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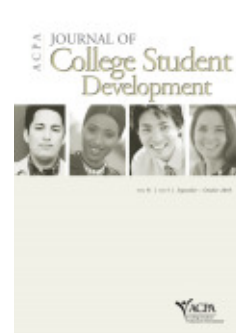
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The Activity of Meaning Making: A Holistic Perspective on College Student Development

Marcia B. Baxter Magolda

The student affairs profession embraced student development theory as its guiding philosophy in the 1970s, a move articulated explicitly in Brown's (1972) *Student Development in Tomorrow's Higher Education—A Return to the Academy*. Brown reiterated student affairs' commitment to the whole student, a commitment outlined as early as 1937 in the *Student Personnel Point of View* (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 1989), and argued for collaboration among student affairs and faculty to promote students' development. Although the profession adopted student development theory as a philosophy to augment its whole student stance, theorists focused on separate strands of theory that complicated emphasizing the whole student.

Knefelkamp, Widick, and Parker (1978) synthesized the student development research literature into five clusters, noting that they "did not find, nor could we create, the comprehensive model of student development" (p. xi). The five clusters—psychosocial theories, cognitive developmental theories, maturity models, typology models, and person–environment interaction models—have remained as separate lines of theorizing through much of the student development literature. Although Knefelkamp and her colleagues portrayed all five clusters as valuable, research tended to further each cluster with insufficient attention to their intersections. Research in the psychological tradition tended to focus on the person; research in the sociological tradition focused on the environment. Literature on

student success, outcomes, and learning is often separated from literature on student development. To complicate matters further, research within clusters to create theory in the context of gender, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation typically resulted in separate silos rather than interconnected possibilities. Although the student affairs profession moved to explicitly embrace the link between development and learning with the *Student Learning Imperative* (American College Personnel Association, 1994) and *Learning Reconsidered* (Keeling, 2004), the learning and student development literatures are rarely integrated (Wildman & Baxter Magolda, 2008). Thus, higher education in general and student affairs in particular lack a holistic, theoretical perspective to promote the learning and development of the whole student.

Constructing a holistic theoretical perspective requires focusing on intersections rather than separate constructs. Robert Kegan, a pioneer in moving toward a holistic theoretical perspective, advocated "moving from the dichotomous *choice* to the dialectical *context* which brings the poles into being in the first place" (1982, p. ix, italics in original). He argued that the questions

"Which is to be taken as the master in personality, affect or cognition?" or "Which should be the central focus, the individual or the social?" or "Which should be the primary theater of investigation, the intrapsychic or the interpersonal?" or even "Which is to be taken as the

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more powerful developmental framework the psychoanalytic or the cognitive-structural?" (pp. viii-ix)

should be reconstructed to focus on the context rather than the polarities. He offered the construct of meaning making as the context that would enable "a sophisticated understanding of the relationship between the psychological and the social, between the past and the present, and between emotion and thought" (1982, p. 15).

Another arena to focus on intersections revolves around addressing tensions and intersections between existing theoretical frameworks and new ones generated from specific populations. Nesting new ideas generated from particular student populations in larger concepts, critiquing and extending existing theory rather than ignoring it, and blending particulars and existing overarching ideas would promote integration toward a holistic perspective. The intersections of learning and development are another major area in which integration is warranted. Conducting contemporary research in ways that explore these tensions and intersections is necessary to construct a holistic theoretical perspective that depicts the complexity and variability of development.

In this article, I briefly trace the academic traditions that have formed the major body of student development literature, highlighting the evolution of separate rather than integrated constructs. I then summarize Kegan's conception of a metapsychology that integrates many of these separate lines of research. Next, I offer a holistic framework for student development theory based on contemporary research that takes a holistic approach. I conclude by outlining the kind of future research that is needed to develop and refine an integrated, holistic theoretical foundation for promoting student development.

ACADEMIC TRADITIONS AND THE THEORETICAL CLUSTERS

Grounded in the Piagetian tradition, the cognitive-developmental cluster of research articulated the increasingly complex assumptions or structures people use to make meaning of their experience. These assumptions about the nature, limits, and certainty of knowledge (Kitchener, 1983) guide *how* people think rather than *what* they think. As Piaget (1950) described, people use a set of assumptions to guide how they make meaning of their experience until they encounter dissonance. Experiences that conflict with their assumptions are often assimilated into their current structure. If the dissonance is substantial enough that it cannot be easily assimilated into the current structure, individuals revise their assumptions to accommodate the new experience, resulting in growth toward more complex meaning making. Perry (1970) sketched the first trajectory of these structures in college students' intellectual development. He described a trajectory from assuming knowledge is certain and authorities possess it (dualism), through increasing awareness that knowledge is sometimes uncertain and authorities are working to resolve the uncertainties (multiplicity), to accepting that knowledge is constructed in context by those evaluating relevant evidence (relativism). These three major phases of epistemological development have been reaffirmed, expanded, and refined by longitudinal studies of college students and adults. King and Kitchener (1994, 2004) clarified how college students viewed knowledge and how to justify their views across this trajectory, which they defined as pre-reflective, quasi-reflective, and reflective judgment. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) refined the trajectory by introducing connected and separate styles of meaning making based on their study of

college and adult women. Baxter Magolda (1992, 2001, 2002) further refined these two styles as gender-related patterns among college students within dualistic and multiplicitic phases that merged in the relativistic phase.

