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Young Entrants and Self-Authorship

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YOUNG ENTRANTS AND SELF-AUTHORSHIP

A thesis

Presented to

The School of Social Sciences, Education & Business

Department of Higher Education and Student Development

Taylor University

Upland, Indiana

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Higher Education and Student Development

by

Greta Johnson

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**Higher Education and Student Development
Taylor University
Upland, Indiana**

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

MASTER'S THESIS

This is to certify that the Thesis of

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entitled

Young Entrants and Self-Authorship

has been approved by the Examining Committee for the thesis requirement for the

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Abstract

The purpose of the current study is to discover the impact that early college experiences have on the self-authorship of young entrants. The study explores the experiences of nine young entrants who participated in an early college experience at a faith-based liberal arts university in Minnesota. The study uncovers what aspects of self-authorship develop and those that have little growth. The following question guides the research: “What impact does the college experience have on the self-authorship of young entrants?” Findings include growth in areas of intrapersonal self-authorship: feeling like a traditional freshmen, learning study habits, time, and effort required for college, and making decisions. Growth in parts of interpersonal self-authorship: growing up fast, maturing, and becoming independent, experiencing depth in friendships and community, and support, encouragement and freedom from parents. Changes in epistemological self-authorship: Christian faith informing and forming beliefs, choosing values based on family, background, Bible and faith, and facing challenges. Implications for practice include providing mentoring opportunities for young entrants, developing communities for young students, and maintaining high expectations and high support for young entrants.

Acknowledgements

Over the last two years, I have become a learner. There are many people who deserve credit for that growth and change. However, I believe there are a handful of models who should most receive that honor: Kate Westrate (a woman with a greater imagination and willingness to learn than anyone I have ever met), Steve Austin (a supervisor and friend with higher expectations and more gracious support than I deserve), Scott Gaier (a professor, advisor, and mentor who fanned the flame of my learner spirit by opening my eyes to teaching). Becoming a learner has been fun, and I cannot wait to see how the enjoyment of scholarship, critical thinking, and synthesis will continue to influence my future.

Throughout the thesis process, it felt as if the thesis was the final end that I would reach and feel accomplished. In fact, the thesis has been much a process of growth that I do not believe I will ever fully understand this side of heaven. I have learned to research and discover, ask questions and enjoy answers that have taught me to worship God with my whole heart, mind, body, and soul. While it has been and continues to be a process, I am happy to say that the task is complete for now.

I dedicate this thesis to my friends. You know who you are. You help me become who I am supposed to be in Jesus Christ. You each teach me things about who God is and you challenge me to live freely in forgiveness. I value you and will remain a loyal friend

to the best of my ability until I get to see Jesus face-to-face. You are loved. Always praying.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Whole-Person Higher Education

From its inception, American higher education has aimed to wholly develop students in their “thinking, writing, and acting well” (Rudolph, 1990, p. 12). Ringenberg (2006) illustrated that, in American colonial colleges, most faculty understood their role included educating mind, soul, and spirit—one way to conceptualize whole-person education. Parks (2000) framed whole-person education this way:

Higher and professional education is distinctively vested with the responsibility of teaching critical and systematic thought and initiating young lives into a responsible apprehension first of the realities and questions of a vast and mysterious universe and second of our participation in it. (p. 10)

Whole-person education includes knowing facts but goes beyond the facts to connecting and engaging the world (Palmer, 1993). Throughout their time in college, students make meaning of themselves and the world. They solidify beliefs, make decisions, and develop personal commitments they have the opportunity to live by for the rest of their lives (Garber, 1996).

Self-Authorship

Astin, Astin, and Lindholm (2011) observed that millions of students enter college each year, coming from different life experiences and backgrounds but all sharing something:

These students share common hopes, concerns, passions, dreams, and responsibilities within the essence of their humanity. They also ask the same existential questions: Who am I? What is the meaning of life? What is my purpose? Who can—and will—I become? (p. 27)

As they seek to find their responsibilities and answer these big questions, they begin to experience self-authorship. Magolda (2009) defined self-authorship as “the internal capacity to define one’s beliefs, identity, and relationships” (p. 633). According to Bryant (2011), “the development of these capacities does not follow a predictable time table” (p. 28). Rather, defining one’s identity, or becoming the author of one’s story, occurs at the “crossroads” of relationships and crisis (Bryant, 2011, p. 17).

Throughout college, students seek to define themselves epistemologically by deciding what and how they believe, intrapersonally by explaining how they view themselves, and interpersonally by constructing relationships (Bryant, 2011). Becoming self-authored allows students to develop commitments. As they navigate through life beyond college, understanding who they are and what they believe centers them in the midst of challenge (Bryant, 2011). Rather than depending on external authority, students who have developed self-authorship understand who they are in any life situation.

The college experience allows students to interact with peers, professors, and other professionals. Those interactions become collisions of ideas and thoughts, which

students can use to forge their own authorship; the collisions stimulate self-authorship. The college experience encourages students to define their beliefs, so that they may give an internal reason for who they are and what they do.

Young Entrants

Since the colonial college, higher education has taken on the challenging call to develop the whole person, including self-authorship. College provides an opportunity for young students to ask questions, learn, and develop their thinking skills, so that they become the authors of their lives (Rudolph, 1990). According to Ringenberg (2006), “The typical colonial college student compared in age to today’s high school student; for that reason alone he needed considerable supervision” (p. 52). Today, post-secondary education traditionally is reserved for those who have graduated from high school.

While the typical student enrolls at age 18, greater numbers of young students enter institutions of higher education (Hoffman, Vargas, & Santos, 2009). Boswell (2001) cited that 38 states have policies and programs that encourage students in high school to enroll in post-secondary classes. Today’s colleges provide spaces to learn and grow; however, noting that young students in the colonial era needed “considerable supervision,” today’s young entrants may require support and care to enable them to develop their identities. Currently, because early entrance students represent as much as 5% of all college students (Hoffman et al., 2009), professionals in higher education must develop knowledge and skills regarding the education of young students. Professionals in the field need to make sense of how to participate in the development of young entrants. Educators who engage young students in the classroom, in residence halls, or in

leadership offices face the task to equip their students in understanding the world and their position in it.

Research has explored young students who enter early college programs, the reasons they enter, and how they perceive their experience (Allen & Dadgar, 2012; Noble & Drummond, 1992). These studies have assessed graduates of these programs in their overall development and satisfaction with life (Shepard, Nicpon, & Doobay, 2009). After graduating, young entrants can make meaning of their lives; however, how starting college early influences their self-authorship remains to be seen. Students who graduate from these programs advance to graduate programs and careers with great achievement (Olszewski-Kubilius, 2002), but not much research illustrates how starting college early impacts young students' ability to define themselves and use that identity to center them in the midst of challenge.

Purpose

Higher education holds the call to equip students in their ability to think and interact with the world, with self-authorship as one aspect of that ability. Students who understand themselves to have an internal locus of control—as opposed to an external authority defining who they are—withstand challenge and trial throughout life: “Delay in developing an internal sense of self is a result of social and educational environments that reward reliance on authority rather than a sign that it cannot happen until one’s 20s” (Magolda, 2003, p. 236). Young entrants have the opportunity to experience self-authorship at an earlier stage in life, but whether or not the early college experience impacts their self-authorship remains unexplored. Therefore, the current qualitative study seeks to understand the impact that early college experiences has on full-time, male and

female young entrants, and their self-authorship. The present research used an interview format in order to answer this question: “What impact does the college experience have on the self-authorship of young entrants?”

