of 10 participants demonstrated no presence of internal voice activity in their meaning-making leading up to the decision to enroll in college.
3. Narratives revealed gaps in generalization across situations and developmental dimensions.
4. Self-authorship appeared to fluctuate across time.

These results reflect current perspectives on self-authorship, both in the adult population as a whole and within the context of the traditional student population (Kegan, 1994; Baxter Magolda, 2011; Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). Extending from that research and specific to this study, however, the findings support the recommendation to extend self-authorship opportunities to the post-traditional student population in higher education based on the data showing that post-traditional students exhibit the same self-authorship patterns as those demonstrated by traditional students. As such, they need to be supported in their self-authorship journeys just as colleges support the developmental journeys of traditional students. It is time to embrace the growing number of post-traditional students enrolling in colleges and universities across the nation and remove the age-related assumptions concerning personal development.

Self-authorship cannot be contained within an age bracket; neither should the opportunities leading to its development be confined by such restrictions.

Implications

As discussed above and according to established research (Kegan, 1994; Kegan & Lahey, 2009), many adults never fully achieve their epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal potential. This study's findings support this assertion. In fact, only two of the study's participants demonstrated evidence of practicing at the highest levels of epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal development, the three dimensions of development represented in Baxter Magolda's (1998; 2011) Self-Authorship theory and framework. Adults who fail to develop in these dimensions, according to Kegan and Lahey (2009), are left ill-equipped to succeed in the postmodern world in which ambiguity and complexity characterize not only the workplace, but also social relationships (Kegan & Lahey, 2009). Based on the study's findings that extend the already established research into the post-traditional student setting, higher education must begin supporting its fast-growing, post-traditional student population (Hussar & Bailey, 2011) in the same manner it supports the traditional student population (Grabowski, Rush, Ragen, Fayard, & Watkins-Lewis, 2016). No longer can it be assumed that post-traditional students are adults and therefore do not need holistic student support. This study, extending from the literature, refutes that assumption by showing that post-traditional students exhibit the same self-authorship patterns as those demonstrated by traditional students. Because they struggle with the same tendencies, they too would benefit from holistic development support, specifically in the area of self-authorship.

This study, supporting the findings from Baxter Magolda (2011) and Kegan (1994), revealed that 8 of 10 (80%) participants were not exercising Self-Authorship at its highest level when weighing the decision to enroll in college, and 6 of 10 were not practicing at any level of Self-Authorship. Of that 60%, half showed no indication at all they were aware of their own voice in the process of making the decision. These findings, along with the associated literature,

support the need to develop programs that will assist post-traditional students in their holistic development.

Furthermore, due to the study's findings that self-authorship did not generalize across situations or developmental dimensions, possible program enhancements might include processes and practices that enable transference of self-authorship from situation to situation and dimension to dimension. In other words, just as Kegan suggested (Baxter Magolda, 2010b), students could be led to recognize and analyze areas in which they are already practicing some degree of self-authorship and encouraged to transfer that practice to other situations and developmental dimensions. In like manner, because the study revealed that self-authorship in the participants was not a permanent attribute once achieved, any program support developed in response to the study would need to include learning components focused not only on the development of self-authorship, but also on the maintenance of self-authorship.

Finally, while the study's results do show the need to design and implement support systems focused on post-traditional students' holistic growth, what the findings reveal at a deeper level is the need for transformation, not only in the level of self-authorship in post-traditional students, but also in the programs delivering curriculum and support to these students. For example, learning opportunities focused on deconstructing and reconstructing paradigms of thinking (Mezirow, 1991; Shields, 2010) would be more supportive of students seeking to be self-authored than traditional lecture-style activities focused on academic content only. In short, program support designed to assist students in becoming self-authored people must first be transformative in structure before it can be transformative in effect.

