STUDENT DEVELOPMENT THEORY

Application in Fraternity/Sorority Advising
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For years theory has been used to describe, explain, predict, and control student development. Fraternity/sorority professionals, both on campuses and at inter/national organizations, often understand that student development theory should help guide their practice. But once the busy school year starts, many professionals do not have the chance to refresh on the fundamental theories that frame fraternity/sorority work, and they often forget to apply the theories.

This handbook briefly explains just some of the theories that professionals, volunteers, and inter/national organization staff can use in their daily practices. Each theory includes a brief overview and a diagram that explains the model. At the end of each explanation there is an example of how professionals can apply theory to practice. These examples should not only help the readers get a better understanding of the theories but also allow them to see how they can integrate theory to their daily jobs. The examples range from case study practices to questions to consider when using the theory in practice. As previously stated, this handbook only provides a brief explanation or model for each theory; for a deeper explanation, please read the accompanying Issues in Focus resource guide. The reader will also be directed to other items such as the original texts for each theory as well as recommended books for the different theories and topics. To help students fully develop practitioners must understand how to integrate student development theory into their programs and daily practices. This handbook should help fraternity/sorority life advisors, inter/national organization staff, and volunteers gain understanding in finding ways to apply these fundamental theories (Evans, Forney, & Guido, et al., 2010).
CHICKERING & REISSER’S THEORY OF IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

Chickering, and later with the help and input of Reisser, created a Theory of Identity Development based on seven vectors of student development. The seven vectors are different from many other theories of development because they are not meant to be sequential stages, but instead show direction and magnitude of identity development. Movement through the vectors does not necessarily happen in sequential order, and people can regress back to previous stages depending on new developments and changes in life. Development and movement through the vectors is self-perceived, meaning that students must recognize which stage they are in and practitioners cannot assess development. Understanding the developmental vectors that students are working through can help professionals when designing programs and facilitating one-to-one conversations.
THE SEVEN VECTORS

Developing Competence
College students develop intellectual competence, physical and manual skills, and interpersonal competence. This vector extends beyond simple competence in these areas and includes understanding how personal goals and values align with those of a group.

Managing Emotions
Students learn to recognize and appropriately react to their emotions in different contexts. The goal of this vector is not to suppress emotions, but to understand that emotions are healthy ways to express oneself in the appropriate environment.

Moving through Autonomy Toward Interdependence
Students become free of the opinions and validation of others and learn to become comfortable with who they are and the personal goals they want to achieve. The biggest developmental change in this vector is no longer relying on the opinions of others.

Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships
Healthy and mature interpersonal relationships include those that are based on mutual respect. This vector explains student development in terms of developing acceptance of diversity and healthy intimate relationships.

Establishing Identity
Identity includes comfort with body and appearance, comfort with gender and sexual orientation, a sense of one’s social and cultural heritage, a secure sense of self in light of feedback, self-acceptance, and self-esteem. Establishing identity builds on previous vectors.

Developing Purpose
Students develop purpose when they weigh their personal beliefs, occupational aspirations, and family commitments in order to set goals for the future. Developing purpose involves understanding options, selecting what fits best, and following through with plans.

Developing Integrity
In this stage of development, students clarify a core set of values and beliefs. Integrity includes three areas: humanizing values, personalizing values, and developing congruence between established values and actions.
CASE STUDY

You are the director of fraternity and sorority life at a midsize public institution. At your institution there are 23 chapters in three governing councils. It is your responsibility to develop and lead a two-day retreat for the incoming chapter presidents. Of the incoming presidents, five are sophomores, 11 are juniors, and seven are seniors. Based on individual meetings you had with each of the new presidents, you can conclude that their developmental progress spans Vectors 2 through 6. What types of activities would you do during the two-day retreat that will encourage growth and development for all of the presidents? How will you encourage participation from all presidents during activities that may not be suited for their particular stage of development?

FURTHER READING


SANFORD PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT MODEL

In 1962 Sanford created a theory to explain how students can become successful in certain environments. He specifically explored the aspects of differentiation and integration. Differentiation is the concept of how students come to understand their personality characteristics and how it shapes and supports their identity. Integration is the concept of how the environment either supports or rejects one's identity. Once students understand their own identity, and have faced a healthy level of challenge and support, they can succeed. When working with students consider: What examples demonstrate the student’s level of readiness? How can I provide a healthy level of support for this student during their challenging time? What are some signs that the student is facing too much challenge?

Three Major Aspects of Sanford Psychosocial Development Model

**READINESS**

As students develop throughout college, they develop a level of maturity that they bring to every situation. The level of maturity and preparedness students bring to the environment and experience is the amount of readiness they have to face each situation. Students demonstrate their level of readiness by how well they interact with others, move through experiences, and manage emotions.

