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Anna Pressler

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, annapressler@gmail.com

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The Role of Leadership Experience in Self-Authorship Development:

A Qualitative Case Study

by

Anna L. Pressler

A THESIS

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# The Role of Leadership Experience in Self-Authorship Development:

## A Qualitative Case Study

Anna L. Pressler, M.A.

University of Nebraska 2013

Adviser: James V. Griesen

Marcia Baxter Magolda's research showed development of self-authorship typically occurred around 30 years of age. However, some programming and experiential learning presented opportunities to accelerate self-authorship development in college. Baxter Magolda emphasized the importance of self-authorship in the formative years of college and post-graduation with significant life decisions of academic major, career choice, and relationships. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the role leadership experience played in development of self-authorship in college. Previous research touted multicultural programming, developmental advising, challenging classroom environments, and living-learning community models as ways to promote self-authorship development, but little research examined the role of leadership. By exploring men's fraternity presidents' experiences and progress toward self-authorship, the researcher hoped to distinguish what aspects of leadership experience promoted development of self-authorship. Findings indicated elements of leadership experience, such as peer accountability, higher level decision making, and personal reflection, positively impacted self-authorship development.

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Completing a master's degree and thesis project requires a great deal of hard work, work that could not be completed without the support of family, friends, colleagues, and mentors.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

#### Background

Knowledge attainment and career preparation are central goals of higher education. Leaders in most colleges and universities believe students should develop various competencies outside basic classroom learning, such as appreciation for diversity, understanding of how to develop respectful relationships, learning to balance one's own needs with the needs of others, and developing a moral compass to guide behavioral choices (Baxter Magolda, 2003). With a desire to develop students within these competencies and others, student affairs practitioners aim to “focus on learning outcomes and assessment in order to demonstrate student affairs programs and services' valuable contributions to the development of the whole student” (Dungy & Gordon, 2011, p. 74).

Development of self-authorship, making a shift to defining the self, values, and knowledge based on personal standards rather than those of authorities or peers, is a key factor in whole student development. As college students contemplate decisions of academic major, career path, friendships, and romantic relationships, they would ideally first understand themselves, their strengths, and their personal values. While most self-authorship researchers show this self-definition is not fully present until near age 30, other researchers have offered suggestions for developing self-authorship through various programs, learning environments, and academic models (Baxter Magolda, 2003; Walczak, 2008; Ortiz & Rhoads, 2000; Piper, 1997). These various models include intentional conversations around college choice, multicultural education, collaborative

and challenging classroom environments, developmental advising, and a community standards model in a living-learning community. However, few researchers have considered the impact of leadership experience on promoting self-authorship.

In order to fully promote whole student development and meet the aim of student affairs in higher education, leaders must understand how leadership experience fits within other developmental activities. For students to successfully navigate the many obstacles they face during and immediately following college, they must understand themselves, their identities, and the roles they play in making healthy, personal decisions. Baxter Magolda (2003) asserted “functioning effectively in contemporary society, both during and after college, requires self-authorship – or the internal capacity to make meaning of one’s beliefs, knowledge, identity, and relationships to others” (p. 235).

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this case study was to explore how leadership experience impacts the development of self-authorship. Specifically, the case study considered leaders’ levels of self-authorship and development in accordance with Marcia Baxter Magolda’s (2004) Theory of Self-Authorship.

### **Research Questions**

One grand tour question and three sub-questions were used to guide the research. The primary question was: Does leadership experience in a men’s fraternity impact self-authorship development? The sub-questions were as follows:

1. What aspects of leadership experience promote the development of self-authorship?

2. How do leaders benefit from the development of self-authorship?
3. How can leadership experiences be used or enhanced to encourage development of self-authorship during college years?

### **Research Design**

The bounded system of men's fraternity members at a large, Midwestern university, referred to as Midwestern University, was used as the population and source of the subsequent sample. The population included presidents just completing their terms of office from 22 men's fraternities. Seven participants were interviewed as the sample for the study. Qualitative research, specifically a case study, was chosen in order to more deeply understand one particular issue (Creswell, 2007).

Participants were recruited via an email sent to all presidents recently completing their terms. Identification of those in the population and aspects of recruiting were assisted by the university's Office of Greek Affairs. The seven participants were provided with informed consent information and voluntarily agreed to participate in an audio-recorded interview. Interviews were approximately 30 minutes to 1-hour in length and were conducted in private rooms at the student union or in a centrally located academic building on campus.

After completion of interviews, all recordings were transcribed. Participants were given an opportunity to check their individual transcriptions to ensure their thoughts were appropriately conveyed and their anonymity was protected. Each transcription, which included descriptions of the participants' experiences as leaders of their chapters, was analyzed through a coding system. The many codes were grouped into six emerging

themes that provide description of the research findings. The themes were further analyzed using Baster Magolda's Theory of Self-Authorship and previous research about the theory's application in developmental practices.

### **Definition of Terms**

To ensure understanding of the research purpose, methods, and findings, specific terms must be defined.

*Leader:* Previous research offers a vast number of definitions of a leader (Kelley, 2008). This study defines a leader as someone serving in a position of authority or directing a group with the privilege of making decisions on behalf of the group, motivating others, and representing the group. Specifically, in this study a leader is the elected president of a men's fraternity chapter. They are sophomores, juniors, or seniors, who lead meetings, discipline members, represent the chapter, and collaborate with all stakeholders to conduct the business of the chapter, among many other roles and tasks. The terms leader and president are used interchangeably throughout the research.

*Leadership Experience:* Someone who has served as leader and conducted the roles, tasks, responsibilities, pertaining thereto.

*Men's Fraternity:* A single-gender fraternal (Greek) organization that focuses on scholarship, friendship, development, and specific core values, and selects members through a strategic recruitment process (North American Interfraternity Conference, 2013).

*Self-authorship*: A shift from defining oneself and one's decisions based on knowledge from authorities to defining oneself and constructing one's own knowledge based on personal values (Baxter Magolda, 2003).

### **Significance**

This study aimed to explore the role leadership experience, specifically as president of a men's fraternity, played in developing self-authorship. Baxter Magolda's (2003) initial research showed self-authored ways of knowing developed after the traditional college age. Her studies were longitudinal in nature and primarily focused on a specific, more privileged population of current and former undergraduate students at one institution of higher education. Further research results pointed to various multicultural education, academic advising, residential living, and teaching methods that offered undergraduate students opportunities to grow in their self-authoring ways. This earlier growth in self-authorship enhanced student learning and overall development in a multitude of ways. Reviewing current literature showed a lack of research on leadership experience's role, specifically leadership in fraternal organizations, in developing self-authorship in undergraduate students. This researcher considered self-authorship development in a new context, and the results provide additional information surrounding possibilities to promote and develop self-authorship within a higher education environment.

Ultimately, the researcher aimed to add to the literature on self-authorship development and inform the practice of student affairs professionals. Implications of the research will ideally serve higher education students, faculty, and staff as they work



together to develop the whole student, one prepared to succeed and become the author of their own lives in and beyond their undergraduate college experience.

### **Delimitations**

This study was conducted at one large research institution in the Midwest. Participants were recruited from one Greek community, and only from men's organizations. Participants were required to be over the age of 19, the age of majority, and also presidents of their organizations during the prior year. Additionally, participation was entirely voluntary. Of the 22 students meeting these criteria, 7 agreed to participate in the study.

### **Limitations**

Case studies are viewed by some as being an exploratory research strategy (Yin, 2009). However, most qualitative and social science researchers today believe case studies can be explanatory as well as exploratory. Although researchers may find it difficult to generalize results to other cases or populations, results should be generalizable theoretical propositions. Another central concern of most forms of qualitative research is bias because of the researcher's influence and active participation in data collection. Qualitative researchers often do not have clear, rigid processes to follow and therefore must intuitively collect and analyze data while trusting themselves and their method.

This specific case study also is subject to limitations. The leadership experience offered in a men's fraternity is unique compared to other leadership experiences offered in a higher education setting. Additionally, while each Greek chapter is national in scope, each Greek system and chapter operates in nuanced manners. Therefore, replication of

this study within other Greek systems, with other Greek chapters, or with leaders of other types of organizations may be difficult. The seven participants in this study do not represent all leaders or all leadership experience. Additionally, the self-selection nature of participant recruitment could have led to only those with more positive experiences volunteering. Time constraints on the part of the researcher also impacted the lack of longitudinal consideration of these leadership experiences and the ability to obtain a larger sample size. Finally, based on the researcher's observations, participants were relatively homogeneous in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, and other aspects of diversity.

### **Assumptions**

Based on previous experience with Greek chapters, the researcher assumed leadership experience as president of a fraternal organization would enhance self-authorship development. Additionally, the researcher assumed a sample of men may present challenges because of their disinterest in discussing personal situations and experiences. However, the researcher also assumed men's fraternity leaders would likely experience more opportunities to develop self-authorship because of their more independent chapter operations as compared to women's fraternal organization leaders who experience significant support from alumnae and national organizations.

### **Conclusion**

This study considered the role of leadership experience in the development of self-authorship in presidents of men's fraternities at Midwestern University. Chapter 2 offers further detail about Baxter Magolda's Theory of Self-Authorship, which served as the theoretical framework for this study, leadership, and men's fraternities. In Chapter 3

the researcher describes research methodology, the research site, and research participants. Chapters 4 and 5 display findings and implications for this research.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

#### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this case study was to explore how leadership experience impacts the development of self-authorship. Specifically, the case study considered leaders' level of self-authorship and development in accordance with Marcia Baxter Magolda's (2004) Theory of Self-Authorship.

#### **Research Questions**

One grand tour question and three sub-questions were used to guide the research. The primary question was: Does leadership experience in a men's fraternity impact self-authorship development? The sub-questions were as follows:

1. What aspects of leadership experience promote the development of self-authorship?
2. How do leaders benefit from the development of self-authorship?
3. How can leadership experiences be used or enhanced to encourage development of self-authorship during college years?

#### **Introduction**

This literature review is intended to review the concepts of self-authorship, leadership, and men's fraternities. As the theoretical foundation for this research, the literature review is focused on Baxter Magolda's Theory of Self-Authorship and how the theory relates to college students. When discussing men's fraternities, the researcher provided context by describing Midwestern University's Greek system and structure.

The literature was found using a variety of peer-reviewed journals, books, and online databases. The search for resources was focused on a large variety of search terms including: “self-authorship,” “Baxter Magolda,” “leadership,” leadership experience,” “leadership development,” “college student leadership,” “college student development,” “Greek/fraternity leadership,” “fraternity,” and “Greek organization.” The literature found and summarized in the literature review does not exhaust all research on these subjects, however it does provide a solid foundation for understanding and further research.

The literature review begins with a review of the Theory of Self-Authorship in accordance with Marcia Baxter Magolda’s research. Examples of how the theory has been put into practice in a variety of programs within higher education are also described. These programs offer methods and techniques for fostering self-authorship development, concepts that would ideally transfer to leadership experiences in a higher education setting. An overview of leadership and how leadership relates to both college students and self-authorship is then discussed. Finally, the body of research debating both positive and negative aspects of fraternities and membership in fraternal organizations is reviewed.

### **Baxter Magolda’s Theory of Self-Authorship**

Cognitive-structural theories “seek to describe the nature and processes of change, concentrating on the epistemological structures individuals construct to give meaning to their worlds” (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 33). Baxter Magolda (2004) developed one cognitive structural theory from a 16-year longitudinal grounded theory study in

which she interviewed a sample of young adults, ages 18 to 34. In multiple interviews with her participants, she focused on their journeys through young adulthood and how they navigated uncertainty of their knowledge, their relationships, and their sense of self to ultimately author their own lives. Baxter Magolda used the first five positions of William Perry's theory of intellectual development, (basic duality, multiplicity prelegitimate, multiplicity subordinate, multiplicity correlate, and relativism), as a base for her initial research (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). Baxter Magolda also reviewed and incorporated research from Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Baxter Magolda (2004) defined epistemological transformation as “questioning existing assumptions and crafting new ones to see the world from a more complex perspective” (p. 31). Further the term *epistemological reflection* (ER) was used to “refer to assumptions about the nature, limits, and certainty of knowledge, and how those epistemological assumptions evolve during young adulthood” (p. 31).