Separate and connected styles also emerged in moral development research, another line of research in the cognitive–developmental cluster. Kohlberg’s (1969) trajectory from egocentric to conventional to postconventional moral reasoning emphasized the separate or justice orientation, whereas Gilligan’s (1970) trajectory from egocentric to self-sacrifice to equality between self and others emphasized the connected or care orientation. Although this line of research clearly addressed the relationship of self and other, the focus remained on moral assumptions and reasoning. Similarly, although both Perry and Belenky and associates explicitly addressed the role of the self in meaning making, the epistemological line of research kept assumptions about knowledge in the forefront. A more detailed synthesis of the cognitive–developmental cluster appears in Patricia King’s article in this issue.

Simultaneously, psychosocial theorists developed the story of how adults construct their sense of self. Much of the research on college populations was grounded in Erikson’s (1968) psychosocial conceptualization of identity stemming from the interaction of physical and cognitive growth and the demands of the environment. Chickering (1969) and Chickering and Reisser (1983) sketched the particular developmental demands facing college students as they balanced autonomy and interdependence. Josselson (1987, 1996) used James Marcia’s framework to study identity based on the combination of exploration and commitment. Some of Josselson’s identity statuses portray identity as shaped largely by external forces (i.e., Guardians), whereas others portray identity

as interdependent with external others (i.e., Pathmakers). These theories emphasized the intersections between how we see ourselves and how we see relationships with others and again the notions of connection and separation arose as adults negotiated self in the context of relationships. Concern about the relevance of identity theories constructed on white majority populations led to theory construction on various social identities (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation). A more detailed synthesis of this cluster appears in the Torres, Jones, and Renn article in this issue.

The remaining three clusters Knefelkamp and colleagues (1978) identified received less attention in the on-going student development literature. The maturity models largely disappeared from compendiums of student development theory, which is unfortunate; Douglas Heath’s (1978) model explicitly identified the cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal dimensions of development. Typology models got some attention, primarily aimed at understanding individual differences, but were regarded as “not truly developmental” (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998, p. 204) owing to their lack of a developmental progression. Person–environment interaction models also got little attention in the mainstream developmental literature and became a separate literature on campus environment and ecology. Ethnographic studies of college students, emerging from an anthropological tradition, focused on student culture. The way these lines of research developed separated the psychology of the student mind from the social context in which it developed. This is ironic because the foundational theories of Piaget and Erikson, as well as many who built on their work (e.g., Belenky et al., 1986; Josselson, 1987, 1996; Perry, 1970) clearly emphasized the person in context.

Kegan’s (1982) conceptualization of a metapsychology that brought together

psychoanalytic and constructive–developmental traditions offered the means to integrate separate clusters of developmental theory into a holistic framework. Bringing together the big ideas of constructivism (i.e., that humans organize meaning) and developmentalism (i.e., that systems evolve through eras based on principles of stability and change), Kegan placed the activity—and evolution—of meaning making at the core of development. Kegan described the subject–object relationship as the deep structure of principles of mental organization. Our meaning-making structures are a combination of elements over which we have control (what Kegan calls *object*) and elements that have control over us (what Kegan calls *subject*). Object is “distinct enough from us that we can do something with it” (Kegan, 1994, p. 32), whereas 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” (p. 32, italics in original). What is subject and object, or what we have control over, changes over time. Each principle of mental organization, or phase of development, stands on a particular subject–object relationship. These principles guide *how* we construct our thinking, feeling, and social relating. As some aspect that was subject becomes object, we move to a more complex principle. For example, in what Kegan calls the socializing mind, we are subject to the expectations of others and thus we construct our identity to align with those expectations (Kegan & Lahey, 2009). When we can take others’ expectations as object, we are able to stand apart from them to construct an internal voice (Baxter Magolda, 2009) to coordinate external expectations. Kegan calls this new principle the self-authoring mind (Kegan & Lahey, 2009). Because the underlying subject–object relationship undergirds thinking, feeling, and social relating, it intertwines

cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal dimensions of development. How we come to know, how we see ourselves, and how we see ourselves in relation to others are all hinged on the same underlying subject–object relationship. Kegan (1994) described growth as “liberating ourselves from that in which we were embedded, making what was subject into object so that we can ‘have it’ rather than ‘be had’ by it” (p. 34). This portrayal of self-evolution integrates thinking and feeling, cognition and affect, self and other. Although Kegan referred to this as growth of the mind, he is explicit that the word mind refers to “the person’s meaning-constructive or meaning-organizational capacities. I am referring to the selective, interpretive, executive, construing capacities that psychologists have historically associated with the ‘ego’ or the self” (p. 29).

Kegan’s metapsychology, with its emphasis on the activity of meaning making, also sets the stage for linking development and learning. Bruner (1990) noted that a “more interpretive approach to cognition concerned with ‘meaning-making’” (p. 2) proliferated in many disciplines. Bruner articulated learning as construction of meaning about the world and about self. This portrayal of learning is synonymous with Kegan’s portrayal of self-evolution in which cognition, identity, and relationships are intertwined. Despite these obvious links, the science of learning evolved separately from even the intellectual development literature (Wildman, 2007). Wildman (2007) articulated three major theoretical shifts in conceptions of learning: “behavior analysis, to information processing, to cultural participation” (p. 20). The shift to learning as cultural participation in the 1980s acknowledged that people made meaning of their experience by acting in a social context. For example, Wenger’s (1998) *Communities of Practice* portrays learning as the interconnection of acting within a practice

context, making meaning of one's experiences in that context, and developing an identity in the context of belonging to that community. This model of learning incorporates Dewey's (1916) emphasis on experience, Piaget's (1970) emphasis on meaning making, and core concepts from constructivist, feminist, liberatory, and culturally relevant pedagogy (see Baxter Magolda [1999] for an integration of these approaches). The goal of such approaches to learning is greater complexity of meaning making. Mezirow described this as transformative learning:

The process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action. (2000, pp. 7–8)

This expansion of meaning making also hinged on “how we learn to negotiate and act on our own purposes, values, feelings, and meanings rather than those we have uncritically assimilated from others” (p. 8). In describing transformation learning this way, Mezirow described the developmental process of moving away from external authority toward self-authorship that is the central focus of Kegan's (1994) and Baxter Magolda's (2001, 2009) developmental theories.