**CHALLENGE**

Many experiences and environments in college provide a certain level of difficulty for students. Students must have a level of challenge for them to move through experiences and gain skills that will make them successful in adulthood. When students face too much challenge they may retreat to previous stages in development.

**SUPPORT**

For students to safely explore their identity and growth, they must have a healthy level of support from their environment. If students are provided with too much support, they will never face challenges that cause them to truly develop.
CASE STUDY

You are a traveling consultant and have been assigned to a struggling campus for two months in hopes of helping with recruitment of new members, developing stronger ties to ritual, and promoting the organization on campus. In your first week you are overwhelmed by the lack of commitment on behalf of general members and have noticed that the executive board works tirelessly to help the organization but most of them are burned out from all of the hard work and are having difficulty coming up with creative ideas. When meeting individually with the executive officers you want to determine how you will be able to assist them. What types of questions would you ask during meeting with these students? How would you provide scaffolding to these students during your two months on campus so that you set them up for success after you leave?

FURTHER READING


SCHLOSSBERG’S THEORY OF MARGINALITY AND MATTERING

Schlossberg developed this theory to explain why students who are involved on campus are more successful: because they feel they belong and matter. This theory of marginality and mattering looks at five ways in which students feel they matter to others. Marginality is a sentiment that can manifest when transition or change occurs in one’s life, such as going away to college for the first time. Feelings of mattering are important to students because they help them to feel more connected to others and the institution. The following diagram explains Schlossberg’s five ways of mattering.

Information for this chart was taken from Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010.
CASE STUDY

You are a campus based fraternity/sorority advisor and recruitment/intake season has just come to a close. You make it a personal goal to meet all of the new members of the 12 chapters you advise. How will you show that, as a professional in fraternity and sorority life, you care about them as individual members of the community and that you look forward to the leadership, diversity, and individuality they will bring to the community? Will you meet with all chapters together or each chapter individually? Will you give a lecture, do some type of activity, or have an informal discussion? Use Schlossberg’s theory of Marginality and Mattering to help guide your choices and explain why you selected this particular format.

FURTHER READING


MYERS-BRIGGS TYPE INVENTORY (MBTI)

The Myers-Briggs Type Inventory (MBTI) is an assessment developed by a mother/daughter team and is based off Jung’s personality type theory (1971). This inventory is self-reporting on personality dispositions. Participants are asked a series of questions and rate whether the statement corresponds with them. The Myers-Briggs theory of personality type explains preferred approaches to interaction with others and making sense of the environment. The following page has more detailed information on the four sets of preferences. Overall, there are 16 possible preference groupings. MBTI preferences can change over time and should not be used as concrete labels for people who have taken the inventory.
**EXTRAVERSION**

I like getting my energy from active involvement in events and having a lot of different activities. I’m excited when I’m around people and I like to energize other people. I like moving into action and making things happen. I generally feel at home in the world. I often understand a problem better when I can talk out loud about it and hear what others have to say.

**INTRAVERSION**

I like getting my energy from dealing with the ideas, pictures, memories, and reactions that are inside my head, in my inner world. I often prefer doing things alone or with one or two people I feel comfortable with. I take time to reflect so that I have a clear idea of what I’ll be doing when I decide to act. Ideas are almost solid things for me.

**SENSING**

I pay attention to physical reality, what I see, hear, touch, taste, and smell. I’m concerned with what is actual, present, current, and real. I notice facts and I remember details that are important to me. I like to see the practical use of things and learn best when I see how to use what I’m learning. Experience speaks to me louder than words.

**INTUITION**

I would rather learn by thinking a problem through than by hands-on experience. I’m interested in new things and what might be possible, so that I think more about the future than the past. I like to work with symbols or abstract theories, even if I don’t know how I will use them. I remember events more as an impression of what it was like than as actual facts or details of what happened.

**THINKING**

When I make a decision, I like to find the basic truth or principle to be applied, regardless of the specific situation involved. I like to analyze pros and cons, and then be consistent and logical in deciding. I try to be impersonal, so I won’t let my personal wishes—or other people’s wishes—influence me.

**FEELING**

I believe I can make the best decisions by weighing what people care about and the points-of-view of persons involved in a situation. I am concerned with values and what is the best for the people involved. I like to do whatever will establish or maintain harmony. In my relationships, I appear caring, warm, and tactful.

**JUDGING**

I use my decision-making (Judging) preference (whether it is Thinking or Feeling) in my outer life. To others, I seem to prefer a planned or orderly way of life, like to have things settled and organized, feel more comfortable when decisions are made, and like to bring life under control as much as possible.

**PERCEIVING**

I use my perceiving function (whether it is Sensing or Intuition) in my outer life. To others, I seem to prefer a flexible and spontaneous way of life, and I like to understand and adapt to the world rather than organize it. Others see me staying open to new experiences and information.
USING MYERS-BRIGGS

This inventory is a great addition to retreats and trainings with professional staff or student groups. MBTI preferences can give professionals or students a stronger vocabulary for understanding personal differences and the complexities of teams. The inventory is a great starting point in talking about expectations and needs of group members.

