EMERGING ADULTHOOD:
THE PURSUIT OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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EMERGING ADULTHOOD:
THE PURSUIT OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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Thesis

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

American culture looks much different than it did fifty years ago when the baby-boomer generation was entering the college gates. What was once an educational pathway for a select few members of society, has evolved into a pathway for many individuals across social, racial, and economic lines. Higher education has evolved to become the main pathway toward the individuality, financial independence, and self-sufficiency associated with adulthood. In order to acquire academic credentials and enhance their path to adulthood, individual aspirations must conform to prescribed academic offerings and career trajectories. Additionally, individuals are required to make long-term decisions without a solidified sense of self or agency, subsequently creating a disastrous cycle of indecision and a prolonged pathway to adulthood. For these reasons, the relationship between individuals and higher education has changed in the twenty-first century. This change has led to a largely transitional phase of life between adolescence and adulthood called emerging adulthood.

The term adolescence was first coined in 1904 by developmental psychologist G. Stanley Hall (Swartwood, 2012). As a student of Darwinian perspectives of human evolution, Hall focused on physical maturation, cognition, and sexuality to support his claim that adolescence was different than childhood. An adolescent experiences rapid physical growth during puberty, increasingly complex ways of understanding their world,
and more serious interest in romantic partners. In addition, historical shifts in child labor laws and compulsory education delayed the transition from childhood to adulthood. The changing social environment influenced children's experience of development, allowing for more leisure time and social activities. This contextual change of childhood in industrialized societies provided the opportunity to separate adolescence from childhood, and better define the experience of individuals as they approached adulthood.

By the mid-twentieth century, differences between the learning capacities of children and adolescents became more apparent through the contributions of cognitive psychology. Children tend to think in concrete terms, whereas the ability to think abstractly arises during the adolescent years (Piaget, 1952). Similar to the cognitive capacity to think abstractly, adolescents start to have an increased awareness and understanding of themselves. This leads to a period of knowledge formation and identity exploration in which the individual constructs a self-concept. The social expectation for adolescents is for them to think at advanced levels and have a strong internal foundation, yet adolescents lack perspective taking ability and are predominately egocentric (Kegan, 1994). Although an adolescent may be egocentric, this is the first time their cognitive abilities allow for individual differentiation to occur. Therefore, egocentrism can serve as a useful tool for individuals as they prepare for the self-sufficiency which constitutes adult roles and responsibilities.

The journey out of adolescence is predominately dependent on two occurrences: graduating high school and turning eighteen years old. Cobb (1995) defines adolescence as "a period in life that begins with biological maturation, during which individuals must accomplish certain developmental tasks, and that ends when they achieve a self-sufficient
state of adulthood as defined by society” (p. 27). In general, human development is gradual, proceeds at different rates, and occurs in sociocultural context (Swartwood, 2012). Achievement of a self-sufficient state of adulthood is a long and arduous journey. Some individuals may actively construct and negotiate their developmental trajectory, whereas others may conform to easily attainable and predictable pathways toward individuality and adulthood (Schwartz, Côté & Arnett, 2005). The latter reflects an impulsive and circumstantial process of individualization, whereas the former is indicative of a process dependent on self-regulation and intent. Therefore, the journey beyond adolescence is largely individualistic, with a variety of trajectories based on an individual's investment in their future. The expectations of individuals before age eighteen and after are very different. Suddenly, they must navigate their own lives and choose pathways in education or work to become self-sufficient and financially independent; the predetermined pathways of adolescence end.

It is naive to assume an individual immediately becomes an adult on their eighteenth birthday, solely by their legal status. Development does not stop at that age, rather it continues as an individual navigates experiences and opportunities beyond the generally structured and supportive environment of adolescence. Decision-making opportunities are abundant when legal adult status is achieved. Achievement of legal adult status allows the individual to vote, consent to marry, and be liable for their actions. This is also when individuals consider pursuing a college education or entering the workforce. The pursuit of a college education requires the legal adult to navigate educational and career pathways, student loan options, and living arrangements. All of which are decisions which impact one's development and future.
Aside from age, marriage and parenthood have been historically considered as social indicators that an individual has reached adulthood (Arnett, 1998; Fox, 1967). These two indicators signify that an individual has some level of authority over their lives and have reached a level of self-sufficiency to support both themselves, their partner, and their children. In the U.S., the median age at first marriage in 2010 was nearly 27 for females and 28 for males (Copen, Daniels, Vespa & Mosher, 2012; U.S. Decennial Census, 2010). In comparison, the median age at first marriage in 1960 was 21 for females and 24 for males (U.S. Decennial Census, 2010). These data also demonstrate that educational attainment is positively correlated with increased age at first marriage (Copen, Daniels, Vespa & Mosher, 2012). This is theorized to be a result of widening educational access, greater acceptance of pre-marital sex and cohabitation, and women entering the workforce (Tanner & Arnett, 2011).

Changing domestic and professional roles have been correlated with women's greater presence in higher education (Thelin, 2011). Women now represent a majority of the college-going population and attain postsecondary education at greater rates than men (Newman, Courtier & Scurry, 2004; Thelin, 2011). "Among first-time students seeking bachelor’s degrees who started full time at a 4-year college in 2004, a higher percentage of females than males completed bachelor’s degrees within 6 years (61 vs. 56 percent)—a pattern that held across all racial/ethnic groups" (Ross et al., 2012, Executive Summary). Therefore, the relationship between individuals and higher education is changing, as the meaning of adulthood evolves.

There has been a shift toward more individualized, subjective notions of what it means to be an adult in industrialized nations like the United States, regardless of race,
ethnicity, and gender (Tanner & Arnett, 2011). This illustrates how the conception and meaning of adulthood is evolving. Historically, individual characteristics such as impulse control, reliability, and diligence have been associated with reaching adulthood (Arnett, 1998). These individual characteristics, along with marital status and parenthood, are still understood as adult status indicators. Nonetheless, researchers are placing more emphasis on individuals' interpretation of their experience and their corresponding capacities for independence (Arnett, 2004; Baxter Magolda & King, 2004). Interpreting one's own capacities leads to judgments and decisions which dictate an individual's pathway toward adulthood.

There is great variation in the timing an individual feels they become an adult. Although American society deems an individual as an adult at age 18, this does not necessarily mean an individual believes they are a fully-operational adult. The achievement of adult status is most often associated with independence from parents, financial independence, and self-sufficiency (Arnett, 2004). Arnett (2003) found that individuals age 18-25 often believe they are not an adolescent or an adult. They are experiencing something different, something much more transitional in nature. Maxine Greene (1988) offers her view of an equitable education for individuals and her interpretation of John Dewey's (1928) perspective on educating for revolutionary transformations in the capacities of individuals:

My focal interest is in human freedom, in the capacity to surpass the given and look at things as if they could be otherwise. John Dewey sought freedom "in something which comes to be, in a certain kind of growth, in consequences rather than antecedents" (1960, p.280). We are free, he said, "not because of what we statistically are, but in so far as we are becoming different from what we have been." To become different, of course, is not simply to will oneself to change. There is a question of being able to accomplish what one chooses to do. It is not only a matter of the capacity
to choose; it is a matter of the power to act to attain one's purposes. We shall be concerned with intelligent choosing and, yes, humane choosing, as we shall be with the kinds of conditions necessary for empowering persons to act on what they choose. It is clear enough that choice and action both occur within and by means of ongoing transactions with objective conditions and with other human beings. (Greene, 1988, p. 3-4)

In a sense, emerging adults are becoming very different from what individuals in their twenties have historically experienced. They lack power over their circumstances. In addition, they traverse a tumultuous economic terrain, and arrive at adulthood much later than preceding generations. The feeling of in-between and insecurity is central to Arnett's (2004) contention that individuals age 18-25 in industrialized nations are emerging into adulthood, with some individuals maintaining that they do not feel they are yet an adult until their early 30's.

The increased age of first marriage and parenthood, the lengthening of time pursuing higher education, and prolonged job instability, comprise the emerging adult experience. Emerging adulthood is a phase in the human lifespan associated with five features: seeking identity, experiencing instability, focusing on self-development, feeling in-between, and optimistically believing in life's possibilities (Arnett, 2004). These characteristic features of emerging adulthood are at odds with what is typically accepted as adult characteristics, and separate from the traditional indicators of adulthood like marriage, parenthood, and completing schooling. In fact, Arnett (2001) found that emerging adults are less concerned with adult role transitions, and more concerned with deciding on their own beliefs, values, and personal ideology. Much of these concerns happen as an emerging adult pursues higher education. For this reason, consideration must be paid to the climate in which higher education institutions find themselves today.
Higher Education

A common theme in all educational endeavors is the development of the individual. Individuals pursue education in accordance with their own sets of interests. These interests are represented in higher education specializations and offer an opportunity for individuals to translate their interests into academic majors. Additionally, choosing an academic major is an example of self-representation. Students communicate their individual contribution to society when an academic major is chosen. Society functions on the basis that individuals excel and serve in specific roles. As vocational specializations have become increasingly complex, social institutions like higher education have adapted to provide opportunities for individuals to direct their studies toward specific careers with explicit sets of skills and knowledge. Society benefits from each of its members’ contributions, and individuals feel solidarity by the mutual contributions of their respective roles (Desfor Edles & Appelrouth, 2005). Given this foundational social process, individual citizens seek the services of the American higher education system to fulfill socially prescribed roles (Thelin, 2011). These roles and purposes are represented in a range of intellectual and vocational interests which vary greatly in American culture, embodied in the longstanding debate between liberal arts and career education. Rather than considering this traditional aged group of college students as fully developed adults, higher education must consider how students learn and develop simultaneously (Wildman, 2007).

The American education system has undergone immense reforms and adaptations. From the Common School Movement of Horace Mann in the late nineteenth century to the Progressive Movement of John Dewey in the early twentieth century, the purpose of
education adapted to serve an increasingly individualized American society (Labaree, 2011). The historical significance of student-centered perspectives were supplemented by the growing fields of psychology, sociology, anthropology, and higher education; a recognition of the potential for institutional involvement in the human developmental process (Thelin, 2011). As Labaree (2011) states, "the public mission of American schools shifted from keeping the faith, to preserving the republic, to stimulating the economy, and finally to promoting social opportunity" (p. 381). The evolving mission of education in American society represents the changing purpose and intended outcomes for pursuing education. In this regard, the process of becoming educated has grown to be more culturally expected and anticipated as a passage toward specific careers, degrees, social mobility, and social opportunity (Labaree, 2011; Marsh 2011).

Within the field of higher education, student affairs and services developed and became more formalized throughout the twentieth century (Dungy & Gordon, 2011). As student enrollments increased, the provision of services for students separately from their academic pursuits became apparent and necessary. Early in the massification of higher education in America, founding documents like the Student Personnel Point of View (1937, 1949) expressed an understanding that "practices would be embedded in a total education program with a focus on the whole student, and committee members encouraged institutions to give equal emphasis to the development of the person and the development of the mind" (Dungy & Gordon, 2011, p. 65). Informed by developmental theorists such as Erikson (1968) and Chickering (1969), student affairs incorporated theories of adult and student development to inform practice. The greater presence of student affairs and services represents the need for providing a more holistic approach to
student development. Additionally, this is indicative of how higher education institutions have cultivated relationships with various stakeholders to achieve its goals.