Kegan's concept of growth of the mind, reflecting an integration of cognitive with intrapersonal and interpersonal development, resonates with Bruner's construction of meaning and Mezirow's transformative learning. When learning is defined as participation in meaningful social practices, all three developmental dimensions are central to learning. The integrative efforts of these lines of scholarship set the stage for creating a more holistic perspective on student development theory.

KEY CONSTRUCTS, CONCEPTUALIZATIONS, AND RESEARCH THAT FRAME A HOLISTIC THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE ON COLLEGE STUDENT DEVELOPMENT

Constructing a holistic theoretical perspective on college student development requires exploring key ideas that ground such a perspective, existing conceptual integrations, and integrative research efforts.

Key Constructs

What forms does meaning making take in the college years? Parks (2000) noted,

in the years from seventeen to thirty a distinctive mode of meaning making can emerge . . . [that] includes (1) becoming critically aware of one's own composing of reality, (2) self-consciously participating in an ongoing dialogue toward truth, and (3) cultivating a capacity to respond—to act—in ways that are satisfying and just. (p. 6)

Referring to this same time period as emerging adulthood, Tanner, Arnett, and Leis (2008) suggested it is a time of gaining self-sufficiency and recentering from childhood and adolescent contexts to adult contexts “which nourish adult interdependence” (p. 38). These overarching concepts capture the thread of evolution from external to internal definition that has run through much of the cognitive and social identity student development literature. Contemporary research, however, clarifies that this evolution is not simply a matter of increasing individuation. As young adults begin to compose their own realities and recenter into adult contexts, they renegotiate the relationship of their internal voices and external influence. External forces, initially in the foreground of meaning making, move to the background as internal forces move to the foreground of meaning making. Thus,

the internal voice becomes the coordinator of external influence (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Kegan, 1994). This renegotiation is mediated by what Parks calls “two great yearnings”: the yearning for exercise of one’s own distinct agency (one’s own power to make a difference) and the yearning for belonging, connection, inclusion, relationship, and intimacy” (p. 91). This balancing of agency and communion (Bakan, 1966) is an ongoing quest for young adults as they compose their own realities in connection with important others in their lives in multiple contexts.

These renegotiations come about when people have experiences that are discrepant with or challenge their current meaning-making structure. Piaget (1950) explained that people initially try to assimilate these discrepant experiences into their current meaning making. When this is no longer possible, people accommodate or alter their meaning making to account for the new experiences. Through this process, individuals come to see their meaning making structure as object. Revising this subject–object relationship and moving to increasingly complex principles of mental organization depends on the nature and intensity of the challenge, the persons’ individual characteristics, and the degree of support available for facing the challenge of reorganizing meaning making (Kegan, 1994; Sanford, 1962).

Existing Integrative Efforts

Many college student development theories inherently include person in context by integrating cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal dimensions, and placing making meaning in the context of the social environment. Abes, Jones, and McEwen’s (2007) recent reconceptualization of their Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity offers a clear vision of the interconnections of contextual influences, meaning making,

and self-perceptions of multiple identity dimensions. Their model draws out connections between the three dimensions of development yet offers them as one possibility rather than a prescribed model. Their incorporation of social constructionist, feminist, and postmodern theoretical frameworks yields a perspective that describes a *possible process* through which students socially construct their identities, respecting the multiple forms those can take, given the complex interplay between contextual influences, meaning making, and social identities. As such, this revised model reflects Kegan’s notion of focusing on the core activity of how we make meaning rather than on the particular meanings we make.

Renn (2003, 2004) explicitly makes the connection between social context and personal meaning making in her use of Bronfenbrenner’s ecology model in which “the environment and the individual shape—and are shaped by—one another; the model represents a dynamic, shifting relationship of reciprocal influence” (2004, p. 29). Although Renn’s work is addressed in more depth in the Torres, Jones, and Renn article (this issue), it is important to highlight here because of its contribution to contemporary holistic perspectives of college student development. Grounding her exploration of mixed-race students’ identity development in this model revealed the complexity of individual development in the context of student culture and institutional milieu.

Using Renn’s work as a frame, Taylor (2008) merged environmental and personal variables to construct an “integrated map of young adult’s development journey from external reliance to internal definition” (p. 219), thus merging the ecology model with self-evolution. Taylor’s visual map highlights the reciprocal influence Renn (and Bronfenbrenner) emphasized and reveals how various meaning-making structures mediate the influence of the environment and

vice versa. The prominence of the environment at external meaning making gradually recedes as internal meaning making strengthens and moves to the foreground. Taylor's conceptualization intertwines contemporary cognitive theories into the cognitive dimension, and identity theories into the intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions. King and Baxter Magolda (2005) offered a similar synthesis in their work on intercultural maturity and developmentally effective experiences (King, Baxter Magolda, Barber, Kendall Brown, & Lindsay, 2009). Abes, Jones, and McEwen (2007) reconceptualized their Model of Multiple Identity Development to integrate the cognitive dimension. These conceptualizations show the potential of integrating multiple theories into a coherent holistic perspective.