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Student Development Theory

Throughout college, students begin to wonder and seek who they are and who they are to become; they quest for the answer to who they are in relationship with others and to their faith (Parks, 2000). Entering adulthood includes a time of asking questions and making commitments in belief. Parks (2000) described this period as re-making meaning. By being made aware of personal assumptions and permitting challenge of those assumptions, students recreate meaning and enter adulthood. Adulthood includes meaning making, but entrance to adulthood somewhat defies quantifiable means. Parks (2000) argued for three distinct markers of adulthood: (1) awareness of personal reality, (2) purposeful truth seeking with others, and (3) learning to respond to others with justice and care.

Erikson. The concept of making meaning fits appropriately in Erikson's (1980) stages of identity development in "Identity Versus Identity Diffusion" (p. 94). Throughout this stage, young adults ponder who they are by wrestling with others' perceptions and their own conception of themselves: "the accrued confidence that one's ability to maintain inner sameness and continuity (one's ego in the psychological sense) is matched by the sameness and continuity of one's meaning for others" (Erikson, 1980 p. 94). Those in this stage seek to make meaning in their minds congruent with their actions.

This stage of identity development represents a time in which self and purpose begin to emerge. Values, beliefs, and actions begin to align throughout this stage, and therefore the view of the world becomes more solidified and identifiable.

In his sixth stage, Erikson (1980) described “[i]ntimacy versus isolation” (p. 134). Students in the sixth stage either choose to unite their newly developed identity (their aligned beliefs and actions) with other people, or they do not (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). Adults in this stage of development live in their individual identities while also participating as a member of a group that has similar convictions. Young adults recognize themselves as parts of a whole, but, in order to reach this point, they must already have an understanding of themselves. Therefore, identity development necessitates maintaining beliefs and convictions (Evans et al., 2010).

Marcia. Marcia (1966) described persons who have identity achievement as people able to persevere through problems, subscribe less to authoritarian ideas, and manage negative information without letting it ruin their mindsets. Identity achievement status occurs when crisis and commitment bring an individual to an understanding of who he or she is as an individual. Once students go through crisis, they feel pressure to make decisions that bring about confidence in their convictions (Evans et al., 2010). In the identity achievement stage, students use internal processes to make decisions instead of relying on external constructs. The internal framework with which they view the world becomes the alignment of belief and behavior.

Fowler. Fowler’s (1996) synthetic-conventional faith described the ability to integrate disparate ideas from various places into an individual’s life. Most adolescents live in this stage and cannot decide, without external influence, the positivity or

negativity of a decision. The fourth stage of faith development, individuative-reflective faith, as framed by Fowler (2000), occurs when beliefs and commitments become coherent and used to make meaning.

Garber. These student development theories highlight the importance of having faith, choosing beliefs, understanding values, and making meaning. The concept of coming to and forming a worldview lies within those ideas. Garber (1999) wrote about those who develop lifelong worldviews as having three commonalities: they (1) formed a worldview that sustained in the midst of challenge, (2) had a mentor who lived out the worldview ahead of them, and (3) have a community that embodies the worldview and is supportive throughout life. Garber (1999) argued that “[t]he college years need to help students develop ways of thinking and living that are coherent, that make sense of the whole of life” (p. 112).

Throughout *The Fabric of Faithfulness*, Garber (1999) argued forming a worldview as central to the college years. Worldview formation occurs in relationship with others who have differing ideas; new convictions develop throughout this period of wrestling with fresh beliefs. Garber (1999) named this time the “critical years” following the lead of Erikson (1964): “a crucial period in which a decisive turn one way or another is unavoidable” (p. 139). Parks (2000) presented the stage this way: “Typically, in the years from seventeen to thirty a distinctive mode of meaning-making can emerge, one that has certain adult characteristics but understandably lacks others” (p. 6). Significantly, Parks’ (2000) age markers specifically labeled those likely moving from emergent to mature adulthood.

Summary of student development theory. Research regarding college students must be grounded in theories of student development; student development theories convey what students experience and how practitioners participate in those experiences. Therefore, a basic understanding of identity development in college students is necessary. Throughout college, students forge their identities in relationships that challenge their beliefs and values. They solidify who they are by observing an alignment between their thoughts and behaviors. Students understand wholeness as they interact with people who are congruent. They achieve identity when they become aware of what makes them who they are. Those seeking truth develop their identities, commitments, and values based on the challenges that others present. Students that can create space for others to exist, as they are, experience identity in adulthood, for they recognize the need for care and treating others justly. Identity formation happens within and without the classroom as students develop relationships and understand themselves in those relationships.

Magolda and Self-Authorship

According to Magolda (2009), Kegan first developed the idea of self-authorship by placing the act of making meaning at the center of development. As a part of making meaning, self-authorship indicates the ability to take other people's expectations and opinions as objects, standing apart from them, rather than as constructs or definitions of life (Magolda, 2009). People become self-authored when they develop a voice of their own from which they know themselves and the people around them. Magolda's (2009) concept of self-authorship had three elements: "trusting the internal voice, building an internal foundation, and securing internal commitments" (p. 631).

Self-authorship does not entail the ability to control the external world. Rather, a self-authored individual can control his or her reaction to external circumstances. Choosing how to react provides the first step to building a philosophy of life on which self-authored people stand; they begin to “organize their choices into commitments that formed a philosophy, or an internal foundation to guide their ongoing reactions to reality” (Magolda, 2009, p. 632). People who have organized their commitments into philosophies begin to live upon their foundation by second nature. As circumstances arise, good or bad, their way of navigating becomes automatic because they have made consistent choices that maintain their identity and their internal freedom (Magolda, 2009).

Non-Traditional Students

Student development literature defines students who enter college after their senior year of high school and complete college in the following four to six years as “traditional” (Muratori, Colangelo, & Assouline, 2003, p. 221). Erikson, Garber, and Parks all referred to the period of time following high school through college graduation as the critical years. However, a greater number of students enter college before this specified time (Hoffman et al., 2009), and the stages in which those students operate may differ from those of their traditional peers. Therefore, research on this age group has increased to develop a fuller understanding of the experiences young college entrants have.

Early college programming. The experiences that early college entrants have appear unique to them not only because of their age, but also because of the types of programs offered to them. Hofmann (2012) defined early college programming as

“programs that enroll high school students in college courses for college credit. Commonly referred to as ‘dual enrollment’... ‘college transition programs’... ‘dual credit’ and ‘concurrent enrollment’” (p. 1). Students participating in dual credit programs take courses with other college students on college campuses, or enroll in their high schools in International Baccalaureate (IB), or Advanced Placement (AP) courses, or attend early college high schools (Hofmann, 2012). During the 2002-2003 school year, 813,000 young students took college level courses (Hofmann, 2012).

Depending on the investment a family can and will make, students participate in full or part-time early college programming. Part-time programs include anything taught in a high school for which a student can gain college credit through examination (IB or AP) and dual credit that a student earns by commuting to and attending class at a college institution (Boswell, 2001).

The full-time Early Entrance Program (EEP) at the University of Washington enrolls exceptional students who have just completed the eighth-grade (Noble, Childers, & Vaughan, 2008). The University of Washington has another full-time enrollment program for students, which begins after their tenth grade year: the Academy for Young Scholars (Noble et al., 2008).