The Myers-Briggs Types Inventory should only be administered by facilitators have been through an extensive three-day training. Certification can be obtained through three different organization and costs approximately $1,500. Information about certification trainings can be found at the following websites:

- http://www.capt.org/training-workshops/MBTI-Training-Certification.htm

FURTHER READING


Lawrence, G. (1982). *People types and tiger stripes* (2nd ed.). Gainsville, FL: Center for Applications of Psychological Type.

KOHLBERG’S MORAL DEVELOPMENT THEORY

Lawrence Kohlberg created a six stage moral reasoning theory in 1976. The six stages fall into three levels of development: preconventional, conventional, and postconventional. People in the preconventional level (Stages 1 and 2) have not yet come to understand societal rules and expectations. People in the conventional (Stages 3 and 4) identify with the rules and expectations of others. People in the postconventional (Stages 5 and 6) can separate themselves from the expectations of others and instead make decisions based on their own chosen principles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage 1: Heteronomous Morality</th>
<th>Makes decisions of right based on a fear of punishment. What is right is avoiding punishment.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage 2: Individualistic, Instrumental Morality</td>
<td>What is right is helping someone if they will help you in return, similar to the motto: You scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 3: Interpersonally Normative Morality</td>
<td>What is right is meeting the expectations of others. Individuals will act in a way to maintain a “good person” image by friends and family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 4: Social System Morality</td>
<td>What is right is to follow the laws and order of society. Individuals act in a way that fulfills social obligations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 5: Human Rights and Social Welfare Morality</td>
<td>Right actions are defined in terms of individual rights and standards which have been critically examined and agreed upon by society. Individuals act in a way that moral obligations and social relationships are based on depending on one another and holding each other accountable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 6: Morality of Universalizable, Reversible, and Prescriptive General Ethical Principles</td>
<td>Right is seen as making decisions that are based on universal principles that apply at all times to everyone (such as equality of human rights).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CASE STUDY

You are working with a chapter that has racked up several risk management violations over the weekend. Members hosted a raucous party in their chapter facility that resulted in multiple reports of alcohol abuse and underage drinking and one hospital transport. When you meet with the chapter leadership, members brush off the severity of the situation, stating that “all colleges kids want to have a good time” and “all the fraternities do it!” Brainstorm a list of questions you would utilize to help these students understand the impact of their destructive decision making. How can you get these students to understand fraternal obligation to care for their members and their guests?

FURTHER READING


PERRY’S COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT THEORY

Perry looks at cognitive development through classroom learning and examines the ways students see issues as “right” or “wrong,” and how these views change over their college career. Most of the development comes from the questions students ask themselves, and these mark the transitions between Perry’s nine positions. Perry uses the term position as opposed to stage because it represents the positional view the student has when it comes to cognitive matters of right and wrong.
## PERRY’S COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT THEORY

| Position 1 | Authorities know, and if we work hard, read every word, and learn the Right Answers, all will be well. |
| Transition | But what about those Others I hear about? And different opinions?? And uncertainties? Some of our own Authorities disagree with each other or don’t seem to know, and some give us problems instead of Answers. |
| Position 2 | True Authorities must be Right, the others are frauds. We remain Right. Others must be different and wrong. Good Authorities give us problems so we can learn to find the Right Answer by our own independent thought. |
| Transition | But even Good Authorities admit they don’t know all the answers yet. |
| Position 3 | Then some uncertainties and different opinions are real and legitimate temporarily, even for authorities. They’re working on them to get to the Truth. |
| Transition | But there are so many things they don’t know the Answers to! And they won’t for a long time. |
| Position 4a | Where authorities don’t know the Right Answers, everyone has a right to his own opinion; no one is wrong! |
| Transition (and/or) | But some of my friends ask me to support my opinions with facts and reasons. |
| Transition | Then what right have They to grade us? About what? |
Position 4b | In certain courses authorities are not asking for the Right Answer; They want us to think about things in a certain way, supporting opinion with data. That’s what they grade us on.

Transition | But this “way” seems to work in most courses, and even outside them.

Position 5 | Then all thinking must be like this, even for Them. Everything is relative but not equally valid. You have to understand how each context works. Theories are not Truth but metaphors to interpret data with. You have to think about your thinking.

Transition | But if everything is relative, am I relative too? How can I know I’m making the Right Choice?

Position 6 | I see I’m going to have to make my own decisions in an uncertain world with no one to tell me I’m Right.

Transition | I’m lost if I don’t. When I decide on my career (or marriage or values) everything will straighten out.

Position 7 | Well, I’ve made my first commitment!