Explicitly Holistic Research Studies

Contemporary research focused specifically on holistic college student development (i.e., that intentionally integrates the three dimensions of development) in social contexts refines these conceptual integrations. I highlight six longitudinal or extensive cross-sectional research efforts and use these theories to create a contemporary holistic perspective on college students' development.¹ Four longitudinal studies trace college students' self-evolution in general, and self-authorship in particular, acknowledging the crucial role of social context in the developmental journey. Baxter Magolda's 22-year study (1992, 2001, 2008, 2009) sketched the journey toward and into self-authorship from age 18 to 40, emphasizing both individual and contextual dynamics that mediate the journey. Torres's (2003; Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004; Torres & Hernandez, 2007) 5-year study portrays the journey toward self-authorship for Latino/a college students with particular emphasis on how cultural

expectations and racism shape the journey. Abes's (2003, 2009; Abes & Jones, 2004) 4-year study of lesbian college students reveals the role of heteronormativity in these students' journey toward self-authorship, a dynamic I return to in the discussion of future directions of theoretical research. The Wabash National Study, a 4-year longitudinal study involving diverse students on six campuses, traces the journey toward self-authorship acknowledging students' individual histories and characteristics, their educational environments, and how they make meaning of their educational experiences (Baxter Magolda, King, Taylor & Perez, 2008; Baxter Magolda, King, Taylor, & Wakefield, 2009; King & Baxter Magolda, 2007; King et al., 2009; King, Baxter Magolda, & Masse, 2008; King, Kendall Brown, Lindsay, & VanHecke, 2007). Drawing on 30 years of formal and informal research, Parks (2000) sketched the evolution of faith development, which she defined as meaning making, from adolescence to adulthood. Her portrayal integrates forms of knowing, dependence, and community that I take to reflect the cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal developmental dimensions. Finally Pizzolato's (2003, 2004, 2005; Pizzolato, Chaudhari, Murrell, Podobnik, & Schaeffer, 2008) research program addresses self-evolution and self-authorship in multiple young adult populations in diverse social contexts. Organizing the particulars of these studies around the thread of evolution from external to internal definition makes a coherent perspective possible without losing the particulars of each theoretical contribution. It also focuses, like Kegan's work and Abes and colleague's (2007) reconceptualized model, on the underlying *activity* of meaning making rather than the specific meaning people make.

Baxter Magolda, Abes, and Torres (2008) blended the findings of their three longitudinal

¹ I focus this article on research that explicitly incorporates all three dimensions of development. Identity, cognitive, and moral theoretical perspectives are addressed in other articles in this issue.

studies to construct an integrated view of college student and young adult development that encompassed three major phases: following external formulas, crossroads, and self-authorship. I start with that integration and expand it using the Wabash National Study's microsteps within external formulas and crossroads, Baxter Magolda's (2008, 2009) identification of three elements within self-authorship, Parks's faith development perspective, and Pizzolato's findings. I frame this integrated, holistic perspective with the language from my longitudinal study because Torres, Abes, and the Wabash National Study researchers all found this framework useful in their work. It is crucial to note, however, that this holistic perspective is not an attempt to create a grand narrative or truth about student development theory. Rather, it is an attempt to chart the prevailing winds over a continent, recognizing that they do not affect each item in the landscape the same way (Frye, 1990).

A HOLISTIC THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

The underlying thread of all six holistic research programs (and of many cognitive and social identity theories) is a gradual emergence of an internal voice to coordinate external influence and manage one's life. Before the cultivation of this internal voice, one's personal voice is an echo of the voice of external authority.

Following External Formulas

The phrase 'following external formulas' captures the approach many of my longitudinal participants (who were predominantly White) used to decide what to believe, how to view themselves, and how to construct relationships with others throughout college and into their twenties (Baxter Magolda, 1992, 2001). They recorded knowledge provided by their college instructors (sometimes literally), chose majors

that advisors or parents suggested, chose social activities and behaviors that yielded peer approval, and defined relational success by meeting others' needs and expectations. Similarly, Torres found that many of her Latino/a participants used external formulas to decide what to believe, make sense of their ethnic identities, and adopt cultural orientations (Torres & Hernandez, 2007). They relied heavily on family to make sense of their ethnic identities and often believed negative stereotypes about Latinos. They identified with either an Anglo or Latino culture, unaware of the possible blending of orientations, and did not venture from the comfort of their orientation. Although they distrusted authorities in general, they trusted their family and known peers. Abes (Abes & Jones, 2004) also reported that some of her participants used external expectations to make sense of their sexual orientation. In their concern to be considered "normal," to fit in with their peers, and to find identity labels that met others' expectations, they sometimes adopted labels without question and without considering how their various social identities intersected. Abes, Jones, and McEwen (2007) described this formulaic meaning making as a filter that allowed contextual influences to be largely accepted as encountered.

Although Parks did not use the language of following external formulas, she captured the phenomenon in her description of adolescent/conventional faith. She noted that "unexamined trust in sources of authority located outside the self" (2000, p. 55) led young adults to compose their reality through others. Adopting beliefs from authorities, depending on assurance from relationships for one's confidence, and participating in community with like-minded others characterized those who had yet to critically examine their faith. Parks made clear that young adults with conventional faith could be strongly committed to their beliefs

despite their lack of internal origins. Similarly, longitudinal participants in the studies noted here were often highly committed to their beliefs and identities despite the lack of internal sources for them.