For example, an adaptation of Kolb's (2014) Experiential Learning Cycle could serve as a transformative structure for post-traditional populations. Though Kolb's cycle is primarily used to explore various experiential learning events, it could be adapted to specifically address self-authorship practice and development. The original framework guides students through a process of first identifying and articulating a concrete experience in learning and follows that step with

guiding them through reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Kolb, 2014, p. 32). The process, at its core, leads students to identify and describe a current construct, reflect on that construct and consider patterns of consistency and inconsistency, deconstruct the original concept and analyze its parts to see how the individual parts align with other relevant concepts, and finally, construct or reconstruct the knowledge in new contexts for future learning.

This process of deconstruction leading to reconstruction aligns with Shield's (2010) transformative leadership model in that it provides a way for students to address and analyze thinking that may be holding them back in their development as human beings. In addition, the process utilizes Mezirow's (1991) "inciting incident" as the point at which the cycle begins, eventually leading to transformation through a process of deep reflection. The key to all three theories—Kolb's, Shields's, and Mezirow's—is active reflection on how something exists in one's thinking and practice and whether the thinking and practice are congruent or not. Growth, or paradigm shifts, occurs when incongruence is identified and cognitive dissonance surfaces. The stronger, more useful construct of knowledge arises from that dissonance.

In the context of self-authorship development, this reflective, cyclical process of deconstructing and reconstructing meaning could serve as a transformative structure supporting transformative effects among post-traditional students. Simply reading about or listening to someone speak about self-authorship as a concept would not produce the same effect. The transformative leader must first create the pathway through which students walk and create their own transformative effects.

One such pathway might be incorporating interview sessions like the ones conducted in this study. Simply providing a non-threatening environment conducive to reflection and articulation of that reflection can lead to transformative results. In fact, one participant returned to the researcher's office two weeks after conducting the interview to report the interaction changed how she perceived a particularly difficult area in her life. She said she felt empowered

to be proactive in the situation, although she did not understand exactly why she felt that way. She only knew the change came during the interview. While this one report is not enough to characterize as a finding in the study, it does suggest transformative possibilities linked to narrative-based interviews.

Recommendations for Action

This qualitative study presents findings that speak to the urgency for change in programs supporting post-traditional students in higher education as well as important factors about self-authorship that should be noted before implementing programs promoting self-authorship.

1. Because post-traditional students in higher education are not receiving focused support in their holistic development (Grabowski, Rush, Ragen, Fayard, & Watkins-Lewis, 2016) despite their growing enrollment (Hussar & Bailey, 2011), stakeholders looking to make the problem visible should consider implementing a leadership-in-action plan such as Kotter's (2012) Eight Stages to Successful Change to promote recognition of post-traditional students, their holistic development needs, and their potential contribution upon becoming self-authored adults. A modified version of that plan might include the following changes:
 - a. Establish a sense of urgency by disseminating the study's findings in context of the supporting literature. Possible venues to consider are colleague lunches, student activities, civic events, education meetings, conversations with business and industry leaders, and presentations at adult learner venues and conventions.
 - b. From the above-mentioned venues, establish a guiding coalition of stakeholders who will develop and communicate a vision and strategy for the visual promotion of self-authorship in post-traditional students.

- c. Generate short-term wins by conducting semester-end surveys of post-traditional students assessing their own self-authorship and sharing the results with stakeholders.
2. As the findings in this study show, a significant percentage of post-traditional students do not operate from optimal levels of self-authorship in epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal development, just as research shows to be the case with traditionally-aged college students (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). Like their traditional counterparts, post-traditional students need self-authorship support to be better prepared for the demands of modern-day life and work. For stakeholders in higher education faculty positions serving post-traditional students, program and course assessments offer prime opportunities to explore ways to implement self-authorship activities and processes in academic programs and courses. At the program level, self-authorship learning outcomes can be added to other student learning outcomes in the program to help ensure self-authorship opportunities are embedded in courses across the program.

