BECOMING AN ORIENTATION LEADER: A CATALYST FOR SELF-AUTHORSHIP DEVELOPMENT

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BECOMING AN ORIENTATION LEADER: A CATALYST FOR
SELF-AUTHORSHIP DEVELOPMENT

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Dissertation

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ABSTRACT

Orientation Leaders (OLs) are current college students charged with helping to facilitate the college transition process for new students. This role has the potential to affect OLs, particularly as it relates to how they self-author. The purpose of this study was to explore the ways that serving as an OL affects self-authorship development and in particular, what aspects of the experience serve as a catalyst for self-authorship. This qualitative study investigated the experiences of four selected OLs working at the same institution during the same period of time. Data was collected from three sources, including individual interviews, field observations, and training course journals.

The data were analyzed using a constant comparative process resulting in seven themes being identified. These themes included: understanding and respect for diversity, leadership and decision making, interdependence of the OLs, personal development and growth, training becomes real, community among the OLs, and purposeful experiences. Findings of the study indicated that being an OL affected development toward self-authorship and that being an OL served as a catalyst for self-authorship development. Although the effect of being an OL varied among participants, all participants indicated that being an OL helped propel them toward being better able to self-author. Study findings offer implications that may be useful to other higher education institutions.
DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my mom, Gail Tankersley, who has never faltered in her love and support for me in all of my educational and life adventures and who continues to serve as a daily inspiration to me.

This study is also dedicated to my grandparents, Thomas and Ruth Nist. To my grandfather who, prior to his death, consistently encouraged me to pursue an education and always made me laugh when he would fall asleep sitting in his chair and then tell me he was only “resting his eyes”. To my grandmother, who continues to brighten my days and reminds me that we are on earth to serve others before ourselves. Now that your coffee is gone, we can go to the park.

Additionally, this study is dedicated to the Orientation Leaders I have had the privilege to work with, in particular, the Orientation Leaders who were part of this study. Your thoughts and actions inspired me to keep going to tell your story.

Finally, this study is dedicated to the gentlemen of the Alpha Omicron chapter of Phi Gamma Delta. Daily you remind me why I decided to pursue a career where I have an opportunity to work closely with students. Always remember the words of Brother Cal and continue to “Press On”.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

One of the first experiences most students have following admission to a college or university is their new student orientation program. These programs have been defined as a “collaborative institutional effort to enhance student success by assisting students and their families in the transition to the new college environment” (Mullendore & Banahan, 2005, p. 391). Most orientation programs are designed to be “a defining moment” for new students and their family members, a time “in which basic habits are formed that influence students’ academic success and personal growth and marks the beginning of the new educational experience” (Mullendore & Banahan, 2005, p. 391).

Although the exact form an orientation program takes varies from campus to campus, Mann (1998) suggests that orientation programs must “balance a wide range of student and institutional goals” and that “the potential of orientation programs to aid in student retention may be compromised by an unclear and frequently narrow view of their purpose and goals” (p. 67).

On many campuses Orientation Leaders (OL) “serve as an institution’s representative to incoming students and families” (Mann, Andrews, & Rodenburg, 2010, p. 55). New students and their families expect that the OLs will know all there is to know about the campus and can answer any question or concern that may come up during the orientation program. Because of this expectation, OLs are often viewed as “key customer
service and front-line associates, serving as both educators and public relations agents” (Mann, Andrews, & Rodenburg, 2010, p. 55) for their particular campus community. With duties such as providing new students and family members with student service and academic information, showing students how to schedule their classes, and conducting tours of campus to help familiarize students with their new surroundings, OLs play a significant role in the transition experience of new college students.

Because orientation programs are a significant aspect of a student’s journey toward graduation, it is important to the success and impact of these programs to understand how orientation programs affect new students. Additionally, knowing how the programs affect the OLs who facilitate the programs is equally important as orientation directors strive to continually improve the programs and OL training curriculum from one year to the next. This process of continuous improvement of the orientation programs and the increased understanding of how participation in orientation programs affect OLs will allow those who plan orientation programs and develop the curriculum for the training of OLs to continually modify the process to better ensure that the OLs are growing and developing as a result of their participation.

The role of an OL on a college campus is unique among student leadership positions. Specific job functions and responsibilities characteristic only to an OL such as facilitating activities for a group of new students, possessing an ability to speak in public to convey program information, and helping new students make a successful transition into the institution distinguish the OL from other student leadership positions. These job functions and responsibilities also demonstrate the complexity of the duty OLs have to support new students. Although there are arguably other student leadership positions on
college campuses that have the potential to help enhance a student’s self-authorship abilities, defined for the purposes of this study as “the internal capacity to choose one’s beliefs, values, identity, and relationship” (Baxter Magolda & Crosby, 2006) without being dependent on the use of external formulas provided by others, few if any student leadership position requires the same level of responsibility, decision-making, and mastering of campus information as that of an OL. Further, no other student leadership position on a college campus requires interactions with and has the potential to affect in some way the transition process of every new student on campus.

Role of Orientation and Qualities of Orientation Leaders

Orientation programs are an opportunity not only to provide an introduction to the campus, but also to contribute positively to the student’s transition to college. As a result, designing and staffing orientation programs with individuals who are well positioned to provide a positive transition experience for new students is critical. Orientation programs allow students to determine institutional fit (Rentz & Saddlemire, 1988); therefore, orientation may be the most salient event when students and parents make enrollment decisions following admission to a college or university, finalize the new student’s college selection process and select courses for the upcoming term.

Because the OLs often become the face of the campus to new students and their parents, devoting adequate time and attention to the OLs recruitment, selection, and training is critical. It has been noted that “a critical element in the selection process is identifying those individuals with true leadership potential” (Abraham, Nesbit & Ward-Roff, 2003, p. 67), who have the best potential to be effective OLs. Without a well recruited, selected, and trained OL staff, running a successful orientation program
becomes problematic and has the potential to compromise the eventual yield and enrollment of students admitted to the college or university. Because some students use their orientation program to make the final decision related to selecting which college or university to attend, having a well-trained OL staff who are able to make complicated decisions, can serve as leaders of their peers, and who are able to build community within their orientation program groups becomes even more important to the success of any orientation program and ultimately to the success of any college or university.

Recruiting an OL staff should begin by determining the characteristics required of a student who will successfully carry out the OL role at his or her institution. Some of these characteristics include having an outgoing personality, being responsible, having the ability to speak in public, possessing a willingness to help, and being willing and able to work well with others (Abraham, Nesbit & Ward-Roff, 2003). These characteristics are important because they allow the OL to carry out many of the main functions and duties of their positions, such as presenting informational sessions to new students and their families and openly and honestly sharing their personal experiences as a college student with the new students with whom they will interact daily. Depending on the institution, these characteristics may be adjusted or added to the orientation program to meet a particular institution’s needs. Once these criteria have been developed based on those needs, building a staff that realistically reflects the campus and the students with whom the OL will be asked to work during orientation becomes equally important.

Pretty (2004) noted that “orientation leaders should be a reflection of the institution in terms of majors, gender, age, involvement experiences, class standing, ethnicity, hometowns, transfer status, and so forth” (p. 11). A balance of personality styles on the
OL team is important because balance allows new students to have leaders who help them “gravitate toward styles that are comfortable for them” (Pretty, 2004, p. 11).

Once the OLs have been selected, they must be well trained. Abraham, Nesbit, and Ward-Roof (2003) suggest that once “the staff has been selected, the training process should begin as soon as possible in order to capitalize on the excitement generated by selection” (p. 75). Because colleges and universities offer different types of orientation programs, such as one-day programs, two-day overnight programs, or week-long programs taking place the week before classes begin, the role the OL will play related to the orientation program will vary depending on the type of orientation program offered (Pretty, 2004). This diversity of orientation programs causes institutions to develop a variety of approaches to training OLs to work with new students. Training formats include: “a semester-long class for credit, a semester-long program without credit, training immediately preceding the summer, training during the summer for orientation programs that begin right before classes start, or any combination of these” (Pierson & Timmerman, 2004, p. 18).

Although the type and length of an OL training program may vary greatly from campus to campus, several training components should be consistent across campuses (Pretty, 2004). These components include: reviewing goals and expectations, requiring self-reflection and assessment, helping the OLs work well with others, developing leadership skills, learning about the campus, knowing how college affects students, learning about the role of orientation in higher education and mastering general program information (Pretty, 2004). In addition, other training components, such as learning consistent ways to communicate information to new students and their families, team-
building amongst the OLs, and understanding the value of supporting each other, are equally important (Abraham, Nesbit, & Ward-Roof, 2003).

Regardless of the training approach, the OLs must understand and be prepared to handle the variety of responsibilities and tasks that they will be charged with carrying out and be comfortable doing so. Because orientation programs have become much more than simply helping a new student register for courses and giving tours of campus, OLs are typically hired because they display some or all of the most desired qualities of an OL such as dependability, flexibility, reliability, a willingness to help, and effective communication skills (Pretty, 2004). Through their participation in the training curriculum and time serving as an OL, these skills and abilities can be enhanced. The challenge for the orientation director is to capitalize on these skills and guide the OLs in developing their capacity to apply these skills and abilities in unpredictable, ever-changing, and challenging situations.

**Statement of the Problem**

Although researchers have written about the topic of self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007; Kegan, 1982, 1994; Pizzolato, 2005), none of these studies specifically address the development of self-authoring abilities of Orientation Leaders. As a result, little is known specifically about the process OLs go through to develop self-authoring abilities during college. Those who work in higher education, including faculty and student affairs professionals, have long recognized their role in aiding the development of the students with whom they work daily both in and out of the classroom. These educators carry out various roles on a college campus, but all have some responsibility for helping students develop and evolve from the less experienced
and less self-directed adolescents these professionals encounter in the freshmen year to the more experienced and more self-directed young adults who graduate at the end of their senior year. If educators hope to gain a better understanding of the ways in which OLs change during college and their development of the ability to self-author and if educators hope to continue enhancing their practice to better serve students in the future more research is needed that focuses on the self-authorship development process of college students.

Although Astin (1993), Kuh (1991, 1995, 1996) and other researchers have long espoused the virtues of engagement and involvement on the college campus, little research has been conducted exclusively on orientation leaders and much is still unknown about the impact of their leadership role on campus and its effects on their growth and development, particularly related to their self-authoring abilities. Because it is expected that orientation leaders be able to work with diverse populations of both students and their families and take on a variety of roles and responsibilities when performing the duties of an orientation leader (Pierson & Timmerman, 2004), it is imperative that they be prepared to handle this level of responsibility.

The vast majority of orientation leaders are a part of the millennial generation; therefore, it is important that those who work with, train, supervise, and help develop an orientation leader staff understand these types of students. Howe and Strauss (2000) outlined seven of the key traits of the millennial generation including that they are: special, sheltered, confident, team oriented, achieving, pressured, and conventional. Armed with this knowledge, orientation professionals can not only design an orientation leader training program to tap into these traits, but also utilize this information to gain a
better understanding of the students with whom they are working and the best ways to help their students develop the skills, abilities, and competencies that they will need to be successful in their careers and the world of work.

**Purpose of the Study**

This study is designed to describe the effects of serving as an OL on the development of self-authorship abilities within a select cohort of four OLs, working at the same institution, during the same period of time. In particular, this study explores how participating in an Orientation Leader Training Course that meets weekly and is designed to provide the OLs with the program and campus information needed to perform the role of an OL and how serving as an OL may affect the self-authorship development of OLs.

Because most research on OL training and development focuses on staff selection and training design (Pierson & Timmerman, 2004), little is known about the impact that becoming an Orientation Leader has on the OLs themselves; consequently, this study is designed as an in-depth focus on the development of self-authorship from the OLs point of view. Gaining this first-hand understanding from the OLs about the changes they are perceiving related to their development of self-authoring abilities and the environment they are working in as an OL will aid educators, program directors, student trainers and others in college and university settings to better understand, work with, and help develop future groups of students both in their classrooms and on their campuses.

Currently I serve as a Director of an orientation program and have a personal interest in better understanding how being an OL affects self-authorship development. This knowledge will allow me to modify the training curriculum and refine the OL role to better tailor the experience to allow for self-authorship development. Knowing more
about the OL experience will enable me to restructure or add in new training course activities each year to increase the chances that the training course can help serve as a catalyst for self-authorship development. Because I want to be purposeful about creating opportunities for the OLs to self-author, it is important to study the OL experience in detail utilizing various data sources. Specifically, I am interested in understanding how serving as an OL affects the development of the OLs ability to self-author in order to further enhance and individualize the training curriculum and development opportunities for the OLs with whom I work. This knowledge will also allow me to better tailor the OL training curriculum and job functions to provide the catalysts needed for self-authorship development. Doing this will allow the OLs to develop the skills, abilities, and dispositions necessary to work with new students as they enter the institution and make the transition into college.

Through an investigation into the experiences of four OLs, I evaluated the effects of serving as an OL on their ability to self-author. Doing so resulted in findings that may help faculty members and student affairs professionals to develop curriculum, policies, procedures, and student support functions and activities to assist college student’s development and growth. The information gathered from the participants may, as Merriam (2009) has suggested, allow the reader to gain a fuller picture of a relationship and to identify the themes and patterns in the data to support their work on campus, either as a faculty member working with students in a classroom or laboratory setting or as a student affairs professional working with students in out-of-class activities and programs. As both faculty and student affairs professionals gain a stronger understanding of the
self-authorship process, they could use this knowledge as they interact with students in other developmental ways.

**Research Questions**

The following questions guided my study:

(1) In what ways does the orientation leader experience affect self-authorship development?

(2) What aspects of the orientation leader experience serve as a catalyst for self-authorship development?

**Significance of the Study**

This study will contribute to the understanding of a young adult’s self-authorship development in two significant ways. First, it will add to the research base related to self-authorship by providing a study that focuses specifically on the development of OLs, a group of students that has not yet been studied in-depth to determine the effect of serving as an OL on the student’s ability to self-author. Second, this study will contribute to understanding self-authorship by offering a focused look at a specific cohort of student leaders that details their personal process of self-authorship development as they serve as an OL. This type of research is important because little research has been done that has captured the first-hand, personal accounts of self-authorship development of orientation leaders. This knowledge could be used by researchers and practitioners to influence future research and practice related to self-authorship development.

By gaining a better understanding of the students’ point of view and how they personally feel they are authoring their lives, faculty members and student affairs professionals can better understand the self-authorship process of their students. It is
hoped that doing so will allow them to enhance their teaching and advising practice to be more responsive to their students as they work through the developmental process from following external formulas to becoming the author of their lives. One of the best ways to accomplish this goal is to listen to the students’ own perceptions and explanations of this process in their lives. This study was designed to allow the voices of the OLs to emerge and explain self-authorship development from their point of view.

Specifically, this study has potential to benefit the many college and university faculty members who develop curriculum as well as administrators of orientation and other transition programs who recruit, train, and help develop student leaders who serve in program facilitator roles for their peers. By allowing the voices of the OLs to emerge strongly in the study, those in the higher education community, especially college and university faculty members and student affairs professionals, will be in a better position to change, update, modify, and create training curriculums and transition programs that are purposefully developed to further the self-authorship process of future generations of college student leaders.

**Researcher Subjectivity**

As is the case with any research study or data collection process, a certain amount of researcher bias and perceptions of personal or other experiences have the potential to affect the work of the researcher. As a researcher, therefore, I have concluded that although there are many research sites within this study where potential subjectivity would not be as present, there are also ways that I could continually monitor my level of subjectivity when conducting this research study to avoid my own past experiences and opinions influencing this study in a negative fashion.
Going into this research study, I did so as a participant observer (Merriam, 2009) and was aware of my role in the study. As a participant observer I was not only watching and taking note of how the OLs were performing their duties I was also participating in the process of the orientation day as the Director of the program. I will elaborate further on my role as the Director of the program in chapter three. The students participating in this study were familiar to me and I was familiar to them given our already established working relationships through orientation programs. This familiarity allowed for a certain amount of trust to have already been developed between us. I needed to be careful, however, to avoid the potential pitfall of becoming too comfortable with each of the participants during the data collection process, thus allowing my already-established relationships with the participants to cloud my judgment as a researcher.

Additionally, to avoid becoming too close to the participants in the study, it was important to have established protocols to maximize the quality of interactions between the OLs and myself. As a researcher, I needed to keep an open mind and allow myself to have clear perceptions of what my participants were doing, saying, and experiencing. To help safeguard that I was clear in my perceptions of what I was observing and hearing from the OLs, I employed various techniques to ensure that I was keeping an open mind including the use of member checks and peer reviewers. By keeping these potential problems and pitfalls in mind as I entered into the data collection process, I avoided issues of researcher subjectivity and bias as I completed the data collection and interpretation process.

Although my close proximity to participants could be considered a hindrance to the study, it is a potential asset that aided me in selecting the participants that could elicit
the most robust information related to college student self-authorship available from the entire cohort. Also, because I had a very clear understanding of the role these OLs perform on campus and their day-to-day functions, I was better positioned to select participants that provided the study with information that allowed me to explain the self-authorship process from the OLs perspectives in a rich and powerful manner.

**Definition of Terms**

Several terms are used throughout this study; therefore definitions of these terms have been provided.

**Catalyst:** A process or action that precipitates movement or change that could lead toward self-authorship.

**Constant-comparative approach:** A process that has been described by Boyatzis (1998) and Corbin & Strauss (1990) as comparing units of data with existing categories and either adding them to already created categories or using them to create a new category.

**Meaning-Making:** When a student can move from a place of understanding something to a place of acting on that understanding to change, challenge, or adjust his or her beliefs, values, and opinions.

**New Student Orientation:** A one-day experience provided to all new, incoming students designed to assist them in their transition to higher education.

**OL Cohort:** A specific group of OLs who have a shared experience of serving as OLs at the same institution, during the same period of time, and who share some common experiences with each other.
**Orientation Leader (OL):** An undergraduate college student of at least second-semester standing who is recruited and selected to serve as a facilitator and leader of new, incoming college students.

**Orientation Leader Training Course:** A 15-week, 2-credit hour academic course designed to help train and prepare Orientation Leaders for the wide array of roles, duties, and opportunities they will encounter during the course of being an Orientation Leader.

**Participant Observer:** The role a researcher can take on when conducting a research study in which the researcher is not simply observing an activity or individual, but rather is somehow actively engaged in some way with the activity or individual under observation (Merriam, 2009).

**Qualitative Research:** Merriam (2009) has stated that qualitative research involves “the search for meaning and understanding, the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis…the end product being richly descriptive” (p. 39). The researcher simply describes what is being seen, rather than influencing the data to tell a different story. The final product will be a thick and rich description of the phenomenon being investigated by the researcher.

**Reflective Writing:** A process in which the OLs engage when they write out their thoughts, feelings, emotions, and opinions about the course of events over a specified period of time.

**Self-authorship:** Is “the internal capacity to choose one’s beliefs, values, identity, and relationships” (Baxter Magolda & Crosby, 2006) without being dependent upon external formulas provided by others.
**Student:** Refers to a new, incoming college student who is a participant in the New Student Orientation program and is not serving as an Orientation Leader.

**Team Leader:** An undergraduate college student of at least sophomore class standing who has already served a year as an Orientation Leader and has returned for a second year to serve as a supervisor to the Orientation Leaders.

**Assumptions**

The reader should consider a few assumptions related to this study and the research results found herein.

First, it is assumed that I took every known precaution to avoid researcher subjectivity and bias during the data collection and interpretation processes for this research study.

Second, it is assumed that each of the participants in this research study participated in an open, honest, and forthright manner that in no way could be viewed as anything but truthful and complete.

Third, it is assumed that each participant came to the study as an individual with his or her own frame of reference, personality, background, culture, and academic experiences that guide and influence his or her self-authorship development process.

Lastly, the environmental context and interpersonal interactions each of the participants had with the other OLs during his or her time serving as an OL had some effect on the developmental process each participant encountered during the study.

**Summary**

This study was designed as an in-depth focus on the development of self-authorship of a selected group of OLs who were all part of the same cohort working at
the same university, conducting the same set of orientation programs for a class of incoming students. Although a small part of the study looked at the role of orientation programs, the majority of the study’s focus was on the reported experiences of the OLs.

Because of a lack of research specifically addressing the self-authorship development process of OLs, a study focused on this group of student leaders was needed to provide a better understanding of the self-authorship process of college students serving in a leadership capacity on a college campus. By considering the impact that serving as an OL has on a student during college and the potential long-term effects of this service on his or her ability to self-author in the future, this research study contributes to the literature and is useful to both faculty members and student affairs professionals alike as they work with, mentor, and help to develop the college students with whom they currently work and the students whom they will encounter in the future.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

To provide background and support for this study, I examined the foundational literature relating to four primary areas including: orientation programs and orientation leaders, theories of meaning-making, adult learning processes and theories and family ecology theory. I begin by discussing the purposes and goals of orientation programs and their development. Next, I outline the desired outcomes of orientation programs and some of the theories of leadership useful when working with OLs. Then, I discuss two theories of meaning-making, namely cognitive-structural and constructive-development, with a specific focus on self-authorship theory as espoused by Kegan (1982, 1994) and Baxter Magolda (2001) and used as a framework for this study. Further, I discuss selected adult learning processes and theories of learning related to how orientation leaders learn in an educational setting that include both a structured course environment (Orientation Leader Training Course) and an experiential learning component (working as an Orientation Leader). Finally, I introduce family ecology theory as a construct and lens used for this study, with specific attention paid to the development of human ecology theory as used to study college student development and later expansion of the ecological systems theory to study human development and behavior as it relates to college students.
Orientation Programs and Orientation Leaders

When Harvard College emerged in the mid-17th century as the nation’s first private institution of higher education, an assumption could be made that those students received the benefit of some sort of orientation to the college because orientation programs have become so common place and expected today. This was, however, not the case. The first documented orientation program did not take place until 1888 when Boston University organized the nation’s first orientation program to “acquaint new students with college life” (Mack, 2010, p. 3). It was not until 1923 that the University of Maine organized the first freshmen week (Mack, 2010, p. 3). Most of these early orientation programs were little more than a small group of new students interacting with a faculty member to “indoctrinate new students into the college and to conduct basic transactions that needed to occur prior to the start of classes, such as, helping new students get settled in their residences, signing up for classes, and learning about institutional traditions and faculty roles” (Mack, 2010, p. 3-4).

During the period between World War I and World War II, much of the function of carrying out orientation activities moved from being a faculty member’s responsibility to becoming the responsibility of the dean of men at most institutions, allowing faculty members more time to devote to the classroom and development of curriculum. Over time, the scale and scope of orientation programs became too much for the dean of men to handle in addition to his many other duties. Thus a need for orientation programs to be directed by other campus administrators charged exclusively with orienting new students to the campus was born.
Noting that orienting new students to the campus was an important function in which many had a vested interest, administrators of college orientation programs began to meet regularly to share ideas and strategies for facilitating quality orientation programs. The first meeting of what would later become the National Orientation Directors Association (NODA) convened in Columbus, Ohio in 1948. NODA has grown steadily into the leading professional organization for college administrators in the orientation and transition field. These annual meetings continue to be an outlet for sharing ideas and discussing topics of interest related to the transitional needs of new college students.

**Purposes and Goals of Orientation Programs**

On many campuses the purpose of orientation programs has evolved to include much more than the basic college information presented in the first orientation programs. Over the years, it has been shown that “college orientation programs encapsulate the essence of their institutions by introducing new students to the academic life, culture, traditions, history, people, and surrounding communities” of which they will soon be a part (Mack, 2010, p. 5). Noel et al. (1986) found that although it is important for higher education institutions to offer orientation programs for their new students, it is just as important to offer the right style of orientation programs. Most orientation programs are designed to offer an “introduction to the institution, the primary objective of an orientation program is to familiarize students to academic and behavioral expectations, education programs, and the student life of the institution” (Mack, 2010, p. 5). By helping new students better understand the responsibilities on which they are embarking,
college orientation programs in essence serve the role of expectation setter for new students.

For successful orientation programs, college administrators charged with developing and organizing these programs are increasingly called on to create an intentional experience that “demonstrates to a new student the interrelationship among the college’s various departments and how he or she fits in” (Mack, 2010, p. 5). In addition, many campuses across the nation now consider orientation programs “a critical part of an institution’s enrollment management and retention plans” (Mack, 2010, p. 5). As orientation programs have taken on a much broader role at many colleges and universities, many of these same institutions have determined that “a student’s integration into a college or university can be multi-faceted with a successful orientation program breaking the institution down into manageable parts and helping students navigate their new community” (Mack, 2010, p. 6).

**Development of Orientation Programs**

As colleges and universities continue to struggle to find ways to recruit the types and numbers of students needed for their respective campuses, they also struggle with how to best support their students once they arrive on campus. A student’s orientation program can be one of the most important factors either in making the final decision to attend an institution or in helping the student feel comfortable on the campus (Mack, 2010). Most colleges and universities provide some sort of orientation program in which students and families participate (Abraham, Nesbit & Ward-Roff, 2003). The design of institution-specific orientation programs, however, is needed to meet the needs of distinct populations of students.
In respect to the design of orientation programs, the research has indicated that there are particular concepts and areas that “continue to appear as high priorities of college freshmen” (Whyte, 2007, p. 71). Whyte has determined that college freshmen still need to focus on the following areas as they attend orientation programs: adjusting to academic work, financial information, and correlation of career and education plans (2007). Because many students become overwhelmed during their orientation program and transition to college (Klosterman & Merseal, 1978; Knott & Daher, 1978), many institutions are taking a much more careful look at the way orientation programs are planned, the amount of information disseminated during orientation programs, and the manner in which the information is presented to students and their families.

The use of various principles of curriculum theory, such as Dewey’s (1958) idea of relating information one is learning to students’ prior experiences or Vygotsky’s (1962) notion of cognitive development related to one’s zone of proximal development are important to keep in mind as one purposefully designs not only orientation programs for new students, but also the training curriculum for the OLs who will facilitate the programs. Whyte (2007) found that because of the need to personalize orientation programs and be purposeful in their planning and execution, many institutions are now targeting their orientation programs relative to specific populations of students, thus creating smaller orientation programs to allow more individualized attention. By investing more resources and considering their students’ needs, orientation program directors can ensure they are using the best practices available in the orientation and transition field. Additionally, by being purposeful in the design and development of the training curriculum used with OLs, orientation directors can more closely plan for
meaningful, learner-centered activities to enhance the self-authorship development of the
OLs with whom they work.