The University of Iowa has the National Academy of Arts, Sciences, and Engineering (NAASE). Students who have completed the eleventh grade go through a rigorous application process to ensure their readiness for the college experience (Muratori et al., 2003). Readiness includes academic capabilities and nonacademic involvements, maturity and family support. A full-time, residential program, NAASE integrates students into the community at the University of Iowa (Muratori et al., 2003).

The full-time, residential Program for the Exceptionally Gifted (PEG) at Mary Baldwin College admits female students from eighth grade to age sixteen (Heilbronner, Connel, Dobyns, & Reis, 2010). The University of North Texas (UNT) has the Texas Academy of Mathematics and Science (TAMS) for high school-aged students to earn 57 credits in two years and then integrate as traditional students into UNT (Boazman & Sayler, 2011).

Considering the young ages of students in early college programming, they usually receive additional support (Olszewski-Kubilius, 2002). Support, in the case of NAASE, includes a requirement for all students to live in honors housing so that University of Iowa staff can consistently care for them. PEG students encounter a similar situation (Heilbronner et al., 2010). For EEP students, care comes through participation in Transition School, an exclusive year-long academic program with other young peers to teach them how to mature and handle university life (Noble & Drummond, 1992). The Transition School includes a specific space set aside for EEP students, so they can feel safe in their youth (Noble & Drummond, 1992). In a high school setting where students can take AP or IB courses, they learn from their high school teachers; therefore, students have the care and assistance that they have in any other high school course (Klopfenstein & Lively, 2012).

By participating in these early college experiences, young students share in the current conversations that center on college completion (Hofmann, 2012). The increasing number of the participants indicates the popular understanding of college's expense and necessity for a middle-class lifestyle. Most dual-credit opportunities offer students ways to enter college early—and to complete coursework on time—at a decreased cost (Allen

& Dadgar, 2012). Early college programming also allows students additional college readiness when the time comes for them to arrive on the college campus.

College readiness. College readiness does not represent a new concept in student development literature. For true college readiness, students need more than academic preparation—they need to understand how to work in the college system, study, manage time, and navigate new social relationships (Karp, 2012). Karp (2012) wrote that college-ready students can understand the culture of their college. Early college programming enables young entrants to engage in college level activity and therefore makes them more college ready than their traditional peers: “We can conceive of dual enrollment as an opportunity for anticipatory socialization and role rehearsal” (Karp, 2012, p. 23).

Students enrolled in early college programming, like dual enrollment, have an opportunity to practice being a college student before truly entering this role. In Karp’s (2012) study, students in dual enrollment programming had fuller understandings of the college student role by the end of the semester than they had at the beginning; this finding shows that practicing a role enables individuals more readiness to embody those roles.

Edmunds (2012) defined college readiness as “[s]tudents’ knowledge and skills, behaviors, attitudes, and awareness of specific college processes” (p. 81). Students learn academic and social behaviors throughout the process of engaging in college level work, by observing and participating in the challenge the relationships. Engaging in early college programming allows students to practice the college student role so they more preparedly function as college students when the time comes. Early college programming can serve as practice for when a student enters college as a traditional student. Those who participate in early college programming more likely graduate on time, have higher

GPA, and feel more prepared for college (Edmunds, 2012). First-year students that complete twenty credits more likely complete college than those who do not; young entrants likely graduate on time because they end their first year with twenty or more credits (Klopfenstein & Lively, 2012). Programs that place young entrants on college campuses allow them to learn how college works and how to live and function in it, while catalyzing their thinking and learning in the classroom.

College readiness presents as much an issue for faculty as it does for the young entrants. Hughes and Edwards (2012) found that both high school teachers asked to teach dual enrollment courses and professors on college campuses have had to learn how to teach these unique students. The young students do not have the skills or the “affective adjustment” needed to function in the college environment (Hughes & Edwards, 2012, p. 31). In both kinds of classrooms, the educators have had to learn scaffolding, providing support that decreases as the student learns to navigate on his or her own. College readiness before the age of a traditional student remains a challenge that faculty must willingly agree to engage. Institutions of higher education must make support services for development of academic skills and social understanding available for young students in order for them to thrive (Tinberg & Nadeau, 2011). Tinberg and Nadeau (2011) used the language of intervention as a way to ensure that students develop in their academic capabilities. For young entrants to succeed, programs must provide counselors who will check in with students on their wellbeing and achievement.

Perception of early entrants. Oftentimes parents of students who participate in early entrance programs believe their students will experience a loss, but students do not feel the same way (Lupkowski, Whitmore, & Ramsay, 1992). Noble, Arndt, Nicholson,

Sletten, and Zamora (1998) found that parents wonder if entering college early forces their children to grow up too quickly. Students have observed parents go through a difficult process as the students enroll in these programs (Lupkowski et al., 1992). However, when their students begin the programs, parents may face the same or similar difficulties as traditional first-year students have when leaving their parents. The parents of these young students may believe that, by allowing their students to leave high school early, their children will experience a loss or deprivation, but that does not appear the case (Noble & Drummond, 1992). Most students gain freedom from their parents to decide whether or not to participate in the programs, and, although the parents may feel excited at their child's growth, they feel cautious about possible losses (Noble & Drummond, 1992).

Students that participate do not perceive or experiences losses. Some have said that they missed out on sports, dances or other social organizations, but most have "no regrets at all" (Noble & Drummond, 1992, p. 109). They recognize that they differ from traditional students, but most do not dwell on it; rather, they grow through their youth and mature in their relationships (Noble & Drummond, 1992). While their parents feel the students miss out on social experiences in high school, young entrants tend to believe they actually miss out on social experiences in college; their age hinders them from interacting socially until they grow physically mature (Noble & Drummond, 1992). Noble et al. (1998) found that few students (if any) believe that they grew up too quickly by participating in the programs; rather, they believe that, if they had stayed at pace in high school, they would have fallen behind in their personal maturity.

Some young entrants perceive that their involvement in early college programs hindered the development of their social skills. In the programs, young intelligent peers surrounded them, but once the young entrants were out of the program and surrounded by traditional students, they found it harder to thrive socially (Noble et al., 2007). Students in these programs have constant support for the first couple of years in college, and, once the support disappears, if they have not learned how to cultivate friendships on their own, they struggle. Their traditional aged peers, whose minds might show further development, may more ably engage in relationship than the young entrants. Noble et al. (2007) found that young entrants do not fit the perceived nerd caricature rather as they continue to age; indeed, they become stable members of their communities.

At Kennesaw State University (KSU), faculty perception of young entrants appears positive (Kinnick, 2012). In the Dual Enrollment Honors Program (DEHP), high school juniors and seniors integrate into regular KSU classes and housing (Kinnick, 2012). Faculty of the KSU community understand that the program enhances the campus by bringing “high-achieving students, through enhancement of the classroom environment, and through positive impact on the image of the university as a school choice” (Kinnick, 2012, p. 42). The faculty and staff perceive that the presence of the young entrants cultivates better student engagement and learning. Outside of the community, students who had an excellent experience at KSU uphold and increase the quality of the university. Overall, faculty and staff perceive a positive influence that dual enrollment has on the university. Perhaps having younger students on the campus increases the professors workload because they need to cater the classroom learning to a

different classroom, but in the end, the arrangement benefits student learning overall (Hughes & Edwards, 2012).