Higher education serves numerous and dynamic purposes for its stakeholders (Burke & Associates, 2005; Newman, Courtier & Scurry, 2004). The broad array of stakeholders in higher education makes it a commodity to serve several different and often competing interests (Newman et al., 2004). Higher education is viewed by the government, legislators and businesses as an economic motor which develops an employable workforce. In addition, higher education institutions provide opportunities for the American population to help the nation compete globally, which is vital to economic health, social well-being, and public needs (Mazurek & Winzer, 2006; Newman et al., 2004). In effort to promote the socioeconomic health of the nation, the American government partially fulfills its obligation to the public by providing various levels of financial support to institutions (Marsh, 2011; Newman et al., 2004).

Stakeholders within higher education institutions such as faculty, administrators, and students all can have competing interests (Clark, 1989). All strive for autonomy within their roles of the academic environment; an organization of simultaneously convergent and divergent interests and aims. The discrepancies between internal and external stakeholders of education can become complicated as these parties tend to meet in circumstances where one needs something from the other (Clark, 1989). As the federal government or state promotes accountability and accreditation measures for faculty and administrators to demonstrate their institutional practices result in student learning, faculty may feel their roles are confined to the knowledge and learning which other parties deem as appropriate and acceptable (Hall, 2012). This represents a potential
conflict in the philosophy of education, where the meaning of knowledge and its origins comes into question (Baxter Magolda & King, 2004; Noddings, 2012). The longstanding conflicts between stakeholders in regard to an emphasis on liberal arts education and education for purposes of vocational or career preparation are still relevant today (Thelin, 2011). As Hamrick, Evans and Schuh (2002) recall:

The roots of liberal arts education are deep, and the philosophy is clear: the undergraduate experience is to impart broad knowledge about a wide range of subjects—not training for a specific professional career. A liberal education was intended to help students better understand the world around them, communicate lucidly, solve problems, and become better learners. (p. 5)

There is resonance of this debate in the early twenty-first century. Flores, Matkin, Burbach, Quinn and Harding (2012) consider the economic, social, and technological progressions which require the development of critical thinking skills and the cultivation of leaders for the future. "The new demands of leadership require ethical behavior, the ability to work with diverse populations, and the ability to think from a systems perspective" (Flores et al., 2012, p. 219).

Contention surrounding instructional planning and student learning outcomes leads to debate over the mission of a university and its impact on students as well as the job market (Clark, 1989). Student interests are wide-ranging as they enter the academic arena, traveling their own paths toward college entry, attainment, and a wide variety of vocations. Higher education must provide educational avenues which are acceptable to the state, but also sought by and relevant to the public as they seek employment. These debates encapsulate the challenges higher education faces, creating both internal and external sources of conflict to be addressed.
Student access, persistence and attainment are popular trends discussed in the current climate of higher education (Harper, Patton & Wooden, 2009; Krendl Gilbert & Heller, 2013; McPherson & Schapiro, 2006; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). How an individual makes decisions during these integral moments characterizes their life trajectory and outcomes (Newman et al., 2004). The decision-making process associated with pursuing higher education is a product of an individual's own construction of knowledge, and their capacity to call upon and apply knowledge in novel situations (Flores et al., 2012). Conceptualizations of the environment and available opportunities also influence the decision-making process by directing attention toward foreseeable worthwhile endeavors (DeWitz, Woolsey & Walsh, 2009; Mattern & Shaw, 2010). The relationship between individual characteristics and an individual's perception of her/his academic potential are invariably linked to the types of institutions in which they decide to attend (Mattern & Shaw, 2010; Savitz-Romer & Bouffard, 2012). Therefore, gaining access to higher education is not only a matter of assessing one's abilities; students weigh their options among vast institutional differences (McPherson & Schapiro, 2006).

To further describe the context of American higher education today, another trend is concern over student persistence and attainment rates (Newman et al., 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). These trends are partly a result of the financial strain in the higher education system, where dwindling state financial support calls for new and innovative sources of revenue and increased dependency on tuition for sustaining operations (McPherson & Schapiro, 2006). Institutions have obligations to the many stakeholders mentioned above and must coordinate efforts to serve governing bodies, the community, faculty, and administrative employees, all while serving students. Trends of financial
strain have emerged and consequently created an emphasis on student retention and institutional accountability.

In the current system of intensifying market forces and in response to issues of student retention, merit-based aid and recruitment have become more prevalent to support rising competition with other institutions (Newman et al., 2004). Higher education must show it is performing at optimal levels and students are similarly progressing and learning in ways an institution intends them to develop. This makes matters especially difficult for non-traditional students who are first generation, low-income, or who come from minority backgrounds. These student populations are more likely to need remedial courses and not persist toward graduation (Baker & Robnett, 2012). Consequently, the context and climate of higher education today is at odds with the development of all individuals who seek its services. There is a misalignment between an individual's potential and the confining nature of a system of higher education which is situated in an environment of market competition.

Given the issues surrounding access, persistence, and attainment, the position of higher education in society is a much debated topic in public spheres. "The way values are defined and implemented in higher education systems stems from the efforts of several groups to inscribe certain value interpretations in the institution's structure" (Rhoades, 1987, p. 3). This makes the structure of higher education inherently malleable and at the whim of pressing societal needs and market trends (Stuber, 2011). Part of the problem which creates stress in the higher education environment is that colleges and universities have to legitimize their services to stakeholders who are less familiar with the scope and nature of its practices. Higher education has varied overarching student
learning goals, although learning outcomes for diverse individuals are not always predictable. In a climate of increasing accountability, institutional mission and type will strongly influence the ability for institutions to demonstrate their practices result in student learning (Burke & Associates, 2005; Hamrick, Evans & Schuh, 2002). Current trends toward accountability on the basis of performance foreshadow this issue (McLendon, Hearn & Deaton, 2006). Institutions must evaluate their effectiveness for purposes of responsiveness and improvement (Bresciani, Moore Gardner & Hickmott, 2009). Without effective assessment of its services and programs, higher education will have difficulty being accountable to its internal and external stakeholders. For this reason, understanding students’ interaction with the higher education environment informs the practices of faculty and administrators (Savitz-Romer & Bouffard, 2012; Sax & Harper, 2011). Likewise, continually searching for valid and reliable measures of the experiences and development of college students would yield great dividends.

Higher education institutions serve as a purveyor of knowledge, often perceived as the gateway to personal, social, and economic prosperity (Stuber, 2011; Thelin, 2011). There are few other social institutions which have been allowed such a high honor and privilege in shaping human life and potential. Higher education has historically provided an arena for critically analyzing social problems, the government, truth, and reality. With greater regulation of this social institution and subsequent reduction of its autonomy, individuals may lose the privilege to develop necessary skills and opportunities to critically analyze the environments which they inhabit. As Maxine Greene (1988) states:

Talk of personal freedom refers to self-dependence and self-determination; it has little to do with connectedness or being together in community. Americans assume that they are born free. If they can function with any degree of effectiveness, they feel entitled to do as they please, to pursue
their fulfillments on their own. To be autonomous and independent: This seems to many to be the American dream. Given the climate of the time, there should be celebrations of that dream coming true. Yet on all sides, official voices speak of irresponsibility, illiteracy, relativism, unethical behavior. The sound of those voices intensifies an uneasiness underlying everyday life, an uneasiness that focuses more and more frequently on education. (p. 1)

The immense responsibilities of the higher education system have the potential to influence all of American society. More specifically, it has the potential to address inequality, poverty and life satisfaction. If individuals are not receiving an education which provides the tools necessary to reach a more advanced level of citizenship, then they are being grossly disenfranchised.

In order to meet the needs of a market oriented system of higher education and its many stakeholders, higher education must prove that it is worthy of its position and place in American society. The relevance of the American system of higher education depends on student learning and development, two very difficult criteria to quantify. In this context, competition and market forces in higher education have the capacity to worsen an already difficult situation for these institutions:

There is a growing gap between the public purposes that need to be served by colleges and universities and the reality of how higher education is functioning. From the establishment of the first college in America in 1636, there has been an understanding that higher education, though it clearly provided private benefits, also served important community needs. Over three plus centuries since then, the public purposes have been formalized in the charters of institutions and in the laws of the federal and state governments. They have been steadily expanded from the preparation of young men for leadership in the community to preparation of a broad share of the population for participation in the workforce and civic life; from polishing the elite to providing widespread social mobility; from generating scholarship aimed at supporting certain beliefs to supporting unfettered, evidence-based debate about social issues as well as wide-ranging and trustworthy research essential to modern society. (Newman et al., 2004, pp. 3-4)
The public purpose of higher education is to provide experiences for students to grow and develop into self-sufficient adults. Given the nature of services provided by higher education and its capacity to influence human life, institutions must prioritize services which aid in the development of each student. To achieve this great feat, the need for performing well and proving results is more crucial than ever. Therefore, this study seeks to explain the emerging adult experience and provide insight for the ever-evolving role of higher education in American's lives. Inherent in this goal is the understanding of what it means to be a citizen or adult, as conceptualized by individuals, institutions and American culture.

The stakes are high for higher education institutions and for its consumers (Rhoades, 1987). The lives of American citizens are greatly impacted by their ability to attain educational credentials and position themselves in the social order. Consumers purchase the services of higher education for intellectual, learning, and vocational purposes, which aids in the culminating goal of self-actualization and self-sufficiency (Labaree, 2011). This process does not go entirely unrewarded, as higher education attainment is correlated with higher income, health benefits, and increased civic engagement (Newman et al., 2004). This embodies the longstanding debate over the social imperative to accommodate all students, when the associated benefits of education are economic, physical, and social well-being (Mullen, 2010). For these reasons, the understanding of student development before and throughout an emerging adult's academic career is especially important. Much focus has been paid to the first year of academic life, although it is apparent that persistence, achievement and attainment are indicative of both student and institutional well-being and survival. Institutions depend on
student enrollment as federal and state support continues to fluctuate, making each year of a student's college life an important opportunity for educators to proactively engage students of all backgrounds.

**Statement of Problem**

Students graduating from high school are legal adults, yet it is evident there is a prolonged journey toward adulthood in contemporary social contexts. The complexity of modern society and the pursuit of individual ambitions through channels of higher education create varied and turbulent trajectories toward adult status (Kegan, 1994). Individual development occurs in dynamic and critical ways during the transition from adolescence to adulthood. Identity, cognitive, and social development are all distinct developmental domains where students experience growth throughout their academic careers; well beyond when they are legally considered an adult.