At the course level, instructors can reassess their course assignments and determine which ones might be conducive to self-authorship processes. For example, an assignment charging students to prepare an autobiographical presentation could be replaced by an interview much like the one conducted in this study, followed up by an introduction to the concepts in self-authorship, and culminating in a follow-up interview in which the student shares some of his or her identified areas of self-authorship and a plan for extending that self-authorship into other dimensions and situations.

3. As stated in the implications section, promoting the development of self-authorship in post-traditional students does not call for academic knowledge as much as transformative opportunities. Again, those in faculty or instructional positions serving

the post-traditional student population can embed deconstruction/reconstruction activities in each of the program courses to support students becoming familiar with the process of analyzing and adjusting paradigms as new knowledge challenges old frameworks of thinking. If resources are needed to prompt students' deconstruction/reconstruction, many philosophy books contain scenarios written for that purpose. Also, Michael Sandel's *Justice* series on iTunes University is also a rich source from which to draw.

While the above recommendations are made from the perspective of the researcher in a higher education setting, the recommendations may certainly be applied in any learning-based setting for post-traditional students and should be adapted to the needs required by the adult learner(s).

Recommendations for Further Study

This qualitative study's purpose was to begin building a database of information that would inform future program decisions related to student support needs. Because it was only the commencement of gathering narrative data from students within the degree completion program, the study should expand to include more post-traditional students from more diverse populations and academic standings. For example, only one male was represented in this study.

In addition, this study's participant selection protocol called for the first ten students who responded to the invitation and completed the consent forms to be selected for the study. This process of selection also limited the study's findings in that it appealed to the tendencies in high-performing students to be first, and in the process further limited the scope of audience the findings may benefit. As future data is collected to add to the findings in this study, a protocol appealing to a broader base of students should be used. Possibly a random selection would work better.

As the study yielded useful information for the development of post-traditional student support, the study's findings also come with limitations. First, because the study only included

ten participants, caution must be exercised in assuming these findings and interpretations will be true for all post-traditional students. Not only is the sample small, the qualitative nature of the study limits the ability to accurately project the findings on other students or even other programs.

With that in mind, however, the study yields many avenues for future research and as such the following recommendations for future study are suggested:

1. The study should be replicated on a larger scale and with greater diversity in population in order to support, challenge and/or refute its findings. In addition, a partner study might be considered at a similar institution that also houses a degree completion program to increase the ability to generalize findings across institutions while differentiating practices that support and/or hinder self-authorship development among post-traditional students.
2. While this study provided rich narratives from which to generate useful results, adding quantifiable data to those findings would strengthen their standing as well as provide more immediate results within the study of self-authorship. Future research should consider identifying or creating a survey or inventory related to self-authorship to support future findings.
3. Future research might also utilize the Pearson-Marr Archetype Indicator (PMAR) to explore any connections between PMAR results and qualitatively assessed levels of self-authorship. Because archetypal research is foundational to narrative research, and self-authorship is assessed from the context of narrative, the possible connections between the two theories are intriguing. In addition, if connections should materialize, the PMAR could serve as quantifiable data supporting the research.
4. As already stated, the development of self-authorship must be embedded in transformative practices. One such practice could be the implementation of interview sessions similar to the one employed in this study. While only one student reported

- the event in transformative terms, the researcher suspected other participants experienced some degree of self-authorship realization suggested by comments such as, “Now that I think of it...” and “I hadn’t thought of that way before.” In future research, to better discern such growth within the interview, the researcher might consider introducing the concept of self-authorship to the participant before conducting the interview. Doing so may enable better communication of any movement in self-authorship development and will begin the student’s ability to monitor his or her own self-authorship in practice.
5. Another strategy that might be considered as a transformative avenue for self-authorship development is the construction of experiential learning portfolios. Future studies might collect data on self-authorship before and after portfolio development to help determine any correlations that might exist between the theory supporting portfolio development—Kolb’s Experiential Learning Cycle—and self-authorship development. Any findings supporting a correlation would benefit many degree-completion programs utilizing portfolio development as a core component in the degree plan.