Self-esteem. According to Shepard et al. (2009), “One important aspect of adjustment to college is how self-concept changes in response to the transition to college” (p. 44). Throughout the first semester of college, traditional students decline in their self-efficacy (Shepard et al., 2009). In their study, Shepard et al. (2009) found that students in early entrance programming do not decrease in belief in themselves, but they remain stable in their self-perceptions, and a few even increase. The authors concluded that this stability or increase may result from interacting with peers equally capable and challenged, both in and outside of the classroom. Students who engage in early entrance programming seem to adjust similarly, perhaps more easily than their traditional peers because they enter environments that thoroughly challenge them.

After their experiences in early college programming, students tend to excel further not only in academics but also in their “social and psychological adjustment” (Boazman & Sayler, 2011). As they move far beyond their peers, they tend to believe that they use their gifts and abilities to achieve happiness; therefore, the young participants do not sense hindrances from their experiences (Boazman & Sayler, 2011). Boazman and Sayler (2011) additionally found that students who engage in the challenge of early college programming tend to grow in their self-efficacy; therefore, the students believe that they can achieve greater happiness through their gifts and knowledge better than some of their traditional peers.

Olszewski-Kubilius (2002) found that young entrants tend to appear “more independent and unconventional, and less conforming as assessed by measures of

personality, compared to students who were equally bright but opted to go to high school” (“How do early entrants,” para. 6). Students who test their ability to work academically see strong outcomes in other parts of their lives. Perhaps because they have become tried in their thinking at a younger age, they become firmer in their minds and have greater success in all other areas. Noble et al. (1998) found that early entrance encourages students to grow in their independence and assertiveness. By participating in college programming at a young age, they can learn critical thinking and question asking, and they become autonomous in their minds and actions; young entrants “are expected to be proactive learners, to question their own and others’ assumptions, and to express their ideas in a thoughtful cogent manner” (Noble et al., 1998, “Continuing personal growth”, para. 6). Thus, young entrants hold much higher expectations than their traditional peers have at the middle or high school level, and, as they develop in their thinking, their view of themselves and their abilities increases.

Graduation. In Kinnick’s (2012) article, she stated “that completion of twenty credit hours before the end of the first year of college is a strong predictor of timely college graduation” (p. 43). Institutions interested in increasing their retention and graduation rates should seek to have dual enrollment programs because these programs equip students with the ability to reach the goal of 20 credits by the spring of the first year. Timely graduation likely means early graduation for young entrants; Olszewski-Kubilius (2002) found that these students usually graduate in less than four years.

After their early graduation, most pursue further education in graduate schools (Olszewski-Kubilius, 2002). In general, young students move from one educational experience into the next without deviating for other activities. Olszewski-Kubilius (2002)

included research by Janos et al. (1989), who found that young entrants struggle to make career decisions at such inexperienced ages.

Summary of Non-Traditional Students. Young entrants begin college at a young age, typically before they have graduated from high school and therefore fall into the non-traditional student category. Early-college programs can either operate as full or part-time and can include living on campus or remaining with family. While each early-college programming experience remains unique, each program challenges young entrants with college level work and interactions. Young entrants require additional support because their age may hinder them from complete college readiness. College readiness includes being academically prepared, understanding how colleges work, knowing how to manage time, and developing relationships. Throughout their time in early-college programs, young entrants become more equipped for college.

Young entrants perceive the experience of early-college programming as developmental in their thought processes and maturity. Many parents perceive that their young entrants experience with early-college programs will hinder their children, making them miss out on high school opportunities. Early-college programs provide a platform on which young entrants experience stability and in some cases, an increase in their self-esteem. Interacting with equally intelligent peers gives them a platform to believe they can achieve at high levels. Young entrants achieve at high levels and graduate early or on time, which enables them to gain further education or begin working at their careers.

Conclusion

As the literature has shown, early college programming provides opportunity for young students to move through college more quickly than their traditional peers.

Engaging in these opportunities provides space for young students to become college ready before their peers but perhaps at the cost of graduating without being ready for life after college. Parents express concern for their young students entering college, but such concern appears mostly unwarranted. Faculty see the value of early college entrance for the institution as a whole, but most have to adjust their teaching or develop supportive methods in order to engage students not yet academically ready for the college classroom. For many institutions, enrolling young students means having higher retention and graduation rates because the students enter into an early program and decide to stay until they graduate. They usually graduate early, which may influence their self-authorship, but little literature illustrate this hypothesis.

Therefore, the current study explored the impact that the early college experience has on young entrants' self-authorship. By interviewing young entrants, the study sought to understand the experience of participants as they define themselves, make meaning, and develop beliefs, values, and convictions. The study has added to the existing literature by examining those who have participated in early college programs and understanding the essence of their experience and its impact on self-authorship.

Chapter 3

Methods

Methodology

As a way to understand how young entrants understand their college experiences and its influence on self-authorship, this study used a qualitative phenomenological research method. According to Creswell (1994), in phenomenological studies, “the researcher identifies the ‘essence’ of human experiences concerning a phenomenon, as described by participants in a study” (p. 17). Therefore, the study used this method to identify what young entrants describe in regards to self-authorship and their college experiences.

Using phenomenology allowed the researcher to listen to first-hand experiences and develop an understanding of what participants encounter in the realm of self-authorship throughout their early college education. According to Cerbone (2006), Edmund Husserl spent a significant portion of his career developing the philosophical discipline of phenomenology. As a mathematically educated scholar, Husserl’s interests drastically changed after hearing lectures from Franz Brentano, who emphasized the philosophy of intentionality, that is, specific mental energy directed toward a particular subject (Cerbone, 2006). This kind of intentionality led Husserl to develop a philosophy that focused on “the essential, rather than the empirical, structure of experience” (Cerbone, 2006, p. 34). Husserl sought to understand the meanings people draw from

their experiences. Therefore, this study used phenomenology in order to understand the essence of the experience that young entrants have and how that experience shapes their self-authorship.

Participants

Participants in this study attend an early college program in Minnesota. Minnesota's early college programming, Postsecondary Enrollment Options (PSEO), provides an opportunity for juniors and seniors in high school to enroll in college classes at the cost of the state (Boswell, 2001). The current study invited participants from among students who decided to spend their senior year of high school enrolled full-time in college courses.

Considering that students engaged in early college programs begin as minors, participants only included those who had become legal adults, had turned 18 years old, and had enrolled in their second, third, or fourth year of higher education. Therefore, they no longer held the title of entrants in the early college program, but they had experienced it. Their experiences, as articulated through interviews, informed the researcher how beginning college early, at a private faith-based, liberal arts institution in Minnesota, has influenced their self-authorship. Three males and six females participated in the present study.

Procedures

Prior to data collection, IRB approval came from both the institution at which the researcher works, and the institution at which the participants attended. The researcher obtained permission to collect data from participants through informed consent. Participation in the study remained voluntary, and the researcher contacted participants

through e-mail invitation. Since the participants came from a specific population, the registrar (as a third party) permitted and oversaw the identification of participant names and contacts. Students received an invitation from the registrar, inviting them to email the researcher in order to volunteer for the study.

The researcher conducted interviews with 9 students, both male and female (a profile of the participants can be found in Appendix A). After receiving the study invitation and volunteering to participate, participants signed an informed consent. Before the interviews began, the researcher conducted a pilot interview with a student who fit the participant requirements; the pilot study helped to assess the protocol (see Appendix B) and its effectiveness in answering the research question (Creswell, 1994). The interviewee involved in the pilot study provided feedback for revising the protocol. Interviews followed a semi-structured design and varied in length depending on the participants' comfort and willingness to share.