Baxter Magolda's (2001) ER model shows a socially constructed and “context-bound” personal epistemology. As individuals take in information or new experiences they interpret what has happened, analyze what happened based on their current perspective, and form conclusions about what that experience means. The individual's current assumptions about themselves and the world, encounters with conflicting assumptions, and the experiences' context shape the meaning the individual creates. The interaction of both internal and external factors leads to developmental transformation.

Baxter Magolda also believes identity and relational development is entangled with personal epistemology.

Baxter Magolda's (2004) research led to phases within an ER Model. In the first year of her study, a majority of her participants fell in the *absolute knowing* phase where participants presumed authorities designated knowledge and that all knowledge was truth. "Absolute learners" developed this core assumption based on expectations for learning including:

- Teachers communicate information clearly to students and make sure students understand
- Students obtain knowledge from teachers
- Peers share material and explain the material to each other
- Evaluation is a means to show the teacher students' acquired knowledge (p. 34).

Men and women differed in the absolute knowing phase, as more women than men used a receiving pattern which "focused on listening and recording knowledge to learn" (p. 34). In contrast, more men used the mastery pattern where students wanted more participation to show their interests and understanding of the material.

Baxter Magolda (2004) defined the next step as *transitional knowing*, these individuals "perceived knowledge as absolute in some areas but uncertain in others" (p. 34). Other aspects of this phase include:

- Shifting from acquiring to understanding knowledge
- Expecting teachers to focus on understanding and application

- Preferring evaluation focused on understanding rather than memorization
- Using peers to explore different interpretations (p. 34).

Students were generally in this phase during their junior or senior year of college.

Gender patterns also appeared in this phase as more women than men exhibited the interpersonal pattern and aimed to build connections with the subject and others to learn in uncertainty. In contrast, more men than women showed the impersonal pattern tending to keep others and the subject of study at a distance. Those who used an interpersonal pattern focused more on how others felt about the subject while those who used an impersonal pattern focused more on their own perspectives.

The next phase, *Independent knowing*, is described by thinking most knowledge is uncertain. In Baxter Magolda's (2004) study, only 16 percent of college seniors reached this phase. Those in this phase:

- Focused on thinking for themselves
- Shared views with peers to expand their thinking
- Expected teachers to promote independent thinking and avoid judging students' opinions (p. 37).

In independent knowing more women used the interindividual pattern focusing on listening to others while struggling to listen to oneself. In contrast, more men used the individual pattern; they struggled to listen to others and could readily share their thoughts.

*Contextual knowing* is "characterized by the belief that knowledge exists in a context and is judged on evidence relevant to that context" (Baxter Magolda, 2004, p.



37). Men and women still differ in this phase but turned to previously described patterns to explore. Individuals know they need to decide their own criteria for knowing, but they often still look to external sources for guidance. Most achieve this stage after graduating from college in the young adult years.

At this point, Baxter Magolda's (2002) research participants reached a crossroads phase in which they identified a need to move from external to internal authority, but they were unsure how to proceed and somewhat afraid. Individuals explored in this phase because of their dissatisfaction with previous decisions made from external concepts. Subsequently, individuals became the author of their own life and became accountable for their own identity, values, and relationships (Baxter Magolda, 2004). By their late 20s and early 30s, participants increased their comfort with themselves, their identities, and how they interacted with others which coincides with the internal foundation phase. "The framework for 'who I am' solidified into a solid sense of self that made participants feel 'personally grounded' and able to be true to themselves in all dimensions of their lives" (p. 40). Individuals could develop their own values and live their lives in accordance to those personal core beliefs. Additionally, being comfortable with their own ways of knowing allowed more comfort with exploring others' views and recognizing that some uncertainty is common.

### **Self-Authorship in College**

The concept of self-authorship encompasses self, identity, and cognition; therefore development of self-authorship equates to the development of the whole student (Baxter Magolda, 2003). Self-authorship involves a shift from defining oneself and one's

decisions based on knowledge from authorities to defining one's self and constructing one's own knowledge based on personal values. Within a college setting Baxter Magolda (2003) determined:

Multicultural education, residential living, academic advising, and teaching illustrate the broad range of possibilities for transforming higher education programs, services, and policies to promote self-authorship as well as the importance of collaboration among academic and student affairs educators in achieving this aim. (p. 237)

**Obstacles students face.** During college students are faced with difficult decisions that can have far-reaching impact on themselves and others, including: career aspirations, relationships, and their behavior (Baxter Magolda, 2003). While in college students are asked to select majors and determine future career goals. Without realizing their own options, interests, and desires, without self-authorship, these decisions can be difficult for students. With self-authorship, students would likely select courses of study based on their own values and interests rather than what they believed family, peers, or society wanted them to do.

Another challenge facing college students is the ability to build an appreciation for diversity and intercultural competence (Baxter Magolda, 2003). Higher education professionals want students to “understand their own cultural heritage, learn about other cultures, move away from ethnocentric perspectives, and work interdependently with people different from themselves” (p. 233 – 234). Increasing capacity for intercultural competence requires epistemological development and a “sense of self that is not threatened by difference” (p. 234).

Similarly, students are expected to engage in respectful, healthy relationships with each other. This can be a true obstacle when students are unable to balance their own

needs with the needs of others (Baxter Magolda, 2003). Entering into relationships before having developed a sense of self can cause deceptions or needs for affirmation rather than true, genuine commitments between two complete people.

Students also face obstacles everyday regarding behavioral choices. Making responsible choices, particularly regarding alcohol, requires deciding to proceed in ways appropriate for oneself regardless of peer influence (Baxter Magolda, 2003).

**Programs to facilitate self-authorship development.** Baxter Magolda (2003)

believed:

...cocurricular structures, although aimed at teaching students to make wise and responsible choices that show respect for themselves and others, are often fraught with control mechanisms that lead students to focus more on external consequences than on defining their internal sense of self. (p. 236)

Research results suggest that students can develop more quickly and operate at higher levels when they are given a supportive environment that challenges reliance on authority and rewards complex thinking. According to Baxter Magolda (2002), higher education professionals must provide environments that convey that “knowledge is complex and socially constructed” (p.4), “self is central to knowledge construction” (p. 5), and “authority and expertise are shared in the mutual construction of knowledge among peers” (p. 6). These three assumptions about environment are further paired with three “principles for educational practice” (p. 6), also referred to as the Learning Partnerships Model. Those principles are “validating learners’ capacity to know” (p. 6), “situating learning in learners’ experience” (p. 6), and “mutually constructing meaning” (p. 7). The three environmental assumptions along with the three educational principles promote

self-authorship through modeling and giving students the support they need to move from external to internal self-definition.

Although many would argue traditional students seeking entry into colleges and universities have not yet achieved self-authorship, Walczak (2008) suggested guidance counselors and admissions counselors should approach the admissions process with self-authorship development in mind. Walczak (2008) stated guidance and admissions counselors “can facilitate the developmental transition between where the student is and where the college expects the student to be for educational success” (p. 35). Ideally, they would offer a safe environment for students to reflect upon their interests and expectations for college and lay the groundwork for initial exploration into self-authorship.

Ortiz and Rhoads’ (2000) created a multicultural education program. In their program, students first were asked to understand the meaning of culture and how it shaped their lives. Second, students gained understanding of diverse cultures through dialogue with others. Third, students deconstructed and recognized their own culture and racial identity. Fourth, students determined how culture played a role in their lives and aimed to understand how multiple cultures can coexist. The last phase involved students understanding how culture, society, and individuals were all interconnected. Baxter Magolda (2003) believed this process promoted self-authorship by encouraging complexity, keeping the self as central, and constructing meaning mutually.

The “Community Standards Model” created at the University of Nevada-Las Vegas promoted self-authorship in residential living (Piper, 1997). In this model, students

developed their own standards for how they would treat and relate to each other and how they would hold each other accountable to these standards. In phase two, students recognized they each presented different values and behaviors and therefore, being held accountable to these standards was difficult. At this point, students could reconvene the group to revise their standards. In the final phase, students who violated standards and those who were concerned about those violations were held responsible through community conversations. According to Piper (1997), students who participated in this model

...learned to appreciate their uniqueness, had become more self-aware, more responsible, more confident, more capable of standing up for what they believed, more willing to state their opinion, more understanding of others, more able to stand up for what they wanted, and more willing to object to activities and actions they felt were wrong. (p. 24)

This model could also be used anywhere on campus where community building is essential, such as student organizations, fraternities and sororities, campus work environments, learning communities, or in the classroom.

Baxter Magolda (2002) believed the areas of career and academic advising were “ideal grounds for promoting self-authorship” (p. 8). Virginia Tech University’s developmental model of academic advising provides an example of increasing student responsibility and decreasing advisor responsibility in an effort to build self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2003). The model takes into account the higher level of need for support and assistance early in a student’s college career. Therefore, the model begins with an “advisor-centered approach” and gradually shifts to a “student-centered approach” while ensuring the student’s development of self is at the center of academic and career decisions (p. 241). Each year of a student’s college career both the student and

the advisor have clear roles and responsibilities in order to smoothly increase student responsibility.

Baxter Magolda (2003) believed student affairs professionals should guide educational transformation and implement experiences that stimulate complex learning.

Baxter Magolda (2003) stated:

Critical thinking, the most agreed-upon goal of higher education, requires the ability to define one's own beliefs in the context of existing knowledge. If this struggle occurred during college, students would learn how to explore multiple perspectives, respect diverse views, think independently, and establish and defend their own informed views. (p. 232 – 233)

In essence, with a push to explore the self, students could more effectively meet the demands of college and be better prepared for post-college life.

Conversely, higher education professionals must be concerned with potential risks to the university and the individual if too much responsibility is given to students before self-authorship is achieved (Baxter Magolda, 2003). Professionals should aim to find appropriate boundaries within which they can promote student responsibility and self-authorship. Giving students more responsibility in college may make some uncomfortable, but uncomfortable situations such as making difficult decisions, facing complex issues, and communicating with others are part of everyday life after college. Higher education professionals should aim to build these skills in students during the college years while students likely have larger support systems more readily available.

### **Leadership**

Building leadership skills in students has long been an aim of higher education (Kelly, 2008). With students' increased desire to become leaders during and after

college, institutions have placed more emphasis on programming related to leadership. Universities often offer courses in leadership and the goal of building students' leadership skills is often listed in university mission statements (Adams & Keim, 2000). Research has proven a positive correlation between leadership experience and enhanced leadership skills, values, and civic responsibility (Kelly, 2008). Alumni frequently point to leadership experiences in college as critical to building necessary skills for their future careers.

Many researchers have studied traits individuals must possess to be leaders and attempted to theoretically define leadership. This research has led to over 200 definitions of leadership (Kelly, 2008). Skills typically associated with leadership include: motivation, decision making, problem solving, organization, delegation, social skills, interpersonal skills, risk-taking, and teamwork. Serving in an officer role or having a position of responsibility in a student organization during an undergraduate career has been shown to positively impact these skills as well as student learning and development (Logue, Hutchens, & Hector, 2005). Various research has also pointed to a students' previous experiences, personal belief in their leadership potential, action orientation, training, and gender as playing a role in the quality of leadership experiences.

Studies also show a difference in leadership skill assessment in men and women at the college level (Adams & Keim, 2000). College men are often more confident in their leadership abilities and believe they are effective in meeting objectives and goals. More women approach leadership in a collaborative manner and encourage others to engage in leadership roles as well. Both men and women were not comfortable

challenging the status quo in their collegiate leadership experiences, however more women than men were willing to do so.

In Logue, Hutchens, and Hector's (2005) study, student leaders stated their leadership experience was "an overwhelmingly positive experience" (p. 405). Students felt fulfilled and receive personal enjoyment as a result of their leadership experience. While some students in the study mentioned negative aspects of their leadership role, such as hard work or feeling pressure, most still described the personal benefits they received even through the challenges. Overall, the study's results "provide evidence that student leadership was significant, not only in the current participants' perception of the college experience as a whole, but also in the resolution of some of the associated developmental processes, such as interpersonal skill development" (p. 406).