A report by the American College Personnel Association titled the *Student
Learning Imperative: Implications for Student Affairs* (1996), notes that “the concepts of
learning, personal development, and student development are intertwined and
inseparable” (Purpose section, para. 3). As a result, many institutions are working from
their initial contact with students and their families to transmit this idea and the
importance of development of the whole person during college. Part of this new push for
a holistic approach to educating students comes from the desire to ensure that students are
being provided the programs, services, and educational opportunities that will allow them
to become the type of college educated citizens society is now demanding. Society
desires citizens who leave college with “a coherent integrated sense of identity, self-
esteeem, confidence, integrity, aesthetic sensibilities, and civic responsibility” (American
College Personnel Association, 1996, Purpose section, para. 2). This more holistic
approach to educating students is also pragmatic. Colleges and universities have found
that students who are happy, feel connected to the campus, and have a sense of belonging
will be retained and graduate at a high rate, a goal of every institution of higher
education.

**Outcomes of Orientation Programs**

Orientation programs have a variety of goals and expected outcomes depending
on institution-specific differences. Capps and Miller (2006) discovered at some colleges
and universities that these goals and outcomes “are tied to enrollment persistence; at
others the outcomes are geared to out-of-classroom learning objectives that deal with
issues such as accepting and celebrating diversity, social structure development, interpersonal skills development, and life skills” (p. 30). Some institutions use orientation programs to build awareness and familiarization with the campus environment and the programs and services offered to aid students’ development in college (Moxley, Najour-Durack, & Dumbrigue, 2001). Other institutions use them to offer faculty and staff an opportunity to make an impression on their new students and to share with them their expectations for their academic and personal growth (Moxley, Najour-Durack, & Dumbrigue, 2001). Some institutions use orientation programs to allow students to become familiar with each other and to help them meet faculty and other campus staff members who will be important in their future success on campus (Robinson, Burns, & Gaw, 1996).

As orientation programs are being challenged, and in some cases required, to prove the value of the outcome of their programs (Black & McKenzie, 2009), it is increasingly important for orientation directors to help the campus community understand not only the value and purpose of orientation programs for the campus, but also the value they provide for the orientation leaders working the programs. Tinto (1988) has stated that even though orientation programs are provided on nearly every college and university campus across the country, many of them “fail to provide the long-term academic and social assistance new students require during the first months of their college career” (p. 451). Further, research that describes the impact and effect of being an orientation leader when working with new students as they begin their college career and what effects being an orientation leader has on their ability to develop self-authoring abilities (Wawrzynski & Pizzolato, 2006) is lacking.
In light of their obligation to develop the conditions that promote student success and development toward an ability to self-author (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008), colleges and universities should be compelled to design and develop orientation program curricula that not only convey a message to new students and their families of these expected outcomes, but are also designed to aid the orientation leaders’ development toward outcomes that lead them to being more independent and able to self-author as a result of their participation as an orientation leader.

Theories of Leadership for Orientation Leaders

Although there are numerous leadership theories discussed in the literature related to college student development, a few theories are of particular interest to the orientation field and the training of OLs. Specifically, the servant leadership model, relational leadership model, and the leadership identity development model are discussed in this review, with a brief background of the development cycle of the various eras of leadership approaches and their overarching assumptions about leadership.

The earliest recognized theory of leadership, developed by Thomas Carlyle (1888), is the Great Man Approach to leadership that characterized leadership based on Darwinian principles (Dugan & Komives, 2011; Kuh, 1991). Next, the Trait Approach to leadership, most closely tied to Gordon Allport (1937), emerged in the early part of the 20th century because many felt that leaders must have certain traits that distinguish them from other people (Dugan & Komives, 2011; Bennis, 1989). By the mid-20th century, the behavioral, situational, and influence approaches to leadership (Bandura, 1977; Blanchard & Hersey, 1972) were being recognized in the literature. These approaches define leadership as having one best way to lead (behavioral), having leaders who react
differently depending on the situation (situational), and having leaders who lead because of their ability to influence others to their opinions (influence). In more recent times, reciprocal and systems approaches to leadership have emerged (Dugan & Komives, 2011; Bennis 1994; Burns, 1978). The reciprocal approach to leadership stresses that leadership is both a shared and a relational process, whereas the systems approach to leadership is built around relationships, although it focuses more on the influential nature of the leader over those he or she is leading (Dugan & Komives, 2011).

**Servant leadership model.**

First envisioned by then AT&T executive Robert Greenleaf (1970/1977), servant leadership has an overarching construct based on the premise that an organization can achieve its goals and objectives by putting the needs and desires of its colleagues (in this case new students) first and by working for the betterment of others before oneself. Considering the leadership qualities most desired of an OL, the list of characteristics developed by Larry Spears of the Greenleaf Center for Servant-Leadership are in direct alignment with those qualities of leadership most desired of OLs. Spears (2005) feels that the qualities of listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment, and building community are the key qualities of a servant leader. These same qualities define a successful OL working with new students.

**Relational leadership model.**

Developed by Komives and her colleagues (1998, 2007), the relational leadership model is an enhancement of the postindustrial approaches to leadership and their overriding principle of relationships as reciprocal in nature. This model defines leadership as “a relational and ethical process of people together attempting to
accomplish positive change” (Jacobson, Kelleghan, Ponikvar, & Stolz, 2006). Comprised of five key elements: purposefulness, inclusiveness, empowerment, ethical practices, and a process orientation (Dugan & Komives, 2011), the model assists orientation directors as they build and refine their OL training programs to develop processes that help the OLs to “expand their capacity to be effective in engaging with others in a leadership context or setting” (Dugan & Komives, 2011, p. 44). Although this model can be effective in helping OLs understand leadership as a process, some OLs may not be developmentally at a place to accept fully the premise of the model because it “presents leadership as a process and may not resonate with students who see leadership only as coming from those in formal leadership positions” (Dugan & Komives, 2011, p. 44).

**Leadership identity development model.**

The leadership competencies that OLs need are further enhanced through the use of the leadership identity development model (LID). The LID model of leadership is based on a six-stage progression of leadership development that involves: awareness, exploration/engagement, leader identification, leadership differentiation, generatively, and integration/synthesis (Komives, Longerbeam, Owen, Mainella, & Osteen, 2006). As a progression model, the LID model focuses on how leadership develops over time (Dugan & Komives, 2011). The premise here is that most student leaders, including OLs, come to college in stage three of the LID, or the leader identification stage. At this stage, students see leadership as positional in nature and carried out only by those in a specific leadership role, such as the president of the student government or the chapter president of a Greek letter organization. The LID further presents “findings that development
between the stages is facilitated by expanding one’s view of self in the context of relationships in groups” (Dugan & Komives, 2011, p. 48). Although the LID “offers insights into students’ leadership development processes through their college experience” (Dugan & Komives, 2011, p. 49), it may not be an adequate model for understanding fully the development of leadership that takes place after college.

**Theories of Meaning-Making**

Theories, in the broad sense, are developed as a mechanism to help explain some sort of phenomena detectable by human senses. Cognitive-structural theories in particular “seek to describe the nature and processes of change, concentrating on the epistemological structures individuals construct to give meaning to their world” (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 33). Researchers and practitioners alike have used cognitive-structural theories to gain a better understanding of “how people think, reason, and make meaning of their experiences” (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998, p. 124).

Constructive-developmental theories, however, are more concerned with explaining how individuals make meaning of the experiences of their lives in a way that positions them to continue this process during the course of their lives. The following section will outline in detail some of the specific cognitive-structural theories of Piaget, Perry, Belenky and her colleagues, and that of King and Kitchener. Also, the constructive-developmental theories of Kegan and Baxter Magolda will be discussed.

**Cognitive-Structural Theories**

The various theories in the cognitive-structural domain share many components including: having a series of stages or steps in the progression of the developmental process, being lock-step in nature requiring mastery of one stage before progression to
the next stage is possible, encouraging an altering of the perceptions and structures of meaning-making, and maintaining a focus on the way meaning is structured instead of a reliance on what one knows or believes (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Cognitive-structural theories presuppose that changes seen in students take place as a series of stimulus and response actions (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Through adaptive responses caused by the discovery of new information or by an experience new to a student, either an assimilation or accommodation response will occur (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Assimilation responses take place when a student “perceptually reorders or reinterprets the challenge to make it consistent with current knowledge, belief, or value structures,” whereas an accommodation response causes changes to the “epistemological or belief structures to admit or be consistent with new experience” (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 34).

The concepts of assimilation and accommodation that Jean Piaget offered result from the use of schema, or the structures of the mind used to make meaning of experiences and events in one’s life (Piaget, 1954). Assimilation and accommodation are “therefore the poles of an interaction between the organism and the environment” (Piaget, 1954, p. 353). When an assimilation function has taken place, students take in the experience and place it into their already developed schema. When an accommodation function takes place, however, students change their schema as a way to make sense of the new information or environment. It is during this changing of schema that a transition period ensues, causing a series of constructions and reconstructions of thought and action (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).
William Perry’s (1970) seminal work *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years* and some of his later writings (Perry 1981, 2005) build on the work of Piaget by providing both researchers and student affairs practitioners a better understanding of the growth and development of college students through a series of nine positions through which students move. These positions show the progression of student movement from meaning-making structures that are shaped by “absolutist, authority-centered, right/wrong views of knowledge in early college years, through stages of extreme relativism and, in their late college years, toward higher stages of personal commitment within relativism” (Kolb, 1984, p. 14). Although one could argue that there is still much validity in Perry’s theory of student development, it should be noted that Perry’s work may be somewhat outdated when applied to the current higher education environment made up of a vastly more diverse, in every imaginable way, student population than was the student population Perry used to gather the data needed to develop his theory (West, 2004). Although other researchers such as Baxter Magolda (1992), Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986), and King and Kitchener (1994) have taken Perry’s work and expanded it to include both women and students from various ethnic and racial populations, researchers and practitioners alike should be cautious not to overemphasize Perry’s work without fully considering the work and contributions of more modern-day researchers.

Although the theories of Piaget (1954) and Perry (1970) offer much in the way of direction to researchers and practitioners studying how students make meaning of their experiences both in and after college, later researchers have added to their work to include populations not addressed by either Piaget or Perry. The work of Belenky,
Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) further developed the cognitive focus of the theories already developed by focusing on the meaning-making structures of women. The authors focused on five perspectives, rather than stages, of development that they discovered that women use as ways of meaning-making. These perspectives, as outlined by Love and Guthrie (1999), include: silence, received knowledge, subjective knowledge, procedural knowledge, and constructed knowledge (p. 18). The outcome of their research determined that their findings “were gender related but not gender specific,” noting that “individuals’ layered and nested identities were related to the issues of race, class, gender, ethnicity, physical ability, sexual orientation, and regional affiliation, and that all of these issues came into play in the process of cognitive development” (Love & Guthrie, 1999, p. 17). Although the implications of this line of research may be applicable to men (Love & Guthrie, 1999), the focus is much more on women from a variety of backgrounds and life circumstances who unfolded more perspectives in their thoughts and ideas of how they make meaning than was possible in Perry’s study (1970) that used men in the consistent context of Harvard College during the 1950s and 1960s.

King and Kitchener (1994) created the Reflective Judgment Model, a seven-stage model of development that “describes a developmental progression that occurs between childhood and adulthood in the ways that people understand the process of knowing and in the corresponding ways that they justify their beliefs about ill-structured problems” (King & Kitchener, 1994, p. 13). For those who work or teach college students, knowledge of this model could be important to understanding “how people justify their beliefs when they are faced with complex or vexing problems,” a situation most college students often find themselves in (King & Kitchener, 1994, p. 5).
The seven-stage Reflective Judgment Model was also influenced by the work of Dewey (1933) related to reflective thinking and Kohlberg (1969) who discussed the evolitional process of various forms of reasoning in college students. The Reflective Judgment Model (Kitchener, Lynch, Fischer, & Wood, 1993) consists of three distinct sub-categories of: pre-reflective thinking (stages 1-3), quasi-reflective thinking (stages 4-5), and reflective thinking (stages 6-7). Pre-reflective thinkers oftentimes do not understand that knowledge is uncertain (King & Kitchener, 1994). Quasi-reflective thinkers can understand that some of the problems they face will be “ill-structured and that knowledge claims contain an element of uncertainty” (King & Kitchener, 1994, p. 58). Reflective thinkers, however, know that knowledge is uncertain, and that it “must be actively constructed and that claims of knowledge must be understood in relation to the context in which they were generated” (King & Kitchener, 1994, p. 66). Although King and Kitchener (1994) do not claim that students move through only seven stages of epistemological assumptions, they do note that these seven stages are those which they “systematically observed” in populations they studied in the late 1980’s and early 1990’s (King & Kitchener, 1994, p. 74) related to the ways students understand and resolve ill-structured problems they encounter in their daily lives as college students.

Constructive-Developmental Theories

Each of the cognitive-structural theories outlined above show that as students move through various life stages, they move through a progression of development related to the experiences they encounter. Each of these theories, however, is limited in the extent to which it can fully explain, beyond the cognitive domain, the development of the full meaning-making process. Further, each shows that students make meaning and
place value on experiences in their lives to differing degrees. We also know this to be the case with constructive-developmental theories of development.

These additional theories that deal with the ways in which students recognize and rationalize their life experiences (Evans et al., 1998, p. 16-17) are useful in the design and development of the curriculum of both orientation programs and the training of OLs. Constructive-developmental theories of meaning-making, that are concerned with how students construct meaning of their experiences and the ways in which they can continually develop meaning-making abilities (Boes et al., 2010, p. 4-5), can be useful in understanding the development process of young adults beyond a one-dimensional view of meaning-making that in many ways defines cognitive-structural theory. Additionally, since constructive-developmental theory “has been proposed as being linked to leadership in general” (Kegan & Lahey, 1984), it can help us gain a clearer understanding of the meaning-making process of college student leaders in general and orientation leaders in particular.

Boes et al (2010) address the two fundamental assumptions of constructive-developmental theories and offer insight into the process of meaning-making in young adults. The first of these assumptions related to constructive-developmental theories is that of constructivism, which “is based on the premise that people create knowledge through interpreting their experience, rather than knowledge being an objective truth that exists outside the individual” (Boes et al., 2010, p. 4-5). Being aware of this assumption helps researchers and practitioners alike understand that many times “individuals make meaning in the space between their experiences and their reactions to them (Boes et al., 2010, p. 5). The second assumption about constructive-developmental theories relates to
the growth seen in individuals that “has an underlying structure that is developmental in 
nature” (Boes et al., 2010, p. 5). Considering these two assumptions, Kegan stated that:

The activity of being a person is the activity of meaning-making. There is no 
feeling, no experience, no thought, no perception, independent of a meaning-
making context in which it becomes a feeling, an experience, a thought, a 
perception, because we are the meaning-making context. 
(Kegan, 1982, p. 11, italics in original)

Drawing on the ideas of Kohlberg (1969), Perry (1970), and Piaget (1954), Kegan (1982, 
1994) further clarified ways in which students think, feel, and make meaning of the 
Kegan’s work by continuing to build on and explore the developmental process that leads 
to self-authorship for college students not only during college, but also during the post-
college years.

**Evolution of Self-Authorship Theories**

Throughout the evolution of the theory of self-authorship many definitions have 
been offered. For the purpose of this review, I will be using the definition provided by 
Baxter Magolda as I find it the most thorough and relevant to this study, but also the most 
concise of those put forward. Baxter Magolda defines self-authorship as “the internal 
capacity to choose one’s beliefs, values, identity, and relationships” (Baxter Magolda & 
Crosby, 2006). As students enter college, many do so without an internal ability to 
coordinate their own lives (Baxter Magolda, 1999b; 2008; 2009a; Baxter Magolda, King, 
Taylor, & Wakefield, 2009; Pizzolato, 2005). Research has shown that most entering 
college students “rely on external sources for their beliefs, identities, and relationship” 
(Baxter Magolda, King, Taylor, & Wakefield, 2009, p. 2), a method of action that can be 
detrimental to both their personal and academic development.
Self-authorship theory extends the work of Kegan who has described the type of development needed to interpret and make meaning of the experiences of one’s life as “the evolution of consciousness, the personal unfolding of ways of organizing experience that are not simply replaced as we grow but subsumed into more complex systems of mind” (Kegan, 1994, p. 9). Kegan further develops self-authorship as a mingling of three components, the integration of “epistemological (assumptions about knowledge), intrapersonal (assumptions about self or identity), and interpersonal (assumptions about relationships)” (Baxter Magolda, King, Taylor, & Wakefield, 2009), components that all come together to aid an individual in making meaning of the increasingly complex experiences of life. It is through this integration of the meaning-making process that students come to self-author their lives and move through a progressive process from “relying primarily on external sources for meaning making, through relying on a mix of external and internal sources, to relying primarily on internally generated meaning making” (Baxter Magolda, King, Taylor, & Wakefield, 2009), structures that allow them to manage their lives from an internal, rather than external, frame of reference. Because the mission statements of most colleges and universities proclaim to develop students in all facets of life and because “one of the hallmarks of young adulthood is shifting from a life guided by adult authorities to guiding one’s adult life” (Baxter Magolda, Abes, & Torres, 2009, p. 183), gaining the ability to self-author one’s life and to define one’s own beliefs and values internally is an important developmental milestone for college students on their journey to becoming fully adult.
**Self-Authorship theory of Robert Kegan.**

As a developmental psychologist, Kegan has spent his career researching and writing about the mental processes of human life and their effect on society. Expanding the work of Erikson, (1950), Kohlberg (1969, 1975), Perry (1970), and Piaget (1954, 1965), Kegan attempts to clarify how individuals make meaning of their life experiences. As evident in the subtitle of his landmark first book, *The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development*, his use of the words *problem* and *process* is a way of being descriptive in pointing to the challenging and ever-changing developmental journey individuals must travel throughout their lives from childhood to adulthood to reach what Baxter Magolda et al. have called “one of the hallmarks of young adulthood” (Baxter Magolda, Abes, & Torres, 2009, p. 183) or more to the point, a “shifting from a life guided by adult authorities to guiding one’s adult life” (Baxter Magolda, Abes, & Torres, 2009, p. 183).

Kegan’s first book is a descriptive account of ten years of, as he describes it, “conversation and company with extraordinary men and women” (Kegan, 1982, p. ix) during the 1970s at the Harvard Graduate School of Education where he explains the developmental process utilizing a paradigm of subject/object equilibrium composed of cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal dimensions. According to Kegan, “subject refers to those elements of our knowing or organizing that we are identified with, tied to, fused with, or embedded in” (Kegan, 1994, p. 32), whereas object “refers to those elements of our knowing or organizing that we can reflect on, handle, look at, be responsible for, relate to each other, take control of, internalize, assimilate, or otherwise operate upon” (Kegan, 1994, p. 32).
In his second book, *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life* (1994), Kegan offers further development of his theory and also considers the work of Belenky et al. (1986) and their study of the way women make meaning and understand their worlds and that of Gilligan (1982) and her work that delineates the differing developmental structure between men and women. With the publication of subsequent research, Kegan offered a much stronger empirical research base for this theory based on evidence collected from cross-sectional studies and longitudinal interview data through the use of subject-object interviews that he collected over the course of a decade of research (Love & Guthrie, 2005). Additionally, other contemporary researchers have utilized Kegan’s theory and expanded it to explore the developmental complexities of college students related to their sexual orientation, career development process, racial status, ethnic background, and socio-economic classification (Abes & Jones, 2004; Creamer & Laughlin, 2005; Pizzolato, 2003, 2004, 2005; Torres, 2009; Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004; Torres & Hernandez, 2007). Further, Arnett (2000, 2004, 2006) has proposed a theory that builds from Kegan’s work and that of other educational and developmental psychologists that identified “a new and distinct period of the life course” (Tanner, Arnett, & Leis, 2009, p. 34) and that “reframed the third decade of life as a transitional stage of development, bridging adolescence and adulthood, labeling this age period emerging adulthood to distinguish the age period from adolescence and young adulthood” (Tanner, Arnett, & Leis, 2009, p. 34).

Kegan has stated that “whether at work, school, or home, adults are expected to be self-initiating, guided by their own visions, responsible for their experience, and able to bring these capacities into interdependent relations with diverse other” (Baxter
Development of and progression through Kegan’s five orders of consciousness that allow individuals to organize and make-meaning of their lives and the experiences that they encounter aid their ability to accomplish this self initiation. Through an increasingly complex order of consciousness from childhood, through adolescence, to adulthood, Kegan’s five orders of consciousness are “principles of mental organization that affect thinking, feeling, and relating to self and others” (Love & Guthrie, 2005, p. 60). Although most of Kegan’s work does not “specifically address college student development, it is valuable in understanding this development in the wider context of the life span” (Love & Guthrie, 2005, p. 59) and for understanding the reality that even though most individuals will move into the third order of consciousness, “it is rare to see people moving beyond the fourth order, but when they do, it is never before their forties” (Kegan, 1994, p. 352). Kegan (1994) goes on to state that the goal of college student development professionals and college faculty is not to move students from one order to the next; it is to work with students in the transition between the orders, a place Kegan feels has the “potential to affect college students’ development intentionally” (Love & Guthrie, 2005, p. 60) and to make the most impact on their development during this transitional period of their lives.

Understanding Kegan’s five orders of consciousness fully requires an understanding of some key assumptions relating to Kegan’s theory. These assumptions have been outlined by Love and Guthrie (2005) as follows:

First, the orders of consciousness not only refer to how one thinks but more generally to how one constructs experience, which includes thinking, feeling, and relating to others. Second, Kegan’s orders concern the organization of one’s thinking, feeling, and social relating rather than the content. Third, each order of consciousness is constituted by a different subject-object relationship. Kegan’s
forth assumption is that the orders of consciousness are related to each other. One does not simply replace the other; rather, each successive principle subsumes the prior principle. Thus, the new order is higher, more complex, and more inclusive. Finally, what is taken as subject and object is not fixed; what was subject at one order becomes object at the next order. Therefore, there is a developing ability to relate to or see that in which we were formerly enmeshed. (Love & Guthrie, 2005, p. 60, italics in original).

Kegan’s (1982, 1994, 2005) writings discuss how the development and progression of these meaning-making experiences are continuous and ever-evolving components of our lives from the time we are born until our death and that they take place within the confines of the five orders of consciousness.

This first order of consciousness, occurring from birth through about age eight, is one in which the individual does not possess the ability for complex thoughts (Love & Guthrie, 2005). During this order, the permanence of objects within the individual’s perception is not very concrete. Children in this order will view objects within a perceptual frame of the here-and-now. If an object is removed from sight, the object, in the child’s mind, no longer exists. Similar to Piaget’s (1954) beliefs in children’s egocentric meaning-making, children at this order will adjust their perception of an object based on their vantage point of the object. In other words, if an object is moved, the child’s perception of it changes; therefore, the object itself has changed.

An example of this change of perspective is a young child crying for a cookie from the box on top of the refrigerator. If the child is at this stage, the child can be fooled into believing that since the box of cookies is no longer on top of the refrigerator, it no longer exists. The reality is, however, that the child’s parent has simply put the box of cookies in the pantry. The box of cookies still exists; it is just in a new location, out of
sight of the child. Many times this move will instinctively cause the young child to stop crying because the child no longer perceives the box of cookies as existing.

The second order of consciousness occurs between the period of late childhood until some point during adolescence or young adulthood. Love and Guthrie (2005) note that the meaning the child makes as he or she learns to construct durable categories or more precisely, “lasting classifications in which physical objects, people, and desires come to have properties of their own that characterize them as distinct from me” (Love & Guthrie, 2005, p. 62). It is also during this time of moving from the first order of consciousness to the second order of consciousness that the child’s perceptions of the world and impulse control, which are subject in the first order of consciousness, move to be object in the second order of consciousness, causing what is now the new subject to become a new durable category (Love & Guthrie, 2005).

Once the transition has been made from the first order of consciousness to the second order of consciousness, children begin to develop their own self-concept and “now recognize that they are individuals with characteristics” (Love & Guthrie, 2005, p. 62) distinct from the people and other objects surrounding them. Also during this time, children move from a state of classifying all people, objects, and feelings in their lives based on their initial thoughts and perceptions of them to a state where they can “classify them according to their properties using ongoing rules that are not dependent on individual perceptions” (Love & Guthrie, 2005, p. 62). Children in the second order of consciousness are able to distinguish between types of people. They can determine for themselves people in their lives whom they enjoy being around, such as their family and
friends, and those whom they do not care for and would prefer to avoid seeing, such as the dentist.

Kegan (1994) has noted that during the second order of consciousness, children move to a point where they transition from a fantasy orientation to a reality orientation and begin to classify themselves based on the way they perceive themselves in their environments. Children become more self-sufficient during the second order of consciousness and begin to move from having desires “being principally about moment-to-moment impulses or wishes to being about ongoing needs or preferences” (Love & Guthrie, 2005, p. 62). These needs and preferences are, however, still very individualistic in nature as children “are still concerned primarily with the pursuit and satisfaction of their own interests, are not yet able to own membership in a wider community than the one defined by self-interest, and are not yet able to think abstractly” (Love & Guthrie, 2005, p. 62). It is not until the transition to the third order of consciousness that movement toward adulthood occurs.

As children make the transition from the second order of consciousness to the third order of consciousness, they are also making the transition from childhood to young adulthood. Typically, the transition into the third order of consciousness takes place during the high school years, but may not happen until one enters college, or in some cases when one is in college (Kegan, 1994). The period of time when a student is in college is a time when some young adults may not have fully transitioned to the third order of consciousness and may simply be unable to meet the expectations of life that society has placed before them (Kegan, 1994). This deficiency could explain why some college students stumble and are not very successful either academically or socially.
during their first few years of college, when others seem to thrive from day one. Most student affairs educators and faculty members know that college students are not all the same, but some may not be considering the reality that if their students have not fully transitioned from the second order of consciousness to the third order of consciousness, the challenges they see students facing may “be more a matter of not understanding the rules of the game than one of an unwillingness to play” (Kegan, 1994, 38).