Data Collection and Analysis

The researcher recorded all interviews . After conducting all of the interviews, the researcher transcribed them. Using the transcriptions and observations from the interviews, the researcher used open coding to place “significant statements” in categories (Creswell, 1994, p. 217). Open coding allowed for the finding of initial themes. After open coding, the researcher found the “meaning units, and the development of ‘essence’ description” by listening for major and minor themes in the language of the interviewees; in so doing, the researcher conducted phenomenological bracketing (Creswell, 1994).

Validity

To develop a high level of validity, the researcher went through a triangulation process: “this ensures that the study will be accurate because the information draws on multiple sources of information, individuals, or processes” (Creswell, 2008, p. 266). Using triangulation allowed all of the sources of information to bring about truthful themes. In order to accomplish triangulation, the researcher listed to the recorded interviews while re-reading the interview transcriptions to ensure that the researcher both heard and reported correct emphasis.

The researcher also used another kind of validity: member checking, or “the process in which the researcher asks one or more participants in the study to check the accuracy of the account” (Creswell, 2008, p. 267). The researcher sent written transcriptions to all of the participants to ensure high accuracy in the report. By investigating the findings, the participants validated the work.

Benefits

Student development professionals and faculty on college campuses benefit from this research. Equipping educators with the understanding of young entrants and their experience with self-authorship may help generate programming directed toward young students. The literature has shown that some programs involving young students provide extra support, and, by doing so, the programs equip young students to feel college ready, safe, and able to learn. Because higher education aims to develop the whole person, giving faculty a fuller understanding of the young student experience and its impact on self-authorship will equip them to care for and cultivate growth in the students.

Young entrants could also benefit from this research. Self-authorship in young students has not received much research attention; therefore, the current study could provide a platform for young entrants to understand their own experience and seek to grow in self-authorship throughout their college years. Students who enter early should know the benefits and disadvantages of starting college early. Thus, the present study provides an understanding of the influence of early college programming on self-authorship.

Chapter 4

Results

Introduction

This study reveals elements of self-authorship in young entrants impacted by early college experiences at a private, faith-based institution in Minnesota. For the purpose of this study, self-authorship was defined as “the internal capacity to define one’s beliefs, identity, and relationships” (Magolda, 2009, p. 633).

The research employed a phenomenological study to gather data. In phenomenological study, “the essential, rather than the empirical, structure of experience” is central to the data collection (Cerbone, 2006, p. 34). This design placed the experiences and perceptions of the participant as of central importance. In this study, the essence of self-authorship and what impacts it become most clear through the experiences of young entrants.

Data analysis from nine interviews with young entrants provided a depth of understanding of the experience of early college enrollment and how it impacts self-authorship. The themes revealed elements of self-authorship young entrants experience and develop throughout their college education.

Findings

The following themes emerged in response to the research question: What impact does the college experience have on the self-authorship of young entrants? The findings

present the essence of the early college experience. The discussion in chapter five explicitly illustrates how the college experience has impacted self-authorship in young entrants.

Primary themes.

Learning study habits, time, and effort. Eight out of nine participants spoke to the difference in effort and time required for college work in comparison to high school level education. Brooke, a female sophomore studying elementary education, said, “At first it was kind of a tough transition just mentally my brain thinking of studying more than just the fifteen minutes read through your notes or whatever but more of like a constantly studying kind of thing.” Many participants alluded to learning how to study better and articulated that the habits they formed during the first year helped them to work better in the classroom in the following years.

As they began college, participants faced a choice that they had not had in high school. Cameron, a male senior studying business, said, “It wasn’t that I didn’t understand the material it just was that I wasn’t willing to like put as much time into it ‘cause I was more concerned about having a good time.” These participants articulated that they began to see the importance of having and organizing priorities in order to succeed in college—internal convictions with external consequences.

Parental support, encouragement, and freedom. Eight out of nine participants articulated the support they received from their parents to pursue early college entrance and the freedom that came with the decision. Brooke said:

They just let me make my own decisions, but just supported me completely and um just believed that this was where I was supposed to be and so that was just really encouraging as well as their influence was important on the decision, and just to have their support was really big.

Most of the participants spoke to a parental reluctance but an understanding that this decision would benefit them for scholastic and economic reasons. Parents of participants appreciated their children's pursuit of academic challenge but struggled with experiencing the loss of one year with their child. The participants felt excited and eager to start the college experience regardless of what their parents felt.

Deeper friendships and community. In the early entrance experience, seven out of nine participants developed friendships and community relationships deeper in comparison to those they had in high school. The growth of this type of friendship came as a surprise: "I wasn't expecting the friendships that I developed to go as deep as they did" (Rose). However, in order to experience deep friendships, participants realized that they would need to engage in social interactions outside of their comfort zones. Two participants articulated the importance of placing themselves into social circles: "I had to like put myself out there a lot if I wanted any social interactions I guess" (Kelly, a female junior majoring in nursing), and "Just knowing that I'm not anything less than the other college freshmen that were here and just um putting myself out there" (Brooke). The participants began to experience this type of friendship and community in the second half of their first year, once they became comfortable with themselves.

Christian faith forming beliefs. Seven out of nine participants articulated that their Christian faith presently forms their beliefs. However, the majority of the

participants could not go beyond identifying themselves as Christians and stating that they value Christian ideals. Smokey, a female sophomore said, “I’m a Christian, so God and then my family is like first on my, my value.” Similarly, Cameron reported, “I’m a pretty strong Christian. So my values are really um focused around that.” Many of the participants gave vague ideas about what having Christian values meant with regard to hard work, honesty, love of people, and the pursuit of a personal relationship to Christ. However, none of the participants explicitly stated how their Christian faith forms their beliefs.

Values based on family, background, Bible, and faith. Seven out of nine participants referred to their background as having a significant influence on how they develop their beliefs. Even the participants who did not explicitly mention their families mentioned that they base their values or beliefs on what they have learned or what they believed in previously. Lynn, a female sophomore studying elementary education, stood out as the only participant to articulate making her background beliefs her own:

And so yes it began with my family and my family influencing me but it definitely has evolved into God revealing himself to me multiple times in my life and just experiencing that. And sometimes I’ll have doubts um sometimes I’m doubtful but I know in my heart that like those things I’ve experienced can never be proven false. So yeah. That’s why I believe what I believe.

Facing challenges. Seven out of nine participants spoke to the idea of facing challenges to their values by hearing the challenges, thinking through them, and remaining convicted in their beliefs. They spoke of trying to remain mindful of what the opposition thought and felt, and open-minded to contrary ideas, while developing

evidence, articulating their convictions, and fitting pieces together without changing their beliefs. Brooke said:

My first reaction is obviously to fight back. But um thinking about it is really important for me and just kind of giving a chance to process so like stepping away from the situation and processing it and then coming back to the situation I think is what . . . I found to work the best.

These articulations point to a development in self-authorship. Participants did not change their mind based upon external influence or the force of others. Rather, participants sought to define their beliefs according to the challenges.

Secondary themes.

Making decisions. Six out of nine participants spoke to the process of decision-making as a process of breaking down the outcomes and choosing the most beneficial outcome . Smokey stated:

The way I make decisions is I like, I like to analyze like everything that could happen if I were to do it, if I weren't to do it, if I were to choose like a different path. Um, and then I slowly like work at finding like what would be the best option or like what would fit best for me.