### **Leadership and Self-Authorship**

As part of a Masters of Business Administration course, Eriksen (2009) developed an activity to allow students to reflect on their values and beliefs and "consider the impact of these on their day-to-day organizational lives and leadership" (p. 747). Eriksen (2009) witnessed the impact students' ability to define themselves had on their authentic leadership skills and abilities. Erikson (2009) stated:

Although it is recognized that the identification of one's values and beliefs and the creation of personal leadership principles are important to one's leadership development, in order to continuously be an effective and authentic leader as one matures and enters new leadership contexts, one must be able to practice practical reflexivity and self-authorship. (p. 749)

One's leadership skills, values, and beliefs grow and develop over time. Progressing toward self-authorship is an important component in that development. Other researchers



(Quinn, Spreitzer, & Brown, 2000) have also shown a link between effective leadership and the leader's ability to reflect and utilize their own values and principles. "Part of self-authorship and authentic leadership is creating one's own leadership principles based on one's lived experiences versus simply adopting someone else's" (Eriksen, 2009, p. 751).

Eriksen's (2009) course activity and focus on self-authorship also had a significant impact on students' relationships with each other. Self-authorship development's impact on relationship building influences leaders' ability to understand their followers, use their deeper understanding of followers during interactions, and become more effective leaders (p. 750).

### **Men's Fraternities**

A great deal of research exists that point to the importance of co-curricular or extracurricular activities on student learning, social skills, and personal development (Kuh, 1995; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Astin, 1993). Additionally, these out-of-class experiences impact critical thinking skills, "real-world" preparation, and understanding of diversity. Men's fraternities offer one option for involvement in extracurricular activities. However, research about the Greek experience is complex and contentious (Herbert, 2006).

Research results indicate a positive correlation between Greek fraternity membership and lessened feelings of loneliness or isolation and college persistence, likely due to the support system offered by the fraternity (Tripp, 1997). Additionally, Greek fraternity members are more likely to be involved in other activities on campus which leads to higher self-esteem and development. Hebert (2006) noted members of

men's fraternities "developed mature interpersonal relationships, learned leadership skills, became involved in community service, benefited from healthy psychosocial development, and enjoyed a sense of community with their brothers" (p. 38).

Conversely, researchers indicate negative influences of Greek fraternity membership including less exposure to students from diverse racial or ethnic backgrounds, lower academic achievement, and increased incidents of academic dishonesty (Hebert, 2006). Specifically for men, fraternity membership has shown to slow development of self-confidence, moral reasoning, and self-identity because membership encouraged dependency on fellow members and limited independence (Kilgannon & Erwin, 1992). In addition, allegations of hazing and alcohol abuse or misuse among fraternity members frequently appear in the media which minimize reports of positive aspects of membership.

Fraternities have existed in some capacity on college campuses for nearly 200 years (North American Interfraternity Conference, 2012). Today, almost 800 campuses host fraternal organizations with a total undergraduate membership of over 300,000 men. Fraternity men are widely present in national leadership roles with 50 percent of Fortune 500 CEOs, 44 percent of U.S. Presidents, and 31 percent of U.S. Supreme Court Justices being fraternity members. Men's fraternities, or Greek chapters, face many challenges including diversity, alcohol use, hazing concerns, and legal issues (Whipple & Sullivan, 1998). However, fraternities also provide opportunities for community engagement, leadership, academic achievement, and networking.

### **Description of Men's Fraternities at Midwestern University**

The host university for this study is home to 25 men's fraternity chapters. The university believes their Greek community fosters friendships, scholarship, social involvement, leadership, and career contacts. At the time of the study, the all fraternity men's grade point average (GPA) was two tenths higher than the all men's GPA at the university. Most all chapters have a chapter house used for group meetings and housing of some members including chapter leaders. Chapters represent students from diverse backgrounds and offer membership to men of all undergraduate academic standings, freshman through senior. Chapters have varying levels of alumni and national organization involvement.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter provided an overview of literature relating to self-authorship, leadership, and men's fraternities. The review of these topics led to greater understanding and context upon which to build this study. Through exploration of self-authorship and leadership experience within men's fraternities, the researcher hoped to add to the body of research and potentially determine aspects of the college experience that could encourage self-authorship development. If self-authorship promoting aspects of current programs and experiences can be uncovered, they can be intentionally incorporated into other aspects of college student life. Specifically, this study will add an additional qualitative case study to the self-authorship, leadership, and fraternal organization literature. In Chapter 3 the researcher describes this study's methodology and the justification for the chosen method.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

#### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this case study was to explore how leadership experience impacts the development of self-authorship. Specifically, the case study considered leaders' level of self-authorship and development in accordance with Marcia Baxter Magolda's (2004) Theory of Self-Authorship.

#### **Research Questions**

One grand tour question and three sub-questions were used to guide the research. The primary question was: Does leadership experience in a men's fraternity impact self-authorship development? The sub-questions were as follows:

1. What aspects of leadership experience promote the development of self-authorship?
2. How do leaders benefit from the development of self-authorship?
3. How can leadership experiences be used or enhanced to encourage development of self-authorship during college years?

#### **Qualitative Research**

When conducting qualitative research, the researcher explores deeper experiences and meanings of participants and their experiences (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). While quantitative research tests variables, qualitative research aims to discover relevant variables. In addition, qualitative researchers attempt to understand information from the perspective of the participant while gaining a valuable understanding of the human

condition (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). To best answer the research questions, the researcher hoped to gain rich description of participants' experiences in leadership and personal development. In order for the researcher to truly understand the participants, they must be able to tell their own stories with explanation of context and personal reflection. The flexible nature of qualitative research also allows adjustments in interview protocol for deeper exploration into the scenes surrounding described experiences and pertinent initial findings.

Another defining feature of qualitative research is the use of a theoretical framework to inform the study (Creswell, 2013). Baxter Magolda's Theory of Self-Authorship was used as a base from which to begin this research. Baxter Magolda's previous research designs and shared best practices for assessing self-authorship were used to frame research questions and data collection methodology. Additionally, emerging themes and findings centered on concepts found in self-authorship theory.

Within qualitative research, five research methodologies have emerged: narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study (Creswell, 2013). In general, all approaches use similar strategies to collect data through observation, interviews, and document review and all strive to describe a human perspective or phenomenon. While qualitative researchers can combine methodologies in a single study, this researcher implemented the case study design.

### **Case Study**

When conducting a case study, the researcher is often trying to explain how or why a certain complex social phenomenon occurs (Yin, 2009). Case studies can be used

to explain, describe, illustrate, and or enlighten interventions or real-life situations. Data collection involves direct observations of the experiences being studied and interviews with those involved. Additionally, case study does not depend on long periods of field data collection. Participant interviews were the primary source of data collection in this research study. Each interview aimed to better understand the experiences of the participant in order to describe development occurring through their real-life situations.

Case study design can involve a single or multiple case study (Creswell, 2013). This research used concepts associated with single case study methods. Participants included individuals with similar leadership backgrounds from the same overall site or bounded system, fraternity men at a single university. This bounded group was limited in size and connected by organization affiliation. Ultimately the researcher hoped to gain a deeper understanding of one particular issue, leadership experience's impact on self-authorship development, within a bounded system of fraternity men.

### **Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval**

Prior to initiating research, the researcher completed the Consortium for IRB Training Initiative in Human Subjects Protections (CITI) to receive certification in research involving human subjects. Approval from Midwestern University's IRB was also received prior to commencing research and data collection (Appendix A). In the participant recruitment email and informed consent document (Appendix B), all participants were provided with the IRB approval notice, case number, and contact information of the IRB should concerns arise before, during, or after participation in the study.

## **Research Site**

This study was conducted at a large Midwestern university, referred to as Midwestern University for the purposes of this research. During the 2012-2013 academic year, the year in which the study was conducted, Midwestern University had an enrollment of approximately 25,000 students, around 19,000 of which were undergraduate students. Approximately 17 percent of undergraduate students were members of a Greek chapter. Men's fraternity membership was just under 1500 students in a total of 22 chapters.

The researcher selected interview sites to ensure participant comfort. Private conference rooms in a centrally located academic building and in the student union were used to conduct interviews. These locations were familiar, convenient, and comfortable for all participants. These quiet, comfortable spaces were used to allow ease of audio-recording each interview and to ensure participants were comfortable discussing their leadership experiences.

## **Participants**

Purposeful, criterion-based sampling techniques were used to recruit study participants. Purposeful sampling is used in qualitative research to select participants who can "inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study" (Creswell, 2013, p. 156). Further, Creswell (2013) stated "criterion sampling works well when all individuals studied represent people who have experienced the phenomenon" (p. 155). Men's fraternity members were used in this study because they characterize a bounded system of people with similar experiences and distinct

opportunities for leadership experience. Men's fraternity presidents represented leaders in the study because of the multifaceted leadership experience reflected in their role. Midwestern University's Office of Greek Affairs provided the men's fraternity president names, chapters, and email addresses. Reports from the Office of Greek Affairs were also used to review chapter membership size and levels of chapter success in academics, involvement, and recruitment. All participants were also required to be over the age of majority, 19 years old in the study's host state. Recruitment efforts initially aimed to attain six participants to serve as the sample of leaders the case study.

The purposeful, criterion-based sampling offered 22 potential study participants. Participants were recruited via email (Appendix B). Consent for participation was obtained in the recruitment email. Participants contacting the researcher to schedule an interview time were considered to have provided consent for the participant to continue with the research. Recruitment efforts resulted in seven research participants, all of whom met participation requirements and agreed to move forward with the study. Specific demographic information was not gathered for this study, however based on the researcher's observations, all participants were male and appeared to be White. To ensure anonymity for the participants, each men's fraternity president was assigned a pseudonym. Table 1 lists the interview number, participant pseudonym, and stated year in school.



Table 1

*Participants*

Interview	Participant Pseudonym	Participant Year in School
1	Joey	Senior
2	Kent	Senior
3	Liam	Sophomore
4	Charlie	Junior
5	Sam	Senior
6	Brian	Senior
7	James	Senior

**Data Collection**

Before interviews began, all participants were allowed to review and ask questions pertaining to the informed consent. The researcher highlighted key components of the informed consent to ensure each participant fully understood his rights regarding refusal to answer a question or discontinue participation at any time.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews following design suggested by Baxter Magolda and King (2007). Open-ended questions and an informal conversational interview structure allowed participants to fully share their stories. Participants were asked to share their experiences from the past year, how they interpreted and handled those situations, and how the experience impacted them personally and in their relationships. Further probing questions were used to encourage deeper reflection and description of participant meaning making experiences. The researcher actively listened to each response to build necessary rapport for participant

self-reflection. Although a specific interview protocol was used (Appendix C), the researcher considered Rubin and Rubin's (2005) thought that "the researcher is responding to and then asking further questions about what he or she hears from the interviewees rather than relying on predetermined questions" (p. vii).

Each interview lasted 30 minutes to 1-hour in length so as not to burden participants but also allow enough time to fully delve into each experience and potential source of development. Each interview was audiotaped for detailed data collection. The researcher concurrently took brief notes to record highlights of the conversation and any pertinent non-verbal communication. The researcher transcribed verbatim the audio-recording of each interview. Each typed transcript was returned electronically to the corresponding participant to allow the participant to review their transcript. Participants were asked to ensure their thoughts were represented accurately in the transcript. Participants were able to make changes, add information, further clarify their comments, and ensure anonymity of member and chapter names. The email sent with the transcript can be found in Appendix D. After participants' completed their member checks, data analysis began.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis in case study research design begins with a thorough description of the case involved (Creswell, 2013). Through the literature review and analysis, the researcher described the university, men's fraternities, and the landscape in which leaders emerge and act within the university and fraternity environment. The researcher analyzed data using coding and development of broad concepts through categorical

aggregation. Upon completion of member checks of transcripts, the researcher reviewed each transcript to gather categories of meanings relevant to the research problem and questions. Transcripts were coded one by one by inserting electronic comments and initial codes connected with significant quotes or sections of data. After completing coding for one transcript, emerged categories were reviewed in previously coded transcripts to observe overlapping categories and ensure key data were not neglected. All codes were transferred to one working document where they were grouped into 23 broader categories. Peers educated in qualitative research methodology reviewed initial transcript codes and categories to ensure accuracy. The broadly coded categories were then focused into six themes that informed the findings and discussion of the research and were applicable to the research problem and questions, exhaustive, and unique in comparison to each other (Merriam, 2009). Another document was then created to list themes and subthemes along with relevant participant quotes. Concepts of the Theory of Self-Authorship were used as a theoretical background to support each stage of the data analysis. A sample of the coding process appears in Appendix E. A listing of themes and subthemes are further discussed in Chapter 4.