It is during this third order of consciousness that students are able to see and understand the points of view of others and to put aside their own wants and needs for those of others in their lives (Kegan, 1994). During the third order of consciousness students can “think abstractly, identify a complex internal psychological life, orient to the welfare of a human relationship, construct values and ideals self-consciously…and subordinate one’s own interests” (Kegan, 1994, p. 75). Having these abilities is an important step in the developmental progression into and through adulthood. In the third order of consciousness there is a moving away from a more concrete way of thinking in either-or terms to possessing an ability to construct the “values, ideals, and broad beliefs” (Kegan, 1994, p. 63) that one strives to live up to during life, but does so with an understanding that there will be moments when one does not live up to the standards and values one has composed for oneself.

It has been noted that college is a time of great change in students’ lives and that the changes that occur are the result of what happens both in and out of the classroom (Brown, 2004; Kuh, 1993, 1995, 1996). Kegan (1982) has stated that for many students, going away to college “can provide a new evolutionary medium that recognizes and cultures the moves toward self-authorship” (p. 185-186). It is during the college years
that many students will have experiences that are new and exciting for them and that test their current meaning-making structures. This is also a time when many students will break away from the family structure and the meaning-making mechanisms of childhood as they enter young adulthood and “begin to develop an independent selfhood with an ideology of their own and will often insist on being taken seriously as an adult and equal” (Love & Guthrie, 2005, p. 63) as they begin the process of moving from making-meaning outside of themselves to doing so internally in a self-authored way.

The ability to self-author one’s life is a construct Love & Guthrie (2005) have found espoused in many universities’ mission statements, in the goal statements of many student affairs divisions, and in various policy statements of higher education associations (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2002, p. 22) as they attempt “to foster the student’s development as a self-directed learner, an individual who acts on the world for the betterment of society (rather than is acted on), and an engaged citizen with a strong sense of values” (p. 64). Kegan (1994) has stated that the college years can be a time when students create meaning-making structures for their lives that build a long-lasting ideology that allows them to “subordinate, regulate, and indeed create (rather than be created by) our values and ideals – the ability to take values and ideals as the object rather than the subject of our knowing” (p. 91). Although reaching the fourth order of consciousness is a goal that most colleges and universities have for their students, Kegan (1994) has found that nearly “one-half to two-thirds of the adult population appear not to have fully reached the fourth order of consciousness” (p. 191), and therefore are finding coping and adjusting to the extreme demands that life in the 21st
century calls on them to handle difficult, and are therefore finding themselves “in over one’s head” (p. 191).

During the fifth order of consciousness further transition of meaning-making occurs and individuals expand the use of their own internal meaning-making systems to integrate others’ systems (Kegan, 1994). The movement from subject to object related to the meaning-making system is much more refined in the fifth order of consciousness and enables individuals to adopt some of the best qualities of others’ meaning-making systems to enable them to navigate through the challenges and roadblocks of modern life. It is during the fifth order of consciousness that individuals are no longer bound to picking sides along the meaning-making spectrum and “rather than feeling a need to choose between the two poles in a paradox, an individual recognizes the contradiction and orients toward the relationship between the poles” (Love & Guthrie, 2005, p. 65).

**Self-Authorship theory of Baxter Magolda.**

The development of Baxter Magolda’s theory of self-authorship draws heavily from the work of Perry (1970), Kegan (1982, 1994), and Belenky et al. (1986) and is considered a lifespan developmental theory outlining the journey one takes throughout life that involves a shift from an external to an internal way of knowing. The concept of self-authorship was first introduced by Robert Kegan (1994) who described self-authorship as a necessary foundation for adults to meet the typical expectations they face at work, home, and school. Self-authorship incorporates epistemological, interpersonal, and intrapersonal development and offers a theoretical lens to understand the meaning-making processes that individuals use to make a wide range of decisions (Laughlin & Creamer, 2007).
Baxter Magolda (2001) outlined four stages of self-authorship development that she determined from research conducted during a longitudinal study of 39 participants whom she initially began interviewing as they were undergraduates. These participants were all students at a small, Midwestern, highly selective institution during the initial few years of the study, but moved to various states and became employed in various fields as she continued to interview them annually over the course of two decades. These four stages of self-authorship, as determined through her longitudinal study, include: following external formulas, facing crossroads experiences, becoming the author of one’s life, and developing internal foundations.

Most traditional-age students enter college with preconceived notions, or external formulas, about how to learn, interact with others, and develop their sense of self (Baxter Magolda, 2008). They glean these formulas from authority figures such as parents, clergy, coaches, and former educators. When students encounter situations that do not fit neatly into these external formulas, they face a crossroads experience, or challenge to their developing a more complex way to approach the world. Although the development of some ability to self-author is a part of the natural maturity process, educational situations can also serve as catalysts for encouraging students toward developing internal foundations (Pizzolato, 2005). As students transition from using external formulas to tapping into internal beliefs to solve problems, they become the authors of their lives and consistently rely on the internal foundations they have developed. Even though Baxter Magolda’s theory is based on empirical research while Kegan’s is not, the theory could be considered flawed in that subjects of the study were a primarily all-white cohort of students from a highly selective institution.
Following external formulas.

Through her longitudinal study, Baxter Magolda (2001) found that the majority of her 39 participants left college “still subscribed to transitional knowing and its accompanying reliance on authority to work through uncertainty” (Baxter Magolda, 2001, p. 71). The challenge in this outcome is that the work environment most of her participants entered after college required independent knowing and an understanding that multiple opinions and views of knowledge are valid (Baxter Magolda, 2001). Of the 39 participants who continued in the study through their twenties, most of them retained transitional ways of knowing, as opposed to independent ways of knowing, and continued to follow the external formulas of others. Many of these formulas “took the form of prescribed plans or predetermined scripts for success in adult life that participants gleaned from others around them” (Baxter Magolda, 2001, p. 71) causing many of her participants to continue to view themselves based on others’ views of them instead of through a set of internally determined beliefs and values. This inability to internally define who one is and the concomitant reliance on external formulas could be caused by what Baxter Magolda (2001) describes as a “lack of experience in working their way through ambiguity…which might account for their reliance on externally derived formulas” (p. 72).

Crossroads experiences.

Individuals arrive at crossroads moments in their lives in many ways. Baxter Magolda (2009a) found that once her participants entered college and were asked to think and act in ways different from what they were accustomed to in their earlier lives, some of them entered into crossroads experiences. Although a majority of her participants did
not enter the crossroads phase until after college, those who did so during college did so because “their external formulas proved insufficient to make the decisions demanded of them daily at work and at home” (Baxter Magolda, 2009a, p. 2). She found that it was the process of being asked to think independently that “pushed participants into the crossroads phase, where they struggled to bring their own internal voices into conversation with the external voices on which they had always relied” (Baxter Magolda, 2009a, p. 2).

Because the vast majority of colleges and universities have created so much structure for their students in the form of student support programs, such as tutoring and counseling centers, Baxter Magolda (2004) has found that many of her participants were held back from developing the ability to self-author in college. This process of potentially over-supporting college students by removing the trial-and-error opportunities previous generations of college students enjoyed caused a majority of Baxter Magolda’s participants to continue to rely on “external formulas throughout college, developing self-authorship during their late twenties and thirties” (Baxter Magolda, King, Taylor, & Wakefield, 2009). This outcome is in stark contrast to the studies by Abes (2003; Abes & Jones, 2004) who investigated the various dimensions of lesbian college students’ development and Torres (2003; Torres & Hernandez, 2007) who studied the effect of diversity and ethnic identity and found that participants were able to develop the capacity to self-author while in college and the study by Pizzolato (2003, 2004), which focused on the development of self-authorship in high-risk students, who found her participants able to develop self-authoring abilities before their college years, mostly because of experiences of marginalization in their lives.
Individuals enter the crossroads phase because they have become unable to remain within the same meaning-making structure they had been using, but instead, find that a new way to make meaning and sense of the experiences of their lives is required. For faculty and student affairs professionals working with college students to help them develop into critical thinkers and life-long learners, there should be constant care and attention paid to ensuring that “educational practice is developmentally sequenced to foster increasingly adaptive ways of making meaning of one’s beliefs, identity, and relationships” (Bekkan & Marie, 2007; Taylor & Haynes, 2008).

_Becoming the author of one’s life._

From her longitudinal participants’ stories, Baxter Magolda (2009b) identified the three components of self-authorship she saw throughout their stories: trusting one’s internal voice, building an internal foundation, and securing internal commitments (2008, 2009c). During the point where her participants were learning to trust their internal voice, the participants arrived at a place of knowing that what happened to them was more a matter of their reactions to a situation, than were the exact circumstances of their experiences in life (Baxter Magolda, 2009b). Coming to this place of understanding allowed Baxter Magolda’s participants to move their life experiences from subject to object and set themselves “on the road to taking responsibility for choosing how to interpret reality, how to feel about their interpretation, and how to react” (Baxter Magolda, 2009b, p. 631) to the situations and experiences they faced in their lives.

Once trust in one’s internal voice was established for Baxter Magolda’s (2009b) participants, they began a new process to “organize their choices into commitments that formed a philosophy, or an internal foundation, to guide their ongoing reactions to
reality” (Baxter Magolda, 2009b, p. 632). Building an internal foundation becomes necessary in life if one is to continue through the process of self-authorship to arrive at an internal foundation for meaning-making. This process of developing an internal foundation is similar to Parks’ (2000) idea of centeredness, or coming to a place of being at peace with oneself.

Although Baxter Magolda’s (2009b) participants had all reached the point of possessing an ability to self-author as they entered their 30s, some came to a realization that, although they had been able to trust their internal voice and had built an internal foundation on which to base their life decisions, some had failed to implement these abilities consistently and were therefore not completely internally committed to the process of self-authorship in all areas of their lives (Baxter Magolda, 2009b). As a result, they were running the risk of not reaching the final stage of Baxter Magolda’s theory of self-authorship: developing internal foundations.

Developing internal foundations.

The culmination of the process of developing the ability for self-authorship is the development of an internal foundation to continually guide and shape individuals’ experiences in life (Baxter Magolda, 2004). Reaching the point of having a fully developed internal foundation allows for individuals to answer Baxter Magolda’s original three questions which must be answered to become able to self-author: how do I know? [epistemological], who am I? [intrapersonal], and how do I want to construct relationships with others? [interpersonal] (Baxter Magolda, 2005). Possession of this internal foundation for self-authorship aligns itself with Kegan’s understanding of the fourth order of consciousness which he describes as:
An ideology, an internal identity, a *self-authorship* that can coordinate, integrate, act upon, or invent values, beliefs, convictions, generalizations, ideals, abstractions, interpersonal loyalties, and intrapersonal states. It is no longer *authored by* them, it *authors them* and thereby achieves a personal authority. (Kegan, 1994, p. 185, italics in original)

Collectively, possessing the ability to trust one’s internal voice, build an internal foundation, and secure the internal commitments necessary to self-author directly relate to the goals and mission statements of most colleges and universities (Kuh et al, 1991): to “guide students to develop an internally defined and integrated belief system and identity, which prepares them personally and intellectually for lifelong learning” (Hodges, Baxter Magolda, & Haynes, 2009, p. 9).

**Relevance of Meaning-Making Theories**

The cognitive-structural and constructive-developmental theories discussed above allow for further understanding of the meaning-making processes individuals possess as they move from adolescence to young adulthood to becoming mature adults. Kegan’s work provides further clarity as to how individuals make meaning of the events of their lives. Using Kegan’s concepts of subject and object, along with his outline of the orders of consciousness, we are better able to understand the meaning-making structures in place as we develop through the lifecycle.

It has been suggested (Baxter Magolda & King, 2004) that the development of self-authorship could be facilitated through the use of the Learning Partnerships Model (LPM). The LPM suggests that the following principles of educational practice promote self-authorship: validate students as knowers, situate the learning in the students’ own experiences, and define learning as mutually constructing meaning. Through the use of these three principles of the LPM, educators create purposefully planned learning
environments and curricular approaches to their teaching that bridge the gap between students’ current developmental level and a self-authored approach to making meaning of the world.

Since learning environments constructed using the LPM are thought to move students toward self-authorship by creating situations in which formulas for success are not readily apparent, the LPM could be highly useful for faculty and student affairs professionals alike as they develop curriculum for their teaching and create programs and services aimed at aiding students’ development during the sometimes challenging college years. Pizzolato (2003, 2004, 2005, & 2006) found that students needed to experience discomfort or provocation in order to move from recognition that current formulas do not meet the needs of the situation to a commitment to seeking out and developing an internal foundation. Pizzolato defined provocation as “a state of disequilibrium that compels students to revisit their own goals and conceptions of self as well as consider multiple perspectives” (2006, p. 38). She conceptualized the provocative moment as one of many experiences that might comprise the crossroads, thus creating a provocative moment which acts as a catalyst for movement through the crossroads stage.

**Adult Learning Processes and Theories**

For traditional-aged college students, moments of discomfort and provocation are certainly part of the evolution of being in college. These types of experiences, however, are not exclusive to this age group of students. As colleges and universities across the country become more populated with students of multiple generations (Donoghue, 2011), it is crucial that college faculty and student affairs professionals understand some of the unique characteristics and in some cases, challenges of working with and supporting a
more mature adult student. Although gaining a better understanding of the nature and structure of working with adult students is helpful to working with this population, it is also useful knowledge when working with more traditional age students. As faculty and student affairs professionals work to prepare younger students for the realities of modern life and the expectations of the workforce, having knowledge of key principles and curricular practices for teaching and supporting more mature adult students is proving to be more and more important.

**Andragogy and Adult Learning**

Over the last several decades, an on-going debate has ensued as to how to define an adult student. For the purposes of this review of the literature and with regard to defining OLs as adults, I have chosen to define an adult student as has Knowles (1980). Knowles feels those who “behave as an adult – who perform adult roles and whose self-concept is that of an adult” (p. 24) should be considered adults. Even though there are other ways to define an adult such as various dictionary definitions, physiological definitions, and legal definitions (Knowles, 1980), I find Knowles’s definition the most clear and understandable, yet still broad enough to include traditional-aged college students, many of whom take on and perform many of the roles of adults over the time period they spend in college.

Much of Knowles’ work over the span of his career dealt with helping us understand the differences between teaching young children, commonly referred to as pedagogy, or “the art and science of teaching children” (Knowles, 1996, p. 253) and teaching adults, which Knowles refers to as andragogy, or “the art and science of helping adults learn” (Knowles, 1996, p. 254). Although German educator Alexander Kapp
coined the phrase andragogy, Knowles is consistently credited with reintroducing the
term to the United States and sparking its modern usage. Although debate has ensued
related to differing opinions as to whether andragogy is a set of guidelines, a philosophy,
a set of assumptions, or a theory (Knowles, Holton, and Swanson, 2005), Knowles (1980)
himself has over the years moved away from his original belief that andragogy is a theory
to a belief in his later writings that andragogy is “another model of assumptions about
learners to be used alongside the pedagogical model of assumptions, thereby providing
two alternative models for testing out the assumptions as to their fit” (Knowles, 1996, p.
43).

Knowles’ concept of andragogy is composed of a set of assumptions about how
adults learn that is based on his belief that many times adults need to know the reason
they need to learn something, may have a need to be self-directing in their learning, tend
to possess a greater volume and quality of experiences compared to youth, usually
become ready to learn as their life situation provides for them a need to know, typically
view learning with a problem-centered orientation, and may have both intrinsic and
extrinsic motivators for their learning (Knowles, 1996). Many of these assumptions are
pertinent for both traditional-aged students and for what some would consider older or
more mature adult students.

Andragogy is also characterized by the climate in which learning occurs. In an
andragogical learning setting, learning takes place in a climate of mutual respect,
collaborativeness, supportiveness, trust, and fun (Knowles, 1984). Although these
concepts may also be found in educational situations based on a pedagogical approach,
the pedagogical process of transmitting information to students in the hopes they learn
something is no longer useful to help prepare students for the demands of the modern
work world. Knowles (1980) believes “it is no longer functional to define education as a
process of transmitting what is known; it must now be defined as a lifelong process of
continuing inquiry” (p. 41).

Although Knowles’ concept of andragogy has not been empirically tested (Pratt,
1993), neither have other theories and models of adult learning been thoroughly tested
through empirical research (Caffarella, 1993; Clark, 1993; Hiemstra, 1993; Merriam and
Caffarella, 1999). This lack of empirical evidence causes many of these theories and
models, including that of Knowles, to be seen more as groupings or sets of assumptions.
Knowles’ concept of andragogy, however, is still useful in developing the curriculum for
OL training because it provides an additional lens through which to view students and the
developmental opportunities available to them through their work as OLs. By using
Knowles’ concept of andragogy as a tool to help prepare students in college to become
lifelong learners and learners capable of the increasing demands of modern life and work,
educators help prepare students for the realities they will face as they graduate college.
Knowles’ concept of andragogy is also relevant to adult students returning to college, as
educators prepare them for new realities as the circumstances of their lives have changed
that may have caused them to return to higher education to retool with 21st century skills
to aid them in their work and personal lives.

Learning Styles and Motivation

Through the utilization of andragogical concepts in working with adult learners,
knowing students’ individual learning style and level of cognitive functioning has also
become an important component of the work of college faculty in the classroom and for
student affairs professionals mentoring and advising students. Flavell’s (1979) work related to cognitive monitoring of learning found that although “young children are quite limited in their knowledge and cognition about cognitive phenomena” (p. 906) and children use a “process of guided participation in which others provide various kinds of help tailored to the children’s current level of knowledge and skill within their zone of proximal development” (Flavell, 1992, p. 1002), college-aged and adult students possess a much more developed understanding of their own metacognitive functioning.

Metacognition, defined as “any conscious cognitive or affective experience that accompany and pertain to any intellectual enterprise” (Flavell, 1979, p. 906), is an area of cognitive-developmental study that aids our understanding of how students think and learn. Helping students understand their own metacognitive ability is directly tied to aiding their understanding of their preferred learning style.

Several researchers (Briggs-Myers, 1993; Canfield, 1983; De Bello, 1990; Kolb, 1981) have developed instruments to help students determine their preferred learning style. Although more specific discussion of learning styles will appear later in this review of the literature, it is important to understand that the use of instruments such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, Canfield’s Learning Styles Inventory, or Kolb’s Learning Styles Inventory can enhance students’ understanding of how they prefer to learn, under what conditions, and in what ways. Use of these various inventories can also support an understanding how students are motivated to learn. Gauging students’ level of motivation to learn is a critical component in determining their learning style because “motivation drives cognition and, in turn, cognitive actions serve to strengthen motivational beliefs” (Borkowski & Thorpe, 1994, p. 45). Knowing how one is
motivated to learn is directly tied into students’ personal efficacy beliefs about their ability to learn and interact with others (Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995).

Similar to Pizzolato’s (2003, 2004, 2005, & 2006) belief that students need to experience moments of discomfort or provocation in order to move from following external formulas to seeking out and developing an internal foundation for their lives, the concept of self-efficacy plays an important role in the academic, personal, and professional development of students at all ages. Self-efficacy is concerned with judgments about “how well one can organize and execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations that contain many ambiguous, unpredictable, and often stressful elements” (Bandura, 1981, p. 200-201).

Bandura and Schunk (1981) found that students who move through college and enter the world of work with high levels of self-efficacy tended to persist in situations they found to be difficult or unfamiliar, as opposed to those students with low self-efficacy who tended to quit before completing the task. It can be concluded from the literature on self-efficacy that one’s perception of one’s level of self-efficacy plays a large role in determining the level of effort one gives to a given task, the amount of time one will devote to a given task, and even which tasks one will consider taking up in the first place (Bandura, 1977; Bandura & Adams, 1977; Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996; Brown & Inouye, 1978; Schunk, 1981; Weinberg, Gould, & Jackson, 1979).

From the standpoint of academic self-efficacy, Bandura et al. (1996) found that “perceived academic efficacy is a considerably better predictor of academic achievement than the traditional measures of self-concept of ability that are widely used in this field of
study” (p. 1210). One’s perceived academic efficacy and intellectual development should not, however, be separated from the social and interpersonal development of the student (Bandura, 1993; Vygotsky, 1962) as these concepts are by their very nature intertwined. One’s interpersonal development is seen as closely tied to one’s self-efficacy within the social learning framework (Bandura & Kupers, 1964; Bandura & Whalen, 1966; Marston, 1965; Mischel & Liebert, 1966) because it has been demonstrated that “self-reinforcement systems can be transmitted on the basis of observational learning through exposure to the standard-setting behavior and self-reinforcing patterns exhibited by adult and peer models” (Bandura, Grusec, & Menlove, 1967, p. 449).

The value of adult and peer role models should not be underestimated in the development of an individual’s self-efficacy. Bandura (1997) has shown that at birth, one comes into the world without a real sense of self and must be “socially constructed through transactional experiences with the environment” (p. 164). These “transactional experiences” are the many and various interactions we all have with those around us and the environment in which we live and work. When one moves from perceiving actions as being a part of another to being a part of oneself and understanding that the individual is the agent of those actions (Bandura, 1997), significant change and movement toward increased levels of self-efficacy can take place.

As children grow into adolescence and then adulthood, they are able to “judge their capabilities and limitations more accurately…and begin to use inference rules or heuristics in processing efficacy information” (Bandura, 1997, p. 171). This allows them to know that the more one has to work to understand, the less capable one is initially
related to that concept or task. Connolly (1989) and Wheeler & Ladd (1982) have found that the effect of developing a strong sense of self-efficacy in childhood has significant ramifications for adult life related to the development of social relationships and self-efficacy, noting that “peers serve as a major agency for the development and validation of self-efficacy; disrupted or impoverished peer relationships can adversely affect the growth of personal efficacy” (p. 173). Possessing a high level of efficacy has been shown to enhance motivation, academic accomplishment, and development of intrinsic interest in academic subject matter (Bandura & Schunk, 1981; Brookfield, 1985; Relich et al., 1986; Schunk, 1984).

As one moves from childhood, through adolescence and into adulthood one must manage many major life transitions. It is during this time of transition from adolescence to adulthood that “people have to learn to manage many new social demands arising from lasting partnerships, marital relationships, parenthood, entry into vocational careers, and management of financial resources” (Bandura, 1997, p. 184). Without a highly developed sense of self-efficacy, these transitions can prove to be difficult and can cause one to enter adulthood with feelings of being poorly equipped, not possessing the necessary skills and abilities, and being “plagued by nagging doubts about their capabilities” (Bandura, 1997, p. 184). This causes one to “find many aspects of their adult life aversive, full of hardships, and depressing” (Bandura, 1997, p. 184), thus defeating the purpose set forth in the goals and objectives statements of most colleges and universities.

To accomplish the goals espoused by most colleges and universities, the concept of self-directed learning most often associated with Brookfield (1984, 1985, 1993),
should be carefully considered when planning any curriculum, particularly for an OL training course. As most college and university mission statements mention (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2002) and various higher education associations espouse in their statements of belief (ACPA & NASPA, 2004; Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2007), one of the main goals and purposes of a higher education is to prepare students for a life of continuous learning and development and to “equip students with self-regulatory capabilities that enable them to educate themselves” (Bandura, 1997, p. 174). Brookfield (1985) has explained self-directed learning to be concerned with adults being responsible for purposefully guiding and directing their own learning, determining their own learning goals, and establishing for themselves how they will conduct, interpret, and evaluate their own learning. Brookfield (1993) emphasizes that if “self-direction means anything, it means that control over definitions, processes, and evaluations of learning rest with the people who are struggling to learn and not with external authorities” (p. 229). One must be careful, however, to note, as Brookfield (1988) has himself, that there are some challenges and ambiguities with the concept of self-directed learning, such as ensuring that an adult is ready for self-directed learning activities and that the facilitators of self-directed learning activities are sufficiently trained to assist learners along the way.

The concept of self-directed learning is consistent with the ideas of Baxter Magolda. She notes that in order to become the author of one’s life, one must move from a place of relying on external formulas and the views of authorities to a place of creating one’s own set of formulas and beliefs. Thus one follows the internal direction of one’s
heart and mind as it relates to all aspects of life and learning to guide the development and progression of one’s place in the world.

Mezirow’s (2000) ideas related to transformational learning, coupled with Baxter Magolda’s (2001) views of self-authorship link well with the core components of self-directed learning. For Mezirow, learning is “understood as a process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one’s experience as a guide to future action” (2000, p. 5). Through the transformational nature of learning, the learner comes to understand how to “negotiate and act on one’s own purposes, values, feelings, and meanings rather than those we have uncritically assimilated from others” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 8). Through transformative learning experiences developed as a result of gaining a better understanding of one’s self, development of one’s belief system, and the evolution of one’s lifestyle over time, the learner becomes more self-directed and as Greene (1988) has stated, “the human self is created and re-created” (p. 21). Using a process of self-directed learning, the learner can determine independently the direction and progress toward the creation and re-creation of who they are and who they would like to become.

For more traditional educators, the practice of self-directed learning and enabling students to be in control of their own learning can be an uncomfortable experience. Candy (1991) found that the introduction of the concepts of self-directed learning can cause adult educators to feel that they must set their own educational agendas aside even though they value the content. Horton & Freire (1990), however, contend that educators cannot simply set aside their role as experts and rely solely on self-direction, stating that “if you don’t know anything…what the hell are you around for, if you don’t know
anything…just get out of the way and let somebody have the space that knows something” (p. 154). Through effective self-directed and transformational learning experiences, learners can move themselves from a place of relying on others to relying on themselves for direction in their learning and truly believe that they as learners are in charge of their own learning process. For faculty members and student affairs professionals who work to develop course or training curriculum, implementing the concepts of self-directed and transformational learning could further enhance their student’s abilities to become lifelong learners capable of continuing the process toward self-authorship.

One way learners can have some control over their own learning is through experiential learning opportunities. Kolb (1984) defined learning as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (p. 38). These transformational learning experiences (Kolb & Fry, 1975; Kolb, 1984) take place within a four-stage cycle of progression including: concrete experience (feeling), reflective observation (watching), abstract conceptualization (thinking), and active experimentation (doing). Having experiences within this cycle allows students to learn through multiple processes and utilize various learning styles, a process that will be described later.