An emerging adult entering higher education must coordinate their aspirations and expectations to align with the academic environment (Mattern & Shaw, 2010; Rumberger, 2010). Aspirations and expectations are also goals, which translate to academic specializations in the higher education environment. It is challenging to align student goals with the opportunities which would most successfully result in enhancing their unique growth trajectories. Additionally, student motivation and persistence are hindered by the financial stress and explorative interests of emerging adults in higher education (Jung, 2013; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Therefore, an emerging adult must become knowledgeable of vast academic and vocational opportunities, then make decisions in accordance with their malleable goals.
Emerging adults in higher education are shifting from an environment where dependence on external authority figures was necessary for their survival to a higher education environment which requires them to be self-reliant and mature in their thinking. The problem is that rarely is it the case that an eighteen year old is mature in the ways they make sense of their experiences (Kegan, 1994). It requires systematic effort to properly scaffold college students to successfully progress toward the self-reliance and self-sufficiency necessary for adult life. Once accepted to a college, it is understood that a major area of study should be selected. If not, a student should at least have an idea of what they want to do. Pursuing higher education as an emerging adult is a time of self-discovery as a major area of study is chosen. Emerging adults must follow tracks to specific degrees and careers, yet their interests and self-understanding are still being constructed. Higher education has been slow to adapt to this new category of emerging adults. A mass system of higher education which channels and narrows student goals and interests is antithetical to the needs of emerging adults with less secure attachments to family and their own identity. Above all else, individuals in the emerging adult age period do not feel they are actually adults. This implies that higher education and society should not treat them as such, or that emerging adults are not given enough support to reach adulthood in a timely manner.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to define emerging adults as both individuals and as products of environmental conditions. Using a developmental approach, this study is intended to explore how emerging adulthood occurs in post industrial societies. Additionally, self-authorship will be used as a construct to consider how emerging adults
develop positively toward adulthood. Self-authorship is the achievement of mature thinking through the congruence of one's epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal dimensions of meaning-making (Baxter Magolda & King, 2004). The theory of self-authorship provides a construct for actualizing the developmental needs of emerging adults. Few studies have connected the theory of emerging adulthood with self-authorship (Thompson, 2014; Torres, Jones & Renn, 2009). This project will fill the gap in the literature by considering: What is emerging adulthood and in what ways is it influenced by cultural norms, expectations, or educational practices? Secondly, are emerging adults disenfranchised of a meaningful education which would accelerate their pathway to the self-sufficiency of adulthood?

Methodology

The methodological approach of this study is to define and conceptualize emerging adulthood. Discussions will search for origins and meaning of modern concepts of adulthood to explain the development of emerging adults through an ecological perspective (Arnold, Lu & Armstrong, 2013; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This perspective views the individual by their unique qualities, contained within systems which reciprocally influence one another. These systems are proximal and distal to the individual; proximal systems are the family, peer groups, and schooling, whereas distal systems consist of laws, governing bodies, and culture. In this fashion, this study utilizes a social psychological perspective of individual development to examine what constitutes becoming and being an adult.

In order to explore emerging adult development mediated by the pursuit of higher education, several social psychological frameworks will inform this analysis of emerging

Thelen and Smith offer the image of a mountain stream to capture the nature of development. They note that there are patterns in a fast-moving mountain stream with water flowing smoothly in some places, but nearby there may be a small whirlpool or turbulent eddy while in other parts of the stream there may be waves or spray. These patterns may occur for hours or even days, but after a storm or a long dry spell, new patterns may emerge. The mountain stream metaphor captures development as something formed or constructed by its own history and system-wide activity (Thelen & Smith, 1998). Here we get a direct focus on processes while outcomes are important primarily as part of further developing processes. The key strength of Thelen and Smith's systems approach is that it captures the complexity of real-life human behavior in physical, social, and cultural time and context. (Corsaro & Fingerson, 2003, p.127)

The focus on processes of emerging adult development is a central philosophy of this study; a recognition of how past experiences inform present and future conceptions of self. Parallel to this philosophy is an emphasis on future-oriented thinking as emerging adults endure the various obstacles of modern life (Aspinwall, 2005; Kegan, 1994, Torres, Jones & Renn, 2009). Implicit in future-oriented thinking are the tenets of self-discrepancy and self-determination theories which will highlight the individual's understanding of their own capabilities in relation to their potential and actual abilities in environmental context (Carver, Lawrence & Scheier, 1999; Niemiec et al., 2006).

Astin's (1993) Input-Environment-Outcome (I-E-O) Model is an influential guide for this study and provides a framework for analyzing student development. First, to decipher the conditions under which the individual becomes socialized during adolescence. Early development characterizes how the individual begins to construct an identity while differentiating between and integrating themselves in social roles. This is
particularly relevant to the presentation of skills and abilities that emerging adults demonstrate as they enter higher education. Second, persistence in higher education environments requires similar developmental tasks observed during childhood and adolescence, although within new and less directly supportive progressions toward adulthood. Lastly, the I-E-O Model emphasizes outcomes associated with degree attainment which will clarify the products of schooling and personal experiences. The goal is to investigate why emerging adulthood is necessary to delineate between adolescence and adulthood, and the potential for them to become self-authored adults through educational interventions.

With these guiding conceptual frameworks, the methodology of this study incorporated three phases. First, a foundational literature review was conducted on emerging adulthood and self-authorship (Arnett, 2004; Baxter Magolda & King, 2004; and Kegan, 1994). Second, literature searches utilized educational, psychological and sociological research databases. Given the relationship between emerging adulthood and self-authorship, the preliminary search criteria focused on academic skills, academic knowledge and expectations, decision-making during higher education, and social issues. Findings were organized by topic and reviewed for commonalities. These commonalities reflected areas for inquiry and were then sorted into the following content areas: Adult transition, emerging adulthood, decision-making, lifespan development, higher education practice, self-authorship, and social factors. Third, the review of the literature and the process of writing were completed simultaneously. The intent of the literature review was to discover intersections between emerging adult development and higher education, while organizing and making sense of findings through the writing process.
Significance of the Study

The dissection of emerging adulthood has the potential to foster innovation in the ways a society aids in the development of individuals, particularly during higher education. It is imperative to adequately address the state of emerging adults today. Their experience of development into adulthood is unprecedented and is potentially maladaptive for the ways humans reach adulthood (Smith, Christoffersen, Davidson & Herzog, 2011). For example, emerging adults’ longer journey to gainful employment and their dependence on parents creates socioeconomic, familial, and personal tension.

College is a destination in American culture. Individuals entering higher education institutions in 2015 are situated in the context of a maturing knowledge-based and technological era. The interactions the individual has with social and educational systems is at the cusp of their experience of knowledge formation and how culture is reproduced. By discussing the confluence of sociocultural events which characterize the unique experience of students now entering the college environment, themes and variations in the individual experience will illuminate the direction in which America is moving.

There is an ethical and moral imperative to appreciate individual differences and support diverse students seeking higher education. It is the work of educators to continually enhance the development of all humans. It is not a choice for higher education to create individuals who will contribute to a just and civil society in America, it is a responsibility (Desfor Edles & Applerouth, 2005). At a time in America's history where higher education is increasingly controlled by external forces, practice in student and academic affairs must adequately and substantially support diverse future student
populations. A continuing area of concern is how practice in higher education can improve and supplement the development of emerging adults. First, it is important to understand what emerging adulthood is, why this category of humans has developed, and how social factors contribute to this prolonged and transitional period of life.

Chapter Outline

The introduction has provided an overview of emerging adulthood and the context of higher education in contemporary society. In chapter two, a conceptualization of emerging adulthood will be provided. Given the social psychological nature of emerging adulthood, chapter two will explain the influence of identity development and social factors on emerging adults. In chapter three, self-authorship will be discussed as a theory for considering how emerging adults make meaning of their experiences, progress toward mature thinking, and assume responsible roles in adult life. Next, chapter four will provide an analysis of the relationship between emerging adults and higher education. An emphasis in chapter four will be the Learning Partnerships Model which articulates the potential for higher education to foster the development of self-authorship (Baxter Magolda & King, 2004). This will provide one example of the way higher education cultivates individuals, and the implications for emerging adults. Lastly, a conclusion follows in chapter five to discuss the intersections between emerging adulthood, self-authorship, and higher education, with an emphasis on the social and cultural implications of emerging adulthood as a newly theorized phase in the human lifespan.
CHAPTER II
EMERGING ADULTHOOD

This chapter will provide a conceptual analysis of emerging adulthood. Emerging adulthood will be discussed in psychological terms and in social context. Each of these perspectives are pertinent to the identity exploration and formation of emerging adults. A well integrated sense of self and identity is essential to the maturation and developmental trajectory of emerging adults. Identity exploration and formation will be discussed relative to how decision-making, self-concept, and future-oriented thinking play a unique role in the lives of emerging adults. This is in effort to expand on the existing definition of emerging adulthood, and better understand what constitutes the emerging adult experience.

In his book, *Emerging adulthood: The winding road from the late teens through the twenties*, Arnett (2004) supports his conceptualization of the period of human life from high school graduation to the late twenties called emerging adulthood. Rather than framing his work in terms of generational differences of humans, Arnett (2004) utilizes social psychological perspectives to describe emerging adulthood as a durable and stable depiction of the experience of individuals in their twenties. To further explain the experience of emerging adults, Arnett (2004) specifies five features of emerging adulthood which he believes are enduring qualities that are experienced predominately and most significantly during the emerging adulthood years. The main five features of
emerging adulthood are: the age of identity explorations, age of instability, the most self-focused age, age of feeling in-between, and the age of possibilities. These features are a product of social and cultural circumstances which shape individuals' psychosocial development.

Arnett (2004) does not profess that emerging adulthood is a "universal period of human development but a period that exists under certain conditions that have occurred only quite recently and only in some cultures" (p. 21). He refers to the sexual revolution and recreational drug use as examples of evolving social and cultural values, particularly in the United States and other industrialized countries. These examples have evolved in American society over decades, the ramifications of which have manifested in the fabric of American cultural norms and values. Emerging adults are a portion of the American population adrift, meandering through college with malleable trajectories toward self-sufficiency, independence from parents, and a consistent purpose in the social order. As the term "twenty-somethings" depicts, there is great variation in the experience of emerging adults. This is a result of opportunities an individual possesses, but also a result of inclinations in their judgments and actions when it comes to life decisions.

Typical factors in the decision-making process are a counter-balance between what outcomes can be expected from a decision and the value attributed to those outcomes. Additionally, decision-making is inevitably influenced by one's self-beliefs (Mattern & Shaw, 2010; DeWitz, Woolsey, & Walsh, 2009). Self-beliefs are constructed as individuals initiate and complete tasks, subsequently creating ideas of strengths and weaknesses. The creative and constructive nature of self-beliefs are similar to self-perceptions, which are conceptions an individual has in regard to who they believe they
are as they construct an identity and self-concept (Owens, 2003). The shaping of self-beliefs and self-perceptions greatly influence decision-making, which is at the cusp of the individual's knowledge formation, particularly throughout emerging adults' exploratory experiences.

During the period of emerging adulthood, individuals have typically attained a degree of independence in terms of meeting the age requirement for being considered as a legal adult. Still, there is a commonality among individuals in this age period: the recognition that they do not operate fully as an adult with the associated roles and responsibilities (Arnett, 2004). Whether adult-like roles and responsibilities are avoided or unattainable is left for debate. On one hand, emerging adults may relish in what is an acceptable hiatus from adult-like roles in love and work which are often perceived as stressful. On the other hand, social conditions may limit an emerging adult's romantic or economic options. In the middle of these two propositions are infinite possibilities magnified by the largest and most ethnically diverse student population to date (DeBard, 2004). Emerging adults may consciously avoid adult-like roles and responsibilities while simultaneously represent a portion of the population susceptible to the ramifications of poor economic conditions (Dennett & Azar, 2011). They are participants in an environment where choices are numerous and opportunities are scarce, especially under poor economic conditions.

Arnett (2004) explains how emerging adults understand the benefits of their transitional status which allows a socially acceptable period of nascent adult qualities and transformations. There is a general ambivalence toward adult social roles and obligations which are perceived as stressors to be avoided until an individual is ready. Emerging
adulthood is an anxiety inducing time, although well-being and self-esteem increase and
depression decreases over-all throughout this phase. Anxiety and frustration are two
analogous emotions which characterize a period where the future conception of self is on
the horizon with seemingly infinite tracks or passages for status achievement. Frustration
is defined as "a deep sense or state of insecurity and dissatisfaction arising from
unresolved problems or unfulfilled needs" (Merriman-Webster, 2014). This seemingly
frustrating period could cause a self-perpetuating cycle which leads to an extended period
of development between adolescence and adulthood (Smith, Christoffersen, Davidson &
Herzog, 2011).