### **Researcher Reflexivity**

In qualitative research, the researcher plays a key role in data collection and interpretation. Therefore, the researcher must be aware of her own influence and any potential bias she may bring when actively participating in a study (Yin, 2009). The researcher in this study identified as a member of the Greek community. The researcher joined a Greek organization as an undergraduate student and was a leader in a chapter,

serving in leadership roles during recruitment and as treasurer. The researcher was not president of the organization but does possess an understanding of what chapter leaders may see, think, and feel through their term in office. The researcher also had prior experience working in the Greek community and was therefore familiar with leadership roles, member education, and overall expectations of both members and leaders in fraternal organizations. The researcher highly valued the experience gained in the Greek community and did believe involvement in a Greek organization could positively impact student and adult development.

The researcher was also a student seeking a master's degree in higher education administration with an emphasis on student affairs. This educational experience influenced the researcher's view of the Greek community and student development. The researcher was passionate about the role of student affairs, including Greek involvement, in developing the whole student in partnership with learning that occurs inside the classroom. The researcher believed the leadership, social, academic and organizational skills built in co-curricular involvement were key components to student growth and ultimate success after college.

This information was only disclosed to participants if asked during the interview. The researcher did not want to influence responses or impact reflection of participants based on their experiences or perceived relationships with the Greek system or student affairs.

## **Ethical Considerations**

When conducting research, participants and the researcher must be aware of potential risks – personally, psychologically, professionally, or otherwise. There were no known risks associated with participation in this research study. Participants were not minors and were provided with a detailed informed consent document prior to agreeing to participate in the study. The informed consent information was reviewed again at the beginning of each interview to ensure the participant recognized their ability to discontinue participation at any time. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary and was therefore not linked to any academic, financial, or other form of incentive. From the researcher's perspective, interviews did not include discussion of emotionally distressing content, however if a participant needs further support they will be directed to on campus resources such as the Counseling and Psychological Services Office. Each participant identified their own pseudonyms to protect anonymity when reporting findings. No men's fraternity chapter names were used to ensure that comments could not be traced back to an individual chapter or leader. The university research site was also given a pseudonym to further protect participants and the institution.

All research documents, including audiotapes, transcripts, coding memos and drafts of the final research report were kept on the researcher's personal computer in password protected files. The researcher was the only person with access to all participant and initial research related information. Participants could have access to their own transcripts for the purpose of checking accuracy at any time prior to the

documents being destroyed at the completion of the research. Peer and auditor reviews of coding only used pseudonyms to further protect participant anonymity.

### **Validation Strategies**

Creswell (2007) presented eight potential validation strategies including: prolonged engagement and persistent observation, triangulation, peer review or debriefing, negative case analysis, clarifying researcher bias, member checking, rick tick description, and external audits (p. 250-253). Creswell (2007) recommended using at least two of these validation strategies in any given study. In this study the researcher utilized peer review, clarifying researcher bias, member checking, and an external audit.

Peer review is “an individual who keeps the researcher honest: asks hard questions about methods, meanings, and interpretations; and provides the researcher catharsis by sympathetically listening to the researcher’s feelings” (Creswell, 2013, p. 251). Peers of the researcher discussed methodology and provided an outside perspective on the researcher’s thoughts. The researcher routinely considered potential bias and stated that bias in the “Researcher Reflexivity” section of Chapter 3.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), member checking is “the most critical technique for establishing credibility” (p. 314). Each participant was allowed to check their transcript for accuracy. One participant made a change; others responded with no changes or did not respond at all. An external auditor was also used, this auditor “examines whether or not the findings, interpretations, and conclusions are supported by the data” (Creswell, 2013, p. 252). The auditor was not connected with the research, but has knowledge of the research process through her dissertation, faculty appointments, and

staff position at Midwestern University. The external audit attestation is listed in Appendix F.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter reviewed the methodology of the research study including the IRB approval, research site, participants, data collection, data analysis, reflexivity, ethical considerations, and validation strategies. An interview process based on recommendations from Baxter Magolda and King (2007) were used collect data to serve the study's purpose statement and answer the study's research questions. In chapter 4 the researcher discusses the findings discovered through the data collection and analysis process.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Findings**

#### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this case study was to explore how leadership experience impacts the development of self-authorship. Specifically, the case study considered leaders' level of self-authorship and development in accordance with Marcia Baxter Magolda's (2004) Theory of Self-Authorship.

#### **Description of Participants**

Seven students from Midwestern University participated in this study. Participants were members of men's fraternities and served their chapters as president during the 2012 spring and fall semesters. Participants were recruited via email with assistance from the Greek Affairs Office at Midwestern University. The participants were impacted by their leadership experiences in different and similar ways. In this chapter, the researcher discusses how these student leaders made meaning from their leadership experiences.

Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant in order to ensure anonymity. The seven participants are described briefly in the following section.

**Joey.** Joey was a senior industrial engineering major from a large city in Midwestern University's host state. He was involved on campus and especially enjoyed his fraternity experience because of the activities and friendships. He believed he was selected as president because of his intelligence, work ethic, and ability to represent the interests of men of his chapter. During his term of office the chapter house underwent



renovation. He hoped to take time to invest in members who were struggling academically, socially or in any other aspect of life and membership.

**Kent.** Kent was a senior forensic science major who previously hoped to attend medical school, but after self-reflection decided to pursue opportunities with Teach for America. He is from a small town in Midwestern University's host state. Kent was involved in numerous leadership activities in high school and college. He thought he was selected to be president because of his desire to focus on fraternity policies, his presence in the house, and his plan to improve the chapter's reputation on campus and set a precedent for the future. He was troubled by previous presidents' leadership and hoped to return to the core values, principles, and purposes of the fraternity.

**Liam.** Liam was a sophomore business major focusing on technology and investing. His fraternity was one of the smaller chapters on campus and primarily consisted of underclassmen. Outside of the fraternity he was a member of many clubs related to his major and future career interests. He believed he was selected to lead the chapter based on his people skills and ability to transition the chapter. During his term he hoped to improve the chapter's philanthropic efforts, recruitment, and campus relationships.

**Charlie.** Charlie was a junior accounting major from a large city in Midwestern University's host state. He was involved in leadership activities in high school and a learning community in college. Charlie believed he was elected to serve as president because he was the best person for the job, a proven leader who was willing to work hard for the chapter. During his term, he had to work closely with chapter advisors and the

national organization as they transitioned from the colony phase to being installed as a chapter. Through that process he focused closely on the organization's purposes and rules and aimed to create unity within the chapter.

**Sam.** Sam was a senior biological systems engineering major hoping to attend medical school. He worked approximately 20 hours per week and committed to various volunteering efforts. He believed he was elected because of his involvement on campus, his dedication, passion, integrity, and reliability. His chapter was locally and nationally recognized for its success in scholarship, philanthropy, and campus involvement.

**Brian.** Brian was a senior studying marketing and management. He was from a larger city in Midwestern University's host state. He took on leadership and service roles early in the chapter and was then elected president because of his desire to increase respect for chapter leaders and create unity. During his term the chapter house underwent a renovation and the chapter experienced some high profile public relations issues.

**James.** James was a senior economics major who was very involved in other campus activities including student government. He initially did not want to join a fraternity but was persuaded to do so by friends and family. James believed he was elected to be president because of the members' trust in his abilities and consistency. He was also viewed as a role model in terms of GPA and involvement. He dealt with a few struggles during his term as president but also experienced success with the chapter and individual members winning awards.

## **Research Questions**

One grand tour question and three sub-questions were used to guide the research. The primary question was: Does leadership experience in a men's fraternity impact self-authorship development? The sub-questions were as follows:

1. What aspects of leadership experience promote the development of self-authorship?
2. How do leaders benefit from the development of self-authorship?
3. How can leadership experiences be used or enhanced to encourage development of self-authorship during college years?

## **Overview of Themes and Subthemes**

In this chapter, the researcher discusses themes that emerged from interviews with participants about their leadership experiences, specifically considering how the presidents developed and made meaning of their experiences. The themes are reflected in Table 2.

The theme of "holding yourself to a higher standard" reflected participants' aim and expectation to serve as a model for others. "Holding others to a higher standard" focused on the leaders' role in peer accountability and upholding the standards of their organizations. The "generativity" theme speaks to the desire of the leaders to give back to their organization through relationships and futuristic thinking. Participants focused on "building decision making skills" as they hoped to be transparent and successfully navigate difficult situations. The theme of "personal development" reflected the translatable life skills president participants obtained through their experiences. Finally,

participants' stressed the importance of "life balance" as they met demands of their leadership role.

Table 2

*Themes and Subthemes*

Themes	Subthemes
1. Holding yourself to a higher standard	a. Acting as a role model b. Representing something bigger than yourself
2. Holding others to a higher standard	a. Peer accountability b. Upholding values of the organization
3. Generativity	a. Care and concern for others b. Changing relationships c. Desire to give back d. Futuristic thinking
4. Building decision making skills	a. Open communication and seeking input b. Consistency
5. Personal Development	a. Self-confidence b. Reflection c. Perseverance
6. Life Balance	

**Themes**

**Theme: Holding yourself to a higher standard.** While discussing leadership roles, each participant described the importance of living the fraternity's values and serving as a role model for members. This led to two related subthemes, acting as a role model and representing something bigger than yourself.

*Acting as a role model.* Participants described their position as a role model in two ways; at times they believed they needed to be a perfect member and at other times they hoped to be a genuine person trying their best. Charlie stated "there was just like a

massive microscope on me to be this really good role model.” Charlie was also somewhat surprised by aspects of his status as a role model:

It takes a while to get mature enough to handle the dual role that a president is and that’s you know business role model, but you’re also a personal role model. The first one I totally expected, but I almost got blindsided by the second one.

James shared similar feelings about the pressure to be a perfect member that he felt internally, from fellow members and from the entire campus community:

You have to have high GPA, you have to keep winning awards, you can’t slouch, you have to volunteer with the fraternity. Basically just being the perfect fraternity guy, the best you can be. Cause if you don’t everyone sees it. Not just your fraternity members, but also everyone on campus.

Liam also echoed this sentiment as he believed “it’s hard for people to separate a role and a personality,” and he, therefore, had to act as people would expect a president to act at all times.

Brian represented another view by saying, “I wasn’t this perfect role model for them. I would screw up too. But, I was really open when I did it. I said ‘well, you know, it’s something I can learn from, and hopefully you guys can too.’” Joey also felt this way as he hoped to maintain his same personality and behavior during his time as a leader “I think once you are president and you still just continue being your normal self, I think that’s almost reassuring to people in the sense that he’s not on some pedestal, he’s just normal Joey still.”

James believed his ability to be a role model was a large reason why he was selected to be president; therefore he hoped to continue on that path during his term “I had just been consistent in the chapter, getting my job done always being there when I needed to be there. Just being a role model as far as GPA, involvement, things like that.”

Kent and Sam found importance in modeling the behavior they expected out of their members. Kent stated “I am supposed to be modeling expectations, which is something that I really believe in. If you’re going to be leading an organization then you model the expectations that you expect the other people to have.” Sam shared similar thoughts:

I always thought of myself as a leader, but I view myself now definitely as a very strong leader. Not only that, a person who leads by example. I made that big deal when I was president just because with a couple past presidents I observed that they would say one thing but then they wouldn’t necessarily lead by what they said. But I made it a point that if I said something, I’m going to lead by what I said.