All of the above recommendations rest in the single purpose to continue extending self-authorship study and development into the post-traditional student population. This study, revealing that post-traditional students demonstrate the same struggles with self-authorship as traditional students, warrants such continued research and practice.

Conclusion

This work is a skeleton, a framework upon which to build future knowledge concerning post-traditional students and their growth toward self-authorship. While plenty of scholarship has addressed both sides of this work independently—post-traditional students and self-authorship—exploring the two concepts together was a fresh idea with limited literature establishing the

connection. Through the creation of this work, however, the two have become one for this researcher.

Post-traditional students, like their traditionally-aged classmates, struggle with epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal development. One cannot say he or she is serving or supporting this population of students without acknowledging this shortfall in development and the role higher education programs can play in addressing that shortfall. Post-traditional students are about self-authorship, and self-authorship is about post-traditional students. This is so because self-authorship is about empowering the human being, no matter the age of that human being. It is a way of knowing that guides a person to live from his or her core being—the place born from deconstructing destructive thinking and reconstructing the pieces into authentic knowledge of self and others. Self-authorship, then, is about empowering people. Therefore, the work ahead for this researcher lies in making each component of this study, self-authorship and post-traditional students, stronger alongside one another—self-authorship strengthening post-traditional students, and post-traditional students strengthening the study of self-authorship. The journey looks promising for both.

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Appendix A: STUDY INVITATION

March 21, 2017

Dear BAAS Student,

As the coordinator of the BAAS program at Texas A&M University-Texarkana as well as a doctoral student at the University of New England, I invite you to participate in a research study related to the holistic development of post-traditional students enrolled in college. Your experience as a post-traditional student may be able to provide valuable information in the future development of the program.

Your participation in the study would require a single one-on-one interview with me, the principal investigator, that would last approximately 90 minutes. The areas we would be discussing would involve your decision to enroll in college as well as the supports and obstacles you experienced in making that decision. You would not receive any compensation for participating; however, your participation would yield valuable information that will be used to develop the program in ways that better support adult students.

Your privacy and confidentiality will be strictly protected by specific procedures designed to maintain knowledge of your contribution and the information gained through your contribution between the two of us. Participation is completely voluntary, and refusal to participate will not affect your standing with the university or the BAAS program in any way.

If you are willing to participate in this study focused on the holistic development of post-traditional students enrolled in college, please respond to this email at your earliest convenience. Upon receiving your email, I will forward you the study's consent form, which you'll need to read, sign and return to me. The first ten students who return the signed consent form will be selected for the study. Two more students will be selected as alternates and will be offered a place in the study should replacement needs occur.

Again, if you are interested in being a part of this study that will help inform improved support of adult students in college, please respond to this email at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

Lisa Myers

Appendix B: CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND**TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY-TEXARKANA****CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH**

Project Title: Exploring Self-Authorship in Post-Traditional Students: A Narrative Study in Students' Meaning-Making Leading to Enrollment in a Degree Completion Program

Principal Investigator(s):

Lisa Myers

University of New England

Texas A&M University-Texarkana

lmyers6@une.edu

lmyers@tamut.edu

903-223-3133

Introduction:

- Please read this form; you may also request that the form be read to you. The purpose of this form is to provide you with information about this research study, and if you choose to participate, document your decision.
- You are encouraged to ask any questions that you may have about this study, now, during or after the project is complete. You can take as much time as you need to decide whether or not you want to participate.
- Your participation is voluntary.
- Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your current or future relationship with A&M-Texarkana or the BAAS program.

Why is this study being done?

- The purpose of this study is to explore the development of adult students in college.
- Adult students, for the purposes of this study, are college students 25 years of age or older.
- Data gathered in the study will be used to better understand the developmental needs of adult students in college and to develop better support for them while they are in college.

Who will be in this study?