The young people of today, in contrast (historically), see adulthood and its
obligations in quite a different light. In their late teens and early twenties,
marriage, home, and children are seen by most of them as achievements to
be pursued but as perils to be avoided. It is not that they do not want
marriage, home, and (one or two) children–eventually. Most of them do
want to take on all of these adult obligations, and most of them will have
done so by the time they reach 30. In their late teens and early twenties,
they ponder these obligations and think, "Yes, but not yet." Adulthood and
its obligations offer security and stability, but they also represent a closing
of doors—the end of independence, the end of spontaneity, the end of a
sense of wide-open possibilities. (Arnett, 2004, p. 6)

The perceived closing of opportunities is now a common association with adulthood. If
emerging adults are aware of what responsibilities correspond with adult roles, then they
also realize they are not fully capable to fill these prescribed roles.

Diverse ethnic groups view the qualities and characteristics of the transition to
adulthood in accordance with their dominant cultural expectations (Arnett, 2003). Arnett
(2003) investigated the relationship between individualistic and collectivist cultures in
relation to their perceptions of adult roles. Participants were asked criterion questions
how they view the transition to adulthood. These questions targeted various priorities in
the transition to adulthood such as: independence, interdependence, role transitions, norm compliance, biological transitions, chronological transitions, and family capacities.

Among these categories for conceptualizing what it means to transition to adulthood, participants from traditionally collectivist cultures supported independence, complying with social norms, completing socially recognized role transitions, and the capacity for filling family roles. Participants from individualistic cultures favored independence but were less likely to be concerned with norm compliance and filling family roles. It is important to separate from these criteria that emerging adults across lines of ethnic and cultural categories tended to emphasize independence and the capacity for adult roles and responsibilities. Actually taking on these obligations is not as important as the capacity to do so. Therefore, the cognitive and social development of emerging adults is important to consider as they acclimate to new environments and roles.

Identity Development

The identity formation of emerging adults is central to their development. Not having a solidified sense of self or identity likely prolongs the development of individuals in this age period. "Identity refers to the distinctly human capacity to reflect on and make sense of ourselves" (Thompson, 2014, p. 89). Erikson (1968) created a stage theory for considering the process of psychosocial development and identity formation. His stages of psychosocial development involve a series of crises to be resolved as individuals develop tendencies toward engaging and interpreting their environment. Erikson's identity versus role confusion stage suggests that individuals struggle as they attempt to incorporate their increasingly complex social roles into their identity. They are operating in various social environments without a solidified sense of identity and subsequently can
become confused. James Marcia (1966) extrapolated on the variety of ways individuals can form identities by detailing the process of identity exploration and commitment through specific statuses or phases of identity. From adolescence continuing through adulthood, individuals explore different roles or identities. In addition to Marcia's (1966) suggestion that individuals explore or commit to identities, he also suggested they may settle prematurely based on pressure from others or endure delayed periods without any positive identity development. Identity is an abstract and dynamic construct which can be described in terms of psychosocial development and levels of exploration, although there are also historical implications for how identity is understood particularly in the case of emerging adults.

Identity explorations have historically been associated with the adolescent stage of life, although studies on lifespan and college student development have directed attention toward the prolonged formation of identity during the college years (Arnett, 2004; Thompson, 2014). While Erikson's (1968) identity vs. role confusion stage was originally theorized as a distinctly adolescent crisis, he also mentioned a prolonged adolescent moratorium where individuals struggle with identity issues into their late teens and early twenties. Arthur Chickering's (1969) groundbreaking work described student development in higher education.

Extending from age seventeen or eighteen into the middle or late twenties, this period is different from adolescence and different from adulthood and maturity. For many it will be the last opportunity for major change before the stability generated by more fixed social, interpersonal, and occupational roles and responsibilities... Developmental changes do occur during this period. Numerous cross-sectional and longitudinal studies of college students indicate that changes occur in attitudes, interests, values, future plans and aspirations, openness to impulses and emotions, personal integration, and intellectual ability. Such changes have been found for diverse students in diverse institutions. Some of these changes are shared...
by those who do not attend college; but college does make a difference. (Chickering, 1969, p. 1-2)

During the formative years of college student development theory, Chickering (1969) referenced the evolution of the human experience within America's complex institutions of higher education. In the contexts of human experience and higher education, an integrated identity is a highly desirable goal. An identity which encompasses culturally derived depictions of valued characteristics to be embodied by college graduates. Although this is a singular goal, there are complex domains of student development which illustrate turbulent developmental trajectories. Chickering (1969) also outlined "seven developmental vectors for the young adult: Achieving competence, managing emotions, becoming autonomous, establishing identity, freeing interpersonal relationships, clarifying purposes, and developing integrity" (p. 19). These vectors specify areas of college student development representative of the baby-boomer generation roughly half a century ago, who had similar developmental tasks as individuals in twenty-first century society.

Given emerging adults are often in a state of identity exploration with fluctuating role commitments and responsibilities, their self-concepts are under construction (Arnett, 2004; Thompson, 2014). Self-concept is comprised of four principles: reflected appraisal, social comparisons, self-attribution, and psychological centrality (Owens, 2003). The first principle, reflected appraisal, refers to "self-concept as a social product derived from the attitudes that others have toward one's self and that one eventually comes to see him- or herself as others do" (Owens, 2003, p. 208). The ability to comprehend others' appraisal of oneself requires perspective taking or viewing the world from another person's point of view. The second principle of self-concept, social comparisons, refers to the judgments
an individual develops of themselves in relation to how they relate to other people and social categories. Building on the reflected appraisal and social comparison principles, the next principle of self-concept, called self-attribution, influences an individual's self-concept by also protecting it. Self-attribution is a process of reflection enacted as individuals evaluate repercussions of their thoughts and actions, subsequently drawing inferences about themselves. The emphasis on interdependence and norm-compliance in Arnett's (2003) study across American ethnic groups serves as an example of the use of reflected appraisal and social comparison in emerging adulthood. Like the other principles, the self-attribution principle is not constrained by accountability to others, nor does it necessarily mean an individual is being accurate in their judgments. In this respect, self-attribution can serve as a means for protecting the ego and preserving self-esteem as subjectivity plays a prominent role in the early formations of self-concept.

Lastly, the psychological centrality principle emphasizes the organization of self in hierarchically categorized components. Again, Arnett's (2004) work on emerging adults correlates with the evolution of self-concept in these last two principles, evident in the characteristically self-focused nature of emerging adulthood. The emerging adult is continuing to construct their self-concept as they travel pathways toward greater maturity and self-sufficiency. Self-concept is vital to healthy social development and for the advancement of intellectual and learning capabilities (Owens, 2003). The processes and principles of self-concept mutually influence the decision-making activities of emerging adults as they explore possible identities.

Cross and Markus (1991) discuss possible futures or possible selves to further expound upon the intricacies of self-concept and identity. An individual's conception of
both their current and possible self guides their process of development. Cross and Markus (1991) define self-concept as an "integrated framework of one's lifespan experiences, motivational states and action orientations" (p. 230). As they construct their self-concept, individuals live and make decisions in accordance with their possible representations of self. Dissonance between actual and ideal selves create stress in humans as they aspire to resolve inconsistencies in their character (Carver, Lawrence, & Scheier, 1999). This is likely a frustrating element of the emerging adult experience. They must select among vast academic and career opportunities while they do not fully understand themselves, and subsequently their possible or future self.

As emerging adults construct their possible selves, they inevitably consider possible futures. Aspinwall (2005) discusses the crucial element of future-oriented thinking during developmental transitions. As Arnett's (2004) five features depict, emerging adulthood can be conceptualized as unstable and in-between; predominately in a transitional or liminal phase. "Transition through uncertainty has been referred to as liminality, the condition of being between social states, and, therefore, without the security of identity" (Dunham, Kidwell & Wilson, 1986, p. 143). During this seemingly prolonged liminal phase of the lifespan, the emerging adult is asked to psychologically invest in their future.

Human beings have the capacity to flexibly represent future events, imagine diverse possible outcomes, and act in light of those representations. In doing so, we make use of several critically important self-regulatory skills: We try to anticipate future circumstances and their impact on ourselves and close others; we take these expected future consequences and a variety of goals and standards into account when deciding on current actions; and we must balance long- versus short-term interests in cases where actions may serve one goal at the expense of another. (Aspinwall, 2005, p. 204)
Aspinwall (2005) explains the need for balance between short-term and long-term goals as an individual in transition thinks about the future. It is assumed that emerging adults view their possible or distal selves optimistically despite more proximal approximations characterized by instability and uncertainty (Arnett, 2004; Carver, Lawrence, & Scheier, 1999). This creates the opportunity to fantasize or otherwise diminish one's authority over their current state, decreasing focus on concrete information which would yield optimal developmental results (Aspinwall, 2005). The balance between short- and long-term goals is important for understanding emerging adulthood, and will be discussed in multiple iterations throughout the remainder of this project. Next, social factors are necessary to explain how emerging adults’ identity formation and sense of agency are shaped by their environment, and the psychosocial processes which contribute to this phase of development.

Social Factors

To further conceptualize emerging adulthood, social factors are important to consider how emerging adults transition in unfamiliar environments. What follows in the remainder of this chapter is an analysis of social factors as they pertain to the ways emerging adults construct understanding of themselves, their capacities, and their environment. First, a focus on the family domain will be provided by describing how rituals and routines drive individual development in cultural context. Second, class differences, status attainment, and the human need for individual differentiation will be discussed. Understanding how emerging adulthood is situated in developmental, social, and evolutionary context is an important foundation for addressing the challenges emerging adults face.
The family serves as the most fundamental group in a culture or society, recognized in law as a legitimate group comprised of parents, children, and broader lines of kin (Fox, 1967). Within the context of the family, children are reared and assisted by parents until they can become self-sustaining and self-sufficient adults. Humans practice a prolonged period of parent-child support in comparison to other mammals, before allowing the child (or adolescent and emerging adult) to integrate independently outside the nucleus of the family (Arnett, 2004; Corsaro & Fingerson, 2003). In recent history, parental support has been lengthened as parents provide financial and emotional support well beyond the adolescent years toward the mid to late twenties (Tanner & Arnett, 2011).

Tanner (2006) discusses *recentering* to theoretically address the process of emerging adult development situated in both familial and liminal contexts. The formative experiences, separation from, and subsequent redefining of the family of origin is fundamental to the process she refers to as *recentering*. Emerging adult recentering is a process of separation from previously supportive environments so that an individual may practice other role commitments, transitioning into more long-term commitments, and lastly as a reorganization of self around roles and responsibilities (Tanner & Arnett, 2011). The contexts encountered by emerging adults as they separate from and redefine their relationships with parents are important to consider as they develop agency and competence outside the family of origin. The emphasis on context as emerging adults’ relationships change represents a focus on the relational nature of human development. In particular, redefining the relationship between emerging adults and environments that
produce development is necessitated by their social skills. Therefore, they must rely on the abilities developed in previously supportive environments.