***Representing something bigger than yourself.*** The presidents took their self-accountability to the next level by discussing their role as the face of the chapter, they believed they represented their organization as a whole and each of its members. Brian described his thought process when determining his actions, “If someone saw me that knew me as the chapter president, didn’t know my name, didn’t know anything about me, how would they perceive that? That’s kind of how I lived my life for a year.” Charlie also believed he represented his organization at all times, “You have to make sure you act accordingly, not just as a member of the fraternity, you have to act as president even when you’re not in a situation you would think of as being president.”

The men often thought more about what they said and how they approached people knowing their position in the chapter made their words represent something more. James shared, “people will perceive you different, have to be careful what you say. Cause I mean, it says a lot more now.”

Representing the chapter and acting on behalf of the chapter also played a role in the leaders' decision making. Charlie stated "I can influence the chapter, but at the end of the day, if I am making a decision it has to be the chapter's decision." As Joey was making decisions, he believed his chapter "knew I would represent them and their interests." Kent agreed stating, "As president you set the direction for the house...luckily for me, on a lot of these things, I've set the direction and most people have agreed." Sam discussed the pressure felt from the chapter's stakeholders knowing his decisions would reflect on the chapter as a whole:

I'd say there is just constant pressure to please everybody. And by that I mean just every decision I felt like I had to make had to do the best to please our alumni, please the current members, please our house parent, and please the university.

Liam shared a similar thought when describing how his actions and demeanor would ultimately set the tone for the entire chapter, alumni, future members, and others invested in the fraternity, "part of that is simply giving off a professional, calm, relatable vibe...Its just about giving people confidence in the fraternity."

The concept of holding themselves to a higher standard was significant for all president participants. They each believed their position as chapter president made them a role model for others and caused them to represent their chapter and organization in their actions and decision making. Each aimed to positively lead their chapter by example.

**Theme: Holding others to a higher standard.** Just as the chapter presidents had to hold themselves to a higher standard, they were also responsible for holding their peers and fellow members to a higher standard. This was represented by their commitment to peer accountability and ultimately upholding the values of the organization.

*Peer accountability.* As presidents of their chapters, participants played a significant role in holding members accountable to the rules and policies of the national organization and local chapter. James discussed the importance of accountability in setting an example for the future, “If we let him get away with it, we’re not holding him accountable to our rules and other members will do the same thing in the future. So we need to set an example, set precedence for the future.”

Joey and Liam discussed the difficult decisions that come with peer accountability. In describing one situation with a new member, Joey shared, “We had a pretty serious conversation with him where we made it clear with him that if he continued his current path, it would be likely he wouldn’t initiate.” Liam stated, “You have to lay down a rule and stick with it no matter what people say.”

Kent and James discussed some informal accountability they had to use daily, with social situations, academic concerns, and any other issue. James stated, “Even now if I go to a party or I see something I don’t like. I still step into that role and say ‘hey what are you doing, don’t do that.’” When Kent saw behavior going against policies or rules he felt it was important to let people know, “I’m going to call you out on it, that’s my job to make sure that you are safe.”

Brian, as a 21 year old, even had to hold alumni of the chapter accountable when they were breaking house rules and making other members feel uncomfortable. “These guys didn’t think I had the authority at the time. And I mean I had to, legitimately the next day I called every single one of them and I said ‘you guys were acting ridiculous.’”



Even though holding people accountable can be hard, many participants believed it was important to honor the responsibilities of their role and hold members accountable even if they were not pleased with the situation. Sam summed up many participants' thoughts when he said:

It kind of made me realize that the tough decisions that might hurt a brother of mine. They could be doing wrong, and I might have to make a tough decision but if it is for the good of the fraternity then so be it. I can't put personal feelings, I can't prefer my personal feelings if I have to make a hard decision that would benefit the fraternity. I can't keep someone in the fraternity that is going to be a bad member and hurt us in the long run if they are being selfish.

***Upholding the values of the organization.*** An important aspect of holding others to a higher standard was remembering and upholding the values of the organization. A fraternity's core values are generally a basis for decision making and subsequently, the rules. Kent shared this sentiment stating "That's what I tried to get through all year, we have a standard for a reason and if we don't uphold our standards what do we have?" Similarly, when talking to his members, Brian attempted to stress the reason each of them joined and the ultimate purpose of the chapter. "You guys were rushed on the values of trying to be good [members], and you know that's not what our house is about."

James appreciated having values and rules as a basis for decision making and safety. "I like rules. I think they're just smart. It's a good thing to have in place. It keeps you safe."

Sam stressed the importance of a well-rounded experience that can only come from a focus on his fraternity values and upholding those values in each member.

If you want to take someone in our fraternity and give them the full college experience you can't just focus on academics, you can't just focus on the social aspect, you need to be very well rounded and be involved, get good grades, get that social component and at the same time get leadership opportunities.

**Theme: Generativity.** Participants valued the concept of generativity as they hoped to leave a legacy after their presidency. They exhibited this desire by showing genuine care and concern for their members, through building or changing relationships, by possessing a true desire to give back, and through thinking futuristically.

*Care and concern for others.* Because of their responsibility to represent the chapter and hold members accountable, participants discussed a desire to keep the members' best interests at heart. Brian described himself as a resource for other members. He encouraged members to come talk to him about their concerns and really wanted to be there to listen. "I was kind of like a resource to them. I was like yea, 'I'll listen to you. I'll talk it out with you and I don't want you to leave until we figure this out together.'"

Charlie tried to remember that membership in his organization was not appropriate for everyone and at times people needed to step back and take care of other aspects of their life. He tried to have these open, honest conversations with members.

Maybe it's good if you take this semester off you know, if you they haven't been paying finances or whatever, and they're not going to events and they need to focus on their grades. It's not in their best interest to stack another organization on top of that.

Joey had a similar experience as he focused on investing in members and taking extra measures to encourage their success rather than relying on typical punishments or programs. Because of his desire to help people during his term, members of his executive board shifted their focus as well.

I think it was really great to see the transformation and thought into that we need to help these people along more so. Whether that is in the social world, the academic world, or just essentially becoming better friends with people.

Joey also learned about his desire to focus on others through his experience as president. “I think I’ll take away a mindset of focusing on others as opposed to myself. I think presidency definitely showed me the value of focusing on others.” Sam reported a similar desire to put his members’ needs before his own, “If anyone ever needed help with something I would without hesitation put down what I’m doing and go help them.”

*Changing relationships.* The presidents shared experiences of changing relationships, both positively and negatively. Through their care for members, they hoped to truly get to know people. Brian specifically made an effort to share more about himself in order to allow members to open up. He wanted know to know members on a personal level rather than just as president and member. He tried to stop in peoples’ rooms or catch them outside of meetings or formal events just to talk.

I would go in and they’d be like, “oh hey what’s up,” and instead of being like “oh nothing,” I would be like “well actually you know I have this test, I am struggling with this class” or things like that. Kind of launch a conversation from there, like “what are you guys struggling with, what are your issues.” I think them seeing that I’m just like them except older, that was a bigger deal than saying that I was president.

Charlie’s attempts to build relationships allowed members to see him as someone who could help them with personal problems. This was somewhat surprising to him, but positively impacted him and his relationships.

I didn’t expect people who had personal problems in their lives to contact me. I didn’t expect that. I figured OK, if you have a question about the fraternity I could probably answer it. But they had personal problems and had questions and they would call me at like 1 a.m.... They looked up to me as someone who could solve their problems potentially.

James and Joey experienced positive relationship building through their support networks and interaction with fraternity stakeholders. James shared, “I think the positive

relationship I have with people who will push me to be better, I've strengthened those relationships...they supported me, they gave me ideas about how to do things differently." Joey stated, "The position requires a lot of interaction with different people that I might not interact with if I wasn't in that position. So that definitely creates relationships."

While all of the presidents believed their position positively impacted relationships, they also had to manage some negative consequences as well. The negative changes generally came from their responsibility to uphold the rules of their organizations and hold members accountable. Most stated they were less likely to be invited to social gatherings, but they also would not necessarily choose to be there. James stated:

Some people I was close with before, now I never see them. Just cause I mean, maybe they go smoke pot or they go drink on a Wednesday. And after year of being responsible, it's kind of hard to be like "oh yea, I'm totally going to come drink with you on a Wednesday."

Joey and Sam had similar experiences. Their roles as decision makers and policy enforcers caused relationships to change initially for the worse, but ultimately for the better. Joey stated, "If it's handled correctly, even the potential negative conflicts can result in better friendships in the end. And I know for myself they have." Sam shared:

There's a lot more positive relationship building than anything. It's weird because it seems that once I got done with my presidency a lot more people were appreciative of what I did than when I was president. Just because I think they realize what I did, even if it was a little controversial in their minds, it was actually beneficial for the house.

***Desire to give back.*** The participants all had clear goals for their term as president and often those goals included leaving the chapter in a better place than when they

assumed their position. Liam hoped to improve the chapter's philanthropy and recruitment efforts and rebuild trust in the fraternity. Charlie worked to move the group from a colony to a chapter and create unity. Joey invested in individual members and moved the house renovation process forward. Kent wanted to return the chapter to the strength of earlier years through increased accountability and a focus on the chapter's values. Sam stuck to the organizations pillars of membership and aimed to increase member participation in chapter and campus activities. Brian saw the chapter through a renovation process and built a positive image in light of negative press. James hoped to maintain the chapter's positive status locally and nationally while improving the chapter GPA, individual member honors, and reminding members that there is always room for improvement.

The president participants also hoped to make a lasting impact on the future of the chapter and the membership. After Charlie had a better grasp on his personal values, he wanted to help other members achieve the same:

You get to the point when you're like, I feel like I have a good path going for me. But I feel like there are other people in my fraternity that I want to be on a good path too. So I just met with brothers, talked with them, and asked them what do you want out of this fraternity, what do you want out of your career?

Joey shared similar thoughts:

I think the best president and leader is the one who unravels the roadblocks for the membership so they can be the best potential for themselves. So I think it went from a very me focused in the beginning to how can I better the fraternity how I can help all these things, etc. to in the end how can I help this individual get the most out of his fraternity experience, or how can I help this individual help the fraternity. Because once my term ends, you know, the seeds I've planted should still continue to grow and help the fraternity long after.

Kent hoped he had made things easier for future presidents by setting clear expectations and a precedent for accountability. “These policies are already in place, you’ve seen how it’s been done for a year now, if we continue with that in 2 to 3 years...it’s going to get easier and easier for presidents.”

Sam’s experience as a president grew a desire in him to continue to give back to the chapter even after he is no longer a collegiate member:

I loved my fraternity from the get go but being president has honestly given me a stronger love for my fraternity that I don’t think I would have ever gotten had I not been president. Through being president I can honestly say I want to stay involved after I graduate and be an active alumni within the chapter and continue to help our chapter to grow and be successful

***Futuristic thinking.*** Within their desire to give back to their fraternities, the presidents had to develop the ability to plan ahead and consider how current actions or decisions would impact the chapter in the future. Before Brian was president he did not believe he fully thought through his actions and possible repercussions. During his term he learned to more fully consider the big picture:

Looking at it from a bigger point of view of not just one incident, but the repercussions of that. What can happen if we do this, what can happen if we do that? Taking an analytical look at what could happen or what will happen from the actions I will take or have taken.

Charlie had a similar experience as he knew the hard work he and the chapter were doing to obtain the status of a chapter would ultimately benefit the organization for years to come. “I was really passionate about us getting to be a chapter because there’s a lot of things you can do as a chapter.” With his goal, Charlie also had to “make sure I was five steps ahead.”

Joey echoed the idea of thinking bigger picture rather than getting carried away with small details or issues:

I think it's easy as president to get carried away with the concerns of the moment. There are so many people who have differing opinions that it could be easy to get sucked away with the passion in any certain moment. But just to kind of look at everything from a birds eye perspective and recognize some things might not be as big of a deal as you think they are was very helpful.

Liam also learned the importance of planning and starting a program or initiative on the right track:

I learned that I really need to plan. I learned the value of having a plan from the beginning. I learned the value more than that of beginnings. And how starting off right can set the tone for a year, for your life, for a long time.

Overall each participant, or chapter president, hoped to achieve generativity. They showed genuine care and concern for their members. They experienced changing, building relationships, primarily in a positive way even through conflict and peer accountability. They expressed a desire to give back to their fraternity during their term and by setting a foundation on which the organization could build for years to come.