- You have been identified as a potential participant for this study because you are
 - enrolled in the BAAS program at Texas A&M University-Texarkana
 - in your first or second semester of courses at Texas A&M University-Texarkana
 - at least 25 years of age
- A total of ten students will participate in the study.

What will I be asked to do?

- You will be asked to discuss your experience with deciding to seek a four-year degree, including the influences, struggles, and supports you experienced.
- The discussion will take place on the A&M Texarkana campus in a private conference room where you and the principal investigator will participate in an interview lasting approximately 90 minutes.
- Your participation in the study will be limited to the single 90-minute interview session and the checking for accuracy of the complete transcript when it is completed.
- You will not receive any compensation for your participation.

What are the possible risks of taking part in this study?

- There are no foreseeable risks associated with participation except for possible discomfort in discussing your personal experience with the principal investigator if such activities tend to make you nervous.
- The principal investigator will strive to conduct the interview in a warm and inviting atmosphere and will attempt to maintain a no-pressure approach during the interview.

What are the possible benefits of taking part in this study?

- You may experience the direct benefit of better understanding yourself as an individual as a result of reflecting on your decision to attend college.
- Your participation may indirectly benefit future students by providing the knowledge base needed to build better support systems for them.

What will it cost me?

- Participants will not incur any costs except for the cost of travel to the campus.
- Travel costs will not be reimbursed.

How will my privacy be protected?

- Your privacy will be protected in any publications and/or presentations resulting from this study.
 - Possible publications include journal articles, dissertation publication, and other publications supporting adult learner development.
 - Possible presentations include roundtable, workshop and conference presentations
- A pseudonym will be assigned to all materials relating to you.
- Nowhere in the publication will the research site be revealed by name, location, or descriptors that could reasonably lead to its discovery.
- Interviews will be conducted in a private conference room, and others will not be allowed entry.

How will my data be kept confidential?

- Research records will be kept in a locked cabinet in the home office of the principal investigator
- [Compliant data](#): Data will be stored on a secure server at UNE that is only accessible from UNE owned computers. All computers that will be used to access research data will have its hard drive encrypted.
- Individually identifiable data will be destroyed after the study is complete;
- Digital information will be stored on principal investigator's private computer and protected by undisclosed password.
- Please note that sponsors, regulatory agencies, and the Institutional Review Board may review the research records.
- A copy of your signed consent form will be maintained by the principal investigator for at least 3 years after the project is complete before it is destroyed. The consent forms will be stored in a secure location that only members of the research team will have access to and will not be affiliated with any data obtained during the project.
- Data from this study may be used for future research purposes as long privacy and confidentiality are maintained.

What are my rights as a research participant?

- Your participation is voluntary. Your decision to participate will have no impact on your current or future relations with the University *[or with other cooperating institutions (Texas A&M University-Texarkana)]*. Your decision whether to participate or not in this study will not impact your standing as a student.
- You may skip or refuse to answer any question for any reason.
- If you choose not to participate there is no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive. You are free to withdraw from this research study at any time, for any reason. If you choose to withdraw

from the research there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive.

- If you fail to keep your appointment for the 90-minute interview on more than one occasion, you may be removed from the study at the principal investigator's discretion.

What other options do I have?

- If meeting at the study site is not conducive to the participant's needs, alternative locations may be agreed upon as long as privacy and confidentiality can be maintained.
- You may choose not to participate.

Whom may I contact with questions?

- The researcher conducting this study is Lisa Myers. For questions or more information concerning this research, you may contact her at 903-293-2390 or lmyers6@une.edu.
- If you choose to participate in this research study and believe you may have suffered a research related injury, please contact Lisa Myers at 903-293-2390 or lmyers6@une.edu.
- You may also contact Lisa Myers's lead advisor, Dr. Carol Burbank, at 301-292-4947 or cburbank@une.edu should you have questions or concerns about the study and/or your experience with the study.
- If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you may call Olgun Guvench, M.D. Ph.D., Chair of the UNE Institutional Review Board at (207) 221-4171 or irb@une.edu.