We found this same trust in authorities outside the self and following external formulas across diverse students in the Wabash National Study, which began following college students at six campuses in 2006 (King & Baxter Magolda, 2007; King et al., 2008). Because 86% of the 315 students used external meaning making in their first year of college and 57% of the 228 interviewed in their second year continued to use it (Baxter Magolda et al., 2009), we were able to identify three “microsteps”—early, middle, and late—within external formulas (Baxter Magolda et al., 2008). We identified the key characteristics of early external meaning making as “assuming authorities had the answers, identifying [one] self through external expectations, and deferring to others in relationships” (p. 18). Consistent and completely uncritical acceptance of external authority suggested no awareness of uncertainty on these students’ part, much like Baxter Magolda’s (1992) participants’ early use of absolute knowing. Encountering uncertainty led to middle external meaning making, characterized by “discomfort with uncertainty, lack of clarity of [one’s] own perspective, and a sense of obligation to live up to expectations” (Baxter Magolda et al., 2008, p. 20). Although uncertainty arose here, students did not know what to do with it and continued to look to authorities to resolve it, much like Baxter Magolda’s (1992) transitional knowers did throughout college. Awareness of multiple perspectives sometimes led to using different formulas for different contexts owing to the lack of ability to integrate multiple perspectives. Shifting identities sometimes resulted from pursuing affirmation from others whose expectations conflicted. Rising

tension among multiple perspectives and expectations, or among external formulas, led to late external meaning making characterized by “an increasing openness to uncertainty, recognition of the need to be oneself, and an awareness of the potential conflict of one’s own and other’s expectations” (Baxter Magolda et al., 2008, p. 24). The important development in late external meaning making was the recognition of the shortcomings of following external formulas. This awareness of following external formulas and the shortcoming of doing so reflects formulas moving from subject to object.

Pizzolato’s work with college students at risk of dropping out identified this recognition of the shortcoming of external formulas as the primary reason her participants exhibited crossroads or self-authored ways of knowing early in college (2003, 2004). These students’ college aspirations often conflicted with their peers’ and communities’ external formulas, forcing them to abandon those to create their own formulas for going to college. This path stands in contrast with Baxter Magolda’s participants, for whom college attendance was the external formula they were expected to follow. This contrast of experiences highlights the role of context in shaping meaning making. Recognizing the shortcomings of external formulas, whether about career directions, relationships, faith systems, racial or ethnic identity, or sexual orientation, led participants in these studies to enter a crossroads where their internal voices began to emerge.

Crossroads

The timing and ways in which young adults enter the crossroads varies widely based on individual and environmental variables. Parks described the unraveling of held assumptions as a “shipwreck, what has dependably served as shelter and protection and held and carried one where one wanted to go comes apart.

What once promised trustworthiness vanishes” (2000, p. 28). No longer able or willing to depend on the unexamined trust in authority, young adults push away from the dock of external authority to explore the waters for themselves.

Sometimes the shipwreck is a jarring one, like Torres’s participants encountered when they recognized racism and the need to work through negative stereotypes about their ethnicity. They often encountered new perspectives and definitions of Latino/a that differed from those of their family. As they became increasingly aware of multiple perspectives about race and ethnicity, they were faced with choosing how to view their own ethnicity. Similarly, Abes reported that her participants started to “realize the limitations of stereotypes; feel frustrated by identity labels insufficient to describe how they made sense of who they were; and challenge other people’s expectations for whom they ought to or were allowed to be” (Abes & Jones, 2004, p. 621). For Baxter Magolda’s participants, who for the most part encountered shipwrecks after college, these occurred around disappointing relationships, unsatisfying careers, major health crises, or the recognition that they had to find some basis upon which to construct their own beliefs and values internally. Many described these experiences as producing some kind of pain that needed to be resolved. Part of the discomfort of the crossroads stems from the knowledge that one needs to construct one’s own beliefs and values yet at the same time one has not formed internal criteria to use to do so.

Two phases of the crossroads emerged in Baxter Magolda’s participants’ stories. The first was listening to their internal voices. They explored “identifying what made them happy, examining their own beliefs, finding parts of themselves that were important to them, and establishing a distinction between their feelings

and external expectations” (Baxter Magolda, 2009, p. 7). Working to hear their own voices prompted the second phase—cultivating their voices—which “involved developing parts of themselves they valued, establishing priorities, sifting out beliefs and values that no longer worked, and putting pieces of the puzzle of who they were together” (p. 7). These tasks were difficult and took various forms depending on how participants approached them, the support available, and the particular tensions in their lives.

Similar crossroads microsteps are beginning to emerge from the Wabash National Study interviews. Some students in their second year interviews described a growing awareness of their own ideas in class, their own values or identity orientations, or their internal understanding of relationships. This emerging internal voice was not yet strong enough to outweigh external influence so they were not consistently able to act on it (Baxter Magolda et al., 2009). A few students who had cultivated their internal voices were able to bring them into tension with external influences. The shift to the exit of the crossroads requires bringing the internal voice to the foreground to coordinate (and perhaps reconstruct) external influence.

Pizzolato’s participants encountered the crossroads, and often navigated it, earlier than most because of their need to develop their own voices to justify attending college. Tension between their community and peers’ expectations and the possibility of attending college unraveled external assumptions early, as did seeing the effects of street life. These provocative moments, as Pizzolato called them, had the potential to lead out of the crossroads depending on students’ volitional efficacy, self-regulation, and coping skills (Pizzolato, 2004, 2005). When they believed in their ability to persist in goal-directed behavior, were the primary source of regulating their own

behavior, and coped with challenges via social relationships, they were most likely to solve disequilibrium by moving toward internal self-definitions. Thus, experiencing pain or shipwreck, listening to and cultivating their internal voices, and engaging in supportive relationships helps young adults to strengthen their internal voices sufficiently to author their lives across a variety of circumstances.