In some of his earlier writing Kolb described the experiential learning model, or learning through reflecting on what one has done, as being rooted in the works of Dewey (1958), Lewin (1951), and Piaget (1971) and having two main goals. The first goal “is to learn the specifics of a particular subject” whereas the second goal consists of learning “about one’s own strengths and weaknesses as a learner…learning how to learn from experience” (1976, p. 26). These goals complement the purpose of the orientation leader.
training course as some of the main features of the course center around learning the subject matter (information needed to function as an orientation leader), gaining a better understanding of one’s own style of leadership and reflecting on it through reflective journal writing assignments, and gaining the ability to make autonomous decisions without the aid of external formulas or support. Since Kolb believes that knowing how one learns sets the tone for the rest of life and “becomes a major determinant of the course of personal development” (Kolb, 1981, p. 248), utilization of the experiential learning model, particularly within the context of the orientation leader training course, has potential for impactful teaching and learning.

It can be useful to consider both of the above referenced learning processes when considering the learning environment. By matching these processes of learning to a specific learning environment, we gain a better understanding of the interaction between one’s environment and the learning process. The four learning environments that match with Kolb’s (1984) learning processes include: affective environments (concrete events), symbolic environments (abstract conceptualization), perceptual environments (observations), and behavioral environments (taking action). Within the affective learning environment, students work on activities designed to help them gain a better understanding of the work profession they are considering entering. The symbolic learning environment enables students to learn how to solve problems and master skills and concepts related to a specific subject area. Within the perceptual learning environment, students complete activities that enable them to see the connections within and between events in their lives. Finally, the behavioral learning environment allows
the student to apply what he or she has learned within an actual scenario he or she could experience within the world of work.

Various inventories have been developed over the years to measure one’s preferred learning style within the context of the four learning processes as outlined in Kolb’s (1984) Experiential Learning Model. First developed in 1976 and revised in 1984, the Learning Style Inventory consists of twelve items that ask the respondents to rank their level of agreement corresponding to the four components of the Experiential Learning Model. Although other researchers (Farrell, 1983; Merritt & Marshall, 1984; Smith & Kolb, 1986; Sims, Veres, Watson, & Bruckner, 1986) have studied the Learning Styles Inventory to determine its construct validity and reliability and found increases in both, Kolb (1993) developed a new version of the Learning Style Inventory he called the LS-IIA that uses reordered responses to avoid response bias. Additionally, Boyatzis & Kolb (1991, 1993) have created the Adaptive Style Inventory and the Learning Skills Profile, respectively, which are designed to help learners assess their ability to be adaptive in various learning situations and to determine the individual learning skills that will prove important in future career endeavors. Each of these inventories can be useful to educators and students alike, particularly when assessing learning taking place within experiential situations. Utilizing the various learning environments outlined in Kolb’s (1984) Experiential Learning Model, educators can assist students in transforming their learning into real-world experiences that help contextualize the learning and experience environments for the student.
Family Ecology Theory

Each of the above-mentioned learning theories and processes plays an important role in understanding how students learn and the experiences and practices that aid in that learning. This next portion of the review of the literature will introduce the concept of family ecology theory. I will first discuss the design and development of the theory as well as its main components, examine some of the foundational beliefs about the theory, and conclude by discussing how the family ecology framework compliments the work educators do with students in college.

In addition to the concept of self-authorship that will serve as the main framework for this study, family ecology theory offers some key ideas and concepts. A family, or in the case of college students, a group of students in a course, student organization, residence hall floor, or sports team, interacts with the environment to create an interdependent system (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993) that supports the growth and development of each student. Evolving from the concepts of human ecology and systems theory (Brofenbrenner, 1979), family ecology theory creates a basis for understanding how the various components of the college environment interact to allow for the change, growth, and development of each member of the family, whether that be students, professors, administrators or the campus community at large. Renn and Arnold (2003) have described family ecology as “more than a framework for explaining and studying the process of student development; it is a useful guide for educational practice” (p. 285).

Brofenbrenner built on the theories of ecological systems (Bubolz & Sonntag, 1993) by expanding to a family ecology theory which is helpful in describing the interactions that take place between students and their professors, students and other
administrators on the campus, and students and their peers. The theory of family ecology can be depicted as a series of concentric rings of environments (Renn & Arnold, 2003) with the family at the center surrounded by environments represented proportionally from the immediate, referred to as the microsystem, to the mid-range, referred to as the exosystem, to the long-range, referred to as the macrosystem (Brofenbrenner, 1979, 1989, 1993). Each of the rings represents the interaction of the components of the environment and the interaction of each component with the others by having the family at the center interact with the various human-developed social and cultural environments that radiate outward from the center (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993). In the case of college students, the center would be comprised of the student’s interactions with those most closely connected to him or her, such as professors and fellow students within the human-built environment of the college or university.

Chickering and Gamson (1987) listed seven good practices in undergraduate education, dealing mainly with student-faculty interactions, and have described the sorts of campus environments that promote interaction within this type of family dynamic. Although several limitations have been identified when using family ecology theory, such as its highly abstract nature, tendency to deviate from pure ecology, being too broad in scope, and using confusing terminology (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993), family ecology theory will become more refined and robust over time. Having already successfully used the concept of human ecology in their study of peer culture utilizing data collected in the late 1990s from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program within the context of student affinity groups, Renn and Arnold (2003) built on the foundational work of Brofenbrenner
(1979) and the work of Bubolz and Sontag (1993) to show the usefulness of the model in studying campus environmental influences on college students.

**Foundations of Human Ecology Theory**

For human ecology theory to be a useful framework for this study, it is important to understand the background development of human ecology theory from which family ecology theory has developed. Bubolz and Sontag (1993) have described human ecology theory as being “unique in its focus on humans as both biological organisms and social beings in interaction with the environment” (p. 419). Bronfenbrenner himself has discussed the theory of human ecology and its ecological orientation as being concerned with:

The progressive accommodation between a growing human organism and its immediate environment, and the way in which this relation is mediated by forces emanating from more remote regions in the larger physical and social milieu. The ecology of human development lies at a point of convergence among the disciplines of the biological, psychological, and social sciences as they bear on the evolution of the individual in society. (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 13, italics in original)

Researchers have used human ecology theory to study the impact of students’ environments on their development (Aulepp & Delworth, 1978; Blocher, 1978; Conyne & Clack, 1981; Fawcett, Huebner, & Banning, 1978; Kaiser, 1978; Kaiser & Sherretz, 1978; Moos, 1979; Renn, 2003; Schroeder & Hurst, 1996). Within each of these studies, human ecology theory and its sub-set model of family ecology are useful in understanding how the family interacts with its environment to create change and development within the student. Human ecology is comprised of three key components of people with the environment in which they live: interdependence of people, richness of resources, and humans in a position to make decisions that have various impacts on their
environments (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993). Having an understanding of how the environment for teaching and learning for students is created and its development over time is critically important to working with students to encourage their growth and development.

Comfort with and adaptation to a new environment is important to students being successful in their new environment. The concepts comprising human ecology theory concerned with the integration, values, perceptions, behaviors, and decision-making processes of students, become increasingly important to college faculty and student affairs professionals working with students in either in-class or out-of-class situations (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993). Discussing the importance of the campus and its learning environments, Kuh et al (1991) have stated that “although student’s biographical, intellectual, and psychological characteristics determine in part what and how much they learn, institutional resources and facilities also contribute to outcomes of the undergraduate experience” (p. 99). Because colleges and universities have many and varied goals and objectives for their students, it is important for both students and the faculty and student affairs professionals of each institution to understand their own campus environments.

**Family Ecology and College Students**

As a lifespan developmental model, family ecology theory is useful to the study of the changes that take place within students over the course of time they are in college. Since family systems that make up the college environment can change and evolve over time (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993), they provide a useful mechanism for studying the change in college students resulting from the various types of stimuli they receive. The use of
family ecology theory to the study of self-authorship development patterns of orientation leaders becomes quite relevant in determining what ways the students’ interaction with their environment serve as a catalyst for self-authorship development.

The values, goals, and purposes of college vary depending on the student and are influenced based on the environment the student is in when attending college. An understanding of the family environment found within the college environment has a direct impact on the level of change and development enjoyed by students during college and affects their continued growth and development after graduation. Incorporating the use of family ecology theory into this study, therefore, requires understanding where the students are having their college experience and with whom they are sharing that experience and making sure that both are consistent with the concepts of self-authorship. Gaining an understanding of how students move from a place of unquestioning acceptance of external beliefs to moving to a place of looking internally to determine their own course will be useful for this study. Family ecology theory, although still a fairly new theory augments the use of the theory of self-authorship in this study, provides further support for studying the interactions of orientation leaders within their environment on the college campus and supports the importance of telling orientation leaders’ stories of change and development.

**Summary**

Arguably, one of the most critical abilities students in college need to develop to be successful after graduation is the ability to lead, direct, and author their lives. This review of the literature examined various theories and ideas relevant to a study of self-authorship development of OLs. Specifically, I reviewed orientation programs and the
role of orientation leaders on college campuses. Next, I reviewed various theories, including those related to meaning-making and those concerned with adult learning processes. Finally, I outlined the family ecology theory and discussed its relevance to a study of self-authorship development.

In the next chapter, I present the methodology for a study that aims at determining what aspects of college life, as studied through the lens of being an orientation leader, contribute to students developing or refining the ability to self-author and move from a point of unquestioningly following external formulas to creating the internal foundations that will serve them well long after graduation.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Utilizing a qualitative research design, I investigated the effect of and potential catalysts for self-authorship development as a result of working as an OL. I discuss the research purpose, approach, and setting. Then I discuss my role as a researcher, the participants and methods used for selecting them, the sample size and methods employed for collecting and analyzing the data, and explain the procedures utilized to increase the validity of the study as well as the ethical considerations of the study.

Research Purpose

I designed this study as an in-depth focus on the self-authorship development process of undergraduate New Student Orientation Leaders who interact with new freshmen and transfer students on a college campus. There are two research questions that guided my study:

(1) In what ways does the orientation leader experience affect self-authorship development?

(2) What aspects of the orientation leader experience serve as a catalyst for self-authorship development?

Research Approach

Although there have been attempts during the past decade to develop a quantitative instrument to measure self-authorship development (Pizzolato, 2007), the
The general consensus among researchers and scholars is that until a more robust quantitative instrument is developed, the use of qualitative methods is still the most useful approach when conducting research related to self-authorship. The assessment of self-authorship development is a complicated endeavor because the language that students prefer to use is often less detailed and comprehensive during the college years than is the more complex and intricate language they are capable of producing in the years following college (Baxter Magolda & Porterfield, 1988; Gibbs & Widaman, 1982). As a result, I utilized a qualitative research design for this study.

Merriam (2009) has noted that qualitative research is about the “search for meaning and understanding, the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis…the end product being richly descriptive” (p. 39). Because the purpose of this study was to discover the ways in which the OL experience has an effect on OLs and the potential catalysts for self-authorship development as a result of the OL experience, a qualitative research design was used. Doing so gets to the main goal of qualitative research, as Merriam (2009) has articulated, of gaining insight and understanding of a situation that can be helpful in the development of future policies, procedures, and practices, specifically related to the work of faculty and staff members on a college campus, both in the classroom and in out-of-the-classroom experiences. The findings discovered as a result of this study could be useful to the enhancement of future practice related to the design of training curriculum for OLs and other student leaders.

**Research Setting**

I conducted this study utilizing OLs working at a large, public, ethnically and economically diverse university located in a mid-sized urban area of a Midwestern state.
The OLs were all part of the same Orientation Leader Training Course that met weekly for one semester. The training course was designed (see Appendix A) to provide the OLs with the necessary program and institution-specific information they would need to function as an OL. Each week the training course covered different topics of information such as group facilitation, campus department information, program logistics and the differences the OLs would see within the varying types of students they would encounter when working orientation programs over spring break and during the summer months.

The OLs in this study worked orientation programs designed for a variety of new students including new freshmen coming directly from high school, transfer students from other colleges and universities, and adult students either entering college for the first time or returning to college after taking some time away from higher education. Each type of orientation program was designed somewhat differently, but all programs were structured to provide new students with the tools and information needed to make a smooth transition into the institution. Programs were also designed to allow new students to become familiar with the broad range of resources available to them at a university situated in an urban area that they may not have had available to them in the various small towns many of the institution’s students come from and to ensure new students feel comfortable and satisfied with their choice of institution for their future educational endeavors.

The total student body from which study OLs were drawn consisted of nearly 30,000 students with a fairly even distribution between males and females. The ethnic breakdown of the student body during the year study participants worked as OLs was composed of 74% Caucasian, 13.7% African American, 3.7 % Non-Resident Alien,
3.2% unknown, 1.8% Asian, 1.7% Hispanic, 1.6% multiracial, and 0.2% Native American students. Nearly half of the student body consisted of first-generation college students and almost one out of every three students attended on a part-time basis. Although nearly eighty percent of the total student body is comprised of undergraduate students, the institution also has a sizable number of graduate and professional students.

The institution is comprised of over 80 academic, residential, student service, and research buildings spread out over nearly 220 acres of land within an urban area.

**Role of Researcher**

Although my knowledge of orientation programs extends back to my own undergraduate experience serving as an OL and going through a similar process of learning how to perform the duties of the position, my time as an OL was in some ways different from that of the participants in the study. As the orientation program and the students it serves have changed over the years since I was an undergraduate, the experience of being an OL has become a much richer source of leadership training and provides many more potential opportunities for growth and personal development than were available to me when I served as an OL.

Because I have gone through many of the same experiences and challenges as the participants in this study, I used that knowledge to enhance my ability to conduct this study in a more authentic manner and am certain that those past experiences did not cloud my professional judgment related to this study. In addition, although I have had exposure to this particular orientation program in the past because I served as an OL, the structure, people, and focus of the program have changed so much from the time that I was an OL that I am comfortable with my choice of research site and do not feel that my past
experiences negatively affected the research process. Although I am now serving as the Director of New Student Orientation, the rest of the staff of the orientation program is completely different from what it was at the time I was working as an OL and none of the undergraduate students with whom I worked when I was an OL are still participating in the program because they have all graduated from the institution. The structural composition of the program and its charge on campus have also changed significantly from my undergraduate days, a further reason to support my ability to maintain as objective an approach to this research as possible.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, I avoided looking only for what I wanted to find during my research. Rather, I reminded myself to take in only what I was observing, analyzing the data for what was truly there, not for what I thought should be there, and took the time necessary to assess the information I gathered continually throughout the process of data collection and analysis. The use of peer debriefers and member checking procedures were employed to increase the trustworthiness of the study. This approach ensured a quality research study and the avoidance of any potential researcher bias. In addition, by not focusing too closely on any one participant, but purposefully observing all participants in whatever way they presented themselves was important. This process tested my abilities as a researcher and my abilities to remain objective throughout the process of conducting this research study. These procedures will be discussed later in this chapter.

**Participant Selection**

The strategy utilized to select participants for this study was purposeful in nature. Brott & Myers (1999) have described a purposeful sampling strategy as one that is used
to select participants that will “illuminate the study and elucidate variation as well as significant common patterns within that variation” (p. 342). Merriam (2002) has suggested that because qualitative research seeks to gain an understanding of a phenomenon or situation from the point of view of the participant under study, it is “important to select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 12).

In respect to considering a strategy to use in the selection of OLs for the study, Maxwell (2005) has suggested that there are two goals related to this process. The first goal of purposeful sampling according to Maxwell (2005) is “achieving representativeness or typicality of the settings, individuals, or activities selected” (p. 89). To reach this goal, I selected OLs who all worked at the same institution, were part of the same cohort of OLs, and were all considered actively working as OLs within the institution. In addition, I selected participants from a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds and an even mix of male and female participants to allow for exploration of self-authorship from both gender perspectives. Confining the selection of OLs to those within these sets of qualifiers helped to assure a consistency of experiences among the OLs and commonality of the OLs within the setting and types of activities they had the potential to have, both individually and collectively. This level of commonality among the OLs allowed for the OL narratives to be compared and contrasted during the data analysis process. It also allowed for the development of a deeper understanding of the OL experience from the point of view of the OL who was having the experience.

The second goal Maxwell (2005) has determined for the selection of study participants when using a purposeful sampling strategy is “to establish comparisons to illuminate the reasons for differences between settings or individuals” (p. 90). The OLs
had three characteristics in common including the same institution of employment, year of employment, and status of actively working as an OL at the time of the study. Although the OLs had these three factors in common, they also had various other factors that allowed for comparison between each participant, thus allowing for a thick and rich description of the OLs experiences to emerge from the study.

I followed a three-step process to select the participants for this study. I first evaluated the available pool of candidates from the total cohort (see Appendix B) and eliminated any of the potential participants who were close to graduation at or during the time of the study. I then evaluated the remaining potential participants and selected five OLs to approach to be part of this study. Once this process was complete, I selected four OLs and sent them a hardcopy letter (see Appendix C) requesting their participation in the study.

After the hardcopy letters were mailed, I sent the OLs a text message asking them to read the letter and reply back to me regarding their willingness to participate in the study. When an OL agreed to be part of the study, I coordinated with the OL to set-up an interview date, time, and location that was mutually convenient. Prior to conducting the interviews, I asked each OL to read and sign a participant consent form (see Appendix D) that detailed and provided additional information about the study. I proceeded with conducting interviews once this process was complete.

Participants

The participants in this study were drawn from the 2012-2013 cohort of 20 OLs. Each of these OLs completed the application and interview process to be selected as an OL and successfully completed the Orientation Leader Training Course. Of these 20
OLs, four were selected to participate in the study. Four participants provided enough data to reach a saturation level where the gathering of additional data would no longer provide significantly different information to inform the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Seidman, 1998).

The four participants in the 2012-2013 OL cohort are diverse in many ways. The ages of the total cohort of 20 OLs ranged from 18 to 23 with 40% aged 18, 15% aged 19, 20% aged 20, 10% aged 21, 10% aged 22, and 5% aged 23. Fourteen (70%) identify as Caucasian, four (20%) as African-American, one (5%) as Middle-Eastern and one (5%) as Asian. Three students were born outside of the United States. Nine (45%) are male and 11 (55%) are female. There are 15 different majors represented in the cohort. Pseudonyms and demographic descriptors were used to refer to specific participants.

**John**

John is a 22 year old Caucasian male majoring in Education. John was in his fourth year of college during the time of the study and had one more year of college before he would graduate. John is from a small town in the central part of the state and attended a high school with a graduating class of only 120. Coming to college was expected of John as all of his immediate family had attended college. John lived on-campus in a residence hall during his first two years of college, but now lives with four friends in an off-campus apartment.

**Jessica**

Jessica is a 19 year old African-American female majoring in Nursing. Jessica was in her first year of college during the time of the study. Jessica is from a large urban area within the state and attended a large high school that was composed of nearly an
entirely African-American student body. Jessica lives on-campus in a residence hall with two other students who were randomly selected as her roommates.

**Rachel**

Rachel is a 19 year old Caucasian female who is still undecided on her major. Rachel was in her second year of college during the time of the study. Rachel is from a suburban area of the state that is within a 20 minute drive of the campus. Rachel attended a large, racially diverse high school. Rachel continues to live at home with her parents while she attends college.

**Michael**

Michael is a 22 year old Caucasian male majoring in Nursing. Michael was a senior in college during the time of the study, but because of the requirements of his academic program, had one more year remaining until he could graduate. Michael was from a suburban area of the state that is within a one hour drive of the campus. Michael attended a medium-size high school with a student body that he described as being a mix of all different kinds of people. Michael lived on-campus the entire time he has been in college.

**Data Collection**

I collected data for this study using three different sources. These sources included two separate semi-structured interviews with the OLs, observations of the OLs as they performed their duties, and a review of documents consisting of the OLs prompted written journals completed as part of the Orientation Leader Training Course. Two of the journal entries were completed during the semester in which the OLs were enrolled in the Orientation Leader Training Course; the remaining journal entry was
completed at the end of the summer, following the conclusion of the summer orientation programs. I discuss each of the three data sources in the section below.

**Interviews**

Dexter (1970) has suggested that an interview is simply a conversation with a purpose. Specifically related to self-authorship, Baxter Magolda (2004) has stated that an interview is partially the context in which one makes meaning. Because I was interested in capturing the OLs perspectives (Merriam, 1998) related to their meaning making process and how these perspectives affect the potential for their self-authorship development, interviews were conducted to better understand the phenomenon under investigation.

For this study, the OLs participated in two separate 30-60 minute, semi-structured interviews that allowed them to reflect on their experiences as an OL and allowed me to gauge how the OL experience had or had not served to promote self-authorship development. Before beginning each of the interviews, I requested that the OL read and then sign the Institutional Review Board approved consent form (see Appendix D) giving me their permission to conduct the interview.

Each interview was guided using pre-determined interview protocols. The first interview (see Appendix E) took place during either the second or third week of September 2012 following the conclusion of the summer orientation programs. The second interview (see Appendix F) took place during either the second or third week of November 2012 following the conclusion of the summer orientation programs. The use of semi-structured interviews was selected so that each interview could have a consistent
framework and also allow for the investigation of each OLs perceptions and experiences (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Although the interview protocols developed for these interviews were semi-structured in nature with questions having been pre-determined, the interviews also took on some of the characteristics of reflective response interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Reflective response interviews allowed me to respond to the OLs and ask further or more detailed questions about the content of the interview rather than strictly counting on and using the pre-determined set of questions developed prior to the interview. The OLs were asked to reflect on their expectations of the OL position and to compare those expectations to their actual experiences from the time of application for the position to the time of the interviews. Participants were asked to consider the entirety of their OL experience and comment on how they feel they have changed or have not changed as a result of being an OL.

Prior to conducting the interviews, I coordinated with each of the OLs to determine a mutually convenient time, date, and location for the interviews. The location selected for the interviews was one that ensured that the interview would not be interrupted, provided a comfortable setting and offered ease of accessibility. Interviews were audio recorded using a digital recording device and transcribed verbatim within 24 hours after each interview.

Observations

Although there are many definitions of observation, the one provided by Denzin (1989) is the most descriptive for this study. Denzin has defined observation as “a field strategy that simultaneously combines document analysis, interviewing of respondents
and informants, direct participation and observation, and introspection” (1989, p. 157-158). The observation portion of the study occurred during the last week of November 2012 and the first week of December 2012 as the OLs were working with new students who were scheduled to begin at the institution the following semester. I spent between 45 and 60 minutes individually observing each of the OLs as they performed their duties. These observations occurred during times they were either facilitating an informational session for new students or when they were assisting others who were conducting sessions. These observations helped to better inform me as to their ability to carry out the duties of an OL, allowed me to gain a better understanding of the ways in which they interacted with new students and each other, and aided my understanding of their decision making process.

During the observations I was very deliberate by taking field notes of how the OLs handled their duties and noted what processes the OLs went through to reach a resolution to any challenges that developed during the observation session. For each observation session I purposefully arrived to the observation site 5-10 minutes before the start of the session I was planning to observe to ensure I had ample time to set up my observation area and prepare for the session. For each of the observations I took a seat in the rear of the room to avoid being a distraction to the OLs presenting the session or to the new students taking part in the session. For each observation session I created a separate paper file and used individual observation note sheets to document four different types of notes including: jotted, descriptive, analytic and personal. Jotted notes were quick thoughts or ideas I had related to what I was observing. Descriptive notes detailed the actual events and activities I was observing. Analytic notes consisted of my analysis
during the course of the observation of what I was observing. Personal notes were short, one or two word phrases describing my thoughts, feelings and emotions as I was conducting the observations. As is suggested by Merriam (1998), once each observation session was complete, I transcribed the handwritten observation field notes and expanded them as needed to ensure clarity and to allow for an accurate capturing of the tone of the observation, along with a detailed description of the participant, his or her actions, the environmental conditions in which the observation took place, and my personal thoughts when conducting the observation.

Documents

As in the case of observation, there are also many definitions of documents. Wolff (2004) has defined documents as being “standardized artifacts in so far as they typically occur in particular formats as notes, case reports, contracts, drafts, death certificates, remarks, diaries, statistics, annual reports, certificates, judgments, letters or expert opinions” (p. 255). As part of the self-discovery and reflection process, each of the OLs was asked to complete three separate prompted written journal assignments (see Appendices G, H, and I). These journals were completed after the first week of the training course, the week after working their first session of orientation programs over Spring Break, and at the end of the summer orientation programs. The review of the participants’ journals took place prior to the second round of interviews.

The content of the data gathered from each of the three OL journals assisted me in triangulating the data sources and aided in either confirming or refuting the interpretation of the data that was obtained from the interviews and observations of each of the participants. In addition, as a part of each of the interviews, participants were asked to
share with me their reflections of their journal assignments and were encouraged to ask any questions they may have of each part of the research process. I ensured the credibility of the research by conducting a process of member checking (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) by providing time for the participants to share their thoughts, opinions, and feelings about the three parts of the research process and by allowing them the opportunity to make any changes or corrections to the data gathered from the interviews, observations, and journals. This process was completed in a manner consistent with my stated research protocols as outlined in the Institutional Review Board approval (see Appendix J) for this study.

**Data Analysis**

A constant comparative approach was used to analyze data generated from the interview transcripts, observation field notes, and the OLs training course journals. This process allowed me to determine, generate, and code the data that ultimately became my final themes (see Appendix K). This approach to data analysis allowed me to organize the data into similar parts and more manageable categories and compare these to the various components and actions of the OL position.

Using a constant comparative approach for data analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Boyatzis, 1998; Corbin & Strauss, 1990), I used a four step process to compare units of data comprised of similar words used consistently from one OL to the next or sections of text taken from the OLs interview transcripts and journals, as well as my observation field notes, to further refine existing categories or to create a new category. The four step process is illustrated in Table 1.
Table 1

**Process of Determining Themes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Baxter Magolda Stages</th>
<th>Step 1</th>
<th>Step 2</th>
<th>Step 3</th>
<th>Step 4</th>
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<td>Formulas</td>
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<td>Crossroads Experiences</td>
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<td>Becoming the Author</td>
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<td>Developing Internal</td>
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<td>Foundations</td>
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Initial a priori categories consisted of four groupings based on Baxter Magolda’s existing four stages of self-authorship that include: following external formulas, facing crossroads experiences, becoming the author of one’s life, and developing internal foundations. Using these pre-established categories allowed me to place the data into large groupings and to ultimately narrow down the data into smaller and more refined themes as the data was continually compared and analyzed. Further, the use of Baxter Magolda’s four
stages of self-authorship development as my a priori theme categories allowed me to better connect her theory of self-authorship with my research questions.