Clearly, the participants believe in the importance of making their own decisions, trying to discern the best choices by considering all of the possible options. Two participants spoke of the necessity of getting others' input in order to fully understand the possible consequences, and the same two participants mentioned prayer as a vital step in their decision-making processes.

Feeling like a traditional freshmen. Five out of nine participants articulated an understanding that they felt like traditional freshmen starting their college experience early. Rose (a female junior majoring in business) stated, “I was a freshmen at [institution], essentially, a year early.” They identified themselves as living through a first year experience, Kroto (a male junior majoring in physics and computer science) said, “It felt, it feels very similar to, ah the, to what I have had as college student, my first year... I would say just mostly overall was very similar to the traditional college experience.” Although a year—and in some cases two years—younger than their peers, the experience of starting college early felt fitting for them in their stage of life and development. Internally participants felt just like everyone else in that stage of life.

Growing up fast, maturing, and becoming independent. Five out of nine participants spoke of the first year college experience helping them to become more grown up, mature, and independent. However, two participants hesitated as they spoke of the idea. Rose said, “You have to grow up a little faster, but you just find yourself sooner, maybe, not necessarily.” Gary (a male senior majoring in biology) said, “I think it kind of forces you to maybe um I don’t wanna say grow up a little faster, but kind of.” Participants articulated that they became more open-minded and independent because they felt forced to think about “things that I wouldn’t like a normal high school student wouldn’t have to think of” (Gary). Therefore, they defined themselves internally as mature and independent, different from what their high school peers would have demonstrated at this stage. Participants articulated specific ideas they had contemplated that defined them as different from their age-peers.

Conclusion

As young entrants, participants experienced changes in how they understood who they were, what they believed, and how they viewed themselves. Participants in this study articulated the necessity of learning study habits and how to do work at a college level, and they view themselves as capable in comparison to their academic peers. Young entrants experienced a positive sense of distancing from their parents as they made the decision to participate in early college entrance, despite the anxiety their parents felt. They also developed relationships with people as they grew in their understanding of themselves. The Christian and family backgrounds that the participants came from influenced how they cultivate values. When participants faced challenges to their values, they remained convicted in what they knew as true. Young entrants believed they had grown in their independence and maturity and made decisions on their own. Participants perceived themselves as similar to the traditional students in their classes; they had a sense they had to grow up quickly because they interacted with traditional college challenges.

Chapter 5

Discussion

Self-authorship according to Magolda (2009) has three elements: “trusting the internal voice, building an internal foundation, and securing internal commitments” (p. 631). Within these elements lies self-authorship, divided into three dimensions: intrapersonal, interpersonal, and epistemological (Magolda, 2009). Cyclical in nature, these dimensions interact with one another in significant ways; they cannot fit in silos. However, in order to understand the depth of the themes revealed through open-coding, each theme has been placed in one of the dimensions. By analyzing and evaluating the codes, some themes appear to illustrate how early college entrants experience self-authorship. In some ways, the participants clearly have developed and grown in their self-authorship.

Intrapersonal Self-Authorship

Intrapersonal self-authorship represents the dimension of self-authorship that people utilize to explain how they view themselves in their own minds. Becoming more self-authored requires individuals to define themselves using internal values and beliefs, rather than external. Those more self-authored use their own voice and inner convictions to define themselves. According to Parks (2000), one of the distinct markers of adulthood comes in an awareness of personal reality. Some of the participants could articulate who they were in a variety of situations and how they define themselves. In this dimension,

participants describe what it felt like to start college, the importance of gaining college skills, and the decision-making maturity that developed during the college experience.

Themes.

Feeling like a traditional freshmen. Five participants articulated that they felt similar to traditional college students even though they began a year earlier than their peers. In Noble and Drummond's (1992) study, young entrants recognized themselves as different from traditional students but did not dwell on the differences; rather they grew through them. Lynn's experience illustrates her perception of herself:

I would say like any incoming freshmen I think my PSEO year really helped me to learn how to stand on my own two feet. How to ah really engage with people who are different from me, who have different perspectives and backgrounds. Um I mean I learned to live with people not my family. Um which I think is a skill we need to learn. But I don't know, for me I would just say it's just anything that a typical freshmen would have learned socially.

Lynn's language and previous literature illustrate that participants in PSEO become more self-authored as they engage in the experience because they understand themselves more deeply. Brooke became more self-authored as she realized some of what she can achieve:

I can do things that are greater than are expected of me and um that I was, since I was able to take full college courses and . . . to be a college freshmen a year early kind of just boosted my confidence in myself.

In the midst of their early college programming, the participants felt bolstered in their views of themselves and the possibilities that lay ahead of them.

Learning study habits, time, and effort. Eight participants articulated the importance of learning study skills in order to succeed in college. Cameron's convictions of the importance of studying and his follow-through reaped positive consequences:

I ended up getting a "B+" in the class. But, it was only because I like worked my butt off. And, honestly I always look back to that class as like learning how to have a work ethic. And, just like talking to the professor, telling me what I needed to do in order to get my vocabulary up and how much I needed to actually study was kind of a wake-up call for me.

Shepard et al. (2009) found that students in early entrance programs feel challenged at a level of productivity and growth. Early entrants experience academic challenge that forced them to grow. The effort Rose put forth helped set patterns and shaped the perspectives she has of herself and the work she can do:

I think there's a major learning curve for everyone when they first go to college. Um, so I wasn't really sure what to expect...I mean there was a learning curve as far as, how do I study? How do I take notes? And, how do I read the material? And, without you know bogging yourself down with a hundred pages every night. But, so yeah there was a learning curve, but I felt like after a period of time I got used to it and developed a system that worked.

Making decisions. Six participants shared that their decision-making process includes dissecting ideas and choosing the most beneficial outcome. Noble et al. (1998) found that, through early college programming, young entrants learn critical thinking and question asking and become more proactive learners and thoughtful communicators. Cameron articulated how he makes decisions:

I look at my options and then decide like what would be the best decision to make that would like um not only like benefit my like future, um but also...I guess like give me the chance to make a difference.

His language does not explicitly and thoughtfully communicate his decision-making process, but the way that he critically evaluates his options and seeks to better himself and the world around him illustrates that he believes his decisions matter.

Interpersonal Self-Authorship

Interpersonal self-authorship represents the dimension of self-authorship that helps people to construct relationship with those around them. Becoming more self-authored requires individuals to build relationships on their own convictions and beliefs rather than those of the people who surround them. In this dimension, participants describe their maturity, relationships to friends and community, and the change in relationship with their parents.

Themes.

Growing up fast, mature, and becoming independent. Five participants described that their early college experiences enabled them to mature quickly. The idea that they had to grow up quickly coincides with Marcia's (1966) theory of identity achievement. Those who have identity achievement can persevere through challenge, subscribe to their own ideas, and mindfully manage negative ideas. Lynn articulated some of these characteristics: "I'm more open-minded. Um. I question a lot of what I've been taught um throughout my childhood. Not that I think anything is horribly wrong. Just um realizing there is other thought processes out there."

The participants described themselves as growing in independence from their parents. Julia stated that the experience “definitely made me um more independent um just kinda leaving a year early, leaving home a year earlier than I like originally thought I would. So, it’s made me more independent. Kinda wanting to do things myself.” These students’ early college experiences enabled them to grow in their own ideas and convictions.

Deeper friendships and community. According to research done by Noble et al. (2007), students engaged in one early college program had a difficult time adjusting to the traditional social landscape once they began regular academic programs. Kelly and Smokey articulated the difficulty of developing friendships: “I feel like socially it was a lot different than I was expecting cause it was harder to like connect and make friends” and “I just think it was hard cause I didn’t really have like all the connections or like all the friends.”