Self-Authorship

Baxter Magolda's longitudinal participants' stories of their 20s and 30s provide rich contexts for identifying the nuances of self-authorship, or the internal capacity to define one's beliefs, identity, and relationships (Baxter Magolda, 2001, 2008, 2009). Baxter Magolda identified three elements of self-authorship from their stories: trusting the internal voice, building an internal foundation, and securing internal commitments (2008, 2009).

Trusting the Internal Voice. The key insight Baxter Magolda's participants reported as instrumental in their beginning to trust their internal voices was the distinction between reality and their reaction to it. "They recognized that reality, or what happened in the world and their lives, was beyond their control, but their reactions to what happened was within their control" (Baxter Magolda, 2008, p. 279). This realization, a reflection of reality moving from subject to object, set them on the road to taking responsibility for choosing how to interpret reality, how to feel about their interpretation, and how to react. Dawn, who was beginning to trust her own voice in managing her Multiple Sclerosis diagnosis at age 33, shared that it enabled being more flexible to work with obstacles. Some of Torres's participants began to trust their internal voices to make cultural choices to define their cultural reality and create their own principles to frame it (Torres & Hernandez, 2007). Similarly, some of Abes's

participants began to trust their internal voices in making sense of discrimination. Jacky, who experienced discrimination on a number of fronts, researched the issues, "reading in-depth about all sides of an issue and then reaching her own conclusions after a logical analysis of multiple perspectives" (Abes et al., 2007, p. 11). Abes and associates described this process as participants using a complex meaning-making filter (e.g., trusting their internal voices) to analyze the cultural messages coming at them from social contexts. Thus, they were interpreting reality and choosing how to react to it.

Pizzolato's participants who entered college already trusting their internal voices encountered realities that called this trust into question (2004). They sometimes felt deficient compared with their peers in academic work, felt that faculty perceived them as unprepared for college work, and encountered negative reactions to their race or ethnic identities. Some avoided these issues and returned to formula following, whereas those who were able to interpret these realities and choose how to react to them returned to trusting their internal voices. Dawn captured this cyclical nature of trusting one's internal voice as she described numerous trips through the "shadow lands" where confusion reigned. She noted that, "it was not possible to be 'in the light' all the time" (Baxter Magolda, 2008, p. 280).

This uneasiness in coming to trust one's internal voice may be what Parks called the "ambivalence" of probing commitment. She described probing commitment as:

a serious, critically aware exploration of the adult world and the potential versions of a future that it offers (which the adolescent, in contrast, receives uncritically), through which society's vulnerability, strength, integrity, and possibilities are assessed. A corresponding self-probing tests the strength, vulnerability, and capacity of the

self to withstand or use what society will make, ask, and allow. (2000, pp. 67–68)

Parks linked this probing commitment with a fragile inner-dependence, thus connecting the cognitive and intrapersonal developmental dimensions. She translated fragile as newly formed yet vulnerable. Her distinction between inner-dependence and independence (see p. 77) is also informative in clarifying that trusting one's internal voice does not translate to isolation from others. Continued exploration and making choices about one's reaction to reality leads to the next element of self-authorship, building an internal foundation.

Building an Internal Foundation. As Baxter Magolda's participants strengthened their trust in their internal voices, they began to organize their choices into commitments that formed a philosophy, or an internal foundation, to guide their ongoing reactions to reality. Mark noted the importance of this foundation when he said, "It's either get a philosophy that's going to be able to provide a foundation or undergirding for what could happen in your life, or when it does hit, you're going to be lost" (Baxter Magolda, 2009, p. 86). As Mark and his peers dealt with career dilemmas, relationship disappointments, parenting, health crises, and finding meaning in a post-9/11 world, those who were building their internal foundations used their commitments to guide their reactions and choices. Torres noted that a few of her participants built internal foundations late in college as they considered choices "within the context of their internal values, culture, and life path" (Torres & Hernandez, 2007, p. 563). They were no longer intimidated by differences and able to maintain their cultural values in diverse contexts. Abes offered another example of a college junior building an internal foundation through integrating her religious, sexual orientation, class, and racial social identities

into a complex system to guide her beliefs, identity, and relationships (Baxter Magolda et al., 2008).

Parks's form of knowing called tested commitment resonates with building an internal foundation, as does her form of dependence called confident inner-dependence. Of tested commitment she wrote, "One's form of knowing and being takes on a tested quality, a sense of fittingness, a recognition that one is willing to make one's peace and to affirm one's place in the scheme of things (though not uncritically)" (p. 69). Organizing one's choices into commitments to form an internal foundation results in a centeredness that Parks and many of Baxter Magolda's participants called being "at home" with oneself. Despite this centeredness, Baxter Magolda's participants still shared experiences in the shadow lands, and in retrospect, noted that they held their internal foundations in their heads before they held them in their hearts.

Securing Internal Commitments. Some of Baxter Magolda's participants, often in their 30s, recognized that they had constructed commitments in their heads but sometimes fell short of living them in their everyday lives. When these commitments shifted from being under construction to being a "home" in which participants could live, they became second nature (Baxter Magolda, 2008, 2009). When commitments became second nature, they were so natural that participants often did not think consciously about them. These commitments automatically came into play as participants navigated the challenges of their lives, making them comfortable with the chaos they encountered. These commitments also offered a sense of security that led to a greater sense of freedom. Trusting that they could use their foundations to make the best of what happened to them, they were more open to taking risks and to reevaluating their internal foundations. Thus, securing their internal

commitments led simultaneously to a sense of security and a sense of possibility.