Progressing from my a priori theme categories in Step 1, I selected portions of the text generated from the data that related directly to one of the two research questions and that also corresponded with one of the four components of the OL position. Doing this allowed me to begin the process of better understanding the role and duties of the OL from their point-of-view and also aided my understanding and sense-making process related to how the components of the OL position could correspond to the four stages of self-authorship Baxter Magolda has outlined.

Second, I continued using Baxter Magolda’s four stages as I determined initial themes that were emerging from the data that related back to the components and actions of the OL position. These initial themes I classified as diversity, adjustment, training, trust, and group authorship. Each of these five initial themes emerged from the data because they were consistently mentioned by the OLs in both their interviews and training course journals, and also were present in the observations I conducted while they were working as OLs. For example, each of the OLs mentioned in their interviews the need to adjust the orientation program schedule to accommodate the needs and desires of the students in their groups or to make accommodations for other OLs who needed their assistance. Although this initial theme of adjusting the schedule was modified and became the leadership and decision making theme as the refinement process progressed, it was initially a theme that was consistent among all OLs in the study.

Third, once sections of data were organized into these five initial themes, I continued reading the data to refine them further into more focused themes that better
clarified their meaning. This process resulted in renaming and expanding the scope of the themes for added clarity. The themes at this point in the process included: understanding and attitudes about diversity, adjusting the orientation schedule, training becomes real, community among the OLs, group authorship, and personal development and growth.

Fourth, by continuing the process of reading the data, I further refined the themes and arrived at a final group of seven themes that included: understanding and respect for diversity, leadership and decision making, interdependence of the OLs, personal development and growth, training becomes real, community among the OLs, and purposeful experiences. The additional two themes of interdependence and purposeful experiences developed as a result of continual refinement of the themes and a better understanding of the impact the OLs were having on each other and the impact my purposeful planning of their experience was having on the OLs.

The use of a constant comparative approach to data analysis as I read and re-read the data to determine categories and themes was an effective method to analyze the data. Doing this throughout the course of analyzing the data allowed me to make meaning of what I was reading in the data as I came to better understand the experiences the OLs were having. Because of the three separate data sources utilized for this study, a large amount of data was generated that aided me in telling the stories of the participants in the study. I provide an explanation and interpretation of the data in chapters IV and V.

**Rigor and Trustworthiness**

To establish the rigor and trustworthiness of a qualitative research study, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that the criteria of credibility, dependability and transferability
be established, particularly when the research is grounded in a constructive-developmental framework. I address below how each of these criteria was established for this research study and how each of these factors played a role in showing evidence of the rigor and trustworthiness of this study.

**Credibility**

Flick (2009) has described credibility as providing evidence that is “free from error and distortion” (p. 257). I provided for credibility in this study by appropriately utilizing the established relationships between me and the selected participants, by employing member checking of the collected data and by using multiple peer debriefers who are knowledgeable of the topic of self-authorship, but who were not directly connected to this specific research study.

Having a working relationship with each study participant, I had already established a certain level of trust between me and the participants at the time of data collection (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). My relationships with each of the study participants at the time of the interviews spanned more than one year. During this period of time, trust between me and the participants was established. This mutual trust was furthered by providing each participant an opportunity to review and edit the data gathered related to their participation in the study. Additionally, each participant’s interview was conducted in-person, allowing for better development of rapport and reading of body language, amount of eye contact, and facial expressions of the participants.

This study employed the research technique of member checking. Lincoln & Guba (1985) have defined member checking as the process of allowing the study participants to read, review, and edit the collected data in order to “obtain confirmation
that the report has captured the data as constructed by the informants, or to correct,
amend, or extend it, that is, to establish the credibility” (p. 236). Sharing the collected
and transcribed data with the research study participants and requesting that each make
any needed corrections, edits, or additions served as the member checking function for
this study. I also requested that each study participant review their own journal
assignments and the recorded observation field notes that I took as the OLs were
performing the duties of their position to make any needed modifications the participants
felt may be needed to further clarify their thoughts, actions, or feelings.

The use of peer debriefing further established that this study was credible and a
rigorously conducted qualitative research study. Lincoln & Guba (1985) have described
the process of peer debriefing as one that allows the data to be experienced by those who
are knowledgeable of the content, yet distanced enough from it for the purpose of
creating the potential for the discovery of factors within the research being discovered by
the researcher which may have not yet been considered. I utilized two peer debriefers,
both of whom were familiar with the topic of self-authorship and knowledgeable of
qualitative research methods, but who were unconnected to this particular research study.
The first debriefer obtained her doctoral degree in higher and adult learning and studied
with Jane Pizzolato, one of the leading researchers in the field of self-authorship. The
second debriefer has worked for decades with college students and understands the
concept of self-authorship deeply. The findings of the study were shared electronically
with each debriefer with a request that they review the data and offer their professional
feedback and comments. Both of these peer debriefers were once employed at the same
university where the study was conducted; therefore, they are knowledgeable of the type of student who typically attends the institution.

It was important for me to select peer debriefers with different educational, family and personal backgrounds and life experiences from my own. Doing this allowed for components, themes, and categories of the data to be highlighted that were not initially obvious or clear to me. Additionally, peer debriefing allowed, as Lincoln and Guba (1985) have stated, for an “effective way of shoring up credibility, providing methodological guidance, and serving as a cathartic outlet” (p. 243), factors that all proved useful and needed throughout the data collection and analysis phases of this research study.

**Dependability**

To establish the dependability of a qualitative research study, Flick (2009) has found that the process of developing an audit trail serves the researcher well. By carefully and thoroughly documenting each and every step of the research process, the researcher allows for the study to be retraced and duplicated by other researchers. My audit trail consists of a variety of materials, including observation field notes, interview transcripts, audio recordings, participants’ written documents, peer debriefing notes, code sheets, analytical notes detailing the interpretation and meaning making process, and the notes and comments received during the process of member checking by the research participants. Each of the above-mentioned components makes up my audit trail for this research study.
Transferability

One of the desired outcomes of this qualitative research study is the opportunity for readers to take the information presented and utilize it in their own practice to develop, modify, or expand programmatic or teaching endeavors that promote the development of self-authorship within college students. By providing a thick and rich description of the phenomenon under study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) through a process of conducting in-depth interviews, participant observations, and detailed reviews of the participants’ written documents, I intend that the information presented will allow for others to find this study credible and useful in their own work with college students. This study may allow others to choose to transfer some of the components of this research to other institutions and to other contexts and types of students found on college campuses who serve in various peer leadership roles such as resident assistants, peer mentors, or leaders of student organizations.

Consideration of Ethics

I took great care to make certain that all reasonable and necessary precautions were taken to ensure that this study was conducted in an open, truthful, and fully ethical manner. Prior to conducting the interviews with the selected participants, I obtained Institutional Review Board approval (see Appendix J) for research conducted with human subjects. I provided each participant an opportunity to ask any questions about the study and offered participants an opportunity to withdraw from the study. Each participant was also provided a copy of the Letter of Informed Consent, detailing the study and asked to sign and date the letter certifying that he or she fully understands the nature of the study and his or her participation.
In addition, I asked each participant to choose a pseudonym to be used to refer to him or her in the study to ensure the highest levels of confidentiality and security of participant information. All data materials collected for this research study were maintained and stored in a secure, locked location, out of reach of anyone other than me. To further ensure that participants were protected and continued to feel comfortable and at ease with the research process, I made it clear to the participants that they could ask any questions they may have had at any time during the research process and that they were fully in control of the type and amount of personal information they choose to share with me. Finally, participants had an opportunity to review all data related to their participation and what was written about them so that they could make any modifications needed to ensure they were portrayed in a manner with which they were comfortable.

**Summary**

This chapter laid out the methodology used for this research study. I began with a discussion of the research purpose, approach and setting. Next, I described the role of the researcher and the participants and method used for participant selection. I then discussed the sample size used for the study along with the process used to collect and analyze the data. Finally, I provided an explanation of the process for ensuring the rigor and trustworthiness of the study and provided some considerations for ethical research. Chapter IV will outline the findings of the study. Chapter V will detail conclusions and implications of the study.
CHAPTER IV
FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to describe the effects of serving as an OL on self-authorship development and to determine potential catalysts for self-authorship development occurring as a result of serving as an OL for a specific cohort of OLs, working at the same institution, during the same period of time. In particular, this study explored whether participating in an Orientation Leader Training Course and serving as an OL can affect the self-authorship development of OLs. The results outlined in this chapter come from data collected and analyzed in consideration of the two guiding research questions of this study:

(1) In what ways does the orientation leader experience effect self-authorship development?

(2) What aspects of the orientation leader experience serve as a catalyst for self-authorship development?

To understand an individual’s level of self-authorship, Pizzolato (2007) believes we must understand both the words and actions of an individual. I chose to interview four OLs from the larger cohort of OLs in an effort to better understand their current level of self-authorship, as well as the degree to which the Orientation Leader Training Course and working as an OL may have served as a catalyst for further development of their self-authorship. In addition to conducting these one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with
the OLs, other data sources included observations of the OLs performing their duties
during orientation programs and a review of their journals completed as part of the
Orientation Leader Training Course. Once all data were collected, qualitative data
analysis procedures were utilized to determine patterns and common themes in the data.

**Orientation Leader Effect on Self-Authorship**

Four themes emerged related to the first research question, “In what ways does
the Orientation Leader experience effect self-authorship development?” These four
themes are: (a) understanding and respect for diversity, (b) leadership and decision
making, (c) interdependence of the OLs, and (d) personal development and growth. Each
of these themes specifically addresses the effect on self-authorship development as a
result of the Orientation Leader experience, both in the Orientation Leader Training
Course and when working as an OL. These themes played a role and had an effect on
provoking the disequilibrium (Pizzolato, 2005) necessary to helping propel each of the
OLs toward development of self-authorship.

**Understanding and Respect for Diversity**

One of the major criteria for selecting a group of OLs is that they serve as an
accurate reflection of the diverse make-up of the student body of an institution
(Cubarrubia & Schoen, 2010, para. 1). This diversity can manifest itself in various ways
such as the OLs ethnic and cultural backgrounds, academic majors, geographic
hometowns, ages, rank in college, and personality types. Because of the purposeful
nature of the OL selection process, in that it was completed in a manner that ensures that
a diverse group of OLs are selected, each of the four OLs participating in this study
mentioned the effect of diversity within the orientation program on their development,
growth, and journey toward self-authorship. Interacting with new students and OLs who had circumstances in their lives as diverse as being a parent as they attend college full-time, being home schooled, and coming from another country to the United States to live and attend college allowed the OLs in the study either to begin or to further question their beliefs.

Two participants in the study mentioned in their individual interviews that the experience of being an OL served as the first occasion they had interacted for a prolonged period of time with others in such a diverse work environment. Not only did the study participants interact with diverse others, causing them to reconsider their own views of others, but the consistent nature of the interactions throughout their OL experience helped to drive a self-examination of their assumptions and actions related to diversity. When asked about how his experience of being an OL has affected how he views other people, John, a 22 year old Caucasian male majoring in Education, stated that:

Well, this is going to sound completely cliché but I really, really learned not to judge people because I mean, you know, I met the full rainbow of personality types and backgrounds and stuff during every new program. And you know, every day I did my best to not have these like preconceptions about people but they always showed up and then they’d get disproven. So I’ve completely changed how I look at people on an individual level, that’s huge, that’s the biggest thing for me. (interview, September 12, 2012)

As John described his OL experience and how it had affected his views of other people, he expressed that it was not only the diversity found within the OL team, but also the diversity of the groups of new students he was assigned to work with each orientation day that affected how he chose to view others and the beliefs he would hold about them.
Related to the view John expressed, Jessica, a 19 year old African-American female majoring in Nursing, explained in our first one-on-one interview that through her OL experience, she was able to reduce the level of judgment she has for others stating:

I'm not as judgmental as I once was, because I could look at people and just start thinking things and analyzing people in my mind when you really shouldn't do that in the first place, but that's what we do as human beings. I mean that's just nature. We have no control over that. But once you meet different people and you learn different stories about people – like I had a girl in my group one time who was homeless. She was living in her car, and she didn't know how she was going to make it through college, but she was here at orientation, still trying to do something to better herself. (interview, September 13, 2012)

For Jessica, meeting the new students in her orientation groups who she felt were different from her allowed her to reduce her level of judgment before really getting to know the students. Additionally, although there were some students Jessica met in her orientation groups who she felt were very different from her, she was able, through her OL experience, to move from a place of immediately judging the student, to simply being interested in the difference. When asked to offer an example of a student she felt was most different from her, Jessica stated:

Oh, there was this guy who was from Jordan, and he was just telling me all these different things. He was younger than me and already he was in an arranged marriage. And he was working like crazy hours. And he drove a Bemmer, and I was just like, "Are you serious right now?" OMG. I was so jealous. But he was the most different student, but he was really nice and really sweet. I liked hearing about his different aspects of life and how his culture is different from American culture in general. (interview, September 13, 2012)

When pressed to further clarify how she worked and interacted with students in her orientation groups who she felt were different from her, Jessica went on to explain that:

I'm still myself in all situations. But I'll more so like ask them more questions than they ask me, because I want to know what's so different about them or understand what's different about them that's different from me. So I try to be more of a student than a teacher to them, in a way…it more so makes me step
away from that and kind of think, well, like what’s their situation, what are they like, instead of just being judgmental. (interview, September 13, 2012)

For Jessica, it was not just the students in her orientation groups from whom she learned lessons about diversity. As she explained in our second interview, learning from her fellow OLs played a significant role in broadening Jessica’s internally held beliefs and values about how to relate to others whom she views as different from her. Jessica noted:

You have people like [OL #1] and [OL #2] who are from different countries and you’re just like okay, you learn more about their culture and like how they ended up in America. Because like [OL #2] was telling me she moved here when she was seven and she was talking about how she had to learn – she spoke some English but not much and how it, you know, had a change on her life and then coming to college. And then [OL #1] who still has her thick accent sometimes, you know, it’s fun to hear her talk. So it’s fun. The diverse – I think anytime you’re in a diverse group, there should be more pros than cons as long as you have an open mind. (interview, October 25, 2012)

This increasing understanding of the importance of diversity and her attitude toward the diversity she experiences with others was evidenced during observations of Jessica as she carried out the duties of an OL. During an observation session, Jessica appeared to be working without conflict with her fellow OLs and seemed comfortable working in an environment with other OLs who approached the job in a more serious manner than she did and who were more directive in their interactions with new students than she chose to be. Jessica also seemed to be learning lessons of the value of diversity, not only from other OLs, but also from the students in her orientation program group whom she viewed as being different from herself. Evidence of this deepening understanding of the role of diversity in Jessica’s life expressed itself during the course of this orientation session observation that Jessica and her fellow OLs were facilitating. During this session, one of the new students in her group posed a question about how to
go on a study abroad trip during college. Knowing that a few of her fellow OLs had been
born overseas, Jessica referred this student to these specific OLs who were not in the
room at the time and let the student know that she would be sure to introduce them at
lunch. Jessica made sure to let this new student know that both of these other OLs knew
a great deal about the study abroad process and would also be able to share their own
personal stories of living overseas. Making this statement and connecting the new
student’s question with the information she knew about her fellow OLs experiences
overseas shows Jessica’s growth and deepening understanding of others and the
importance of the role of diversity in our daily lives.

Just as Jessica learned lessons of diversity from her fellow OLs, Rachel, a 19 year
old Caucasian female who is still undecided on her major, expressed in one of her
journal entries that she:

Found myself having a more mature mind in understanding how each leader
contributed to the staff and the program each day. I feel like my experience as an
Orientation Leader aided me in having a less naïve and more real look at the
culture and diversity on campus. (personal communication, August 25, 2012)

As Rachel discussed her OL experience with me during our first interview, she
mentioned some ways she felt that her time as an OL had aided her development toward
gaining a better understanding of others and the diversity of people she would come
across in society. When asked to discuss what she felt she had learned related to working
with others from her experience as an OL, Rachel mentioned that:

I think it helped a lot in understanding different types of people. I went to a pretty
like diverse [high] school compared to some other high schools that students go to
so I felt like I had a good grip on, you know, what real life is like and what other
people are like. But I think orientation like truly taught me and just understanding
other people or at least attempting to and knowing the different kind of people
you’re going to encounter. (interview, September 18, 2012)
During our second interview, I asked Rachel to discuss with me again how she felt working as an OL has helped her. Unlike our first interview when Rachel had focused the direction of this question on the lessons she had learned from the new students she met in her orientation groups, during our second interview Rachel focused on what she was able to learn about herself from her interactions with her fellow OLs. Rachel mentioned that:

By working with people who are different from you, you learn a lot about how – about yourself and about how other people work. And I feel like throughout the process I learned things about myself that – some of my weaknesses – things like that that I don’t think I really recognized prior to orientation and working in that kind of environment. (interview, October 25, 2012)

Although most of the other OLs in the study focused on how they felt the OL experience had allowed them to learn more about themselves related to working with diverse others, Michael, a 22 year old Caucasian male majoring in Nursing, explained that he saw the diversity of the OL group less as a benefit for him to learn about himself, but more as a strength of the OL team. He explained his feelings by stating:

We were very diverse, and it was very awesome, because we got to learn of each other's background. We got to learn about [OL] background and her ways. So we got to learn about things over there and then how she came over here. And then [OL], we got to learn about her background and how diverse her culture is. And that kind of made us stronger as well, just learning about each other's backgrounds and where each other came from, and all those types and different things. (interview, October 22, 2012)

For Michael, the moments of his learning and growth related to diversity and interacting with others who are different from him did not come only from his interactions with new students or from his fellow OLs. When asked what he found most impactful about the OL retreat held during the period between the end of the training course and the start of the summer orientation programs, Michael noted that the Building
a Community activity, where students were separated into various teams, some with privileges and some with no privileges, caused him to re-think seriously how he views others. Michael shared that his participation in the Building a Community activity:

Really put me in a different mindset. You always hear of people treating minorities differently or rejecting minorities from certain things. You hear about it, but you don't necessarily put yourself in their shoes, and you don't really get to see that until I actually did this project in how people were denying help to us – because I was the minority – denying help to us, and you're just like, "What are you doing?". (interview, October 22, 2012)

Two of the OLs in the study mentioned in their interviews that their personal lives, backgrounds, and experiences did not provide them with many opportunities to meet or interact with people from diverse backgrounds for any length of time. Jessica, for instance, mentioned in her Orientation Leader Training Course journal completed after the spring break orientation programs that she was:

Surprised how many different types of people I met last week. I know we were told to expect lots of different types of people, but I was still surprised. When I was thinking about people who were different from me, I really only thought about race, but after last week and meeting so many different kinds of kids, some from really small towns and some who went to very different kinds of high schools than me, I guess I am now thinking about differences in new ways, not just about race. (personal communication, March 19, 2012)

The experience Jessica had of being an OL after the spring break orientation programs seems to have provided her the needed environment for growth and development of her thinking related to diversity and the benefits she can gain from working with other OLs and interacting with new students who think, act, and approach life in ways different from herself. This experience and way of thinking related to respecting the diversity found in others is consistent with the views of the other OLs in the study.
The diversity found within the OL group and the new students each participant met as part of their orientation program groups affected each of the participants’ self-authorship development. They were exposed to the beliefs, values, and opinions of the other OLs and of the new students in their orientation groups, compared those with their own and then articulated how this exposure affected their ability to question their currently held beliefs, values, and opinions. This finding is consistent with Pizzolato (2003) who found that exposure to diverse others tends to affect one’s own beliefs, values, and opinions and can ultimately serve to affect an individual’s self-authorship development. This finding also mirrors the report of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (2007) which in part stresses the importance of exposure to diversity as being a key factor in student development in modern higher education.

Leadership and Decision Making

The second theme that emerged from the data was how each of the OLs in the study showed development of leadership and decision making abilities as a result of their OL experience. Each OL in the study expressed development of leadership and decision making abilities by making adjustments to the orientation schedule provided to them. The OLs in the study had determined early on in their OL experience that despite the hour-by-hour schedule of the day provided for their orientation group, most days the schedule would need to be adjusted to accommodate the needs and desires of the students in their orientation groups. These hour-by-hour schedules could be considered a type of external formula provided by others, similar to what Baxter Magolda (2007) has referred to in her research. This structured schedule would seem to reinforce formula following, but it is rare that any OL experiences a day that adheres to the schedule exactly as it is
presented to them because the role of an OL requires them to adjust to the needs of the students in their groups, needs that are different from group-to-group. This uncertainty and the concomitant need to be flexible and adapt to the situations that arise during the orientation program day serve to enhance the OLs leadership and decision making abilities. Additionally, the uncertainty of the orientation program day affects the self-authorship development of the OLs as they are forced to move from simply following the formulas provided to them by others to creating their own formulas or ways of performing the duties of the OL position.

The lessons learned from the action of adjusting the orientation schedule aid the OLs development of necessary 21st century leadership skills they will need after college when they enter the workforce. Skills such as flexibility, adaptability, timely and responsive decision-making, and being able to prioritize activities are critically important to success in work environments that more commonly require employees who can adjust quickly to the changing nature of the company they work for or the clients they work with daily on the job. Through the action of making adjustments to the orientation schedule, the OLs are practicing their abilities to be responsive to others and to new situations they find themselves in and are also gaining increased levels of self-confidence and self-reliance that will serve them well throughout life after the OL experience is over.

As the OLs determine that there is a need to adjust the orientation schedule, they must then use what they know from training, from experience, from what they have learned about their group, from authorities, and from each other to determine the best course of action each hour of each day. In our second interview, John shared that:
During the early weeks [of orientation programs], I would go to Team Leaders or the GAs because I didn’t have memories or past experiences where – that I could rely on where I had been in a situation similar to the one I was in. But if I – if – when I still encountered a unique experience, I – you kind of just have to weigh the options, consider what’s most important – like, if you’re trying to decide between scheduling a student’s classes and then taking them to a – to an information session, scheduling their classes comes first. That’s the thing that they have to have done. So, as much of a pain as it is for them to have to miss something that – some information that they might want to know, the priorities have to be organized. (interview, October 24, 2012)

John’s statement shows that early on in his OL experience, he felt the need to go to others around him for assistance. He quickly realized, however, that being an OL would require him to use his developing leadership and decision making abilities to adjust the orientation schedule in such a way as to ensure that the students in his group were getting what they needed out of the day, even if that meant they might complete their tasks in an order contrary to what is spelled out on the hour-by-hour schedule. John found that being an OL required flexibility and an ability to adapt to the needs of the day to accomplish the goals of the orientation program and to fulfill the needs of the new students whom he was working with during each orientation program. John expressed this need to understand what was in the best interest of the new students in his group when he stated that:

You also have to know what’s best for the student and what’s best for their experience that’s about to – that they’re about to undergo at the university. And as long as you keep that in mind, then, really, whatever decision you have, whether it’s the right decision or you ultimately find out that it’s a flawed decision, at least you have some reasoning and validity to back up why you chose to do that. (interview, October 24, 2012)

This statement expresses John’s process of thoughtful and responsive decision-making and his evolving understanding that inherent in any decision-making process is the reality that the decision being made may ultimately be wrong, but that a decision still needs to
be made. This understanding shows a growing development of John’s ability to
determine for him the path forward, rather than his solely relying on the advice and
opinions of external others.

During an observation of the OLs helping to facilitate an orientation session, I
witnessed the OLs at the end of the session conferring and determining which OL would
take which students from each of their orientation groups. The OLs had determined that
they needed to collaborate and make a decision about how to adjust the program schedule
to accommodate the needs of a few of the students in their groups. It was clear from my
observation that no formulas existed to help the OLs determine what to do; they simply
had learned from their experiences as OLs that they could adjust the orientation program
schedule as needed to accomplish the goals of the day and to ensure that the students in
their groups received the information and resources they needed during orientation. The
OLs had moved from simply following external formulas to creating their own internally-
determined process going forward, a process that was influencing their leadership and
decision making abilities.

Much like John, Jessica too found the decision whether or not to follow the hour-
by-hour schedule to the letter really came down to deciding what was best for the
students in her orientation group. During our first interview, Jessica shared a story of one
of her students who had an emergency situation develop at home during the course of the
orientation day. Jessica explained the situation by stating:

I had one girl in my group and she was telling me, you know, how she had a child
and she had to go home because of an emergency. She had already scheduled her
classes, so I was like, "Well, yeah, you got classes. You got your ID card. I'm
pretty sure you need to go home." And not only as that being an orientation
leader but an individual, you know home is first. So I was – I felt responsible enough to tell her go ahead and go home. (interview, September 13, 2012)

An example such as this illustrates how the types of decisions the OLs needed to make daily and how their roles as OLs served to affect their self-authorship development. It also offers further understanding related to the decision-making process that each OL went through daily as he or she interacted with new students. Jessica’s ability to think through the situation presented to her, to determine the best course of action moving forward, and to be flexible and adapt to the needs of this student show evidence of Jessica’s ability to define her decision-making process internally without the aid or assistance of others external to the situation. Being an OL also necessitates being able to adjust to the changing nature of the orientation day and sometimes put aside the external formulas that have been provided to create a new formula, one that was developed internally based on one’s beliefs and values. This need to adjust the schedule Jessica expressed well when she stated that during the course of the orientation day:

Sometimes you had to cut little corners here and there. You know, you can’t give a full Gold and Blue Preview [information session] like you would normally because you might be late for advising. But you don’t usually have to take extreme measures, but you usually have to eliminate some things from the schedule. You just figured out like what would be far more important. Like Gold and Blue Preview is important, but if you can only sit there for 10 minutes, then you can only sit there for 10 minutes. You try to get as much as you can in, in that small time frame. And then what you don’t discuss in Gold and Blue, you can easily sit with your students and talk about what they missed while we’re walking from place to place; you explain some things about campus escort and what you can and can’t bring in a residence hall. So you always get – you still have time to sit and talk or walk and talk for that matter with your residents about things they missed in the session, but you may just have to do it in a different order than what is listed on the schedule. (interview, October 25, 2012)

Like Jessica and John, Rachel also discovered that the need to adjust the daily schedule and adapt to the situations she found herself in each day was a critical aspect of
being an OL. The action of adjusting the orientation schedule served to allow Rachel to further develop her abilities to be flexible and responsive to the needs of the situations she found herself in daily and allowed for continual development toward self-authorship. In her journal written the week following the spring break orientation programs, Rachel shared that she had “learned how to be flexible and how to adapt into any role that is needed of me for the day” (personal communication, March 19, 2012). This need for flexibility and adaptability also served to affect Rachel’s self-authorship development. By learning to be flexible and adapt to situations as needed, Rachel moved from following the external formulas given to her in the form of the hour-by-hour schedules to creating a formula and flow for the day that she felt she needed to accomplish the goals and objectives of the students in her orientation group.