**Theme: Building decision making skills.** The position of president required each participant to engage in complex decision making both personally and on behalf of their chapters. Therefore, they all felt their decision making skills significantly improved. James learned to think clearly when making decisions in the midst of chaos or controversy, “if something bad is happening, being calm, keeping your head, trying to keep thinking straight instead of freaking out like everyone else does around you.” Joey thought his decision making skills improved by learning how to weigh the pros and cons of a particular situation.

I will use the experience of presidency, I think going back to decision making, just kind of looking at all the different parts of the puzzle. Trying to objectively understand how the positives can outweigh the negatives, what direction should be taken given the situation.

The presidents gained and used these decision making skills through open communication and transparency with their executive board and members, by seeking input from others, and by maintaining consistency.

*Open communication and seeking input.* Each president valued the opinions of others when making decisions. Brian stated:

I try to be as open as I can and ask for input. Say “this is what I was thinking, let me know if you think this is right, if this is not right. I want to know your opinions.” There were multiple times where you know my thinking at first, I’m like “oh this makes a whole lot of sense” and people said “well what about this issue, what about that issue,” and we kind of came together and said “alright, this is good. I’m glad we could talk this through.”

Brian also tried to ensure his decision making process was as open as possible, “I basically was just trying to be transparent as much as possible...my thought process was out in the open and so was there’s.” Kent shared a similar belief stating he thought a president should attempt to share the reasons behind decisions that were made, “I think, as president, it is your job to be the spokesperson and say ‘this is why, this is what’s going on’ and they need to be strong enough to, and trust everybody enough to, understand the reasoning.”

Liam and Sam appreciated getting input from their executive boards. Liam shared “With exec meetings, we had people who were bent on doing what was best for the fraternity. We could kind of brainstorm and think tank through those.” Liam further stated “I tried to get as much input as I could from as many different people and then based off that make a decision.” Sam said “If need be, I would call an exec board meeting



just out of blue and we would talk about situations and problems and working through with the eight of us.”

Joey discussed the transformation of his desire to seek input from attempting to gain acceptance to wanting to do what was best for the organization.

I think there is a maturing process that occurs from seeking input so as to be affirmed as a president, which is the negative; and then, eventually, it becomes seeking input so as to best represent the membership and the best direction for the fraternity, which is the better ultimate outcome.

*Consistency.* As the presidents worked through the difficult decisions, maintaining consistency was essential. They hoped to treat each individual member fairly and also take previous precedence into account. Liam and Kent specifically shared representative thoughts about consistency. Kent knew members understood his decisions because Kent stuck by his and the organization’s values. “People knew the decisions I was going to make, if something happened they pretty much knew what I was going to do. I think that ultimately came from having set values and knowing the direction I wanted to go.” Liam thought his term taught him the importance of consistency, “I learned I need to make a plan and stick with it.”

Kent summed up thoughts on consistency shared by most participants:

Being consistent is one of the best things you can be as president, that you’re not somebody that’s going to be wishy washy. Something happens and you’re not going to for one person do it this way and for another person do it that way. That the decisions you make are just very values based.

Building decision making skills appeared to come inherently from the work required in the position of president. Each president faced difficult, complex situations and they knew their decisions not only impacted them, but impacted individual members and the organization as a whole. Therefore, they developed their decision making skills,

aimed to be open in their communication, sought input from others, and remained consistent in their decisions and values.

**Theme: Personal development.** The presidents all went through some level of personal development through their leadership experience. Brian shared, “It was a lot of personal development, that’s what I wasn’t expecting...It turned out to be a really personal thing.” Joey shared a similar thought, “I definitely learned about myself.” Sam also felt he matured as a result of his presidency, “It really helped me mature into the person I am today. Just those everyday pressures and situations really made me a lot less selfish and made me really mature.”

The participants also built life skills they believed would help them in their future careers and other leadership positions. Brian used his experience in his job search, “It was the best on the job training I could possibly ask for. I’ve had multiple interviews already where...my entire interview was based around my management skill as being president.” James learned to have a good work ethic and also to delegate. “You find key people you can trust with tasks, and you delegate it out to them. And, by the end, you get pretty good at it cause you do it consistently.” Similarly, Liam learned the importance of helping educate others when delegating, “There’s kind of that conflict between getting stuff done and then wanting people to be able to fish for themselves, to use that analogy.” Joey became more aware of the need to listen, “not being so strong willed and opinionated. That’s an easy way to alienate people and to build walls, that’s never a good thing in any organization.” Sam discussed the importance of being a good communicator, “One thing I learned about myself was just the need to be a good communicator, because if you can’t

communicate that, then you aren't going to get anywhere. Along with that I guess, patience when communicating with people.”

While learning these life skills, the presidents built self-confidence, learned to reflect on their skills, values and performance, and also discovered the value of perseverance even in difficult situations.

***Self-confidence.*** The presidents all worked through challenges in their position and had to become comfortable leading a group of their peers, therefore they built self-confidence. Brian had to communicate with a large variety of people through various issues in the house, at first he was not overly confident, especially dealing with older individuals. As he gained understanding of his role, he built the self-confidence necessary to talk to almost anyone, “I just became very comfortable with talking to basically whoever I needed to talk to at the time.” Joey also had to manage a variety of situations and people and gained confidence in his ability to influence others, “When I especially focus on it, I can be a very positive influence for anyone.” Charlie became more confident in his ability to be successful as president, “I definitely felt like I could, not necessarily defeat this burden, but I definitely would handle it.” James shared, “I have a lot more confidence, just cause I’ve dealt with a lot of different situations.”

***Reflection.*** Each president experienced a time when they felt it was necessary to reflect upon themselves, their values, and their performance. They all hoped to be a positive influence for others and they used this personal reflection to further develop themselves. Charlie shared, “I took a reflectionary period and I reevaluated what I wanted to do academically, I didn’t do so good this last semester probably because of all the

presidential stuff. What's my goals?" Charlie also described experiences where, after having time to reflect, he wished he could have done a few things differently, "There's obviously things I wish I could have done better, but I don't know how I could have known that at the time." Joey had a similar experience knowing that there were areas he could have improved, "I think I could have done better, just by being more calm with the situation and just trying to relate my point of view."

Like Charlie, Kent specifically set aside time to reflect on his personal values. He felt this was important as he tried to help others better themselves as well. "I think journaling really helped me kind of track where I was at and what I needed to do, and just really reflect on my life before I continue to try to reflect on other people's lives."

*Perseverance.* During their terms, the president participants all shared times when they felt overwhelmed or in a difficult situation where they need to persevere. Brian stated, "I was pretty overwhelmed at some points, but at the end of the day I said, 'well, this is what I signed up for, this is kind of what it takes.'" Joey explained that he did feel stress, but overall he had a great experience, "I think it was a great experience. It was so much fun. It was stressful at times." Charlie shared:

It was really easy to say, "maybe I should take a semester off and focus on some other aspects of my life." The fact that I didn't, I think, is a testament to how confident I am in my abilities to be successful no matter what the circumstances are.

Sam expressed related thoughts, "Through the tough times and whatever, it was honestly probably the best experience and most rewarding experience of my life."

Liam and Kent conveyed the importance of sticking to their plans and values.

When explaining what he learned through his position, Liam clearly stated, “How diligence is mandatory for leadership.” Kent shared:

I was really proud of myself for just that entire year not side stepping my values, not bending, not being corrupted, just because it was the easy way out. It made myself very proud of just how strong I could be. Just going through all these things and not letting everything that happened just make me cave.

The participants experienced significant personal development through their terms as president. They built valuable life skills they could take with them to future careers and positions. They gained self-confidence in their skills, especially in their ability to communicate with others. They actively reflected upon their experiences and decisions to learn more about themselves and tried to improve. Through the stress and pressures of their role, they learned to persevere in order to more fully enjoy their experience and stick to their personal values. For some, the level of personal development was surprising, but all experienced growth in some capacity.

**Theme: Life balance.** Participants described the significant time commitment associated with being president of an organization while also attempting to balance personal relationships, jobs, other involvement, and academics. They faced this challenge in different ways, but all discussed the importance of finding balance and focusing on time management. When discussing his role as president, Charlie stated “It’s almost like a full time job, and, at the same time, it’s more than that because you are never off duty.” James also saw the position as very time consuming, “You have 100 guys, you get texts all day, you get phone calls, voicemails, emails from parents, emails from other people outside the fraternity who want information...I mean there’s always something to do.”

Sam conveyed similar feelings about the constant communication, “One thing I didn’t expect as much was all the emails, honestly and the constant communication. I felt like, on a daily basis, I was in constant communication with alumni, current members of the house, Greek affairs, etc.” Joey shared, “There’s a lot going on; you have school, and then you have all these duties and potentially other organizations on top of that.”

Through these vast time commitments, participants learned the importance of prioritization and time management in order to maintain some level of balance in their lives. Brian shared, “To focus on the chapter and school instead of trying to handle three things at once. It just wasn’t feasible so I had to quit my job.” Charlie expressed how important time was to him, “Time became way more valuable to me and so every 15 minutes counted. Time management increased significantly.” Charlie also talked about the necessity to think ahead with the fraternity and his personal life, “Being more organized and being 10 steps ahead in the fraternity and what’s going on made me have to think 10 steps ahead in my own life.” Sam shared similar thoughts, “Time management skills was huge, just balancing the big responsibilities of being president and 100 other things going on in my life.” When asked what he learned during his term James said, “Time management skills. And then just balance was really big too.”

### **Summary of Findings**

The themes that emerged were significant thoughts represented by each president participant when reflecting upon their leadership experience. First and foremost, the president participants felt they had to serve as positive role models while representing and entire organization, therefore they held themselves to a higher standard in their

actions and words. Just as they had high expectations for themselves, they also held their members to that same higher standard. They maintained this standard through peer accountability and upholding the values of the organization.

The president participants all cared deeply about the current and future success of their fraternities, therefore they considered the concept of generativity. They showed care and concern for their members even within changing relationships. They had a strong desire to give back to their organization and therefore aimed to think futuristically rather than simply in the moment. Their focus on the future and the big picture positively built their decision making skills. They strived for open communication and saw value in seeking input from others. They also aimed for consistency in their decisions in order to help set precedence for the future.

The president participants experienced complex situations and difficult decisions which lead to significant personal development. They built life skills they will use in other roles, including self-confidence. In order to learn even more about themselves and to continuously improve, the president participants engaged in reflection. They also persevered through the stress and complexities of the role. This in turn caused a focus on time management and life balance.

The themes that emerged showed a connection between leadership experience and personal growth. In Chapter 5 the researcher provides further discussion about the results of this case study, the implications of the findings, and recommendations for future practice and research.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Discussion**

#### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this case study was to explore how leadership experience impacts the development of self-authorship. Specifically, the case study considered leaders' level of self-authorship and development in accordance with Marcia Baxter Magolda's (2004) Theory of Self-Authorship.

#### **Research Questions**

One grand tour question and three sub-questions were used to guide the research. The primary question was: Does leadership experience in a men's fraternity impact self-authorship development? The sub-questions were as follows:

4. What aspects of leadership experience promote the development of self-authorship?
5. How do leaders benefit from the development of self-authorship?
6. How can leadership experiences be used or enhanced to encourage development of self-authorship during college years?

#### **Summary of Findings**

The findings of this research study indicated a link between leadership experience and development of self-authorship for men's fraternity presidents at Midwestern University. Emergent themes included:

- Participants identified themselves as role models for members of their fraternities and also as a public voice and face for their organization.



- As presidents, each participant served a role in holding members accountable to set values, polices, and rules.
- Each participant held a desire to give back to their fraternity through building relationships, showing care for others, and thinking futuristically.
- All participants enhanced their decision making skills placing value on open communication, seeking others' opinions, and remaining consistent in their decisions.
- Personal development was experienced through practical skill building, development of self-confidence, engagement in reflection, and perseverance even through difficult situations or decisions.
- With multiple pressures felt from their positions, each participant learned the value of time management and gaining a life balance in order to focus on the fraternity, academics, personal matters, and other involvement.