An emerging adult's early familial experiences serve as a foundation for both personal and social development. The habitual nature of family life and schooling sets the stage for more complex organizational capacities necessary during adulthood (Corsaro & Fingerson, 2003). The establishment of routines or rituals, both cognitive and behavioral, are seen within families, schools, social interactions, and cultural traditions. These rituals or routine qualities of cognition and behavior occur early in life and increase in complexity as individuals develop and gain knowledge. Cognitive rituals are tendencies for the way individuals think in reaction to certain situations or stimuli. Behavioral rituals are similarly regular ways of interpreting and reacting, but with a physical and observable component. Ritual and routine structures of experience allow culture, language, and behavior to become intertwined and reproduced (Stryker & Vryan, 2003). They allow the emerging individual to exist in predictable situations where they can develop the necessary knowledge and skills for adult roles and responsibilities. Additionally, they serve as opportunities to form progressively more organized schematic representations of the self, others, the nature of knowledge, and the environment.

Social processes like routines also indicate a desire for class membership. Shore (2003) attributes the structure and routine nature of activities as ultimately class acts which are ritualized and used as indicators of status within a middle-class culture of busyness. Goffman (1959) defines this as impression management, which is the suggestion that human actors desire to be viewed a certain way during social interactions and act according to their interpretation of higher status positions. Schlenker (1980)
defined impression management as "the conscious or unconscious attempt to control images that are projected in real or imagined social interactions" (as cited in Owens, 2003, p. 211). This emphasizes the precedence of social interactions as emerging adults find their place in the social order.

Routines and rituals are useful to understand the ways individuals are shaped by processes of socialization, subsequently developing class differences and goals for status attainment. Middle- and upper-class parents are likely to promote certain culturally derived characteristics which are less prevalent in lower-class families (Corsaro & Fingerson, 2003; Owens, 2003). Middle-class families have been correlated with perpetuating a culture of busyness which consists of dispositions and values necessary to maintain middle-class status (Gutierrez, Izquierdo & Kremer-Sadlik, 2010). Some of these middle- and upper-class dispositions are curiosity, consideration of others, and happiness, whereas lower-class parents emphasize obedience, conformity, and good manners (Kohn, 1969; Weiss, 2012). In families where both parents or a single parent work, cultural transmission is often accomplished by the use of services and institutional tools outside the immediate family as mothers and fathers have incorporated new roles within American culture (Gutierrez, Izquierdo & Kremer-Sadlik, 2010). Structured activities after school have become a more prominent feature of middle-class children and adolescents' leisure time, serving as further practice for future adult roles and responsibilities.

Within the structure of social factors and experiences mentioned above, an emerging adult progressively differentiates themselves from others. The process of individual differentiation is at the intersection of individual need and choice. Individuals
need to feel solidarity in their social life, yet still have their own identity. The process of individual differentiation is largely an indication of the environment they are raised in, and the class differences which predetermine their financial and career trajectories (Andres, Adamuti-Trache, Yoon, Pidgeon, & Thomsen, 2007). An emerging adult differentiates themselves, yet ultimately integrates cultural vestiges and self-knowledge to transmit their identity to the outside world (Pizzolato, 2010). In this respect, individual differentiation and growth is a product of unequal circumstances and often perpetuates diminished or advantaged opportunities for social mobility based on parental social status (Irwin & Elley, 2013).

The structure of American society impacts the ways emerging adults construct knowledge, their identities, opportunities, and relationships with others. Consequently, the construction of an individual is intimately linked to the characteristics of their social and educational environments. Contemporary society is both exciting and potentially deprecating to the development of emerging adults. Rudimentary elements of the socialization process illuminate the potential for social expectations to envelope an individual, serving as distractions which may not have been as pervasive in less information-dense historical contexts. With so many potential choices for educational and career trajectories, the emerging adult pathway is convoluted with abundant opportunities yet constrained by their familial and social class destinies.

In sum, both the psychological and social factors discussed in this chapter offer a characterization of the emerging adult experience within an information dense and technological society (Thompson, 2014). As Arnett (2004) explains, emerging adults have shifted away from solely viewing adulthood in terms of the milestones of marriage,
parenthood, or full-time work. They make judgments about their individual capacity for financial independence in accordance with their journey toward self-sufficiency.

Fundamental components of identity, self-concept, and future-oriented thinking reflect the pervasiveness of intellectual ability on outcomes for emerging adults. Similarly, social factors frame their opportunities, decision-making and choices. Therefore, providing opportunities for emerging adults to develop intellectually and learn more efficiently, fosters their ability to make life decisions during higher education and subsequently construct an identity which enhances their well-being.
CHAPTER III
SELF-AUTHORSHIP

Emerging adulthood is a period which culminates when an individual feels self-sufficient, financially independent, and as though they can take responsibility for themselves (Arnett, 2004). Emerging adults strive for autonomy so that they may transcend instability and solidify their purpose and identity. Given the detrimental effects of anxiety on emerging adults and their learning capacities, the theory of self-authorship serves as a supplement to the emerging adult literature because self-authored meaning-making mediates the adverse effects of anxiety in a liminal phase of development (King, Baxter Magolda & Masse, 2011). Self-authorship emphasizes the congruence between individual autonomy and mature meaning-making capacities (Baxter Magolda & King, 2004). It is a concept for understanding the developmental processes involved in reaching an integrated sense of self and identity for the progression toward adult maturity.

Self-authorship refers to an inner-voice or solidified sense of self which is evident in the meaning-making activities of adults, rather than relying on external forces to dictate an individual's thinking (Baxter Magolda & King, 2004; 2012). Meaning-making is described as "students' integration of activities, concepts, assumptions, and questions that results in making meaning of their own experience" (Baxter Magolda & King, 2004, p. 129). In order for an individual to consider their knowledge, identity, and relationships in a self-evaluative or self-reflexive manner, that which is subject must be converted to
object in order for an individual to progress toward mature meaning-making (Kegan, 1994). This is necessary for what Baxter Magolda and King (2004; 2012), and Kegan (1994) consider to be self-authorship. Self-authorship focuses on intellectual development as a student development theory, outlining the epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal dimensions of adult development which influence how individuals make sense of their lives in transition.

Self-authoring individuals take internal and external responsibility for their thinking, feeling, and acting. In addition to seeing themselves as the creator of feelings, they can internally reflect on and hold conflicting or contradictory feelings rather than being subject to these changing emotions. Questions of personal integrity are important from a self-authoring perspective because individuals evaluate themselves based on internal standards. (Boes, Baxter Magolda, & Buckley, 2010, p. 4)

Self-authorship is a self-evolution theory founded on constructivism, which is grounded in the assumption that people construct knowledge by making sense of their experiences (Boes, Baxter Magolda & Buckley, 2010; Kegan, 1994). Self-evolution also incorporates developmental theory, which "focuses not on what we know—the content of our thinking—but on the complexity, underlying structure, and pattern of meaning-making, or how we know" (Boes, Baxter Magolda & Buckley, 2010, p. 5). By combining constructivism and developmental theory, self-authorship considers the individual as actively constructing and organizing their experiences (Kegan, 1994). One's understanding of the world is inevitably their own creation, shaped by their existing position and place within their self-narrative.

With self-evolution theory as a foundation, self-authorship integrates epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal developmental dimensions (Boes, Baxter Magolda & Buckley, 2010; Kegan, 1994). Kegan's (1994) holistic portrayal of
adult development refers to these three dimensions as knowledge, identity, and interpersonal relationships respectively, which are interdependent categories of one’s meaning-making structure. For example, an individual's identity is enhanced from increased knowledge and the maturation of social relationships. The developmental trajectory of these three categories influence one another in various ways. These are dependent on the individual, rather than suggesting all individuals will develop knowledge, identity, or social relationships in the same way.

Cognitive Elements

There are some underlying cognitive elements which are important to consider how self-authorship occurs. The works of Kegan (1994) and Piaget (1952) are essential to explain how the development of knowledge, identity, and interpersonal relationships intersect. Considering the individual's construction of knowledge and experience, becoming an adult is a critical struggle between objective and subjective meaning-making (Kegan, 1994). This is a process Kegan (1994) explains as a tug-and-pull between subjective and objective categories of experience and knowing:

"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. All these expressions suggest that the element of knowing is not the whole of us; it is distinct enough from us that we can do something with it. "Subject" refers to those elements of our knowing or organizing that we are identified with, tied to, fused with, or embedded in. We have object; we are subject. We cannot be responsible for, in control of, or reflect upon that which is subject. Subject is immediate; object is mediate. Subject is ultimate or absolute; object is relative. (Kegan, 1994, p. 32)

The subject-object relationship is paramount to the ways in which individual's construct and attribute meaning in regard to the origins of their knowledge, their identity, and social relationships.
To illustrate the subject-object relationship, Baxter Magolda and King (2012; citing Kegan & Lahey, 2009) describe the difference between the socialized mind and the self-authored mind. Those operating on the spectrum of a socialized mind are greatly influenced by external demands, generating their conceptions of knowledge, self, and others with the assistance of an external locus of understanding. In contrast to the socialized mind, the self-authored mind recognizes categories of knowledge, self, and others as object. The self-authored mind is theorized to reflect on and manipulate information to arrive at internally generated meanings and conceptions of oneself in relation to knowledge and others. What is evident in the relationship between the socialized and self-authored mind is an ability to objectively make meaning within and between situations and relationships. This is accomplished among categorical representations of knowledge and oneself, where the individual and society are intertwined in mutual yet distinctly personal constructions of meaning.

The transformational nature of meaning-making is similar to what Piaget (1952) referred to as equilibration. Equilibration is a twofold cognitive process. Equilibration refers to the efforts involved in maintaining a state of homeostasis as individuals encounter new information or information which is already a part of their schematic representation of the world. When an individual is able to call upon pertinent knowledge when encountering new information, they assimilate that new information into their current level of understanding or current inventory of knowledge. If new information is not part of one's cognitive repertoire, they must accommodate the information by transforming or creating new knowledge to be incorporated into what becomes a new level of understanding. Borrowing from the work of Piaget, Kegan (1994) discusses
cognitive processes such as equilibration and elements like schemas which aid in understanding how individuals organize their experience among modern demands of society. Schemas are categories of meaning attributed to objects and stimuli in one's environment. Schemas are useful as information is processed by humans, making comprehension and understanding of situations more efficiently achieved in the context of one's understanding of the world. Individuals either assimilate information into already existing schemas or accommodate new and unfamiliar information as they transform and update schematic representations of their knowledge and subsequently the interpretation of experience.

Becoming a self-authored individual is difficult when one's understanding of the world is situated in a transitional or liminal phase. The process of equilibration modifies an emerging adult's organization and representation of schemas as they categorize new experiences into their knowledge inventory. Maintaining equilibrium during emerging adult development is important not solely for the purpose of learning, but also as the individual resolves cognitive dissonance. This is a critical goal because the resolution of dissonance is necessary for mental health, well-being, and positive development (Swartwood, 2012). Equilibration during the emerging adult years likely includes the elements of self-authorship which integrate one's organization of the origins of knowledge, their own identity, and the meaning of their relationships (Baxter Magolda & King, 2004).

The process of developing self-authorship and more sophisticated meaning-making capacities is important during a period in life where aspirations and decisions impact the trajectory of an individual's adult life. It is important to move from an
environment where the emerging adult sees their world subjectively and move toward objectivity in their construction of knowledge, identity, and relationships. This would allow for less distracted and more targeted thoughts and actions to affirm one's place in adult-like roles. Therefore, the foundational cognitive elements specified above are significant because interpretation is a key component to decision-making as emerging adults integrate themselves in transitory environments like higher education. This will be discussed in greater detail in chapter four.