Will I receive a copy of this consent form?

- Yes, you will be given a copy of this consent form.

Participant's Statement

I understand the above description of this research and the risks and benefits associated with my participation as a research subject. I agree to take part in the research and do so voluntarily.

Participant's signature or

Date

Legally authorized representative

Printed name

Researcher's Statement

The participant named above had sufficient time to consider the information, had an opportunity to ask questions, and voluntarily agreed to be in this study.

Researcher's signature

Date

Appendix C: UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND IRB APPROVAL



Institutional Review Board
Olgun Guvench, Chair

Biddeford Campus
11 Hills Beach Road
Biddeford, ME 04005
(207)602-2244 T
(207)602-5905 F

Portland Campus
716 Stevens Avenue
Portland, ME 04103

To: Lisa Myers
Cc: Carol Burbank
From: Olgun Guvench
Date: March 13, 2017
Project # & Title: 030317-003, Exploring Self-Authorship in Post-Traditional Students: A Narrative Study in Students' Meaning-Making Leading to Enrollment in a Degree Completion Program (Initial)

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects has reviewed the above captioned project, and has determined that the proposed work is exempt from IRB review and oversight as defined by 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2).

Additional IRB review and approval is not required for this protocol as submitted. If you wish to change your protocol at any time, you must first submit the changes for review.

Please contact Olgun Guvench at (207) 221-4171 or oguvench@une.edu with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Olgun Guvench", written in a cursive style.

Olgun Guvench, M.D., Ph.D.
IRB Chair

IRB#: 030317-003
Submission Date: 3/1/17
Status: Exempt, 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2)
Status Date: 3/13/17

Appendix D: TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY-TEXARKANA IRB APPROVAL

From: **Abbie Strunc** astrunc@tamut.edu
Subject: IRB Approval
Date: March 23, 2017 at 1:55 PM
To: **Lisa Myers** lmyers@tamut.edu
Cc: **Sandra Labby** slabby@tamut.edu

AS

Good afternoon,

Please see your IRB approval letter attached to this email.

Best,

Sandy Labby & Abbie Strunc, IRB Co-chairs



Abbie Strunc, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Education
abbie.strunc@tamut.edu
Phone: 903.223.3030

7101 University Avenue
University Center
Texarkana, TX 75503-0597



LM03212017.docx

DEAN OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

www.TAMUT.edu



03/21/2017

Dear Ms. Meyers,

I am pleased to inform you that the Texas A&M Texarkana (TAMUT) Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved your human subjects research proposal (#LM032102017) entitled *Exploring Self-Authorship in Post-Traditional Students: A Narrative Study in Students' Meaning-Making Leading to Enrollment in a Degree Completion Program*. Based on the information provided, your protocol was categorized as requiring Full IRB Review (see TAMUT SOP 13.0) and was approved. Your approval is good for one year, expiring on March 21, 2018. Should you need to collect data beyond this date it is your responsibility to request a continuation from the IRB prior to March 21, 2018.

The IRB wishes you the best in your research endeavor.

Sincerely,

Dr. Abbie Strunc
Assistant Professor of Education & IRB Co-Chair
Texas A&M University -Texarkana

Dr. Sandy Labby
Assistant Professor of Education & IRB Chair
Texas A&M University-Texarkana

Appendix E: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Introduction: Before we get started, do you have any questions about the study or your role as a participant before we begin?

Answer any questions the participant may have.

Continue: Before we start the actual interview, would you mind completing the following form for the study's data collection? Remember all information will be kept private and confidential.

Field of Work/Position:

How long have you been in the workforce?