Hughes and Edwards (2012) found that young students need additional support in order to fully engage in the program; staff and fellow students must equally care for their affections and academics. Kroto described his relationships with encouraging instructors: “The teachers appreciated me. And, I have actually quite a few friends from, or ah, acquaintance teachers from that yeah PSEO year. That I like to think that they respect me and I definitely respect them.” Cameron described a group of supportive students that regularly met together:

I was part of the AC lounge clique... I loved the community that we had. And all the friends that I was able to develop that year. Not just like with other PSEO students, but also with some of the other people in my classes, you know and upperclassmen.

These responses seem congruent with Olszewki-Kubilius' (2002) findings that, while young students feel expectations to mature quickly, they appreciate and utilize additional support.

The friendships the participants built took time but seemed worth the effort because they developed into meaningful relationships. Rose began to articulate how she felt living at the threshold of two of Parks' (2000) marks of adulthood: truth seeking in community and responding with justice and care. "I made really good friends. And, what I noticed that was different was just the depth of the relationship. And you'd get to know people, but you know that these are the people that are gonna stick by you."

Parental support, encouragement and freedom. Noble and Drummond (1992) found that young entrants have freedom to participate in early entrance programs, although their parents remain cautious and concerned for their children. The participants in the present study articulated a similar experience, with eight out of nine participants receiving support in their decisions. Lynn was one such participant:

My dad was very proud of me...My mom on the other hand um she definitely had a harder time...She has her periods where she's like, I wanna know what you're doing every time and every moment of the day . . . that's not possible. And so, she had to adjust. But she has.

The participants displayed a change in self-authorship as they began to articulate a distancing and a satisfaction with the change in relationships with their parents.

Epistemological Self-Authorship

Epistemological self-authorship represents the process in which people develop what to believe and how to believe it. Those more self-authored develop their beliefs from internal convictions and experiences, rather than the beliefs or the forces of others. In this dimension, participants describe the foundations on which they ground their beliefs, how their backgrounds have influenced their beliefs, and how they defend those beliefs.

Themes.

Christian faith forming beliefs. Seven participants in this study shared that the Christian faith forms their beliefs and convictions. Their faith framed how they see the world and some of their values come out of it; however, none of the participants explicitly conveyed what it meant to allow their faith to form their beliefs. Garber (1999) argued that worldview should sustain an individual in the midst of challenge. Unfortunately, the participants in this study, like Lynn, do not have a well-articulated understanding of their beliefs: “I am a Christian and everything that follows. Um. I love God...I love people.” The participants explained some internal convictions but could not expound upon the meaning those convictions have in their day-to-day life.

Values based on family, background, Bible, and faith. Seven participants described their beliefs and values as based on their family’s history or background. Brooke shared, “I grew up in a Christian home. And so a lot of the Christian beliefs and values are very solid for me....one of my beliefs is to have a personal relationship with

Christ.” Much like other participants, her background influences her personal beliefs.

More self-authored individuals will use their backgrounds to inform their beliefs;

however, they come to their convictions based on their experiences and understandings.

Those who have entered Fowler’s (2000) fourth stage of faith development live congruently and use their commitments and beliefs to make meaning. Some participants in this study contributed their understandings of integrity and acting upon their beliefs.

Cameron illustrated how he lives with integrity and makes work meaningful:

In this internship I have, we're not really monitored... we're just given assignments, day-to-day tasks that I'm supposed to do for the business. And then, um, even like time reporting isn't monitored at all...But it, it comes down to like an integrity thing for me. Um, so I think that's one way I've shown my um integrity in my values is um being honest all the time.

Smokey illustrated Erikson’s (1980) “Identity Versus Identity Diffusion” stage, when she shared:

I try to practice what I believe. I don’t like to say I think one thing and then go and like completely change against it. I try to like always take what I believe and if I’m gonna tell someone to do something I have to believe that too or like practice it well.

These participants began to demonstrate where their beliefs come from and how their values shape their behaviors.

Facing challenges. Seven participants shared that, when they face challenges in one of their beliefs or values, they tend to remain unmoved in their beliefs. Participants, like Kelly, seek open-mindedness, but they remain in their convictions:

I just, try to talk to them in a respectful manner to help them understand what I believe. And, I find though that there are some people that just aren't gonna wanna listen or agree with you or anything. So, I just try to be respectful about it. I don't know if they don't agree than they don't agree, but I try to do my best just to live out my values, I guess.

Their experiences with challengers have helped them to determine and decide what they believe and how they will live out their beliefs. These participants show some change in their self-authorship.

Limitations

The most significant limitation to this research lies in the difficulty of determining if engagement in early college experiences impacts self-authorship. Possibly, the type of students that enroll in early college programs come more developed in their self-authorship than others because they arrive academically engaged, desirous of challenge, and willing to learn. The type of students who volunteered to participate in this research may have more self-authorship, illustrated by their willingness to spend their time sharing how they perceive themselves. The participants used language that displays growth in self-authorship, and time in college may contribute to that change, but the research unfolded in such a way that one interview could not determine the specific impact early entrance had in students.

The small number of participants also limited the research. Each of the participants volunteered; however, the fact that they volunteered for the interviews displays their possible interest in human development and growth more than a traditional

student or another early entrant. The research became further limited by the stories they shared and the experiences they had.

Finally, the researcher attended the institution researched as a young entrant. The experiences and understandings of early entrance influenced what questions were asked and how the research was conducted.

Institutional type and the role of faith. While neither quite a limitation nor a construct in itself, institutional type holds merit in determining practical implications especially for similar universities. Not all universities are the same. The participants in this study consisted entirely of students on a small campus, which provided a higher opportunity for relationship with faculty. At a larger institution, young entrants expectedly would have given different responses.

Faith weaves throughout the fabric of the institution that the participants attend. Also, due to the institution's small size, students have high contact with faculty and staff. Therefore, great opportunity and expectations exists for students (both traditional and otherwise) to experience relationships that will help them develop convictions, faith, and identity. The role the institution played in the development of participant responses lies implicit within the themes. On the faith-based, liberal arts campus, participants interact with faculty, staff, and peers who share a common faith, similar backgrounds, and related convictions. While they may face challenges in some ways when interacting with and understanding their faith, the institution can provide thorough opportunities to engage in faith conversations, in which young entrants wrestle with articulating what they believe and why they believe it.

The possibility remains that participants in the study did not explicate their beliefs because they understood the researcher came from the same institution and therefore assumed shared beliefs.

Implications and Recommendations for Practice

Young entrants will continue to enroll at institutions as long as early college programs remain available. Therefore, staff and faculty at all kinds of institutions should become aware of ways to help young students grow and develop. These three specific recommendations require little additional programming or monetary cost but do need faculty and staff who willingly participate: becoming mentors, developing communities for young students, and maintaining high expectations and high support.

Mentors. Garber (1999) believed that adults living with committed worldviews had a mentor who lived out the pattern ahead of them. In this research, Cameron articulated that mentors have helped him become who he is:

My mentor has been huge, um in terms of that. He was my youth pastor in high school, and then a mentor kind of throughout college. And, meeting with him to talk about like life situations has been really big. I would actually say, my, one of my managers this summer has been big um in terms of just like seeing how she works and is has like has the most integrity I've ever met in a person. So, I look up to her as an example for that, in terms of like the workplace and values I portray there.