Development of Self-Authorship

The cognitive elements discussed above demonstrate how an emerging adult constructs meaning associated with themselves and others. Although emerging adults are not children or adolescents, their thinking can still be influenced by egocentrism, impulsivity, and the immediacy of emotions during their transition to adulthood (Aspinwall, 2005). Additionally, the capacity to construct abstract mental representations is embedded in one's orientation toward the subject-object relationship. The cognitive and developmental elements discussed above are necessary for understanding the complexity of the sometimes intangible relationship between the individual and society. Likewise, the ability for emerging adults to develop a self-authored level of meaning-making is predicated on these constructive elements of cognition. The remainder of this chapter will explain the positive development of self-authorship.

The successful development of self-authorship is described in three meaning-making structures: external formulas, the crossroads, and finally self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2010; Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). The theoretical passage toward self-authorship incorporates the work of Kegan (1994) by explaining self-evolution as reliant
upon underlying meaning-making structures. More specifically, Baxter Magolda and
King (2012) provide a conceptual foundation for researching self-authorship, utilizing
qualitative methods and analyses. Analysis of qualitative responses were used to
understand participants’ personal characteristics, interpretations of experiences, and
developmental growth in a longitudinal study. This led to their perspective of the three
meaning-making structures which outline the development of self-authorship (Baxter
Magolda & King, 2012).

In the first meaning-making structure, external formulas, progression toward self-
authorship is explained in three underlying positions: Trusting External Authority,
Tensions with Trusting External Authority, and Recognizing Shortcomings of Trusting
External Authority (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). Following these three positions
within the external formulas meaning-making structure, an individual will first rely on
external authorities for knowledge acquisition, constructing identity and their need to
please others based solely on external authorities. Those who use the Tensions with
Trusting External Authority meaning-making position:

become increasingly aware of—and concerned about—subjectivity. As they
encounter conflicting expectations, they struggle to figure out what to
believe, how to define themselves, and how to manage pleasing others.
The primary distinction between this and the next meaning-making
position, Recognizing Shortcomings of Trusting External Authority, is that
in the latter position, there is an increasing acceptance of uncertainty and
the emerging recognition of the need to hold one's own opinions, be
oneself, and not be driven by living up to others' expectations. (Baxter
Magolda & King, 2012, pp. 65-66)

The external formulas meaning-making structure emphasizes the dominance of external
sources on meaning-making as the understanding of knowledge, identity, and social
relations undergo transformations (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). Although individuals'
thinking in the external formulas meaning-making structure is dominated by external sources, they will ultimately realize there are inherent conflicts when unequivocally trusting external sources of knowledge without relying on oneself to navigate their experiences, interpretations, and choices.

The Crossroads is the meaning-making structure where an individual comes to recognize and construct their internal voice. The Crossroads consists of four positions in total. During the first two positions of the Crossroads, considered as Entering the Crossroads, the dominant influence is still external authority as an individual comes to Question External Authority then Construct the Internal Voice. Although the internal voice materializes in the Questioning External Authority position, there is still a "lack of awareness about how to relate differently to external authority" (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012, p. 67). Additionally, one may realize there are other pathways to conceptualizing knowledge, identity, and their relationships rather than explicitly upholding the opinions of others. After Questioning External Authority, an individual moves to Construct the Internal Voice position. This is where "both external and internal meaning-making structures are actively present and competing for dominance, but overall, the external forces still edge out the internal; for this reason, it fits within the external segment of the Crossroads" (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012, p. 73). During the final two positions of the Crossroads, considered as Leaving the Crossroads, the individual begins to Listen to the Internal Voice then Cultivate the Internal Voice. This represents a phase where the external voice is restricted as the internal voice becomes clearer. The internal voice is consciously refined while the external sources are diminished as the predominate influence. Although external sources are still considered strongly, during the Crossroads
the individual gains an internal source of meaning-making while external forces become less powerful.

Lastly, in the third meaning-making structure, following External Formulas and the Crossroads, is the Self-Authoring meaning-making structure (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). This meaning-making structure is comprised of three positions: Trusting the Internal Voice, Building an Internal Foundation, and Securing Internal Commitments. In the Trusting the Internal Voice position, an individual augments their knowledge, identity, and ways of relating to others as they come to rely on and maintain confidence in their internal voice. During the next position, "Building an Internal Foundation shifts to crafting one's beliefs, values, identity, and relationship to the world into a philosophy of living to guide one's decisions and actions" (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012, p. 98). In the last position of self-authorship, there is less effort to consciously focus on utilizing the internal voice as self-authoring one's decisions throughout various situations becomes second nature and the individual Secures Internal Commitments.

In these positions and meaning-making structures of intellectual development, there are consistent delineations between internal and external sources of meaning-making. The ability to differentiate between these two sources of meaning-making requires conscious effort and proper scaffolding to support an emerging adult's progression toward a self-authored level of thinking. Emerging adults must make sense of their previous experiences and identity formations through an awareness of the relationship between their knowledge, identity, and interpersonal relationships. The development of self-authorship provides a depiction of only one hypothetical progression toward adulthood. The question now becomes: What is the role of self-authorship in
higher education? Are emerging adults disenfranchised of a meaningful education which would accelerate their pathway to the self-sufficiency of adulthood?
CHAPTER IV
THE PURSUIT OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Evident in the works of Arnett (2004) and Baxter Magolda and King (2004; 2012) is a richness in the transition during the emerging adult years. There are several opportunities to engage roles and responsibilities as an emerging adult; a phase which is comprehensively addressed in higher education. Postsecondary schooling offers a bridge between adolescence and adulthood, which signifies the transition between "private family life to public political and occupational settings where adults live" (Lutfey & Mortimer, 2003, p. 187). Americans utilize the services of higher education institutions to become self-sufficient citizens. This chapter will further explain the potential for aiding the development of emerging adults and considering how to redefine higher education through the works of Astin's (1993) Input-Environment-Output student impact model and Baxter Magolda and King's (2004) Learning Partnerships Model for the intellectual development of college students. First, the relationship between emerging adults and higher education will be discussed in greater detail to consider how development and learning are codependent.

Emerging Adults in Higher Education

Emerging adults typically achieve a small semblance of adult life during the college years, with less supervision than adolescence and more free time to consider how to express their interests and energy. Pursuing a college education represents a relatively
unstable time, often with a less firm family foundation; in-between an individual's formative nuclear family and the eventual family of their own creation. Emerging adults typically lack financial independence and work a myriad of part-time jobs, still financially dependent on their parents. More importantly, they are discovering themselves as individuals during college. Emerging adult's are justifiably very self-focused. They must balance and find congruence between their feared and ideal selves in order to be comfortable with their actual selves (Carver, Lawrence & Scheier, 1999). This comes after the usually structured and more nurturing environments of childhood and adolescence, in which the individual generated conceptions of self and identity with a predominately external locus of control (Kegan, 1994). Emerging adults in higher education search for clarity and consistency in who they are and what they will become as they grapple with how to incorporate their personal expectations with their identity and self-concept. Additionally, personal expectations are balanced with the perception of social and cultural expectations.

The conditions of the college student experience reflect much of what Arnett (2004) theorized as an ultimately transitional period of life characterized as immensely unstable and self-focused. Arnett's (2004) work depicts emerging adults as individuals who traverse the academic terrain with great variability, attempting to decide on what major they should claim or which career to pursue. For emerging adults, navigation through the higher education environment requires resilience to distraction while choosing a career path or academic discipline to study. College students must navigate academic, social, and economic roles as they attempt to answer the question: Who am I and what do I want to become? They are making a series of decisions relative to their
identity, relationships and career. Therefore, decision-making throughout the pursuit of higher education greatly characterizes and impacts both their current experiences and future outcomes.

Niemiec et al. (2006) highlight self-determination theory in relation to the process of internalization and college students' motivation as they are socialized. Individuals must internalize social and cultural expectations to become fully integrated into the college environment. Motivation during this time dictates where and how much effort is allocated in the multitude of fluctuating areas of an emerging adult's self-concept and personal experience. Whether an individual emphasizes love, work, or school, and the combination of these three, is largely a result of who they believe they are, their expectations for success and failure, and the level of value they attribute to future goals in these essential areas of the human experience.

There is no question that higher education is a destination in American society, representative of the passage toward socially desirable positions. As Arnett and Tanner (2011) explain, "attending college or university marks a crucial turning point in the occupational and social class destiny of emerging adults" (p. 32). Higher education offers a stepping stone for emerging adults to become self-sufficient, financially independent, and attain higher social status. Aspirations for independence from parents or for status attainment serve as examples of external influence on individual expectations for adult status which distract from internal sources for optimizing well-being (Aspinwall, 2005). This is reinforced by Coomes and DeBard (2004) who explained "valued behaviors are determined through a combination of internal drive and external pressure that makes up the motivation of college students" (p. 5). As the self-authorship literature in chapter
three indicates, internal drive must be the predominant influence for an individual to transcend their transitional status and achieve a solidified sense of self and identity. "Considerable research indicates that social mobility and status attainment are a function not simply of family social status and individual ability but also intervening experiences, including educational experiences and attainment" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 373). If an emerging adult could think at a self-authored level while simultaneously be given opportunities to experience mature independence, it follows they would optimally assimilate to adult-like roles and responsibilities (King & Baxter Magolda, 2004).

Student Development Models

There are major components of the higher education experience which contribute to the likelihood an emerging adult will succeed and characterize their outcomes. These major components are entering college, staying there, and completion. Each of these fundamental levels represent opportunities for the development of self-authorship in the higher education context, and can be applied to Astin's (1993) Input-Environment-Outcome (I-E-O) Model. The I-E-O Model addresses the "value-added of the experience with which the student is engaged" (Bresciani, 2011, p. 323). This is considered as an impact model which "provides a framework for considering the impact of college while taking into account students' characteristics and predispositions prior to college" (Sax & Harper, 2011, p. 502). This is pertinent to what Sax and Harper (2011) refer to as "the conditional effects of college, or the ways in which college environments such as classroom climate, peer culture, or out-of-class involvement–might affect students differently on the basis of their race, class, gender, or other unique characteristics" (p. 500). Conditional effects represent the need for strategically structured learning
environments to serve diverse student populations. In addition, the amount of student learning and personal development associated with any higher education program must be proportional to the quality and quantity of diverse students' involvement (Milem & Berger, 1997). A higher education model which embodies these concepts is the Learning Partnerships Model developed by Baxter Magolda and King (2004).