Age range (circle one): 25 – 30 31 – 40 41 – 50 51 – 60 61 – 70

The following questions and requests will be utilized to help guide the participants' narratives and to better ensure the type and depth of responses to assist in the study's exploration of self-authorship:

1. Tell me a little about yourself: your background, work, family, etc.
2. If you were to construct a story of your life, who would play the role of the good guys in the story? You can use pseudonyms or even omit names and relationships altogether if you prefer.
 - a. Why do you think you see them in this way?
 - b. Are these people aware of your perceptions of them? Why or why not?
3. Who would play the role of the bad guys in your story? The same freedom to use names and relationships or not still applies.

- a. Why do you think you see them in this way?
- b. Are these people aware of your perceptions of them? Why or why not?
4. Tell me about your decision concerning college right after high school.
 - a. Why did you choose not to go?
 - b. Why did you decide to drop out after that initial attempt?
5. What made you decide to earn your bachelor's degree now, at this point in your life?
 - a. When did you first start thinking about it?
 - b. What encouragement—from yourself, others, and your personal situation—did you experience?
 - c. What challenges—in your thinking, actions, and relationships—did you experience as you considered enrolling in college?
 - d. How did you deal with the support you received as well as the challenges you experienced?
 - e. What people in your life held the most sway in your decision to become a college student?
 - i. Did they encourage your going to college or discourage it?
 - ii. What makes their opinion so valuable to you?
 - f. Now that you are an official college student, what would you say is the reason for your being here?

Because the interview will be semi-structured, the degree to which the listed questions are utilized will be determined in each interview as determined by the details of each participant's stories and whether those details sufficiently support the purpose of the study.

Appendix F: RESEARCHER'S CURRICULM VITAE

Lisa Myers

PO Box 3544, Texarkana, TX 75504

903-293-2390

lmyers6@une.edu - lmyers@tamut.edu**EDUCATION**

University of New England (Maine)
 Ed.D. in Educational Leadership
 Expected completion in 2017

Texas A&M University-Texarkana
 M.S. in Adult Education (2009)
 B.S. in English (2000)

Texarkana College (1996-1998)

ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

Texas A&M University-Texarkana
 Clinical Faculty (2013-present)
 BAAS Program Coordinator (2013-present)

Texarkana College; Texarkana, TX
 Adjunct English Instructor (2009-2013)

Redwater Independent School District; Redwater, TX
 District ELAR Chair (2011-2013)
 Dual Credit English Instructor (2009-2013)
 Teacher (2003-2013)

Texas A&M University-Texarkana
 AmeriCorps Teacher Academy Coordinator (2001-2003)

Texarkana Independent School District; Texarkana, TX
 Teacher (2000-2001)

COURSES TAUGHT

Composition and Rhetoric I and II
 Advanced Composition for Educators
 Psychology of Work
 Strategies in Action Research
 Prior Learning Assessment Theory and Practice
 University Foundations for Adult Learners

RESEARCH INTERESTS

Self-Authorship in Post-Traditional Students
Transformative Leadership
Transformational Learning
Prior Learning Assessment and Metacognition
Adult Learning Concepts in Public School Administration

PRESENTATIONS

The Missing Adults in Adult Education: The Need for Adult Education in Public School Administration Programs (AAACE – 2014)

The Other PLA Benefit: Metacognition in Adult Learners (Council for Adult and Experiential Learning – 2015)

Learning Counts Prior Learning Assessment: The Wheel Has Already Been Completed (Council for Adult and Experiential Learning – 2016)

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Curriculum Development (secondary and post-secondary levels)
Face-to-Face, Web-enhanced, and Online Instruction
Professional Development
Program Coordination (administration, marketing, advising, assessing)
Workshop Facilitation
Event Speaking

VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

School Board Trustee (Redwater Independent School District)
Mentor of Future Teachers
Spiritual Development Teacher and Facilitator

HONORS AND RECOGNITION

Summa cum laude
Delta Kappa Gamma
Phi Theta Kappa
Sigma Tau Delta
Kappa Delta Pi
2015-16 Council for Adult and Experiential Learning: Learning Counts Ambassador