The findings of this research study offered answers to the research questions posed regarding self-authorship and leadership experience.

## **Discussion**

Many researcher studies were previously completed regarding self-authorship and leadership experience, specifically that of fraternal organizations. The results of this study added to the growing body of research and literature on these topics. The findings of this research were specifically compared to Baxter Magolda's phases of epistemological reflection and self-authorship and previous programs found to promote self-authorship.

**Research question 1: What aspects of leadership experience promote development of self-authorship?**

When considering Baxter Magolda's epistemological reflection model, which ultimately leads to self-authorship, students' levels of decision making and input seeking helped determine progress. Participants in this research study likely passed the independent knowing phase and were within contextual knowing or beyond. The contextual knowing phase involves recognizing the need to make personal decisions and assumptions, but also placing value in gaining input and guidance from others (Baxter Magolda, 2004). Men in this study showed a desire to move away from selfish thinking to gain input from others when making decisions. They used their alumni advisors, national organization, Greek Affairs Office, executive board members, and other peers to brainstorm ideas and alternatives to problems. In the end, they were the representatives of the organization, they were in the leadership role, and they built the self-confidence necessary to take the knowledge gathered to make their own decisions. Baxter Magolda's (2004) research showed participants did not reach this stage until after graduating from college in the young adult years. The men in this study achieved indicators of this phase within college, likely, in part, due to the skills gained within their leadership experience.

Beyond the epistemological reflection model lays the crossroads (Baxter Magolda 2009b). Phases of the crossroads include listening to the internal voice and cultivating their voices. Listening to the internal voice involves "Identifying what made them happy, examining their own beliefs, finding parts of themselves that were important to them, and establishing a distinction between their feelings and external expectations" (Baxter

Magolda, 2009a, p. 7). Cultivating their voices “involved developing parts of themselves they valued, establishing priorities, sifting out beliefs and values that no longer worked, and putting pieces of the puzzle of who they were together.” (Baxter Magolda, 2009a, p. 7). Participants in this study shared the importance of prioritizing their responsibilities and finding a life balance. This involved identifying aspects of life, and their leadership experience that were gratifying and significant for them. Their responsibility as a role model and representation of the organization caused an examination of their own beliefs. They also expressed the need to balance their own wants and needs with the expectations they met from members, alumni, Greek Affairs, and other fraternity stakeholders. Ultimately, in order to listen to their internal voice, the leaders had to understand the power of their internal voice within their own lives and their service as president.

Self-authorship’s three elements – trusting the internal voice, building an internal foundation, and securing internal commitments – are developed beyond the crossroads (Baxter Magolda, 2009b). When trusting the internal voice, individuals “recognized that reality, or what happened in the world and their lives, was beyond their control, but their reactions to what happened was within their control” (Baxter Magolda, 2008, p. 279). Building an internal foundation involved increasing trust in internal voices and forming an internal philosophy, or foundation, to guide reactions, behavior, and decisions (Baxter Magolda, 2009b). Securing internal commitments comprised “crossing over from understanding their internal commitments to living them” (Baxter Magolda, 2008, p. 280-281). These aspects of self-authorship are generally experienced in the late 20s and 30s.

Participants in this study showed signs of trusting their internal voice and building an internal foundation, and were on the verge of securing their internal commitments. As exhibited in Baxter Magolda's research (2008), participants in this study were not always solidly trusting of their internal voice, but through reflecting on challenges they produced a clear understanding of their personal perspectives. A trust of their internal voices was displayed with the responsibility of peer accountability and complex decision making. Most participants described a dependence on personal values to determine how to approach individual members and problems that arose within the chapter. Participants also described their need to share how and why they made the decisions they made to all fraternity stakeholders. Their internal foundations were secured through building confidence in their decision making skills, their ability to act as a role model, their need to represent themselves and something larger, and their desire to prioritize important aspects of their role and their life to strive for life balance.

Aspects of personal development achieved through reflection within the leadership experience also impacted development of the internal voice and internal foundation. As examples, both Kent and Charlie explicitly stated the importance of reflecting on their decisions, personal values, and values of the organization when determining how to proceed. Charlie stated, "I took a reflectionary period and I reevaluated what I wanted to do." Kent described his experience with reflection impacting a solidification of his values:

I just kind of realized that I wasn't living in a consistent fashion. I think it was because of a "habitude" that specifically talked about values, just how when we make decisions, when we live by these values, our decisions become so much

more clear and so much easier and so much more purposeful, and I realized I hadn't ever really taken the time to really consider that or do that myself.

Kent then took the time to thoughtfully consider his values and how they were impacting his decisions, both personally and in his leadership role. Charlie and Kent both considered this reflection a turning point in their leadership experience, one that allowed them to be more successful in the second semesters of their terms. This personal reflection shows signs of listening to and considering an internal voice and building an internal foundation, core aspects of self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2008).

The findings of this research also reinforced aspects of the Community Standards Model (Piper, 1996) that promoted self-authorship development. As in the Community Standards Model, the participants in this study made meaning and kept their selves central while interpreting, enforcing, and maintaining standards within their organizations. Participants personally decided what was right within the context of their organization, and ultimately, were responsible for standing up for what they determined to be right. They also had to communicate openly and honestly with their members and others to allow for effective peer accountability. As in the Community Standards Model, aspects of self-awareness, peer accountability, standing up for what they believed in, complex decision making, and a willingness to state their own opinions while also gaining understanding of others' opinions promoted self-authorship development within participant presidents.

The tensions and complexities of this research study's participants' leadership experience and the support they received from peers, their executive boards, alumni, and

others encouraged movement within and between phases of the epistemological reflection model and the crossroads, ultimately leading to self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2009b)

**Research question 2: How do leaders benefit from the development of self-authorship?**

While serving in a leadership role, leaders are expected to make decisions on behalf of their group, represent the group, uphold their personal values and the standards of the group, and much more. With progress towards self-authorship, college student leaders can be better equipped to deal with these complex situations (Baxter Magolda, 2003). Additionally, leaders must be able to appropriately engage in relationships with others – those in their group and all of the group’s stakeholders. Developing these healthy personal and professional relationships without self-authorship, or a leader possessing a clear sense of self, could lead to a lack of genuine care and commitment (Baxter Magolda, 2003). Acting as an authentic leader, and positive role model, requires a developed inner voice and foundation.

The leaders in this research study all expressed benefits they experienced from building their inner voice and becoming more open to new thoughts, ideas, and points of view. Brian shared:

I started realizing that before...I would kind of act rash sometimes, be like “well what I think is right, and I don’t care what everyone thinks.” Being president kind of opened my mind up to kind of wanting input; you know, constructive criticism is fantastic.

Brian also said that his leadership experience grew his trust in himself, which in turn aided in his decision making process. “It made me trust some of my own instincts a lot more.” Joey had a similar transformation in his decision making process. Developing

trust in his own values and internal voice helped him adjust his approach to tough decisions:

I think it went from, just trying to make the right decisions so as to almost gain a footing so you were a trusted president to ultimately making decisions based upon what was best for the fraternity and the memberships.

Kent clearly stated the impact of trusting his own internal foundation, “By sticking to my values and making my decisions based off of those, it really helped me.”

All of the leaders in this study experienced significant personal outcomes from their experience as a leader, including progress toward self-authorship. In higher profile leadership roles, such as serving as president of a men’s fraternity, demands for time, pressures to make certain decisions, and requirements to build positive relationships, confirmed the necessity of an internal compass.

**Research question 3: How can leadership experience be used or enhanced to encourage development of self-authorship during college years?**

According to Baxter Magolda and King (2004), “promoting self-authorship during college years requires finding the delicate balance between guiding learners and enabling them to be responsible” (p. *xxiii*). The participants in this study reported having the opportunity to assume great responsibility and engage in complex decision making on a variety of topics and issues. They were also given support from their chapter’s members, executive board, and alumni, their national organizations, and local university officials. As with other programs found to promote the development of self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2003; Baxter Magolda & King, 2004; Ortiz & Rhoads, 2000; Piper,

1997; Walczak, 2008), the results of this study emphasized the importance of appropriate challenge and support.

Promotion of self-authorship development during college requires (a) urging students to build their decision making skills and assume responsibility and (b) offering a supportive environment in which they are encouraged to make decisions and reflect upon their personal values and beliefs. This can be done using concepts found in the Learning Partnerships Model (Baxter Magolda & King, 2004). The Learning Partnerships Model “validated capacity to use their internal voices, situated learning in their experience, and invited them to construct meaning of their experiences” (Baxter Magolda, 2008, p. 283). The Learning Partnerships Model supports the fact that each student, each leader, will operate differently and allows support to be framed in the context of the leader’s perspective and needs.

Concepts of the Learning Partnerships Model were reflected within this research; student leaders were validated in their capacity to know through their selection to lead their chapters. Their knowledge and confidence in their internal voices were further validated as they were looked to as role models and key decision makers on behalf of their organizations. Participants experienced significant learning experiences within their leadership roles as they built relationships, life skills, and their decision making process. Their learning was mutually constructed through reflection, open communication with others, and the support provided by peers and authority figures. Therefore, participants in this study were able to build a deeper internal belief system, an internal identity, and mutual relationships through their leadership experience.



## **Implications**

Baxter Magolda and King (2004) advocated self-authorship as the “central goal of higher education for the 21<sup>st</sup>-century” (p. *xxiii*). The findings of this study suggested that leadership experience, specifically in a men’s fraternity, does promote self-authorship development.

Most of the participants in this study had previous leadership experience in their fraternities or in other organizations. That leadership experience was often viewed as a reason for selection to be president and a source of support as participants moved into this larger role. However, several aspects of this higher profile leadership position were surprising to participants. Therefore, student affairs administrators should assist in growing leadership experiences in lesser roles to ensure students are ready for in-depth, challenging situations faced when serving as president of a complex organization. Engagement in these lesser roles should focus on aspects of the Learning Partnerships Model, building decision making skills, fostering relationships, and discovering personal leadership abilities and values (Baxter Magolda and King, 2004). Students who have these early experiences will likely progress further towards self-authorship prior to assuming the challenging role of president, allowing them to ultimately be more successful and experience additional growth.

Sources of support from inside and outside the organization were also viewed by participants as keys to success. To benefit fully from a leadership experience, the leader needed support networks to ensure the capacity to learn and develop when challenged (Baxter Magolda, 2003). A few participants also mentioned the benefit of support from

others serving in similar positions. Discussing issues and opportunities with those who may have comparable experiences allowed deeper reflection and brainstorming.

Therefore, student affairs administrators should provide opportunities for students to build peer relationships and support networks. These support networks can in turn encourage collaboration and foster each other's development.

Reflection was presented as another key component of a development promoting leadership experience. Leaders should be encouraged to engage in reflection to make sense of what they have seen, heard, and experienced. They should consider their decisions and the implications of those decisions in order to make sound, reliable decisions in the future. Reflection should also enhance their role as president or as a leader in general, as it relates to their academics, other involvement, and goals and aspirations for the future. Active, regular reflection to determine how their experiences match or differ from their expectations, their internal foundations, and advancement toward future goals can in turn support progress toward self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2008).

Ultimately, the results of this study demonstrated the importance of the following aspects of the leadership experience when aiming to promote self-authorship development:

- Validating the leader's knowledge through experience through selection as a leader, acting as a role model, and representing a group or organization.
- Reflecting on the leader's personal values and an internal foundation to find ease in peer accountability and upholding the values of the organization.

- Building the leader's trust in their decision making process and skills.
- Fostering opportunities to experience mature, mutually beneficial relationships.
- Helping leaders construct their own meaning of the experience in order to personally develop and build life skills.

Professionals in higher education should aim to incorporate these concepts into programs and initiatives to fully promote student self-authorship development.

### **Future Research**

The results of this study added to a growing body of qualitative research on self-authorship and programs that foster self-authorship development in higher education. Similar to other research, this study focused on student development in activities outside the classroom, but was unique in the emphasis placed specifically on leadership experiences. This study focused solely on leadership experience within a men's fraternity at Midwestern University.