Baxter Magolda and King (2004) developed the Learning Partnerships Model to address the advancement of self-authorship in higher education. The Learning Partnerships Model compliments Astin's (1993) I-E-O Model by strategically optimizing students experience in relation to their inputs and how the context of higher education can promote intended outcomes. The Learning Partnerships Model is informed by holistic approaches of student development, with self-authorship as an intended outcome for college students (Baxter Magolda & King, 2004). This approach recognizes the need for cognitive maturity, integrated identity, and mature relationships in today's contemporary social and occupational environments. These three criteria correlate with the three dimensions of self-authorship: epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal foundations. In addition, they encapsulate necessary elements of effective citizenship, considered concomitantly with self-authorship as the main intended outcome of higher education by Baxter Magolda and King (2004):

Effective citizenship requires the ability to evaluate possible actions, interpret contexts and consequences, and make wise choices—all characteristics of cognitive maturity. For these choices to be coherent and ethical requires an internal belief system and an internal identity that together guide action. Ethical action for the good of the individual and larger community requires the capacity for mutuality and interdependence characteristic of mature relationships: it requires understanding of and commitment to one's interests in interaction with understanding of and commitment to the interests of others. (p. 6)
The characteristics of effective citizenship reflect the need to intentionally develop self-authorship in emerging adult college students. As stated in chapter two, emerging adults reside in routine structures of experience, where they communicate and collaborate with others to construct schematic representations of their environment. The Learning Partnerships Model emphasizes this as it "challenges external authority dependence via three core assumptions: knowledge is socially constructed, one's identity plays a central role in crafting knowledge claims, and knowledge is mutually constructed via the sharing of expertise and authority" (Baxter Magolda & King, 2004, xix). These core assumptions of the model recommend a shared responsibility in the development of students' knowledge between professors, administrators, peers, and themselves. In the context of the Learning Partnerships Model, more knowledgeable others are not simply the purveyors of knowledge, rather, they offer opportunities to discuss knowledge claims and decipher meanings in the context of a student's identity (Vygotsky, 1978).

In correlation with the three core assumptions, learning partnerships support self-authorship via three principles: "validating learners' capacity as knowledge constructors, situating learning in learners' experience, and defining learning as mutually constructing meaning" (Baxter Magolda & King, 2004, xix). The principles of the Learning Partnerships Model challenge external authority dependence while empowering students to move toward self-authored meaning-making capacities. The Learning Partnerships Model requires the mutual construction of knowledge between student and educator. Intended outcomes of this model revolve around structuring and strengthening the internal foundations of both student and educator. This is accomplished through the intentional efforts of faculty and administrators to reflect and reconsider their roles as
educators (King & Baxter Magolda, 2004). The characteristics of learning partnerships are immensely important in multicultural environments because collaboration and perspective taking are central to the capacity for recognizing and positively resolving both individual and group differences.

To properly enact the Learning Partnerships Model, the assumptions and principles of learning partnerships must occur within the daily lives of emerging adults as they move away from external dependence and move toward internal authority (Baxter Magolda & King, 2004). Understanding that not all knowledge is absolute and the individual must apply strategies to discern the accuracy of information, is integral to building learning partnerships. The emerging adult must assimilate and accommodate information as they construct knowledge, identity and their relationships. This is a natural process of human development, although emerging adult characteristics such as instability, feeling in-between, and optimism in life's possibilities all intersect to predispose them for turbulent educational pathways.

Higher education has the potential to provide opportunities for learning partnerships to lead students toward mature meaning-making. This is not happenstance and must be enacted through the pedagogical practices of faculty and the programmatic purposes of administrators. Likewise, the enactment of learning partnerships would look differently as students' unique input characteristics interact with diverse college environments. Next, emerging adulthood and learning partnerships will be analyzed through trends in higher education research which correlate with the I-E-O Model: access, persistence and attainment.
Trends in Higher Education

Gaining access to higher education is a major step for an emerging adult to step away from the dependency of adolescence and step into roles with greater maturity to further their development. The first two years of college are considered as a transition into the higher education environment (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). During this time, emerging adults must decide their academic majors or career trajectories which Baxter Magolda and King (2004) highlight as dangerous to decide when meaning-making is predominately influenced by external formulas. What is necessary for students to internally generate their paths is to "reflect on their values, beliefs, and identities during college" (Baxter Magolda & King, 2004, p. 29). This can be addressed through the practices of faculty and higher education administrators.

To sufficiently bring about change in the source of emerging adults' meaning-making, faculty and administrators must incorporate conscientious support for students through the above principles and assumptions. The principles and assumptions of learning partnerships represent a preference for an individualized approach in what is typically a mass-educational environment. Learning partnerships highlight the recognition of emerging adult college students as independent individuals, rather than as part of a group or in aggregate form. Also, learning partnerships simultaneously support and challenge emerging adults.

The point of access and transition to the first years of higher education are crucial moments which characterize what an emerging adult gleans from their experiences. The transition into academic communities represents a shift toward an increased need for self-regulated decision-making and behaviors (Tanner & Arnett, 2011). Neurologically, the
young college student's frontal lobe is still maturing, signifying underdeveloped impulse control, planning skills, and higher order mental capacities such as critical thinking (Thompson, 2014). Reason, Terenzini and Domingo (2006) highlight the importance of developing competence during this time, citing the "personal, organizational, environmental, programmatic, and policy factors that individually and collectively shape students' development of academic competence" (p. 149). As emerging adults come to recognize their capacities and competencies, their internal foundation builds, and they become increasingly aware of the requirements of their roles within the higher education environment. Therefore, the underlying cognitive capacities necessary to build competencies and agency must be meaningfully arranged to produce development.

Students arrive on the college campus with a variety of backgrounds, as DeBard (2004) explains, higher education is currently serving and will continue to serve the most diverse student population in history. Within this diverse population of students, family background and academic preparation are two strongly related inputs which characterize student success (McPherson & Schapiro, 2006). Diverse or underserved students often lack academic or technological skills, adversely influencing their engagement and success (Goode, 2010). Given there is a diverse cultural presence on college campuses, the Learning Partnerships Model incorporates interdisciplinary curricula and multicultural education to support engagement and intercultural competence of students (Haynes, 2004; Hornak & Ortiz, 2004). Engagement is necessary for optimally impacting knowledge formation and cognitive skills during the first transition phase of pursuing higher education (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). This sets the stage for increasingly
mature meaning-making capacities as emerging adults progress through the higher education environment.

The second set of trends in higher education research are persistence, maturation, and attainment. Influences on persistence can be discussed in both broad institutional terms or on the basis of individual needs. First, in institutional terms, two-year institutions have been found to adversely affect persistence compared to four-year institutions (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). There are differences in the access level and matriculation of students into these institutions, as well as socioeconomic implications for student persistence leaning in favor of higher socioeconomic backgrounds (Corrigan, 2003). Additionally, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) explain the importance of state policies and system structures in relation to student persistence finding:

High performers have statewide governing capacities, whereas low performers rely on institutional governing structures. High-performing states also made better use of data as a tool to improve transfer performance, including state-level feedback to campuses about their performance relative to other institutions in the state. (p. 382)

Additionally, private institutions were found to have marginally better persistence rates than public institutions (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). This has implications for how the size, mission, and vision of an institution can affect the emerging adult. If an individual is placed in an environment with less student-centered policies, a lack in adult-like maturity would likely intensify their challenges. Similarly, where an institution falls in relation to emphases on research, teaching, and service have profound impacts on the student, faculty, and administrator interactions which garner academic benefits.

On an individual basis, persistence and attainment are reliant on several factors: resilience, engagement, socioeconomic status, or grades (Corrigan, 2003; Nettles &
Millet, 2006). Sanford (1966) outlined the reciprocal influences of challenge and support on student resilience and engagement. If a student experiences the optimal level of challenge while still feeling supported, Sanford (1966) believed they were more likely to develop independence. Challenge and support are central to learning partnerships, represented in cognitive processes of assimilation and accommodation. The preservation of equilibrium is necessary for the maintenance of internal foundations. Likewise, the balance between challenge and support optimally influences the aspirations and motivation of emerging adults.

In a similar student development theory relative to persistence and attainment, Schlossberg (1989) conceptualized the elements of marginality and mattering. Students who feel marginalized in the college environment are more likely to feel insecure, depressed, or irritable, which can adversely affect academic performance and subsequently the likelihood for persistence and attainment. On the other hand, students who genuinely feel they matter within an institution are more likely to become involved and optimally extend their academic development. The challenge and support factor, as well as the marginality and mattering factor, represent how institutional practices can affect emerging adults. Emerging adults are likely to both seek opportunities for growth and simultaneously avoid adult-like roles and responsibilities (Dennett & Azar, 2011). This signifies the need for a careful balance to engage emerging adults effectively, while recognizing their need to feel they have some control of their environment and life trajectory.

The I-E-O Model and the Learning Partnerships Model offer a framework for considering the development of emerging adults throughout the above trends in higher
education. The Learning Partnerships Model represents an allegiance to cultivating individuality and the human right to develop capabilities to pursue valued objectives.

What is required within the developing individual to achieve learning outcomes such as thinking critically, demonstrating intercultural competence when interacting with others, and making discerning judgments about moral and ethical issues? Each arguably requires being able to reflect on one's assumptions, compare them to others' assumptions and perspectives, discern patterns and anomalies, and apply methods of inquiry to one's approaches and one's critique of other's approaches. These are commonly included among habits of mind associated with college education, especially when referring to professional education and liberal education. (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012, p. 4)

The emerging adult is in dire need of authentic experiences which necessitate reflective thinking to secure their internal foundations (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). Although it is a challenging task to incorporate the above elements of the Learning Partnerships Model, its assumptions and principles can be intentionally enacted as students transition and persist in higher education. Likewise, the philosophical foundations of the Learning Partnerships Model complement Astin's (1993) I-E-O college impact model as both focus on the possibilities of higher education to move the emerging adult beyond their initial input characteristics and provide spaces for the individual to come to fruition. This is accomplished through improved pedagogies and intentional interactions which target critical thinking capacities rather than solely curricular or academic standards.
CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION

The intent of this conceptual analysis of emerging adulthood was to focus on both historical and contemporary texts which contribute to understanding of emerging adults' multifaceted life transition. The conceptualization of emerging adulthood in contemporary society is a necessary foundation for contemplating possibilities to develop self-authorship in higher education contexts. This was accomplished by organizing the paper into several areas: identity development, future-oriented thinking, self-discrepancy theory, decision-making, information processing theory, epistemological development, student development, and trends in higher education. The literature search process served as a foundation of empirical work to analyze intersections between emerging adulthood, self-authorship, and higher education.

As discussed in chapter two, emerging adults experience instability in their identity and interpersonal relationships. They also have the potential to develop increasingly integrated and complex identities and meaning-making abilities. The college environment is unique in that it provides a temporary context for an emerging adult to assess, reassess, and change their life plans (Arnett, 2004). Looming in this context is the completion of a degree in which an emerging adult is typically expected to enter the workforce, pursue graduate school, or otherwise meander paths toward a legitimate adult life which they value. The emerging adult must engage and persist through their higher
education experience as they coordinate their identity explorations and individual purpose with various levels of knowledge, awareness, and skill.

The inclusion of social factors for interpreting emerging adulthood was included in chapter two to illustrate a developmental process which is shaped by the many people and experiences in an individual's life. Characteristics resulting from aforementioned socialization processes contribute to an individual's sense of self. These self-perceptions are inherently a part of recognizing that a human exists among other humans, and whose behavior must appropriately, normatively, and somewhat predictably respond to their environment. Social development is occurring simultaneously as emerging adults contemplate and construct their own identity among the presence of others in what are often unfamiliar higher education environments. The chaotic depiction of the emerging adult experience is a foundation for understanding how individuals are affected by environments where they may not receive as much individual attention. The emerging adult is struggling with the expectations inherent in higher education environments. Therefore, the very student-centered curricular approaches for the development of self-authorship are feasible and offer a unique pathway out of this liminal phase of life.