A similar discovery of the need for flexibility and adaptability that lead to the development of enhanced leadership and decision making abilities is evidenced in Michael’s comments in his journal written at the end of the summer orientation programs. Michael stated that “the orientation programs were so hectic and changeable that we had to adapt to any situation or problem at any given time using teamwork…we all relied on each other and helped each other out, which was an amazing thing to see in action” (personal communication, August 25, 2012). The ability to take the pre-determined schedule and make modifications to it to accomplish the ultimate goals of the day for each of the new students in their orientation groups shows a level of development of self-authorship within each of the OLs in the study. Additionally, Michael’s recognition of the need for and positive benefits of working as a team and collaborating with his fellow OLs to accomplish the goals and activities of the orientation day shows an understanding
of the interdependent nature of the OL position and the importance of each OL knowing him or herself well enough to understand the limits of their skills and abilities.

Although adjusting the orientation program schedule is simply an example of the larger phenomenon of the OLs moving from following the external formulas provided to them to developing the ability to determine internally the formulas for how to progress through the orientation program day, it does offer clarity to understand the effect of the OL position on the OLs ability to self-author as it relates to their ability to adapt to change, to be flexible, and to work as a team to accomplish the task at hand. By discovering the need to adjust the pre-determined orientation program schedule, study participants’ enhanced their leadership and decision making abilities and their self-authorship development because it caused them to question the external formulas being presented to them (Baxter Magolda, 2001) and to create and fine-tune their own internal formulas for accomplishing the tasks of the day.

The conversations and final decisions they made as they conferred with each other allowed each participant to further understand the beliefs, values, and opinions of their fellow OLs, thus serving to affect their own development toward self-authorship. With no pre-determined instructions given to the study participants when they encountered moments of disequilibrium (Pizzolato, 2005) such as when the orientation schedule would no longer work within the context of the day, they needed to determine for themselves how best to proceed without the assistance of external formulas, further supporting their own self-authorship development.
Interdependence Among OLs

The OLs seemed to be aiding each other’s progression toward self-authorship in an interdependent manner. The complexity of the relationships among the OLs and the development of reliance on each other to carry out the functions of being an OL characterize this interdependence among the OLs. Additionally, interdependence among the OLs seemed to manifest itself in the teamwork and collaboration the OLs used to complete the orientation program day and in their realization of the need for flexibility and adaptability in an interdependent group to accomplish the goals of the orientation program.

This use of teamwork and collaboration to accomplish mutually beneficial tasks during the orientation program day was evident in my observation of the OLs during one of the more hectic portions of the day. At the conclusion of lunch, many times the new students needed to be split out from their orientation program groups to attend special sessions for specific populations, such as athletes and medical students. This process required the OLs to first determine which of the students from their respective groups needed to be taken some place different from the rest of the orientation group, then group the new students into sub-groups going to the same general area of campus, and finally determine from those OLs present who should take which groups of new students to their next session. This task seemed to be accomplished with the realization that any one of the OLs may end up with a mix of students from several other OLs groups. As I observed this process taking place, I could see and hear the back-and-forth conversations and deliberations taking place and the realization that the OLs were collaborating and working as a team to determine a solution for how to get all of their students to their next
destination on time. Without the OLs understanding that they were indeed dependent on each other to make this process work and without the ability to adapt and be flexible with the process, it would have been challenging to have accomplished as much as they did throughout the orientation program day. The OLs seemed dependent on each other for their individual success as OLs.

As John, Rachel, Jessica, and Michael individually were having experiences that served to affect their self-authorship development, they also were actively helping each other to author their own experiences. By working together to navigate the details of the orientation day, the individual development of self-authorship each of the OLs was experiencing appears to rely on a level of interdependence within the OL team. Evidence of this reliance appears in the comments that the OLs made related to a question asking them to reflect on what they felt they learned and how they learned it as a result of being an OL. John expressed in our first interview that being an OL allowed him to:

Really strengthen my ability to work with other people. I’ve always been really skeptical about working with other people because, I don’t know, just group work in high school never got me anywhere, but I kind of, after working with a staff like this and knowing that people have my back in just the right moments, it taught me a whole bunch of ways to communicate professionally. Being an OL taught me there is more than one way to accomplish a task and that you do not always have to follow the lead of others, sometimes you just have to figure out a new way of doing something. Those are probably the biggest things I learned as an OL. (interview, September 12, 2012)

John’s experience as an OL served to affect his self-authorship development because it showed him that although he may be given specific formulas to follow, such as the hour-by-hour schedule of the orientation day, he also had the ability to author his own path and accomplish necessary tasks in his own way. He learned that he could utilize his own thoughts, opinions, and beliefs to create his own way and to accomplish his tasks in
a manner more consistent with his own personality and style. He also learned about the role he and others play in a healthy, mutually beneficial community and the process in which he chooses to interact with others to complete the business of the day. John discovered what needed to change and develop within him to allow for this sort of interaction with others to occur and for a healthy community to develop.

Rachel had a similar comment related to what she felt she had learned by being an OL, but focused her comments more on how the other OLs she was working with affected how she ultimately authored her own experience. Rachel shared in our first interview how the relationships she formed with her fellow OLs affected her own level of self-authorship by stating:

To my surprise, when I became an orientation leader I didn’t realize like how close you would get with the other orientation leaders that you were working with. I think that through other jobs that I’ve had, you know, you do see them often, but it’s not for a whole day and it’s not for a day of where you do go through stressful situations and where I need to call them because they need to help me pick up a student from here and take them there to where you have to kind of – even if you don’t know them very well at first, they’re there to help you kind of a thing. So I think like through the early time of being an OL I had no idea, but like everyone always said, “Oh, you’re just going to be family,” but like it really did become a family – I was really like amazed at the fact of how close you really did get to know some people outside of work just from like your close interactions inside of work and how that interaction and those relationships helped me better understand myself more and how I want to go through life. (interview, September 18, 2012)

Rachel’s ability to understand how her authorship was developing as a result of her fellow OLs authorship shows her understanding of her own personal development and growth through the time she served as an OL and deepened her understanding of interdependence.
In the same way, Michael shared how two distinct parts of the OL experience, the Orientation Leader Training Course and working the spring break orientation programs, served to propel his personal self-authorship development. These experiences also served as an interdependent mechanism for the authorship of the entire group of OLs and allowed Michael to understand further the importance of interdependence. Michael described these feelings by stating:

The classroom really helped to bring people together. And so that helped, but then what really brought everything together, I feel, is spring break, where we kind of knew how each other reacted to different – well, okay, that spring break helped us learn how others reacted to different situations, and we kind of learned from each other. And that's what helped us through the summer. We knew who was good at what and, you know, all those things. Like I know that [other OL] is really good at speeches, so he'd do most of the family presentations. And [other OL] was very informative about the campus, so if I didn't know something, I would go to him and all those things. So we kind of learned the way of each other, and that also helped to bring us together as a team and be able to get through different problems. (interview, October 22, 2012)

Jessica also shared that her ability to author her life came in part as a result of her interactions with her fellow OLs. When asked to share how she felt the interactions she had with her fellow OLs affected how she will interact with others in the future, Jessica stated that:

It just shows you that you have to rely on one another in any work setting because you always – somebody always knows something that you don’t know. And especially when those people have far more experience than you have, you have to go to them and ask them questions. So it’s like there’s no way of getting around having to rely on one another. I know I have to be willing to use the experiences of others around me to better inform how I am doing things now and how I will handle other situations in the future. (interview, October 25, 2012)

Understanding that as an individual she will continually need to rely on other people to carry out her duties, Jessica learned not only how working in an interdependent manner and relying on her fellow OLs could be helpful to get her through challenging situations
as an OL, but how having these sorts of interdependent and reciprocally helpful relationships will be needed in her future work environments.

Although key researchers on the topic of self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Kegan, 1982, 1994; Pizzolato, 2005) have focused mainly on the individual development process, the results of this study indicate that each of the study participants was experiencing a level of interdependence that enabled the individual self-authorship development to occur. This interdependence resulted from the study participants’ close interactions with each other and their increasing levels of understanding each other’s beliefs, values, and opinions. This finding relates to the study by Baxter Magolda (1995) which found that students utilized their individual levels of relational knowing, characterized by both attachment to and connections with others, to make meaning within their lives and to advance their understanding of their own beliefs, values, and opinions.

**Personal Development and Growth**

The fourth theme that emerged was the effect that being an OL had on the development and growth of the OLs ability to self-author and their personal identity and self-awareness. This development and growth manifested itself most strongly through the OLs development of self-efficacy, growth in their levels of self-assurance, and their increasing levels of confidence and independence as evidenced in their own descriptions of development and growth found in their Orientation Leader Training Course journals and their responses to questions asked in both one-on-one interviews. John clearly expressed this development and growth in our first interview when he was asked to share how he felt that serving as an OL had affected how he viewed himself. John stated that:
There was never really a time when I kind of – that I can kind of nail it down that
I changed for the better or anything, but just comparing myself as I am now
compared to how I was last – exactly one year ago, I’m way more confident in
myself and my work ethic because there were some days when I really didn’t feel
like smiling all day and talking all day, there were days when I had someone who
I just could not get along with, days when personal things really affected my job,
but I pushed through it and found that I had the strength to be able to do it and
that was something I had never really had that opportunity to realize before.
(interview, September 12, 2012)

For John, working as an OL increased his level of self-confidence and helped him
to develop an internal strength and resolve that he had never had prior to his OL
experience. Because of his OL experience John feels that he increased his level of
confidence and gained a stronger work ethic, even when some days his heart was just not
in it because of personal challenges in his own life. The OL experience, for John, helped
him develop the ability to push through the challenges in his life and focus on the task at
hand. Writing in his Orientation Leader Training Course journal the week after the
spring break programs, John mentioned that:

I had been told what my responsibilities would be during the training course, but I
never stopped long enough to realize the number of jobs I would be balancing
simultaneously…but now that I have gone through spring break, I feel much more
confident in my ability to be a good OL…I know I can do this and I think I will
be an even better OL by the end of the training class and definitely by the end of
summer. (personal communication, March 19, 2012)

In our second interview, John shared how he felt that his level of confidence had changed
during the course of the summer stating:

I guess my confidence level grew throughout the summer, just because I – as time
went on, I was more familiar with everything and the less I had to ask team
leaders or other orientation leaders or you guys for help. So, I knew exactly what
I was doing, and, as a result, I was more confident and was able to – I don’t know
– I think, reflect that in my work. (interview, October 24, 2012)
When asked to explain further how he felt his time as an OL had affected him related to his confidence level, development of independence, and in particular his process of decision making, John shared that he felt it was “kind of weird to think of…in my mind, I like to think that it was all, it was me who was making decisions…I was the one deciding to act and how to act” (interview, October 24, 2012). John’s comments from his journals and his interviews show the level of personal development and growth he experienced during the various parts of his OL experience as he moved through the training course, into the spring break programs, back into the training course after spring break, and then throughout the remainder of his time as an OL.

Because being an OL requires making many decisions throughout the day, it is important when studying the self-authorship development process, particularly of young adults, to gain a better perspective of their lives in respect to how their childhood and teen years could be affecting their ability to develop self-authorship abilities. When asked to share what influence his parents had on his thoughts, opinions, and decision making process, John shared that:

For my first couple years here [college], I was in a really bad state of depression because I – up until I graduated high school, I basically did everything just solely based on what my parents expected of me and what could make my parents happy. And then, once I got to college, it was kind of like, “Look at all this freedom,” and I had no idea what to do. (interview, October 24, 2012)

John’s statement above expresses how he grew up living his life for his parents and making decisions based on what he felt his parents would want or expect from him. Once he came to college, however, John began a process of evolving from following the formulas provided for him to creating his own formulas for what he believes and how he wishes to live his life. When asked to share the point in college at which he felt he had
shifted from living a life based on his parents’ beliefs to one in which he was determining for himself what he believed, John expressed that:

This is my fourth year here [college], and last year, I really – I don’t know. It’s – I’m – I guess I’m like a late-bloomer, but I’ve kind of started to really develop a sense of identity and get in touch with what I believe in things. And it’s interesting to me because with the political season around and the holidays coming up, I have such different views than those that my parents have. And I feel guilty sometimes, but it’s interesting because I still think it’s a new experience for me to be able to have my parents be upset with me over something and argue that I’m right…I can sit down with them and have a mature debate, whereas previous to maybe my sophomore year of college, I would just say, “Yeah, Yeah, whatever you think.” And I think that that’s really had a huge effect on me lately. (interview, October 24, 2012)

Similar to John, when Rachel was asked to share any points during the past year of working as an OL when she felt she had learned something about herself that she did not feel she knew before which she believed helped her develop and grow as an individual, she stated that:

I think I definitely learned a lot about myself. I think naturally it was just a growing year for me because this is my first year of college. So it was definitely a lot of transition just in that aspect. And I think orientation was a really good tool for me to get adjusted to [college], especially because [this college] was not initially the place I wanted to go to. Being an OL I’ve just really grown in understanding a lot about what my future career could be. I know that’s kind of an odd thing but this year like taught me a lot about my strengths more so and like what I really truly enjoy doing. (interview, September 18, 2012)

Unlike John who had grown up feeling he needed to do what his parents wanted and expected of him to make them happy and who chose to go through his childhood and adolescent years following closely the path his parents had set out for him, Rachel expressed that she had grown up with parents who are supportive but who had always allowed her to make her own decisions. Rachel stated that her parents have:

Always been supportive of whoever I want to be. I feel like they’re just happy with who I am. Like I don’t know if there is per se someone that they want me to
be, but I feel like they’ve always been satisfied with who I am. And I think that they’ve helped a lot with me being a confident person because they’ve always been so confident in me and to have like your family support you that’s like who is supposed to be there for you and I feel like that’s helped me a lot to have the image that I do of myself. (interview, October 25, 2012)

When asked to explain further how she felt that the year serving as an OL has affected who she thinks she is developing into as a person related to her beliefs, values, and personal understanding of herself, Rachel expressed that being an OL helped her to further refine her own identity and to:

Become more like – I think just as you grow up you know more and more about yourself. And I think this job was just another way of me learning about myself or just reinforcing things that I kind of already thought and just how I interact with people and how – the kinds of things that are fulfilling to me. So like I feel like it just was another aspect of showing me what I really want to do in my future and what really does fulfill me and what I enjoy. (interview, October 25, 2012)

In contrast to John who had experienced very strong influences from his parents that affected what he believed and how he chose to manage his life growing up and to Rachel who has parents who are more inclined to be supportive and encouraging of her making up her own mind related to her beliefs and values, Jessica expressed in her first interview that she felt the biggest influence on her development and growth during the time she served as an OL did not come from the influences of her parents; rather, they came from the new students in her group with whom she interacted. When asked to share a story of a student she worked with during the orientation programs who had had the most significant effect on her development, growth, and understanding of who she is and how she wishes to manage her life in the future, Jessica recounted the same story she had shared earlier in our interview of the student in her group who she discovered was homeless and was not sure what the future would hold. Jessica shared that:
We talked and like I just wanted to know more about her personally. I didn't really per se ask her, you know, "How did you get in this situation?" but I offered – gave her advice: Well, is there someone you could stay with? Are you going to try to live on campus, get more financial aid, do scholarships? And she was just telling me she didn't know where she was going – what she was going to do, what direction she was going, but she was here, and that was the big thing to me. Despite everything she's going through, she's here. So I can't judge someone who has nothing but is trying to do something. (interview, September 13, 2012)

Although Jessica found that her development and growth as an OL came from the interactions she had had with the students in her group, John and Rachel both showed development and growth as OLs that had developed from their relationships with their parents. For Michael, however, development and growth as an OL came from a different source. His development and growth during his time as an OL resulted from the entirety of his OL experience and served as a mechanism to help him solidify his decision to pursue a career in one of the helping professions and to become a nurse. When asked to share how he felt serving as an OL helped him relate to others and make decisions, skills that will be critical to success in his future nursing career, Michael explained that:

I feel like when I make decisions publicly wise or just people wise, I definitely use my orientation skills with that. For example, being a peer mentor. I think orientation really helped me want to be a peer mentor even more, because I like dealing with people, and I like dealing with – if they have problems, I like talking with them through it. Or if they don't understand a certain subject or a certain something, I like talking with them through that as well. And orientation really helped me broaden those skills and gain – well, yeah – and gain more skills and so forth to help me deal with diverse people. (interview, October 22, 2012)

As he thought more about his OL experience during our second interview, Michael went on to express how he felt that his experiences as an OL both during his time in the Orientation Leader Training Course and when working as an OL allowed him to expand his abilities as a leader and taught him lessons and skills that he will use in his future career as a nurse. Michael shared that his experiences as an OL:
Helped me grow as a leader and helped me deal with problems in not only orientation, but in everyday life and taught me you kind of have to adapt to it. And that kind of helped me not only with everyday life and orientation, but it may help me with nursing as well because, you know, patients are going through a lot, and their vitals could be – like start falling. You have to kind of adapt to that and be there for them, and try to help. Like let's say their blood pressure is falling. You have to kind of like raise their blood pressure and you have to know what's going on and be able to know what drugs you're giving them and everything. So you have to adapt to their body, I guess. (interview, October 22, 2012)

Although the time a student spends in college will presumably be a time of personal development, growth, and maturing, the findings of this study indicate that as a result of the time spent in the Orientation Leader Training Course and working as an OL, study participants appeared to experience accelerated levels of personal development and growth related to self-authorship. Their abilities to move from following the external formulas provided by others to creating their own internally generated formulas appears to have been enhanced and strengthened as a result of their OL experience. Although this finding may seem to contradict Baxter Magolda’s (2001) research that found her study participants gaining self-authorship abilities only after college graduation as they progressed through their 20s and 30s, it is consistent with Pizzolato’s (2003, 2004) research in which she found her study participants showing signs of self-authorship while still in high school.

As a result of their OL experience, each OL in the study developed and grew as an individual, particularly as it relates to their development of self-efficacy, the growth they experienced in their levels of self-assurance, and the increasing levels of confidence and independence they felt about themselves. All of these attributes are important for development toward the ability to self-author.
Catalysts for Self-Authorship Development

After analyzing the data related to the second research question, “What aspects of the orientation leader experience serve as a catalyst for self-authorship development?” three themes emerged. These themes emerged from analysis of data obtained from the OLs journals, from observations of them carrying out their duties, and from each of the two one-on-one, semi-structured interviews conducted with the OLs. These three themes included: (a) training becomes real, (b) community among the OLs, and (c) purposeful experiences. The following sections provide details related to each of these three themes.

Training Becomes Real

After working the spring break orientation programs, the training the OLs experienced before spring break became real for them and served as a catalyst for further self-authorship development. This practical application of knowledge functioned as a catalyst for self-authoring. Because the orientation program schedule was set up in such a way that the OLs would have completed only half of their formal training by the time the spring break orientation programs began, these programs provided a mechanism for the OLs to begin to realize and to place into context all of the material they learned in the first half of the training course. After the spring break orientation programs, the OLs have encountered enough disequilibrium to propel them to approach the post-spring break training differently because the training had become real for them. This reaction was expressed clearly by John in our first interview when he stated:

Spring Break kind of put everything in perspective, and I guess before Spring Break, the class – talking about the programs during that training class, the programs seemed so far off and so, I don’t know, almost like mythical, like I had never done one before but there’s all this stuff that goes on and all these events and places that we have to be and things we have to know, and it seemed almost
unattainable. But then after the Spring Break programs, it was so much more reasonable and understandable of what I would have to know and I could – it was like the point where after that everything I learned in the class I started taking in and I was able to like fine-tune it into my own personal work ethic and how I would incorporate it into my job. (interview, September 12, 2012)

For John, participating in the spring break orientation programs helped him to realize the importance of the information he was learning in the training course and the ways in which he could best incorporate the information. He began to use the training in his own way to further move from a place of being provided with all the formulas for doing his job to a place of personally developing his own sense of how best to use the information he had been given.

Similarly for Rachel, the training became real when she was asked in our first interview to share her thoughts about the effect of the spring break orientation programs on her approach to the second half of the training course. When asked whether she felt that working the spring break orientation programs made a difference in how she approached the second half of the training course, Rachel stated:

I think it definitely did for sure because I think at that point you knew how the program was going to go, you knew – like you knew what to expect in reality of what was happening. So I feel like – I think I took it [the training course] seriously the entire time, but I think it just became more of a reality of what I was actually doing. So I feel like I might have paid attention more, I might have like read over a sheet like after we went over it once or twice more just to – like I felt like I really wanted to understand more of everything that we were learning just because I knew how frazzled I was I think a little bit prior to that spring break week. So I think that spring break week just made me realize like how the program actually works so it was easier for my head to really understand what you guys were saying. (interview, September 18, 2012)

Michael also explained in our first interview his feelings about the spring break orientation programs and how he felt they had helped him make sense of what the programs would be like going forward. The close proximity in time of the training
course and working the spring break orientation programs helped to further serve as a catalyst for his self-authorship development. This week of orientation programs helped Michael realize the value of the training course and allowed him to make more sense of the second half of the training course once he had gone through the spring break orientation programs and gained the added knowledge and practical application of what the OL position really entails. He now had a context for formulating his own approach to both the training course and his role as an OL. Michael expressed in our first interview that he felt that the spring break orientation programs “definitely helped me learn the process a lot better and then everything just made sense when we got back into the [training] classroom” (interview, September 10, 2012). Having the opportunity to put into practice during spring break the information he was learning in the training course allowed Michael to make better sense of the information he would learn during the second part of the training course.

The week of orientation programs that took place over spring break in effect served as a week-long learning opportunity for the OLs. It is during this week that they had the opportunity to implement what they had learned so far in the training class and could use the week of programs to begin to determine for themselves who they are and what role they can play related to orientation and how they will choose to utilize their beliefs and values on the job. Having the spring break week of orientation programs between the two parts of the Orientation Leader Training Course allowed the OLs to apply the theoretical knowledge learned in the training course in a practical and real-world manner.
Additionally, what the OLs in the study experienced as a result of the spring break orientation programs is consistent with Knowles’ (1996) research on the learning processes adults possess. Knowles’ research, based on studying adult learners, found that adults need to know the reason they need to learn something, become ready to learn as their life situation provides for them a need to know, and typically view learning with a problem-centered orientation. The findings of the study suggest that the OLs who participated in this study approached the second half of the training course in a more purposeful way because they began to realize the training’s importance after the spring break week of orientation programs. After the OLs had an opportunity to work with new students and to gain an understanding of what the job entails, the training became real to them and the level of importance the OLs placed on the training increased. This change could be seen in the level of attention paid to the topics of conversation during the training class, the number and quality of the questions asked during class, and the increase in e-mail communication between the OLs and the instructors asking follow-up questions related to topics of conversation in the training class.

**Community Among the OLs**

The second theme that emerged related to catalysts for self-authorship development was the discovery by the OLs of how the development of the OLs as a smaller community within the larger university allowed them to increase the level of trust and ultimately the feeling of community they felt for each other. Although some of the OLs knew from the start of the first orientation programs that they would need to rely on each of their fellow OLs, others had to learn this by attempting to do their jobs independently, only to discover this would not be possible.
This development of community among the OLs and its corresponding increase in the level of trust they had for each other was further enhanced during the training retreat held immediately before the start of the summer orientation programs. During this retreat, various activities occurred that were purposefully structured to build community among the OLs. By structuring the activities in such a way as to force the OLs to work together and learn more about each other to complete the activities of the retreat successfully, the OLs further enhanced their levels of understanding and trust for each other. In our second interview, Michael shared his thoughts on how the training retreat helped him feel more connected and trusting of the other OLs when he stated that the training retreat “was really helpful and let me get to know the other OLs on a more personal level – more than you can do in a class or over one week of orientation programs – I felt more connected after the retreat” (interview, October 22, 2012).

Activities such as One Minute Commercials, that required each OL to take one minute to share why he or she is important to the group as a whole, and Tower Building, designed so that the OLs work in small teams to build the tallest tower in a set amount of time, also contributed to the development of the OL community. It was the Building a Community activity mentioned earlier, however, that had the strongest resonance with the OLs in the study. This activity allowed each OL to physically see and feel the reality of not being included in a community. Participating in this activity and talking through as a group the feelings and emotions each of the OLs was experiencing during this activity allowed the OLs to understand better where each other was coming from, developed community among the OLs, and increased the level of trust each OL had for their fellow OLs. Although the Building a Community activity was mentioned by each
OL in our one-on-one interviews, Jessica’s interpretation of the activity seems most impactful. In summing up her impression of the Building a Community activity, Jessica shared that “after we did that activity and all talked about it, you could tell everyone better understood each other, where we were coming from, and how it felt to be excluded – you could tell we were a tighter group” (interview, September 13, 2012).