Baxter Magolda's participants' descriptions sound similar to Parks's (2000) definition of interdependence, which she suggested typically occurred after midlife. Parks described interdependence as the ability "to depend upon others without fear of losing the power of the self" (p. 87), which opened the door to re-patterning truth and faith. This interdependence is connected with convictional commitment, or the ability to hold a deep conviction of truth in the context of paradox in the "ongoing motion of meaning-making and faith" (p. 60). A few of Baxter Magolda's participants used the same word Parks used—wisdom—to describe this element of self-authorship. This openness to further grown, to reevaluating one's center, and to embracing paradox seems to set the stage for Kegan's self-transforming mind.

Caveats

The six research programs I have used to construct this holistic perspective primarily use a constructive–developmental lens. Moving toward integration with other academic traditions is a direction I explore next. Before turning to those directions, I want to reemphasize the point of the holistic perspective I just described. My intent is to point out key threads and possibilities in the underlying activity of meaning making that reappear across many theoretical approaches and that seem relevant (albeit in different times and ways) to a wide range of college students. Our task, if we are to make student development theorizing useful in practice, is to balance identifying new possibilities with the underlying activity of meaning making in a way that allows us to explore the intersections across these theoretical perspectives. Our task is to continue to critique, refine, and enhance our understanding of the possibilities of young

adults' meaning making as their personal characteristics intersect with college and societal environments.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS AND POSSIBILITIES

Just as the perspectives I have highlighted here call for dialectic rather than dichotomy, the future of student development theorizing depends on dialectic. It requires bringing multiple perspectives into dialogue, maintaining a context (which I have proposed based on Kegan's work is the activity of meaning making) in which to nest and integrate these perspectives, and conducting developmental research in ways that enlighten holistic development. In arguing for a context and a holistic approach, I am not arguing for a grand narrative or theory. I am advocating exploring the intersections among multiple dimensions of development from multiple perspectives, openly identifying and exploring tensions among these perspectives. Creating one grand theory of holistic development is not possible or desirable; however, placing theoretical frameworks in dialectic to inform a holistic view of development is necessary, as I elaborate next.

The Need for Holistic Perspectives

As Abes and colleagues (2007) noted, "Few models or theories exist to understand the holistic development of college students" (p. 16). Although research on particular dimensions of development is important, grounding it in a more holistic perspective that incorporates social context and epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal developmental dimensions would contribute to creating more holistic theories. Nesting research on particular dimensions, or on particular aspects of the intersection of person and context, within a larger holistic perspective would help to organize student

development theories into a coherent whole rather than the numerous “families” or separate silos into which they are currently organized. Hopefully, the integrative approach taken in the articles in this issue will help to move theoretical research in that direction.

Intentional exploration of the intersections among developmental dimensions is also crucial to understanding the activity of meaning making. King (2010) makes this point in offering evidence for both an “equal partners” perspective and a perspective that the cognitive dimension is the “strong partner” of the three. Torres offered evidence that the cognitive dimension helped her participants make sense of racist stereotypes (Torres, 2010; Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004), but viewed them as interrelated because “no student ever progressed more than one phase without development in the other dimensions moving forward” (Torres & Hernandez, 2007, p. 570). Pizzolato (2010) also argued for keeping all three in constant connection, saying, “It is through cues from the interpersonal dimension that participants are compelled to question who they are and how they know” (p. 200). Baxter Magolda (2009) traced multiple relationships of the three dimensions in her participants’ lives. Some tended to rely on their epistemological dimension when sorting through challenges in all three dimensions. Others who were naturally self-reflective often began with their intrapersonal dimension. Some who were intensely concerned about how others perceived them placed their interpersonal dimension in the forefront. Collectively, they often described holding their convictions initially in their heads rather than in their hearts, suggesting the possibility that convictions were constructed cognitively before they were implemented intrapersonally and interpersonally. Further understanding of the nuances of these intersections would enlighten the individual and societal characteristics that

mediate development.

Linking traditional college student development theory with adult development literature and to adolescent meaning making would also contribute to a holistic perspective. Kegan’s self-evolution theory has spawned extensive work (e.g., Berger 2004; The Adult Development Research Group, 2001) on adult development involving a wide range of ages and socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. An entire literature on adult development exists, summarized in numerous handbooks (e.g., Smith & DeFrates Densch, 2009; Hoare, 2006), and informs and intersects with the development of adults attending college. Work with adolescents that highlights their meaning making before college (e.g., Laughlin & Creamer, 2007; Meszaros & Lane, 2010) would also inform college students’ meaning making possibilities.

Using Multiple Theoretical Frameworks to Enhance Holistic Perspectives

Considering student development theories in the context of and in interaction with multiple theoretical frameworks from academic traditions outside of student affairs and higher education is another crucial future direction. Abes, Jones, and McEwen (2007) model this direction by incorporating the social construction of identity, feminist conceptualizations of intersectionality, and the postmodern conceptualization of queer theory into their reconceptualized model. These theoretical frameworks emphasize the fluidity of identity construction, the role dominant social forces play in constructing relationships among multiple social identities, and the role performance of identity plays in shaping identity and dominant structures. As I noted, incorporating these perspectives leads to a holistic perspective that focuses on the underlying process or activity of meaning

making rather than specifying the particular constructions that arise from it.