Emerging adulthood is a depiction of the human experience which was used to highlight the need for self-authorship. Perspectives on the processes associated with emerging adulthood and self-authorship similarly focus on the transition to adulthood. Recentering is also a useful tool for this purpose, considering the fundamental environmental adaptations necessary for emerging adults. Recentering describes the shift away from environments which previously supported dependence to the environments of adulthood which favor independence (Tanner & Arnett, 2011). Although recentering is
an essential concern, the self-evolution inherent in the process of becoming self-authored is a more cogent articulation of the positive developmental trajectories of emerging adults. Baxter Magolda and King's (2012) description of the movement from external formulas, through the crossroads, culminating in self-authorship serve as evidence of the necessity for pulling apart and putting back together oneself and conceptions of the world. This is not a quick or easy process, especially when an individual is in transition.

The process of developing self-authorship is difficult when individuals must shift from environments of familial bonds and togetherness to environments where "each woman or man for him or herself" predominates the collective mentality. Likewise, this culturally individualistic mentality creates an adult world of indifference toward others and an isolated existence where individual needs supersede collective needs. These are broad generalizations of how humans think and behave, although this project raises questions about how social conditions and higher education affect the individual and how an individual's characteristics and engagement affect student outcomes in higher education.

In chapter four, Astin's Input-Environment-Output and the Learning Partnerships models were necessary to consider how the positive development of emerging adults can occur. Astin's (1993) work highlights the developmental trajectory or process of emerging adults' growth while pursuing higher education. The Learning Partnerships model compliments the I-E-O model as a philosophy of educational practice, one which articulates efficient communication between faculty, administrators, and students. The Learning Partnership model gives authority and power to students, altering the context of learning and development to emphasize collaboration, respect, and strategies for reaching
agreement between conflicting views. Higher education must prioritize these and other
critical thinking skills to sufficiently prepare individuals to participate in often polarizing
public domains. Given the unique role of higher education institutions, they are
responsible for facilitating the development of self-authorship in emerging adults.

Emerging adulthood is a tumultuous time which would most valuably culminate
in self-authorship. The ability to feel independent and self-sufficient; to have control over
one's environment and reflect on milestones in one's development are distinctly human
capabilities. This encompasses how emerging adults think and behave, how they may
incorporate what Greene (1988) discussed as "a special sort of critical understanding" (p. 4). The seemingly prolonged period of maturation from adolescence through emerging
adulthood is a topic of great interest to both parents and higher education professionals
alike. There must be a keen representation of a student population in what is a liminal
phase of the lifespan (Dunham, Kidwell & Wilson, 1986). What is necessary for
emerging adults to transcend insecure and in-between environments is to arrive at
decisions which separate from external authorities; to take authorship over their life by
internally generating and becoming responsible for themselves and others (Baxter
Magolda & King, 2004).

In some ways, focusing on the needs of emerging adults could be construed as a
preoccupation with individuality in contemporary education environments, although
becoming self-authored provides the opportunity for authentic conversations about
human freedom and public discourse to begin. Additionally, the development of self-
authorship is inherently beneficial for society, as it promotes productive interpersonal
relationships and empathic understanding. The emerging adult years are usually the first
time a person has the cognitive ability to consider and reflect on their knowledge, identity, and relationships in an objective manner, resulting in more authentic projections of self (Baxter Magolda & King, 2004). These projections enable peers and others to similarly display themselves authentically and less inhibited by external forces or subjectivity, allowing for more genuine interactions to benefit future occupational environments and civil society more broadly.

Emerging adults are in search of possibilities to transcend their current space, and take control over their life trajectory. In this respect, emerging adulthood represents the potential to transcend an individual's current status, whether that be in terms of personal growth, social status, or economic status. Emerging adulthood is a period characterized by a pursuit for independence and self-sufficiency where choices are numerous, although opportunities are competitive and scarce. Pursuits for individual growth are common throughout the human lifespan, which represents a uniquely human need for self-actualization. What is unique about the emerging adult pursuit is a need for the individual to transcend their liminal status and arrive at a state of self-sufficiency for the first time in their lives.

There are common elements of tracks, pathways, movement and transcendence throughout this project. This represents the most rudimentary goal of educational practice: to structure the individual so they are adaptive and have the capacities to become a socially responsible and best possible version of themself. Becoming different than one has been is a meaningful and often individual process, one filled with seemingly infinite pathways. The decisions individuals make are symbols of their current version or place in their self-narrative. Targeted interventions to increase individual investment,
motivation and engagement has been, and will continue to be, the difficult task of educating students. Without an individual's investment and effort to shape their future, educational pathways are part of our social imagination. Social institutions have programs, initiatives or strategic plans to address student development, although they must emphasize togetherness and collaboration.

One portion of the emerging adult experience that is emphasized implicitly rather than directly in this project is the inherent desire of emerging adults for independence and self-sufficiency. Although independence from parents and self-sufficiency are what Arnett (2004) describes as the most significant culminating goal for emerging adults, this is predominately supported by the five features and the social and historical conditions of human development. An emphasis on the desire emerging adults have in accordance with their perceived life choices and their actual options in environmental context would enrich their presence in the literature. The source of desire for self-sufficiency is a very personal goal which is interconnected with the socially enabled desire for independence. The coupling of desire with fear of unstable economic conditions has the potential to create dissonance and a self-perpetuating cycle of inactivity. This is a gap in the literature which is in need of further consideration and research.

The expectations and subsequent claims on the minds of young people are important to consider (Kegan, 1994). They can be detrimental when there is an ambivalence toward the development of adolescents and emerging adults, an ambivalence which centers on a "close connection between adult-world problems and evident troubles in the lives of young people--causal links that widely spread fault and responsibility for problems" (Smith, Christoffersen, Davidson & Herzog, p. 12).
Wherever one attributes blame in these circumstances, increased institutional involvement in the development of students cannot be overemphasized (Wildman, 2007). The temporary placement of emerging adults in higher education institutions legitimizes the continued search for meaning and identity; almost as though they are expected to continue searching. Historically, liberal arts education epitomizes the continued search for origins of knowledge and the cultivation of critical thinking. Perhaps the career oriented, vocational tracks of contemporary mass higher education are not comfortable in an environment of individuals who seek higher education for more enjoyable and self-exploratory purposes. Additionally, perhaps the prolonged period of "emerging" is representative of emerging adults' dissatisfaction with the predominately economic purposes of their lives situated in industrialized societies.

This study suggests how socialization and human nature perpetuate inequality, and a general dissatisfaction with current modes of education and cultural transmission. The manifestations of busyness, convoluted meanings, and underlying social expectations in everyday life likely create the "uneasiness" Greene (1988, p. 1) describes. These also detract from human freedom and complicate the pursuit of happiness. It is evident emerging adults are preoccupied, creating avoidance and disengagement from adult roles and a society which they do not feel they belong. This is potentially dangerous to their well-being. Additionally, these ideas are exacerbated by a complacent culture whose argumentative public domains and media outlets often express egocentric and ethnocentric points of view. These are often expressed through arbitrary lines of fictional rhetoric, which only further illustrates the need for individuals to have strong internal
foundations with the ability to communicate effectively with others who are not willing to work in partnership.

It is not surprising that society has the propensity to be complacent or detached from the experience of emerging adults. The human condition in America has become individualized and somewhat isolating. Cultural context is a powerful influence on the way children, adolescents, and emerging adults learn how the adult world operates. Further, the commodification of success and elements of consumerism cloud a common existence and a common purpose to live well with one another. The premise that a consumerist ideology has become more prevalent in American culture is evident in the materialistic nature of modern life and individual lifestyles (Miles, 2000). The proliferation of advertising in the 20th century is one example which depicts an American culture enchanted with desire for goods to serve as status indicators (Spring, 2003). This preoccupation with material objects and social status can also be applied to emerging adults' pursuit of higher education.

All this holds relevance for a conception of education in what is described as our free society. It is through and by means of education, many of us believe, that individuals can be provoked to reach beyond themselves in their intersubjective space. It is through and by means of education that they may become empowered to think about what they are doing, to become mindful, to share meanings, to conceptualize, to make varied sense of their lived worlds. It is through education that preferences may be released, languages learned, intelligences developed, perspectives opened, possibilities disclosed. I do not need to say again how seldom this occurs today in our technicized, privatized, consumerist time. (Greene, 1988, p. 12)

Commodification is an aspect which is imbedded in the ideology of consumerism. This creates a detachment from the self and an emphasis on extrinsic goals and rewards, rather than an internal authority for navigating the higher education environment and life
transitions. When considering an emerging adult has a lack of internal authority and a strong desire for status attainment through the tracks of higher education, they are likely to have fleeting inclinations which emphasize short-term goals. This has the potential to serve as further distraction from activities which would genuinely enhance an emerging adult’s position in relation to their long-term goals.

In higher education, increasingly market-oriented practices lean toward accelerated programs and inflated grading systems to both appease and subsequently disenfranchise consumers of a meaningful higher education experience (Mullen, 2010). This dissatisfaction generally goes unaddressed, as consumers of higher education have been given the illusion of more choices and greater access. Keane (2012) explains the varying future priorities by social class and whether higher education is viewed as an obligation. In this sense, perceptions of the purpose and value of education also play a role in educational expectations and decision-making (Mullen, 2010). A society with variable educational purposes in a market system may be hazardous to public understanding and its cultural foundations, although America is a diverse nation with institutions who inevitably will have diverse missions and purposes (Breneman, 2006; Hamrick, Evans & Schuh, 2002).

The existence of emerging adulthood represents the crucial need for leadership, where the future is inhabited by individuals who can effectively contribute rather than idly stand-by, waiting for action to take place. The scrupulous efforts individuals make to acclimate themselves to the world are powerful examples of their need to evade anonymity. Human beings have a tendency to struggle as they find their individual purpose and space in the social structure (Greene, 1988; Martusewicz, 2001). The
potential for higher education to reduce this struggle and to provide a space for the
development of effective citizenship, is subsequently a worthwhile and valuable area of
study (King & Baxter Magolda, 2004).

The products of this study represent how individuals develop in contemporary
society and together demonstrate how emerging adults are uniquely disenfranchised in
the current system of higher education. Students are graduating college without the
knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to find meaningful or gainful employment.
They are drifting through their twenties without receiving a meaningful education which
would allow them to take authorship over their own lives. Additionally, college students
must take on immense debt to pay for their education, with very little support to find
employment in an unforgiving economic environment. The concept of “survival of the
fittest” hardly applies when emerging adults are set up for failure. The educational focus
on content and rote memorization of subject matter has taken precedence over character
development and critical thinking. This is not necessarily a result of poor teaching, it
could be the indiscretion of policy makers and a complacent culture which is unable to
meet the demand of an increasingly accessible postsecondary education.

In sum, emerging adulthood is similar to a life in limbo; on the precipice of
adulthood and what an individual imagines their future existence to become. The
emerging individual is in search of their identity through a wide-variety of social and
academic experiences. Commitment to one's identity is the product of much deliberation.
It is the result of contemplative periods of insight and understanding of one's own
experience. This is a meaning-making experience which is shaped by culture and
language, manifesting in the location one finds themself as they traverse pathways and
potential trajectories toward self-authorship. The emerging adult must decide what constitutes their pathway by considering who they are and how to survive. Education is the most common answer which is perceived to enhance pathways for a population in search of survival. The development of self-authorship in emerging adults is a challenge, although its promotion is necessary for humans to effectively withstand the challenges of collaboration with diverse others in a global environment.
REFERENCES