The OLs views of the relationships that they were forming with each other evolved throughout the training course, the training retreat, and their participation as an OL, both during the spring break orientation programs and over the summer. Evidence appears in John’s comments in our second interview when he was asked how he would describe the group of OLs he worked with to someone unfamiliar with the group. John stated that:

When I think about the people that I worked with it is seriously, it’s just like a huge, big family. It’s a very professional relationship, knowing – meaning that I can’t expect anything outrageous or unfair out of any of the people who I work with, but at the same time, I know that if I need something, they’ll always be there. There’s not a single person who I started – who I worked with this summer who I don’t still talk to. (interview, October 24, 2012)

These comments begin to show how John viewed his relationships with his fellow OLs and how the development of community among the OLs over an extended period of time aided in their collective ability to trust each other, allowing them to carry out the duties of their positions more effectively. When asked to share when he first felt that the OLs were becoming a family unit, John shared that during the spring break orientation programs he was:

Surprised how supportive and close the orientation team proved to be this past week. I’ve never been employed at a place that has such a feeling of camaraderie as the staff at New Student Orientation. Even at times when we were all stressed and tired, we were always able to smile and help whoever needed it. This
atmosphere seriously helped me get through the tougher moments of the week, and I modeled my actions after some of my coworkers’ great examples. (interview, October 24, 2012)

When asked to consider why it is he felt the OLs with whom he worked were able to form this sense of camaraderie and community and why he felt doing so was important in the development of the relationships the OLs were forming with each other, John explained that he felt it was:

The nature of the job, where it forces interpersonal communication, and there’s really no space for negativity in relationships or – I don’t know – cattiness between cliques or guys versus girls or girls versus girls – it’s just – there’s no space for it. There’s no time for it because we’re constantly moving. Nothing is ever routine, really, as much as we wish it would be. So, I think that we all just – I think that there’s that underlying tone of we’re all in it together, and we have to learn to work together, and we didn’t just say it. We experienced it, and we knew it. We knew we had to work effectively as a team. (interview, October 24, 2012)

As the nature of the OL position necessitates the OLs to be in constant contact with each other during the day to plan and coordinate activities and the movement of students from session to session, the OLs must learn to interact and communicate with each other regularly. When asked what she was most surprised about after working the spring break orientation programs Rachel mentioned in our first interview that she “did not expect to communicate so much and in so many different ways with the other OLs – it seemed like we were texting each other all day to help each other with the program” (interview, September 18, 2012). Additionally, during the post-spring break training course session which was devoted to debriefing the spring break week of orientation programs and in their post-spring break reflective journal writing assignment, the OLs had several opportunities to communicate their thoughts and emotions about their fellow OLs. They were able to verbalize and write about their opinions on the development of the OLs as a
team and could express their views on the development of the OLs as a community.

Having the opportunity to reflect on their first week working as an OL allowed the OLs to put into context their experiences and gain a better understanding of the practical applications of the information they were learning not only in the training class, but about each of their fellow OLs.

In our second interview, John explained how he felt that the process of the OLs forming a team and building trust and reliance with each other actually started during the training course they took together during the spring semester:

The training class with all the icebreakers that we do and the way that the activities are organized where they’re forum discussions or group activities that are then shared to the full – to the full class, it – we’re expected to have a certain amount of interpersonal skills when we enter and apply for the job. But those – the activities that we do in the training class really, really start breaking down walls between co-workers and enable for bonding and trust to start to build up that I don’t think we could’ve done without that kind of atmosphere in the training class. (interview, October 24, 2012)

Rachel mentioned another interesting area related to the development of community and the resulting trust that emerged among the OLs in our first interview. When asked to share how she began to trust the other OLs on the team, Rachel explained that for her, trust developed as a result of gaining a better understanding of the role each OL carried out for the team. She stated that being an OL:

Helped me to realize a lot of people’s strengths that are different than me, especially on staff. I think that there were certain times where I was like, “That person does stuff a lot different than me,” in just thinking about like why that person was hired and like through the summer like it was so obvious why they were hired. (interview, September 18, 2012)

Having the opportunity both during the training course and when working as an OL to be exposed to a variety of different types of people, from different parts of the country and
the world, who had different approaches to managing their lives, Rachel had gained an understanding and appreciation of the different ways her fellow OLs approached their job as OLs and the various roles each OL played on the team.

Knowing more personal information about each other the OLs developed a sense of community and trust that expanded their individual capacities to better understand their own identities and individual processes related to authoring their lives. This increased level of community and trust served as a catalyst for further development toward self-authorship as it enabled the OLs to see in others what they would like to emulate in themselves. John expressed this concept clearly in his final training course journal completed at the end of the summer. In his journal, John expressed that “having the opportunity to work with such different people and learn why they approached the job differently than me really helped me think deeper about myself and the growth I experienced because I was an OL” (personal communication, August 24, 2012).

This opportunity to learn more about the personal experiences of his fellow OLs and the ways they approached the role of OL may have allowed John to enhance his ability not only to better understand the life experiences of the other members of the OL team, but also to potentially gain a better understanding of his own internal beliefs and values.

The findings of the study show that as the level of community developed, in this case, the OLs understanding and appreciation of each other, participants were better able to move through the disequilibrium of the challenges of the orientation program day (Pizzolato, 2005). When asked to describe when they felt the level of community building and trust began to occur, all study participants mentioned the spring break week of orientation programs as being the first time they began to realize that they needed to
trust and rely on their fellow OLs in order to carry out the duties of their positions. Participants also mentioned that it was during the spring break week of orientation programs when the entire group of OLs began to bond and when the development of the group as a community that took care of each other began to form. These feelings of community and trust building are consistent with the research of Kuh (1991, 1993, 1995) which discusses the value and importance that the out-of-the-classroom experiences students can have on a college campus and the positive effect these experiences can have on students’ learning and development.

**Purposeful Experiences**

The third theme that emerged from the data related to orientation leader experiences that served as a catalyst for self-authorship consisted of a number of activities or events that took place during the OL experience. By being purposeful in the planning of the experiences the OLs would have over the course of their time as OLs, I was able to provide specific catalytic moments to help propel the OLs toward self-authorship. These catalytic moments included: (a) the purposeful selection process of the OL team, (b) the Orientation Leader Training Course, (c) the Spring Break week of orientation programs, and (d) the retreat that took place prior to the summer orientation programs. Although these experiences have been discussed previously in this chapter and the participants own words have already been used to help describe their impact, it is important to discuss each in more detail to provide additional clarity and support for their catalytic effect on the self-authorship development of the OLs.
Purposeful OL selection.

The process for recruitment, selection, and training of the OL staff is rather robust and rigorous. Once the recruitment process is completed toward the middle of the fall semester, the selection process used to choose the next cohort of OLs commences. The selection process takes place in two distinct parts: the group interview and the individual interview. During the group interview portion, each aspiring OL is asked to carry out a series of three activities designed to gain a better understanding of the candidate’s ability to perform the duties of an OL. These activities include Stuff in a Box, Tonight’s Match-ups, and a Student Panel. Each activity is designed to gauge the candidates’ ability to work with others and to work independently to solve a challenge. During the activities, each candidate is given minimal direction and is judged on their ability to successfully complete each activity. All three of these activities were noted by study participants as being unexpected and not a typical component of interviews they had been a part of in the past. Rachel noted in our first interview that the group interview process was:

A bit strange at first because I have never had an interview like that before…I have never had to interview and compete against others who wanted the same job as me, but because I knew I wanted this job I knew I had to show my best stuff…I knew I needed to impress you guys and show that I would be a good orientation leader and that I was the kind of person you would want working with new students. (interview, September 18, 2012)

Those candidates who are successful during the group interview process are invited for an individual interview. During the individual interview, the candidate is asked a standard set of six questions. The candidate then presents a 5-10 minute presentation on a topic of his or her choice. Once all candidates have completed their interviews, the selection committee meets and evaluates the candidates individually on
their merit and collectively related to their fit on the team, with emphasis placed on the special qualities or characteristics each would bring to the team. Although the entire selection process is done purposefully to recruit and select the best students on campus to be OLs, the final selection of the OL team takes on a special level of purposefulness to ensure we are hiring candidates who are capable of being successful in an environment that, although structured, has a significant amount of ambiguity and challenge that requires OLs to navigate through to accomplish the goals of the orientation program.

The selection committee is purposeful in its task of selecting OLs who show potential to be successful in managing and navigating the orientation process and are able to work in an environment without much external assistance with decision-making. This first experience in the course of becoming an OL, the experience of going through the group interview, begins the process of self-authorship as the OLs showcase their skills and abilities.

**Orientation leader training course.**

The Orientation Leader Training Course also served as a purposefully developed catalyst to support self-authorship development of the OLs. The structured nature of a training course could potentially impose many external formulas that the OLs simply needed to follow to ensure success on the job. However, in reality, the course gives the OLs program and institution-specific information and stops short of instructing the OLs on how to implement the information being given to them. The training course is purposefully designed to provide a time when the OLs can learn a little more about each of their fellow OLs, while learning program specific and institutional information they can then share with their new students. The course is structured in a way to allow the
second year OLs (Team Leaders) to be actively involved in the planning and dissemination of course information to the OLs. Additionally, the reflective journals the OLs are asked to write are assigned at strategically important times during the training course to coincide with transitions in the OLs development, such as after the first class, after the spring break week of orientation programs, and at the conclusion of the OL experience. These reflective journals serve as catalysts for self-authorship development because they allow the OL to think purposefully about how the OL experience they are having up to the point they write the journal is impacting their ways of thinking and acting. These reflective journals force the OL to take some time to think and process the experience they are having as an OL and to discuss the current structure of their thinking as they continue to work to move from simply following the external formulas provided to them to developing the internal formulas they will use in life going forward.

In her final reflective journal completed as part of the training course, Jessica mentioned that:

Having the opportunity to put on paper my thoughts about being an OL was good for me although I did not like doing it at the time during the semester. I realize now that the summer is over and my OL experience is ending that taking the time to put my thoughts on paper helped me process my experience better and helped me sort of figure out what I actually learned or was thinking and feeling over the last semester and summer. (personal communication, August 21, 2012)

During each of the individual interviews conducted with study participants and also in the training course journals, the OLs discussed the impact of the training course and the various ways they each referred back to information learned in the training course during the time they were working orientation programs. These references back to the training course lend credence to the belief that the training course served as a catalyst for
self-authorship development by offering the OLs information to use during the orientation programs, but doing so in a way that allows each OL to use the information in their own way and not in a manner dictated by the leadership of the orientation program.

**Spring break orientation programs.**

The spring break week of orientation programs serves as a week-long training course. These programs take place halfway through the OL training course, but require the OLs to carry out all of the responsibilities of an OL without the benefit of the full semester of the training course having been completed. Although some question the fairness of putting the OLs into real-world orientation experiences without the benefit of completing their entire training course, the reality is that having the spring break week of orientation programs to practice and try out some of the new skills and decision-making mechanisms they were introduced to in the training course serves them well after spring break when they re-enter the training course and during the summer months of orientation programs.

The spring break week of orientation programs serves as a catalyst for self-authorship for the OLs in the study by allowing them to apply the knowledge they are learning directly to a real-world context as they make their own decisions when faced with a challenge rather than following external formulas. This week of programs also enabled the study participants to author their own outcomes to the un-expected situations that occur during orientation programs for which they have no specific way of being trained. This week of orientation programs further allows the OLs to respond to situations as they develop using their best judgment and internal decision-making processes. Michael reflected on this process in our second interview when he noted that:
I have never really had a job before where I got to be the one to make the final decision about what to do…I always have had a boss around who told me exactly what to do if I did not know something or something was happening at work that no one ever told me how to do. (interview, October 22, 2012)

**Pre-summer orientation programs retreat.**

During the week leading up to the start of the summer orientation programs, the OLs participate in a two-day retreat that takes place both on and off campus. This retreat is purposefully designed to further engage the OLs in learning more about their fellow OLs, to share additional orientation program information that was not previously covered in the training course, and to allow them to participate in activities designed to challenge their pre-conceived notions about certain groups of people and cultures. Additionally, the retreat is structured in a way as to allow all OLs to interact with each other and ensure that they all have the opportunity to work with each other, something that may not have happened because of the scheduling oddities that exist during the spring break orientation programs.

All the OLs in the study mentioned the pre-summer retreat as an event that impacted the remainder of their summer as an OL and left a lasting impact on their decision-making process. The one activity during the retreat mentioned by all OLs in the study was called Building a Community. This activity allowed the OLs to experience what it feels like to be in either a group of privilege or a group without privilege. It was this activity that seemingly had the strongest impact on the OLs in the study and their future levels of judgment related to those who they feel are different from them. In particular, John seemed to be most strongly impacted by participating in this activity and
stated so in his OL journal completed at the end of the summer. In his journal, John expressed that:

> When we did that community activity at the retreat in May I was not too sure of it at first, but after working all summer and really having some time to reflect on all the different types of students I met I now really understand the point of the activity. After meeting so many different students this summer it was really eye opening for me and helped to remind me to avoid judging other before I get to know them. (personal communication, August 24, 2012)

Having an opportunity to determine for themselves how they would react during this activity, using only their internally defined thoughts and beliefs, as opposed to the thoughts and beliefs of others, allowed the OLs to translate this ability to their work as an OL. This activity served as a catalyst for self-authorship development by allowing the OLs to move from following the external formulas for treating others that they may have learned from their parents, to internally developing their own formulas for treating others that were in-line with their developing view of the world and decision-making processes.

Each of these four purposefully designed experiences became moments of potential for the OLs to experience the process of transitioning from following the formulas provided by external others to developing their own internally generated thoughts and decision-making abilities. Additionally, the intentionality of the development of each of these experiences offers further support for others on college and university campuses to either create or further develop student leadership or student employment opportunities that are purposefully designed to allow other students to have these same sorts of experiences and the corresponding benefits that come with them.
Summary

This study had two main purposes: to describe the effect of serving as an OL on the development self-authorship abilities of a specific group of OLs and to determine if there were specific catalysts for this development of self-authorship. Data were gathered from three sources, including the OLs journals written as part of the Orientation Leader Training Course, observations of them carrying out the duties of OLs, and two separate one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with study participants. This data was used to help answer the two guiding research questions of this study.

Data analysis of the first research question determined that four themes were present for all study participants that served to affect their development toward self-authorship. These themes included (a) understanding and respect for diversity, (b) leadership and decision making, (c) interdependence of the OLs, and (d) personal development and growth. These themes were found to exist either as a result of taking the Orientation Leader Training Course or as an effect of study participant’s service as OLs when working orientation programs.

In respect to the second research question, data analysis determined that three additional themes were present for study participants that served as catalytic consequences of either participating in the Orientation Leader Training Course, serving as an OL during orientation programs, or both. These themes included: (a) training becomes real, (b) community among the OLs, and (c) purposeful experiences.

An analysis of the findings from the data collected from study participants has generated insights that may be useful to those on a college campus who teach or in other ways mentor students. Additionally, this study has provided specific and first-hand
accounts of the developmental process of self-authorship from study participants. The data gathered from the OLs in this study reveal that the experience of taking the Orientation Leader Training Course and serving as an OL does affect self-authorship development and that there can be specific catalysts put into place to encourage this development. The insights that can be taken from this study could aid educators, orientation program directors, student trainers and others in various types of college and university environments not only to better understand the students they are working with currently, but to help educators determine the necessary changes or adjustments to their programs or services to allow for a more pronounced development of self-authorship within future generations of their students.
CHAPTER V
CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study sought to explore how becoming an OL could affect self-authorship and investigated what catalysts exist as part of the OL experience that could lead to self-authorship. In this chapter I will first provide a summary of the key aspects of the study including a discussion of the purpose of the study, the research approach taken, and the research methods utilized. Second, the major conclusions of the study will be discussed followed by the implications for student personnel administrators, orientation program directors, and student employment supervisors resulting from the study. Third, the limitations of the study will be discussed and recommendations for future research will be offered. Finally, a summary of the chapter will be provided.

The purpose of this study was to explore the self-authorship development process of a specific group of undergraduate Orientation Leaders working at the same institution, during the same period of time, who interact with new students on a college campus during orientation programs. Although research has been conducted about orientation programs generally (Pretty, 2004) and their effects on new students and their families in particular (Mann, Andrews, & Rodenburg, 2010), very little research has been undertaken that specifically seeks to better understand the effect of serving as an OL on the OLs themselves.
By exploring first-hand accounts of the OLs experiences through this study, various groups could be aided in their understanding of self-authorship including: student personnel administrators, orientation program directors, student employment supervisors, student trainers, and faculty members who teach and support the development of students. As these groups of individuals come to a better understanding of the self-authorship development process of college students, the work that each carries out could be supported, enhanced, and further developed.

This research was guided by two research questions:

1. In what ways does the orientation leader experience effect self-authorship development?

2. What aspects of the orientation leader experience serve as a catalyst for self-authorship development?

The research approach utilized for this study was developed to ensure that the actual words and first-hand accounts of the OLs were clearly expressed in the study’s findings. A qualitative research approach (Merriam, 2009) ensured that the voices of the participating OLs informed understanding of thoughts, feelings, emotions, and development toward self-authorship as a result of their participation in an Orientation Leader Training Course and their work as an OL. Four OLs were purposefully selected to participate in this study. These OLs were selected from a total cohort of 20 OLs who worked at the same institution during the same period of time, and who interacted with new students during orientation programs. The study took place at a large, public, ethnically and economically diverse university located in a mid-sized urban area of a Midwestern state.
To gather data for the study, I utilized three different sources of information including: the journals each of the OLs wrote as part of the Orientation Leader Training Course, observations of the OLs carrying out their duties, and two separate one-on-one, semi-structured interviews. Using a constant comparative approach, data from the study was analyzed, first using open coding, and then axial and selective coding was used to develop themes (see Appendix K) within the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). By triangulating the data using each of the three data sources, rigor and trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of the study was established. Additionally, the credibility of the research is enhanced through the use of member checking and two peer debriefers familiar with the topic of self-authorship.

Conclusions

Using Baxter Magolda’s four stages of self-authorship development, which include following external formulas, facing crossroads experiences, becoming the author of one’s life, and developing internal foundations as my initial theme coding categories provided a starting point from which I could begin coding the data that ultimately lead me to determine my final themes. Situating my data within the context of Baxter Magolda’s already established stages of self-authorship allowed me to sort and categorize the data effectively to arrive at my final seven themes. Although my final themes are broader in scope than Baxter Magolda’s four stages of self-authorship development, they do directly connect back to each of her stages and support her contention that self-authorship occurs in stages and develops over time by moving from one stage to the next.

The findings of the study indicated that the development of self-authorship is affected as a result of working as an OL in multiple ways and that there are specific
factors and occurrences during the OL experience that serve as a catalyst for self-authorship development. Also, each of Baxter Magolda’s stages of self-authorship development manifested in distinctive ways due to the setting of the study and the uniqueness of the OL position. From the data collected for the study, five specific conclusions can be drawn. Each of these conclusions will be discussed separately below.

**Prolonged OL experience enables Self-Authorship**

Findings of the study indicate that the prolonged nature of the OL experience served to enable the OLs in the study to further develop their abilities to self-author. Because the OL experience extended over the period of a full year, the OLs in the study had the opportunity to interact with their fellow OLs over many months, allowing them to get to know each other better on a personal level. They were able to use the knowledge their fellow OLs gained through this experience to help them create their own internally defined formulas for approaching life going forward. The value of a prolonged OL experience is consistent with the research of Baxter Magolda (1995, 1999a) that found increased levels of meaning-making and epistemological development when students are involved in educationally purposeful activities.

Having the opportunity to see their fellow OLs interacting with new students, to learn more about their personal backgrounds and approaches to life, and to have time to process the changes they were experiencing as a result of these interactions by recording them in their training course journals and expressing them during training course discussions, the OLs in the study each expressed development toward self-authorship. This development and growth toward self-authorship would most likely not be possible if the OL experience was short-term in nature.
**Purposeful planning leads to Interdependence**

Inherent in the term self-authorship is the idea that one self-authors on their own without the aid and assistance of others in their lives. The realities of the OL position, however compels the OLs to be dependent on one another to accomplish the duties of the position and eventually form an interdependent unit where each OL relies on the other OLs to help them do their jobs. A result of this interdependence is that the OLs in the study realized that by working with each other so closely, gaining a better understanding of their fellow OLs, and emulating some of the best traits and qualities they saw in their fellow OLs over time, each OL in the study was partially dependent on their fellow OLs to assist them in their personal development toward self-authorship. Although this type of interdependence could be evidenced in other college interactions both in and out of the classroom, the unique nature of the OL position, coupled with its prolonged duration and the purposefully planned activities of the Orientation Leader Training Course, helped to propel study participants toward self-authorship.

**Disequilibrium provokes Self-Authorship**

Pizzolato (2006) has found that students can be provoked to self-authorship through the experience of disequilibrium in their lives. Inherent in the role of being an OL are many moments of disequilibrium during which the OLs must work through to accomplish the goals of the orientation program. As the OLs in the study experienced moments of disequilibrium or conflict on the job, they were compelled to reconsider or develop their own formulas and processes to work through the disequilibrium and accomplish the task at hand as they worked with new students in their orientation groups. This realization matches closely with the findings of Pizzolato (2005) in her study of
provocative moments that lead to self-authorship development. Through the process of considering the various perspectives of their fellow OLs and the new students in their orientation groups, the OLs in the study began to revisit their personal approaches to how to deal with experiences on the job that were unfamiliar to them. Because of these moments of disequilibrium the OLs experienced, each was propelled toward enhanced levels of self-authorship that they may not have experienced if they were not OLs.

**Application of knowledge aids Self-Authorship**

In addition to the three conclusions already discussed, findings of the study indicate that having the opportunity to directly apply the information that they were learning in the Orientation Leader Training Course by performing the duties of an OL aided the self-authorship of the OLs in the study. The process of learning orientation program information, applying it on the job, and having the opportunity to reflect on this learning and application process, in both their training course journals and course discussions, further aided progress toward self-authorship for the OLs in the study. This structured and purposeful process of learning, applying, and reflecting could be recreated in other student leadership or employment situations on college and university campuses. The findings of this study support the notion that the learning of program-specific information, combined with direct application of this learned knowledge and sufficient time to reflect on the learning and application process, aid self-authorship development.

**OL Experience Transforms Thoughts and Actions**

A final conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that the OL experience is transformational in nature and unique compared with many other student leadership or employment situations on college and university campuses. The OLs in the study
expressed in their training course journals and one-on-one interviews how their thoughts and actions were transformed as a result of being an OL. The skills and abilities gained, such as how to effectively communicate, how to prioritize and how to work as a team, are ones the OLs in the study can take with them after college and continue to implement in their decision-making processes during the remainder of their college experience. This transformation of the OLs’ thought processes related to their understanding of diversity, their self-identity, and the OL community they joined, aided the OLs in this study to develop toward self-authorship. This enabled them to more fully develop their own internally developed formulas of thought and action to utilize in their lives going forward instead of continuing to rely on external formulas provided to them by others in their lives.

**Implications**

The findings of this study support the notion that self-authorship development can be encouraged through intentional creation of situations and experiences (Baxter Magolda, 1999a, 2009a) for students in which external formulas do not readily exist. In the orientation program used as the context of this study, some of the situations lacking apparent formulas were introduced during the Orientation Leader Training Course, whereas others were a function of the OL job duties because the OL position is both a form of student employment and student leadership. This kind of learning by doing (Kolb, 1984) may be possible in any student employment opportunity on a college campus that requires various 21st century skills (Arnett, 2006; Baxter Magolda, 2007) needed in today’s knowledge economy such as the ability to adjust to changing situations, strong skills in decision making, problem solving, and conflict resolution, and the ability
to collaborate and work with others. Several aspects of this particular student employment and leadership situation, such as the need for the OLs to work both independently and interdependently and their need to adjust daily to the needs and desires of the students in their orientation groups, seem to optimize the OLs capacity to enhance their flexibility and adaptability to new situations. Additionally, the role of an OL lends itself to developing increased abilities to self-author and provides a catalyst that can serve to propel them toward self-authorship.

Although some of these aspects could be replicated in other types of student employment and leadership situations, many are inherent to the OL position. For example, the duration of time the OLs spent working the orientation programs provided the OLs with multiple opportunities to confront complicated situations and solve them with increasingly complex methods and approaches. The amount of time the OLs spent working the programs also enhanced the impact made by the diversity within the OL group. Had their experience been comprised of only a week-long orientation program, the OLs might not have been as significantly impacted by the provocative situations they encountered. Also, they might not have had time to get to know each other well enough to be able to articulate how interacting with diverse others had affected them and their view of others. When possible, orientation or other student employment or leadership programs designed to support self-authorship development would benefit from an extended time period (Mack, 2010) to allow for maximum potential for self-authorship development and growth. Although not all programs can be designed with this extended time period, program facilitators do have control over many other aspects of their programs. Program facilitators should also be purposeful about choosing a staff that not
only represents the ethnic and cultural diversity of their campus, but also is diverse in many other ways ranging from academic majors, geographic hometowns, age, rank in school, and personality type (Mack, 2010). This one component of the orientation program development is critical to providing future OLs with the necessary catalysts to help ensure they have the same opportunities to develop and grow from their own OL experience.

Another aspect of the orientation program used for this study that facilitated OLs encountering catalysts was the Spring Break week orientation programs. This week of programs allowed the training to become real for the OLs. It also gave them a chance to test their knowledge and skills, and forced them to challenge their approaches to the job and develop more complex ways of knowing, acting, and trusting others. Although this is an aspect that would probably be the most difficult to replicate in other student employment or leadership situations, it could be possible to make modifications to portions of other student employment or leadership situations to allow for this level of growth and development toward self-authorship to occur.

Specifically, the findings of this study offer implications for three unique groups including: student personnel administrators, orientation program directors, and professionals on college campuses who supervise student employees in all types of student employment positions.

**Student Personnel Administrators**

Professionals on college campuses charged with assisting students’ development, from incoming first-year students who are potentially unclear of their purpose or future direction to graduating seniors who are hopefully much more confident and assured of
their beliefs, values, and identities, could benefit from the findings of this study in several ways. First, gaining a better understanding of the concept of self-authorship and of how its development could be enhanced through on-campus employment and leadership opportunities allows those who design and develop these sorts of experiences to create experiences that are specifically designed to affect development of and be catalytic in nature to support self-authorship development. This could be particularly helpful for those working in residential life areas of campuses related to the attention they give to the environmental factors of their housing facilities and the impact these could have on the ways and pace of self-authorship development. Purposeful design of facilities in such a way as to provide adequate lounge, meeting, and student interaction spaces could elicit enhanced opportunities for additional student interaction and ultimately the development of their self-authorship.