Institutions seeking to support young students can provide mentoring opportunities that connect students to individuals further along in their self-authorship. Mentoring opportunities can come as formal relationships programmed and developed by faculty or

staff. However, mentoring relationships can develop more informally and organically if staff and faculty become aware of the young students willingness to connect with them. Opportunities exist for young entrants to feel bolstered by relationships with people who have developed convictions and beliefs.

Communities for young students. Both the literature and this research clearly evidence that student communities matter for the growth and development of young students. Noble et al. (2007) found in another early college program that “[c]learly the presence of a cohesive peer group was extremely important to most respondents’ willingness to enter the UW as young scholars” (p. 163). Their finding indicates that community relationships impact retention of students but also serve as vital sources of friendship and sense of belonging. When young entrants understand their place in the community, they stay, learn, and grow with their friends.

Young entrants desire to interact with and build social lives around their early college peers, but they also want to build relationship with traditional college students. Student development faculty and staff can encourage these kinds of interactions by facilitating orientation groups that place young entrants together. They can create programs and opportunities for young students to gather with one another in a common and comfortable space. Academic faculty and staff can ensure that young entrants fully participate in the classroom by integrating them in pairs and groups that include traditional students. Social communities connect students and serve to develop relationships that bring challenge assisting in developing self-authored beliefs and convictions.

High expectations, high support. Young entrants leaving their parents a year early need their institutions to maintain high expectations and high support. Noble et al. (2007) described a seminar for young entrants that one institution has in place to “[h]elp them explore their personal identities, consider meaningful career options, and develop their particular talents and interests” (p. 164). Faculty and staff working with young entrants do not necessarily need to create a seminar, but the ideas coming from it remain important. Faculty and staff can support students by asking questions that will help young entrants explore their self-authored identities. High support will allow young entrants to use their abilities while feeling safe.

The participants in this study spoke of their academic achievements in high school in comparison to the challenge of engaging in the college classroom. They had expectations for themselves as well as expectations that their instructors would support them. Participants distanced themselves from their parents but sought relationships with faculty that helped them feel supported. Faculty and staff at the institution conveyed support to the participants as they built relationships with them and offered help in the midst of failure. The support that the participants experienced encouraged them to press on and determine how to academically achieve in college. Faculty and staff should maintain high expectations of the achievements of young entrants in order to challenge them to work diligently.

Future Research

Still much research remains to conduct with both young entrants and self-authorship. Researchers of self-authorship could create a shared tangible and operational definition of self-authorship. A single definition could help construct a congruent idea

more easily assessed. If an operational research definition exists, questions may be more skillfully generated and narratives pursued.

Future research will need to include a longitudinal research methodology, which involves interviewing a cohort of young students before they enter programs, during their college career, and a few years beyond the experience. Researchers can observe these students' self-authored growth if asking the same questions of the same students .

Boazman and Sayler (2011) observed that, a few years after graduating from programs, young entrants flourish and feel more satisfied with their lives than their traditional peers, possibly due to the early college experience. Therefore, future research must ask young entrants what they believe about their experience and how it has shaped their behaviors and their lifestyle.

Future research with young entrants will need to collaborate with studies on traditional students. Research that compares the self-authorship of traditional students to that of young entrants will begin to illustrate whether the time in college, engagement in curriculum, willingness to learn, crossroads in life, or some other influence forms self-authorship. Comparison will demonstrate if young entrants stand as unique or further along in their self-authorship.

While perhaps not as deep or narratively rich, future research should include quantitative analysis. Surveys that ask participants to rate their views of self-authorship related to beliefs, values, relationships, and decisions may indicate differences between traditional students and young entrants. The number of participants involved in survey data will likely end up higher than the number of interview participants, and, therefore, other conclusions may emerge.

Future research can explore what it might mean to be more self-authored at a younger age. Self-authorship implies living and operating out of a belief in the experiences and convictions an individual has. Obviously, younger people have not lived as long, but age does not determine self-authorship; therefore, studying self-authorship of both traditional and non-traditional (young entrants) students remains necessary.

Conclusion

Self-authorship entails the process of defining identity and authoring one's story. Throughout college, self-authorship is encouraged to flourish. Young entrants begin college before the traditional-aged student and experience college at a young age. Their experiences impact the way they see the world, how they define themselves, and what they believe.

Young entrants who participated in this study experienced growth in self-authorship in some ways. Throughout this study, participants articulated growth in self-authorship, as they understood who they were outside of the ideas and opinions of others. Participants in this study identified that the classroom study skills and practices they maintain impacted the values and beliefs they had of work later on in their college careers. Participants who conveyed their decision-making came from within for the betterment of others illustrated their self-authorship. Their experiences on the college campus helped them to become more independent and open-minded. Participants experienced meaningful community throughout the early college experience, as they more fully understood themselves in relationship to others. The healthy distancing participants experienced from their parents gave them satisfaction and growth.

Throughout the study, clearly not all areas of self-authorship have experienced equal growth. Participants have the opportunity to grow in self-authorship as they seek to form their beliefs that have remained framed by their familial background. Participants spoke of integrity in belief and action as vital to their values but could not delineate between their family background and their own experiences and understandings. Finally, as participants faced challenges to their beliefs, they remained unmoved for better or worse, a sign that they have opportunity to grow in understanding why they believe what they believe.

Higher education in the United States aims to educate students to become engaged actors in the world. By challenging young entrants to become open-minded critical thinkers, they solidify values and beliefs, make decisions, and develop commitments from which they will live the rest of their lives. Early college experiences can provide spaces and times when young entrants thrive in their self-authorship. Students, faculty, and staff can collaborate to create learning and growth opportunities that will develop deep conviction and beliefs.

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Appendix A
Profiles of Participants

1. Pilot interview- Wendy
 - A. Junior
 - B. Education major
 - C. Female
2. Cameron
 - A. Senior
 - B. Business major
 - C. Male
3. Kroto
 - A. Junior
 - B. Physics major
 - C. Male
4. Rose
 - A. Junior
 - B. Business major
 - C. Female
5. Smokey
 - A. Sophomore
 - B. Unknown
 - C. Female
6. Julie
 - A. Sophomore
 - B. English literature and writing
 - C. Female
7. Kelly
 - A. Junior
 - B. Nursing major
 - C. Female
8. Brooke
 - A. Sophomore
 - B. Elementary ed./ TESOL
 - C. Female
9. Gary
 - A. Senior
 - B. Biology major
 - C. Male

10. Lynn
 - A. Sophomore
 - B. Elementary ed./ French
 - C. Female

Appendix B

Protocol Questions

1. Describe your early-college programming experience.
2. Describe how prepared you were for learning in a college classroom.
3. Describe how prepared you were for social interactions on a college campus.
4. Describe how prepared you were for the academic challenges (ex. Homework).
5. Explain how your early college experience has influenced you academically.
6. Explain how this experience has influenced you socially.
7. Explain how this experience has influenced how you think.
8. Describe how your parents felt about you choosing early-college programming.
9. What kind of influence did your parents have on your decision to do early-college programming?
10. What kind of involvement do your parents have in your schooling now?
11. Describe how you make meaning in your life. (Operational definition of making meaning: taking any given circumstance or individual and allowing it to make you aware of your assumptions and challenge them.)
12. How have you learned to make meaning?
13. Who has been a part of this process?
14. How do you make choices?
15. What do you most value?
16. How do you see what you most value align with your behaviors?