Abes's use of queer theory to reinterpret her longitudinal data (Abes, 2009; Abes & Kasch, 2007) underscores the value of using multiple interpretative lenses to understand the complexity and fluidity of college students' development. Concerned that her constructive–developmental theoretical perspective masked possibilities in her interpretation and did not sufficiently take power structures into account, Abes (2009) advocated “bringing together multiple and even seemingly conflicting theoretical perspectives to uncover new ways of understanding the data” (p. 141). She and a colleague created a borderland between constructivist and queer theory from which they were able to tell a richer story that “brings to life students' lived experiences through constructivism while simultaneously deconstructing them through queer theory” (p. 148). As Abes and Kasch (2007) reinterpreted Abes' longitudinal transcripts from the vantage point of queer theory, they described one participant as “reconstructing external authority by resisting heteronormativity and destabilizing structures it created” (p. 629). This analysis reveals the role of resisting power structures in cultivating one's own voice. They also noted that participants performed new versions of their sexuality, gender, religion, social class, and the intersections of these identities to resist heteronormative structures, thus continuously redefining the meanings of these identities (Abes & Kasch, 2007). Development of these identities is therefore a process of “becoming” that is not assessed as more or less complex. This queer interpretation focuses on the continuously changing interaction between self and society and among social identities unbounded by external or internal definition. Although their queer interpretation does not use the external to internal framework of constructive–developmental theory, it does

reveal students' capacity to reconstruct their social identities and the power structures in their social contexts. Recognizing that this queer interpretation was more nuanced when partnered with a constructivist interpretation, Abes offered a rich and insightful exploration of the implications for researchers simultaneously using seemingly contradictory theoretical frameworks.

Zaytoun (2003, 2006, 2010) also advocated integrating multiple theoretical frameworks and illuminated that some of their contradictions may not be incompatible. Zaytoun (2006) integrated feminist, post-structural, and constructive–developmental frameworks in her exploration of “how development results from experiencing the world from within particular social locations” (p. 53). Drawing upon the work of Paula Gunn Allen, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Patricia Hill Collins, Zaytoun (2006) wrote,

Self is intricately embedded in relationships not only to other people, but to aspects of the world that include social groups, communities, and inanimate and spiritual entities that are deemed important to the individual according to social influence and identity categories within which they relate. As social location plays a role in construction of self, it can also influence how an individual makes meaning and develops psychologically. (p. 59)

Zaytoun (2006) further explored how social identity categories mediate the process of psychological development, how personal consciousness is linked to social consciousness, and how the growth of both personal and social consciousness occurs within the tensions of particular social locations. Drawing on feminist phenomenology, Zaytoun argues that concepts of multiplicity and relationality of self “resonate with Kegan's orders of consciousness, particularly fifth order, and how Kegan's subject–object approach compli-

cates yet appreciates and complements goals of phenomenology” (2010, p. 155). She views Anzaldúa’s (2002) concept of *conocimiento* as consistent with Kegan’s self-transformation and believes that both help to elucidate the relationship between personal and social consciousness. Taylor (2008), whose conceptual integration was noted earlier, also linked Anzaldúa’s seven stages of *conocimiento* to the journey toward self-authorship, noting how Anzaldúa’s descriptions enriched understanding of leaving external formulas, experiencing the crossroads, and self-authorship. Both Zaytoun and Taylor point out that Anzaldúa’s stages are not linear but cyclical, yet they resonate with the underlying activity of meaning making.

Working with multiple theoretical frameworks helps to address nagging questions in student development theory. Feminist, postmodern, and phenomenological perspectives aid in Kegan’s suggestion that we integrate person and context, self, and other in dialectic rather than a dichotomy. Exploring meaning making in the context of social location enlightens questions about how culture, power structures, and oppression shape and are shaped by individual meaning making. Jones (2010) used intersectionality to explore self-authorship in the context of social location thus “connecting individuals to groups and society and exploring the relational and mutually constitutive nature of these relationships” (pp. 240-241). Pizzolato (2010) explored how cultural selfways, or the “socialization of individual selves toward the culturally agreed upon ways of being and knowing” (p. 192), mediate meaning making. Her explorations led her to advocate for greater focus on the interpersonal dimension within meaning making. Baxter Magolda (2010) synthesized the work of numerous authors to address questions about the role of culture and making culture and context object in the evolution of self-authorship.

Using multiple theoretical perspectives

also helps to illuminate myths that abound by highlighting inherent, but often under-emphasized, aspects of existing student development theories. For example, pairing Anzaldúa’s cyclical model with the journey toward self-authorship reveals the possibilities for experiencing the journey cyclically just as Baxter Magolda’s (2008) participants reported. Because most theories about self-evolution present it as a trajectory without explicitly emphasizing cyclical possibilities, readers often assume theorists are arguing for a lock-step linear trajectory when most have not. In the same vein, self-evolution in general and self-authorship in particular are often assumed to privilege self over other and separation over connection. Kegan’s and Baxter Magolda’s integration of the three dimensions clearly emphasizes the connection between self and other throughout self-evolution. Both theories also convey that self-authorship refers to internal rather than separate authorship and heightens the potential for authentic connection with others rather than isolation. Considering multiple theoretical perspectives and their links to constructive–developmental frameworks helps to highlight these linkages in ways that are masked when individual meaning making is placed in the foreground. Of course, use of multiple methodologies and methods, a topic beyond the focus of this article, is also needed to capture the complexity of integrated development.

Constructing Theory in Context: Theory and Practice as Dialectic

Student development theorizing could also benefit from eliminating the typical dichotomy between theory and practice in the student affairs profession. To understand students in their diverse social contexts and locations requires building theory in practice, intentionally and systematically gathering and interpreting how students make meaning of their experience.

Using these observations and interpretations to guide practice creates the opportunity to refine existing theories and identify new possibilities while pursuing the profession's goal—developing the whole student.

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