Second, if self-authorship is, as Baxter Magolda (2004) states, “a developmental goal fundamental to successful adaptation in the world of the twenty-first century” (p. 15), then it should be incumbent on professionals working with students on a college campus to understand fully the concept of self-authorship and to position their programs and services in such a way as to better ensure they are doing their part to aid their students’ development toward self-authorship.

Third, as student personnel administrators are increasingly called on to engage with the parents of their students, gaining a fuller understanding of the concept of the self-authorship process of students could aid their interactions with the parents they encounter. The current millennial generation of traditional-age college students relies heavily on the advice, support, and direction their parents have provided them throughout
their childhood and into young adulthood (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Thus many of these students are finding it difficult to make the adjustment to the college environment where many times they are asked to make decisions and act on information in ways with which they are simply not familiar because their parents have always taken care of such tasks for them. Having an enhanced understanding of the self-authorship development process of students could aid student personnel administrators not only as they work with students, but also as they interact with their parents.

Lastly, this study could assist student personnel administrators in better understanding their own personal development toward self-authorship. To be most effective in aiding college students’ development, it is important that those working with college students continually strive to better understand themselves and the extent to which their personal beliefs, values, and identities can affect the relationships they are forming with the students whom they are charged with developing as individuals.

**Orientation Program Directors**

The findings of this study could also aid individuals on college campuses charged with and responsible for the development and coordination of orientation programs for new students. It was determined from the study that several specific factors related to being an OL both affect the progression of self-authorship development and serve as catalysts for such development including: understanding and respect for diversity, the development of enhanced leadership and decision making abilities, the level of interdependence occurring within the OL group, the personal development and growth that the OLs in the study experienced as a result of their time serving as an OL, the reality of the training becoming real after the spring break week of orientation programs, the
level of community that develops as a result of the OL experience, and numerous purposefully designed experiences that took place during the course of time each study participant was serving as an OL.

Using this study as a guide for future development of Orientation Leader Training Courses or other forms of OL training could be helpful to other orientation program directors as they attempt to be purposeful in their approach to training to increase the likelihood that the end result of an OLs participation in the training and his or her time serving as an OL can be a developmental and educational experience that also allows the OL to develop his or her ability to self-author his or her life as he or she progresses through college, into young adulthood, and ultimately out of the institution and into the work world.

**Student Employment Supervisors**

This study also revealed the potential impact of purposefully designing employment situations for college students in such a way that the potential for progression toward self-authorship becomes more likely. For those on college campuses responsible for the supervision and development of students in an employment situation, it is important to understand the role and impact that purposefully designing employment situations play to allow for the levels of self-discovery and growth needed to move toward being able to self-author one’s life. By designing campus employment opportunities in ways that purposefully and meaningfully allow students to encounter moments of disequilibrium and discomfort, supplemented by equally purposefully designed mechanisms for reflection and practice, those who supervise students in employment situations position their students to discover new and different strengths
about themselves that they may not have known they had. These experiences could be
the catalyst needed to propel them toward developing the ability to self-author.

Limitations of the Study

Every research study presents various limitations that should be addressed. Since
I served as the primary data collection instrument for this study it is possible some
limitations could have resulted from personal bias even though every possible precaution
was taken to avoid this. It is also possible that if an outside party had conducted both sets
of interviews with each of the OLs that the OLs may have shared new or different
information with an outside interviewer. Furthermore, both interviews with the OLs were
conducted after they had completed their OL experience. It is possible that if data would
have been collected at different points in time during the OL experience that the OLs
would have been better able to share their experiences and would have had new or
different moments of disequilibrium as they progressed through the experience of being
an OL. The use of pre-OL experience interviews also could have added understanding of
where the OLs were related to self-authorship abilities as they came into the study.

Additionally, this study included only participants from one institution, thus
limiting the applicability of the findings that resulted from the study. The experiences of
the OLs who participated in the study that were found to affect and act as catalysts for
self-authorship were imbedded in a specific orientation program and shaped by the
characteristics of the institution in which the orientation program and the study took
place. The findings of this study may be applicable only to other institutions of similar
size and student body characteristics. Likewise, the findings would be most applicable to
institutions with a similar process for orientation (i.e., one day programs held throughout
the entire summer) and that use an orientation leader training course as the mechanism to
train OLs, as opposed to more short-term training programs. Expanding the study to
include institutions of varying types or examining the use of a variety of OL training
methods could allow for comparison across training processes and their effect on self-
authorship development of college student leaders.

Next, the duration of the study is also a limitation and may have affected the
findings that were discovered. The study occurred over one academic semester and one
summer of working as an OL. It would be valuable to expand the study to include both a
longitudinal examination of the self-authorship development of participants after their
time as OLs, as well as a round of interviews with future OLs to compare effects of and
catalysts for self-authorship from year to year to determine if differences are present. It
would be useful to follow up with study participants a few years after the conclusion of
this study to examine whether self-authorship development is transferable to other
situations or is embedded in the OL experience in any particular way.

Lastly, the use of self-authorship theory as the lens through which the OL
experience was investigated caused the study to take on the same limitations as those
placed on the theory of self-authorship in general. Although specific questions were
asked of each participant during the one-on-one, semi-structured interviews related to
other influences in their lives beyond being an OL that could be affecting their self-
authorship development, I did not fully examine the effect of other factors on identity
development such as race, social class, ethnicity, or sexual orientation that could have
affected the OLs development of self-authorship.
Recommendations for Future Research

Although the findings of this study provide insight and evidence to support the notion that serving as an OL affects self-authorship development and that through purposeful planning catalysts can be put into place to promote self-authorship, additional research is needed to continue to uncover further knowledge related to the developmental process of the self-authorship of college students. Baxter Magolda (2007) has indicated that one of the needed areas for future research is to explore the educational practices that promote self-authorship (p. 79), therefore, four recommendations for future research and their potential beneficiaries are discussed below.

For individuals who work on college campuses, having additional insight and knowledge of the self-authorship development process of the students they work with and advocate on behalf of could prove valuable. Additional research is needed focusing on the various roles student leaders have on a college campus and how individuals who work with students can better work with them to purposefully support their self-authorship development. Although this study was specifically focused on the self-authorship development process of a particular group of student leaders, OLs in this case, future studies could explore other types of student leaders on a college campus to provide additional knowledge to aid those who work with students outside-the-classroom to develop or modify their programs and services to better meet the needs of college students who are in the process of moving from following external formulas to creating an internal sense of their own beliefs, values, and identities.

Further research could also be conducted to examine other ways in which the training process for other leadership development and student employment opportunities
could provide catalysts for self-authorship development. Focusing on other forms of student leadership and employment training could shed light on whether the catalysts that emerged from this research are particular to the experience of becoming an orientation leader, or could extend to other on-campus leadership or employment opportunities. This research direction could further explore how training and hands-on experience reinforce self-authorship development in leadership and student employment opportunities beyond that of an OL. For those individuals on college campuses who are charged with the training and development of student leaders or student employees working in various campus offices in support roles, having additional research on training processes that have the potential to lead to self-authorship development could provide the resources and support needed to make modifications to student training and development programs that are already in place.

By design, this study included participants from only one institution of higher education and one orientation program. This inherently limits the applicability of the findings that can be drawn from this study. The experiences of the participants that affected their self-authorship development and served as catalysts for self-authorship were imbedded in one specific orientation program and were shaped by the characteristics of the one institution under study. That being said, individuals on college campuses charged with developing orientation programs could be aided by further research being conducted that widened the research base to include programs across institutions, both public and private, composed of a wide variety of types of orientation program designs and OL training methodologies.
Additional research could also be conducted that specifically addresses the role faculty members play on college campuses in helping to develop, mentor, advise, and support their students’ self-authorship development process. Although this study can contribute to the base of informational research studies already conducted on self-authorship development, it does not offer much aid or assistance to faculty members looking for specific ways to help provide mechanisms for self-authorship development in a classroom setting that is not specifically designed to serve as a means of training for OLs, such as the Orientation Leader Training Course discussed in this study.

**Summary of the Chapter**

This chapter provided a discussion of the findings discovered in a study designed to investigate what effects and catalysts are present that served to aid self-authorship development of a specific group of OLs charged to work with new students during their New Student Orientation programs. The findings of this study support the notion that student employment and leadership environments, such as being an OL on a college campus, affect the development of self-authorship and serve as a catalyst for self-authorship development to occur.

Additionally, conclusions were provided and discussed as they relate to how self-authorship developed as a result of being an OL and implications for various groups were discussed. Several limitations of this study were explained that, if addressed, would have enhanced the study. Various recommendations for future research were offered including recommendations for groups such as: student personnel administrators, student trainers, orientation program directors, and faculty members. Additional research that focuses on these specific populations of individuals would add to the existing base of research and
would enhance what we currently know about the effect of and potential catalysts for self-authorship development of college students.

It is my desire that the findings of this study will assist college student personnel administrators and others who work with and are charged with aiding in the development of college students to better understand the role self-authorship development can play in the overall growth and development of college students. I hope that other researchers and practitioners will use the findings of this study to develop additional research studies that further investigate the role student employment and leadership positions that students hold on college campuses can affect and serve as catalysts for their self-authorship development. Finally, I hope this study will provide additional support for the use of self-authorship theory when studying students’ growth and development while they are in college.
REFERENCES


# APPENDIX A

## ORIENTATION LEADER TRAINING AGENDA

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<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>TOPICS</th>
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| **Week 1**  
January 9 | Our First Class (4 points)  
Training Manual, Nametags, & Team Postcard Picture | |
| **Week 2**  
January 16 | Martin Luther King Day | |
| | No Class—Complete your Advising Scavenger Hunt! | |
| **Week 3**  
January 23 | OL Responsibilities & Skill Development (4 points)  
Morning Meet & Greet, Check-in, and Customer Service | Advising Scavenger Hunt |
| **Week 4**  
January 30 | OL Responsibilities & Skill Development (2 points)  
Group Facilitation and Placement Testing | |
| **Week 5**  
February 6 | OL Responsibilities & Skill Development (4 points)  
SEAS Training; Your Gold & Blue Preview | |
| **Week 6**  
February 13 | OL Skill & Knowledge Development (2 points)  
Conflict Resolution; Group Leader Logistics (Continued) | Gold & Blue Preview |
| **Week 7**  
February 20 | OL Responsibilities (4 points)  
Academic Advising; Class Registration; High School vs. College | |
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<td>Practice Makes Perfect! (4 points)</td>
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<td>Orientation Walk-Thru; Orientation FAQs</td>
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<td>Spring Break Programs!</td>
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<td>Week 11</td>
<td>How’d We Do? (2 points)</td>
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<td>Spring Break Reflection</td>
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<td>Meal Plans; Housing; Office of Accessibility; Financial Aid &amp; Student Accounts</td>
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<td>Week 14</td>
<td>Service Project! (2 points)</td>
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<td>Week 15</td>
<td>Student Populations (2 points)</td>
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<td>Transfer Students; Adult Students</td>
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<td>Week 16</td>
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<td>Orientation Leader Meet &amp; Greet</td>
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<td>Student Union, room 335</td>
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<td>Service Project Reflection</td>
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## APPENDIX B

### 2012 ORIENTATION LEADER COHORT

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September 1, 2012

Dear Michael,

As we finish up the summer of orientation programs and begin another school year, I want to invite you to participate in a research study I am conducting related to the self-authorship development process of current college students.

This study will utilize three separate data sources including interviews, observations, and a review of written documents. In order to accomplish this, I am inviting you to participate in two separate 30-60 minute interviews in which I will ask you a set of questions and ask that you respond honestly to my questions. These interviews will be audio recorded and later transcribed into written form. For the observation portion of the data collection process, I will observe your interactions with new students as you are performing the duties of an Orientation Leader. These observations will take place for approximately one hour over two separate observation periods. In addition, I would like your permission to review the journal assignments you completed as part of the Orientation Leader Training Course.

Your participation in this research study will benefit my research study and the higher education research community. This research intends to investigate the catalytic effects of participation in an Orientation Leader Training Course and working as an Orientation Leader on the self-authorship development of current college students. It is a hope of this research that information will be gathered that aids faculty and staff members of institutions of higher education in better understanding the developmental process of self-authorship in current college students.

There are no known risks to you as a result of participation in this research study. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. No penalty to you will occur as a result of choosing not to participate in this study. You may also choose to withdraw
from the study at any time. The data collected as a result of this study will be coded in such a way as to protect your identity and all research related materials will be kept in a secure location that will only be accessible to the researcher.

Please note this study is one of the necessary requirements to complete my doctoral degree in Secondary Education at the University of Akron. If you should have any questions about this study, you may contact me at 330-671-0326 or my advisor, Dr. Denise Stuart at 330-972-8468. This research study has been reviewed and approved by the University of Akron Institutional Review Board. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may call the Institutional Review Board at 330-972-7666.

By checking the box below, you acknowledge that you:

1) Have read the information provided about and all of your questions have been answered,
2) Agreed to participate in this study, and
3) Have been given a copy of this consent letter for future reference.

☐ I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Mr. Christopher Tankersley
Researcher and Doctoral Candidate,
The University of Akron
Department of Curricular and Instructional Studies
Simmons Hall, 209
Akron, Ohio
330-671-0326

Dr. Denise Stuart
Associate Professor and Advisor
The University of Akron
Department of Curricular and Instructional Studies
Zook Hall, 10
Akron, OH 44325-4205
330-972-8468
APPENDIX D

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Becoming an Orientation Leader: A Catalyst for Self-Authorship Development

**Introduction:** You are invited to participate in a research project being conducted as part of a doctoral dissertation research study at the University of Akron. Mr. Christopher Tankersley, a doctoral student and Director of New Student Orientation at the University of Akron will conduct the data collection.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study is to learn about the student experience at the University of Akron and specifically as an Orientation Leader.

**Procedures:** The researcher is requesting that you participate in two separate 30-60 minute long individual interviews. During the interviews you will be asked questions about your experiences as a student at the University of Akron and your experiences as an Orientation Leader. With your consent, the interview will be audio recorded.

**Risks:** There are no potential risks to participants.

**Benefits:** There are no direct benefits to participants. The data collected will be used as part of a doctoral dissertation research study; therefore any benefit generated by this research will be directed toward the interviewer, not the participant.

**Right to Refuse or Withdraw:** Participation in these interviews is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time, with no penalty for doing so. You may also choose to not answer any individual question during the interviews, or leave the interviews when/if you see fit.

**Confidential Data Collection:** Your identity will remain confidential in all reporting of data. Only gender, level status, and college identifiers (i.e., male University College sophomore, female Arts and Sciences junior) will be used in reporting the data. No names will be associated with any comments or responses. Your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent of the law.
Confidentiality of Records: Only the researcher will have access to the audio recordings, interview transcripts, and consent forms. Recordings will be kept in a secure location until the project is complete, at which time they will be erased. The informed consent forms will be kept in a separate locked cabinet from the audio recordings and transcripts.

Who to contact with questions: If you have any questions about this study, you may contact Mr. Christopher Tankersley at ctanker@uakron.edu or 330-671-0326 or Dr. Denise Stuart at dstuart@uakron.edu or 330-972-8468. This project has been reviewed and approved by The University of Akron Institutional Review Board. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may call the IRB at 330-972-7666.

I have read the information provided above and all of my questions have been answered. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I will receive a copy of this consent form for my information.

_______________________________
Name of Participant            Agree (Please Check)☐
Date
APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL #1

Introduction – Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. The purpose of this interview is to give you an opportunity to reflect on your experiences during the Spring Break and summer 2012 NSO Programs.

To start, tell me a little bit about yourself…maybe a few things I would not already know about you.

Drawing Exercise: 5-10 minutes

1. Thinking back to the day before the first day of NSO programs over Spring Break, draw a picture that illustrates your expectations for the first day/first week of NSO.

2. Describe your expectations. What role did you see yourself playing?

3. Now, thinking back to the end of the day on your first day of work during the Spring Break programs, draw a picture that illustrates what the day/week was really like.

4. Describe how the week actually materialized.

5. What most surprised you about the first day/week of NSO?

6. Describe a situation that happened during NSO for which you felt well trained to handle.

7. Describe a situation that happened during NSO for which you felt challenged to handle. How did you cope with that situation? What aspects of the training you had during the Orientation Leader Training Course helped you handle the situation?

8. What most surprised you about the Orientation Leader Training Course? Thinking back to Spring Break and then throughout the summer, describe some ways in which each day was similar and ways in which each day was different. How did you approach the differences of each day? Did reacting to difference get easier or harder as the week went on?
9. Did you have any negative experiences during the Spring Break or summer NSO programs? How did you respond to that situation?

10. Thinking about the new students you interacted with during the Spring Break or summer NSO programs, think about a student who was most different from you? Describe what it was like to work with that student.

11. Describe your role as Orientation Leader when you are assigned to a group of new students.

12. Describe your role as Orientation Leader when you are assigned to a family/parent group.

13. Describe your role as Orientation Leader when you are staffing the registration room for the day.

14. Describe the role that Chris, Carly, Cory, and Nino play during orientation days.

15. Describe the role that the Team Leaders play during orientation days.

16. What went through your head when an NSO participant (student, parent, or UA rep) asks you a question to which you don’t know the answer? In the eyes of NSO participants, you are the UA expert. How do you react to that?

17. How did it feel to be on display 24-7 during NSO?

18. How did you judge whether or not you’re doing an effective job as an Orientation Leader?

19. How did your experiences during the first week of NSO over Spring Break shape how you approached the rest of your OL training and the summer NSO programs?

20. How do you think becoming an OL (the application process, the OL training class, the Spring Break NSO programs, and working NSO programs over the summer) has affected who you are and the way you see yourself? In what ways are you the same? In what ways are you different? Has the experience affected your beliefs or values?

21. How do you think it has affected how you see others? The university? Anything else?
22. Tell me about what you’ve learned about relating to other people from your OL experience?

23. Tell me what you feel you have learned about yourself from your OL experience?
APPENDIX F

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL #2

Introduction – Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. The purpose of this second interview is to give you an opportunity to further reflect on your experiences during your time as an Orientation Leader now that a few additional months have passed since we last spoke.

1. To start, tell me about how the past few months have gone for you? Any major changes since we last spoke? Tell me about your classes? What about anything of note you are doing outside of the classroom?

2. How would you describe the Orientation Leader job to someone who has no knowledge of the orientation program?

3. What most surprised you about being an Orientation Leader?

4. How was the job different from what you thought it would be as of the last training class before the Spring Break programs?

5. Talk about how your approach to the job changed over the summer months. In what ways was your approach in March different from the way you did your job in by the end of the summer?

6. Describe a situation that happened during NSO for which you felt well trained to handle?

7. Describe a situation that happened during NSO for which you felt challenged to handle? How did you cope with that situation? What aspects of the training and your experience as an OL to that point helped you handle the situation?

8. Did you have any negative experiences during the NSO programs? How did you respond to that situation?
9. Reflecting back on the summer, think about a student who was most different from you? Describe what it was like to work with that student.

10. Describe a specific situation when an NSO participant (student, parent, or UA rep) asked you a question to which you didn’t know the answer? How did you handle the situation? Looking back, would you handle it any differently now?

11. How did you judge whether or not you were doing an effective job as an Orientation Leader? When you felt like you weren’t doing an effective job, what did you do to remedy the situation?

12. So far, we’ve focused primarily on your individual experiences of and approaches to being an Orientation Leader. Now I’d like to talk about your experience working as a part of a larger group of Orientation Leaders. Describe the Orientation Leader staff as a group.

13. In what ways, if any, did the group evolve throughout the summer (become a team)?

14. In what ways, if any, did the way you interacted with each other evolve?

15. Describe the process by which you began to rely on each other?

16. What were the pros and cons of working in such a diverse group?

17. Thinking back to the Orientation Leader Training Course, what suggestions do you have about the order of the training? Is there anything you feel should be moved to occur before or after Spring Break rather than where it was scheduled?

18. What was the most meaningful aspect of Orientation Leader Training Course?

19. If you were designing the Orientation Leader Training Course for next year, what would it look like?

20. What was the most meaningful part of the retreat that occurred in early May? What part of the retreat most impacted how you did your job?

21. Describe one example of “Building a Community” in real life? Did you notice students at NSO who seemed privileged or not-privileged?
22. How do you think being an OL (the application process, the OL training class, the
Spring Break programs, and the summer NSO programs) has affected who you are
and the way you see yourself? In what ways are you the same? In what ways are you
different? How has the experience affected your beliefs or values?

23. How do you think it has affected how you see others? The university? Anything
else? Tell me about what you’ve learned about relating to other people from your OL
experience.

24. Is there anything you thought we’d talk about today, that we didn’t cover? Is there
anything else you’d like to add?

25. Do you have any questions for me?
APPENDIX G

ORIENTATION LEADER JOURNAL PROMPT #1

Orientation Leader Training Course
Journal Prompt #1
Spring Semester 2012

Name: ___________________________________
Date: __________________________________
Student ID Number: ________________________

Please type your response in the space found below each question. Feel free to use as much space to type as you need.

Journal Prompt #1

Now that you have begun your Orientation Leader training, reflect on your decision to apply for and accept the position of Orientation Leader. Describe the process by which you came to your decision by answering the questions below.

1). Why did you decide to apply for an Orientation Leader position?

2). What were your other options for courses during the spring semester and/or employment during the summer (i.e., what would you have done with your time if you were not participating in orientation leader training this spring and were not working orientation programs this summer)?

3). Once you were offered the position, describe how you made your decision to accept the position? Describe the process you went through?

4). Were you happy with your decision at the time you accepted the position? Why or why not?

5). Would you make the same decision today? Why or why not?
APPENDIX H

ORIENTATION LEADER JOURNAL PROMPT #2

Orientation Leader Training Course
Journal Prompt #2
Spring Semester 2012

Name: ___________________________________
Date: ____________________________________
Student ID Number: ________________________

Please type your response in the space found below the question. Feel free to use as much space to type as you need.

Journal Prompt #2

In 1-2 pages, please describe your experiences as an Orientation Leader during the spring break programs. Tell me about both the positive and negative experiences you had during the week. What were you ready to handle? What took you by surprise during the week? How did the training class help or not help you feel prepared for the week? How did you personally feel about working the spring break programs?
Orientation Leader Training Course
Journal Prompt #3
Summer 2012

Name: ________________________________
Date: ________________________________
Student ID Number: ____________________

Please type your response in the space found below the question. Feel free to use as much space to type as you need.

Journal Assignment #3

In 1-2 pages, please describe the totality of your experiences as an Orientation Leader. Think about the entire past year, from the time you heard about the position, to applying for the position, the interview process, training class experience, and finally working as an Orientation Leader.
APPENDIX J

IRB APPROVAL LETTER
NOTICE OF APPROVAL

August 14, 2012

Christopher Tankersley
84 Castle Blvd.
Akron, Ohio 44313

From: Sharon McWhorter, IRB Administrator

Re: IRB Number 20120806 "An Investigation of the Role of Becoming an Orientation Leader on Self-Authorship Development"

Thank you for submitting your Exemption Request for the referenced study. Your request was approved on August 10, 2012. The protocol represents minimal risk to subjects and matches the following federal category for exemption:

☐ Exemption 1 – Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices.

☒ Exemption 2 – Research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior.

☐ Exemption 3 – Research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior not exempt under category 2, but subjects are elected or appointed public officials or candidates for public office.

☐ Exemption 4 – Research involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens.

☐ Exemption 5 – Research and demonstration projects conducted by or subject to the approval of department or agency heads, and which are designed to study, evaluate, or otherwise examine public programs or benefits.

☐ Exemption 6 – Taste and food quality evaluation and consumer acceptance studies.

Annual continuation applications are not required for exempt projects. If you make changes to the study’s design or procedures that increase the risk to subjects or include activities that do not fall within the approved exemption category, please contact me to discuss whether or not a new application must be submitted. Any such changes or modifications must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.

Please retain this letter for your files. This office will hold your exemption application for a period of three years from the approval date. If you wish to continue this protocol beyond this period, you will need to submit another Exemption Request. If the research is being conducted for a master’s thesis or doctoral dissertation, the student must file a copy of this letter with the thesis or dissertation.

☒ Approved consent form/s enclosed

Cc: Denise Stuart - Advisor
Cc: Stephanie Woods – IRB Chair
APPENDIX K
CODE LIST

Themes Related to Self-Authorship Effects:

Understanding and Respect for Diversity: Data related to this theme included the OLs' ethnic and cultural backgrounds, understanding of personality types, the consistent nature of the diverse experiences of the OLs, working through conflict, and development of understanding related to the importance of the role of diversity in the OLs' lives.

Leadership and Decision Making: Data related to this theme included examples of the OLs adjusting to the changing nature of the orientation day, being flexible and adapting as needed, making timely and responsive decisions, and being able to prioritize activities.

Interdependence of the OLs: Data related to this theme included the OLs' understanding of the complexity of the relationship they had with each other, a development of a reliance on each other to accomplish the goals of the orientation program, and their need to work as a team and collaborate as needed during the day.

Personal Development and Growth: Data related to this theme included the OLs' development of increased levels of self-efficacy, a marked level of growth in their self-assurance, and increasing levels of confidence and independence.

Themes Related to Self-Authorship Catalysts:

Training Becomes Real: Data related to this theme included the OLs placing into context after the spring break orientation programs the information they had learned in the training course before spring break, the OLs encountering a level of disequilibrium strong enough to propel them to approach the post-spring break training differently, and the importance of incorporating the information they learned into their daily work with new students.
Community among the OLs: Data related to this theme included the OLs forming a smaller community within the larger community of the university, the increased levels of trust they felt for each other over the course of time, and connections each other was able to form with the other OLs throughout their OL experience.

Purposeful Experiences: Data related to this theme included such experiences as the OL selection process, orientation leader training course, spring break orientation programs, and the pre-summer orientation programs retreat.