Future research could expand exploration of leadership's impact on self-authorship development to other types of leadership experience and different institutions of higher education. Additionally, all participants appeared to be white and all were male. Future research could be expanded to include more diversity in terms of race, ethnicity, and gender. This research could also be replicated in a longitudinal manner to track development over time rather than solely at the end of a leadership experience.

Very little research on self-authorship has been done in a quantitative manner (Creamer, Baxter Magolda, & Yue, 2010). Therefore, self-authorship research is time intensive and complex to conduct and evaluate. Use of a reliable, valid quantitative

measure of self-authorship, such as the Self-Authorship Survey or Experience Survey used by Pizzolato (2005, 2007) or the Career Decision Making Survey (Creamer et al., 2010) would provide another way to assess a program, experience, or intervention's impact. Assessing a complex construct like self-authorship in a quantitative way provides a challenge; however, there is a need for simplified research capabilities and comparative data. In the case of this research study, a quantitative measure of self-authorship could allow more longitudinal comparisons as well as comparisons to students who have not served in significant leadership roles.

### **Conclusion**

Increasing demands on college students and young professional necessitate a level of self-authorship development. Baxter Magolda (2008) asserted that self-authorship is essential in order to engage in transformational learning, which is in turn required to keep up with knowledge acquisition, intercultural competence, social responsibility, and many other aspects of adult life. This study considered the impact that leadership experience, specifically serving as president of a men's fraternity, had in supporting development of self-authorship. Participants' leadership experiences were explored through the lens of previous research on programs or initiatives that were proven to promote self-authorship development.

According to Baxter Magolda (2008), "Self-authorship evolves when the challenge to become self-authoring is present and is accompanied by sufficient support to help an individual make the shift to internal meaning making." (p. 271). Baxter Magolda's (2008) research reported that self-authorship was not achieved until

participants' were in their mid-30s. However, other researchers have suggested that self-authoring ways are possible in the early 20s if challenges are presented and the proper support is available. The results of this study showed that leadership experiences of seven students serving as men's fraternity presidents at Midwestern University offered appropriate challenges and supports to positively foster the development of self-authorship in accordance with the Learning Partnerships Model and other self-authorship research.

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**Appendix A**

**IRB Approval Letter**



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December 7, 2012

Anna Pressler  
Department of Educational Administration  
139 N 11th Street Apt. 905 Lincoln, NE 68508

James Griesen  
Department of Educational Administration  
125 TEAC, UNL, 68588-0360

IRB Number: 20121213181 EX  
Project ID: 13181  
Project Title: Leadership Experience and Self-Authorship Development

Dear Anna:

This letter is to officially notify you of the certification of exemption of your project by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects. It is the Board's opinion that you have provided adequate safeguards for the rights and welfare of the participants in this study based on the information provided. Your proposal is in compliance with this institution's Federal Wide Assurance 00002258 and the DHHS Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR 46) and has been classified as Exempt Category 2.

You are authorized to implement this study as of the Date of Exemption Determination: 12/07/2012.

1. Please include the IRB approval number (IRB#20121213181 EX) in the emailed informed consent messages. Please email me a copy of these emails, with the number included, for our records. If you need to make changes to the messages, please submit the revised messages to the IRB for review and approval prior to using them.

We wish to remind you that the principal investigator is responsible for reporting to this Board any of the following events within 48 hours of the

event:

\* Any serious event (including on-site and off-site adverse events, injuries, side effects, deaths, or other problems) which in the opinion of the local investigator was unanticipated, involved risk to subjects or others, and was possibly related to the research procedures;

\* Any serious accidental or unintentional change to the IRB-approved protocol that involves risk or has the potential to recur;

\* Any publication in the literature, safety monitoring report, interim result or other finding that indicates an unexpected change to the risk/benefit ratio of the research;

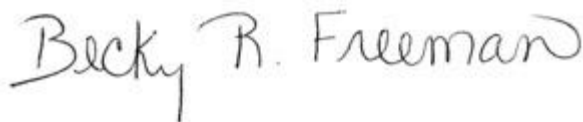
\* Any breach in confidentiality or compromise in data privacy related to the subject or others; or

\* Any complaint of a subject that indicates an unanticipated risk or that cannot be resolved by the research staff.

This project should be conducted in full accordance with all applicable sections of the IRB Guidelines and you should notify the IRB immediately of any proposed changes that may affect the exempt status of your research project. You should report any unanticipated problems involving risks to the participants or others to the Board.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB office at 472-6965.

Sincerely,



Becky R. Freeman, CIP  
for the IRB



**Appendix B**

**Informed Consent and Recruitment Email**

Dear <student>,

My name is Anna Pressler and I am conducting a study of leadership experience and self-authorship. The purpose of this study is to explore how leadership experience impacts the development of self-authorship. As a former president of your fraternity with distinct leadership experience, I would like to request your participation.

Participants in this study will benefit because of the opportunity to reflect upon their leadership experience and their last year. The Greek Affairs Office and student affairs administrators will benefit from this study by gaining a deeper knowledge of how leadership experience impacts student development.

Participation in this study will require approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes. You will be asked to participate in an interview that will last no longer than one hour. The interview will take place on campus and will be audio recorded. Following the interview, you will be asked to review your interview transcript electronically for accuracy. I anticipate you will be able to review your transcript in less than 30 minutes.

There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research.

Your interview responses will be kept confidential. Your interview file will be saved in a password protected file, and you will be asked to select a pseudonym to keep your information confidential.

You may ask any questions concerning this research at any time by contacting Anna Pressler at [AnnaPressler@gmail.com](mailto:AnnaPressler@gmail.com) or [402-450-2823](tel:402-450-2823). If you would like to speak to someone else, please call the Research Compliance Services Office at [402-472-6965](tel:402-472-6965) or [irb@unl.edu](mailto:irb@unl.edu). The IRB approval number for this project is IRB#20121213181 EX.

Participation in this study is limited to participants who are 19 years of age or older.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You can refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researchers or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. By scheduling an interview time, you have given your consent to participate in this research. You should print a copy of this page for your records.

Please email me by Monday, January 14 if you are willing to participate in this research. Please include your name and your phone number in your email. Interviews will be scheduled around your availability, ideally before Friday, January 25. I hope you will consider participating in this study!

Thank you for your time,

Anna Pressler

[AnnaPressler@gmail.com](mailto:AnnaPressler@gmail.com)  
[402-450-2823](tel:402-450-2823)

Dr. James Griesen  
Faculty Advisor



**Appendix C**

**Interview Protocol**

### Interview Protocol for Fraternity Presidents

<b>Time of Interview:</b>
<b>Date:</b>
<b>Interviewee:</b>
<b>Interviewee Pseudonym:</b>

Begin Interview: Introduce researcher and review informed consent.

1. Please start by telling me a little bit about yourself.
2. Why do you believe you were selected to be President of your Chapter?
3. Tell me about your year as President of your Chapter.
4. What events do you believe were significant during your term?
  - a. Why were they significant?
  - b. How did you handle these significant situations?
5. What challenges, conflicts, or pressures did you face as President?
  - a. How did you handle these challenges?
  - b. What support systems, if any, did you use to work through these challenges?
  - c. How did these challenges affect you?
  - d. Now that you've had more time to think about this situation, would you make the same decision now?
6. Tell me about an experience when you had to interact with someone different than you.
  - a. How did you handle this situation?
  - b. What did you learn about yourself?
  - c. What did you learn about your relationships with others?
7. How did your experience as president match or differ from your expectations?
8. How do you feel your experiences as President affected your view of yourself?
9. What did you learn about yourself during your experience?
10. How do you feel your experiences as President affected your relationships with others?
11. What are the key things you will take away from your leadership experience?
12. What advice would you give to future Presidents of your organization?
13. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience as President?

**Appendix D**

**Participant Transcription Review Email**

### **Participant Transcription Review Email**

Dear <student>,

I am contacting you in relation to our <interview date> interview. I have attached your interview transcription (text version of our interview) to this email. I want to give you a chance to review the data and change anything that you might have stated or stated incorrectly.

If you have changes you would like made, respond to this email by <two weeks after email send date> with those changes. If you don't believe anything needs to be changed, please respond via email saying no changes are necessary.

Thank you for participating in this research!

Sincerely,

Anna

Anna Pressler  
AnnaPressler@gmail.com  
402-450-2823

Faculty Advisor  
Dr. James Griesen  
jgriesen1@unl.edu

**Appendix E**

**List of Codes**

### Sample Coding Process

Phase 1 Codes Compiled from Transcripts	Phase 2 Codes
Acting as role Model	Acting as a Role Model
Acting as role Model	
Acting as role Model	
Acting as role Model	
Acting as role Model	
serving as role model	
adhering to the rules	
being a good representative of the organization	
being a good role model	
being a role model	
being a role model	
being a role model	
being a role model	
role model	
Being held to a higher standard	Holding Yourself to a Higher Standard
Being a good leader	
being mature	
being professional	
your words and actions have an effect on others	
your words and actions have an effect on others	
Viewed as a resource for decision making	
looked to as a role model	
high standards	
Higher Purpose	
holding self to a higher standard	
holding self to a higher standard	
holding self to a higher standard	
holding self to a higher standard	
holding self to high expectations	
Holding self to higher standard	
Holding self to higher standard	
Holding self to higher standard	
leading by example	
leading by example	
can't separate the person from the position	
Represent More than Yourself	

Representing Others	
representing others	
Representing Something Bigger	
Representing something bigger than self	
Representing something bigger than yourself	Representing Something Bigger Than Yourself
Representing something bigger than yourself	
Representing something bigger than yourself	
Representing something bigger than yourself	
Representing something larger than yourself	
Representing something larger than yourself	
representing something outside yourself	
representing something outside yourself	
Representing the chapter	
something bigger than yourself	
Heightened sense of Responsibility	
Heightened sense of responsibility	
Heightened sense of responsibility	
pressure to be perfect	
pressure to have it all together	
pressure to succeed	
Pressures of the Position	
pressures to perform to a high standard	
setting high standards for yourself	
setting higher personal standards	
setting higher standard for others	
commitment to organization	
commitment to the job	
commitment to values	
Commitment to values of organization	
personal pressure to succeed	
personal responsibility	
personal responsibility	
personal responsibility	
personal high standard	
having and upholding higher standards	
Spokesperson	

Phase 2 Codes (From Previous Table)	Final Theme and Subtheme
Acting as a Role Model	1. Holding yourself to a Higher Standard a. Acting as a Role Model b. Representing Something Bigger than Yourself
Holding Yourself to a Higher Standard	
Representing Something Bigger Than Yourself	



**Appendix F**

**External Audit Attestation**

Kelli K. Smith, PhD  
 2020 Southern Light Drive  
 Lincoln, NE 68512  
 work: 402.472.8217  
 cell: 402.310.4451  
 smith@unl.edu

### Study External Review

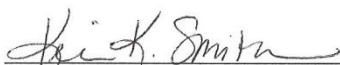
The following is a summary of the external review completed on a research study being completed by Anna Pressler, M.A. candidate at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The central question explored in this qualitative study was, "to explore how leadership experience impacts the development of self-authorship."

Review steps completed by this reviewer:

1. Initial meeting in early February in which Ms. Pressler described her research, the theoretical foundation for her study, and electronic copies of her research materials.
2. Became familiar with purpose of the study and the research questions related to this study.
3. Reviewed transcripts from the researcher's seven subjects.
4. Examined procedures used for member checking.
5. Read drafts of Chapters 2 (literature review) and 3 (methods)
6. Reflected on the thematic analysis of the researcher's analysis of those transcripts related to all research questions.
7. Reviewed supporting documents, including IRB approval and subject communication documents, analysis files (Excel) used to determine themes.
8. Met for a second time to provide my feedback on her thematic development.

Following the review of these documents, I met with the researcher to discuss my assessment of the status of her study, her documentation and, to some extent, her analysis to that point. From this review, I consider her study to be well-designed and thorough. Furthermore, I consider this study to have been conducted in an ethical manner using procedures and protocols reflective of rigorous qualitative research.

Signed this 5<sup>th</sup> day of March, 2013.



Kelli K. Smith, PhD, External Reviewer  
 Assistant Director, Career Services  
 Adjunct Faculty, Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communication  
 University of Nebraska-Lincoln