Transition | Why didn’t that settle everything?

Position 8 | I’ve made several commitments. I’ve got to balance them – how many, how deep? How certain, how tentative?

Transition | Things are getting contradictory. I can’t make logical sense out of life’s dilemmas.

Position 9 | This is how life will be. I must be wholehearted while tentative, fight for my values yet respect others, believe my deepest values right yet be ready to learn. I see that I shall be retracing this whole journey over and over – but, I hope, more wisely.

Adapted from Perry, 1981, Figure 1: Scheme of Cognitive and Ethical Development
CASE STUDY

The men of Lambda Gamma Phi had an unregistered party at their campus house where there were kegs and drinking games present. You want to give them sanctions that are both educational and punitive. In preparation for a meeting with their executive board you want to think about how best to talk through the rules and why they are in place, as well as how you will determine what sanctions will be the most beneficial to all members of the chapter. How can you use Perry’s theory to help lead your discussion and sanctioning? Remember, you want to cater the conversation to men at multiple different positions in their cognitive development.

FURTHER READING


SCHALLER’S SECOND-YEAR EXPERIENCE

Schaller looked specifically at issues students tend to deal with during their second year of college in order to help guide practice when working with this population of students. These four stages represent issues students face when making choices between multiple academic majors and extracurricular activities. It is important to remember that not all second-year students will progress through these four stages during their second year of college, some students will be ahead of the curve and this progress may take longer for others. This process could seem especially different for students that have transferred at the start of their second year of college.

RANDOM EXPLORATION

- Continue to examine options among academic and extracurricular activities
- Hesitant to commit to one particular choice and give up on others

FOCUSED EXPLORATION

- Begin to feel pressure towards choosing a path
- May feel overwhelmed at the number of choices
- Understands that by committing to opportunities he/she will enhance their college career

TENTATIVE CHOICES

- Students become more realistic about the number of organizations they can be involved with
- May start looking for leadership opportunities within academic and extracurricular activities

COMMITMENT

- Students actively engage in planning for their future
- Seek out mentors and meaningful internships
- Commit to an academic major and/or extracurricular activities
CASE STUDY

An alumnus has approached your development department and is interested in endowing a program for second-year students but would like to see a proposal before making a final decision. You have been asked to create an outline that will be presented to this alumnus. After speaking with a group of second-year members you have determined that they want to participate in a retreat for emerging leaders in their second year of college. What types of activities, speakers, and sessions would you want to plan during this two-day retreat? You will want to use theory in your rationale to help you have a better chance at being awarded a grant.

FURTHER READING


RENN’S ECOLOGICAL MODEL OF MULTIRACIAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

Renn argues that in understanding the development of multiracial college students it is better to use an ecological model as opposed to a model that implements strict stages. These five identities through which multiracial students may see themselves are fluid and nonexclusive. Because this is an ecological model there is no prescribed path students will follow in their self-understanding and not all students will transition through multiple ways of viewing their own identity.

- **Monoracial**: Only identifies with one race
- **Situational**: When racial identity is fluid depending on the context and environment
- **Multiple Monoracial**: Identify equally with all parts of their cultural heritage
- **Extraracial**: Do not use racial categories common in the USA, or may not use racial categories at all
- **Multiracial**: Do not use the monoracial paradigm, label themselves as mixed, bi-racial, etc.
CASE STUDY

A multiracial student comes into your office to speak with you about which council she should join. This particular student is distraught over selecting a historically Black or historically White chapter and does not know which she will feel more comfortable in. She says that at this moment in her life she feels she must pick one race over the other, which is not something she has felt in the past. What advice would you give her and how would you use Renn's ecological model in helping to guide your discussion with this woman?

FURTHER READING


TORRES’ BICULTURAL ORIENTATION MODEL

Torres’ theory examines a Hispanic student’s cultural orientation based on his/her level of ethnic identity and acculturation. The model consists of four different cultural orientations (Bicultural Orientation, Anglo Orientation, Hispanic Orientation, and Marginal Orientation) placed quadrants that are created by intersecting acculturation and ethnic identity. A student in Anglo Orientation prefers to function within the Anglo or White culture (this student has a high acculturation and low ethnic identity). A student in Hispanic Orientation prefers to function within the Hispanic or Latino culture (low acculturation and high ethnic identity). A student in Marginal Orientation does not identify with either Anglo or Hispanic culture (low acculturation, low ethnic identity). A student in Bicultural Orientation is able to function and navigate between both cultures (high acculturation, high ethnic identity).
CASE STUDY

As the only fraternity and sorority life professional at your institution you work with students from multiple councils, including your campus’ Multicultural Greek Council. During a conversation with the president of a historically and predominantly Latina sorority you learn that the women are having internal struggles over deciding a main community service and philanthropic cause. Some of the women see it as important to help prepare Latino/a high school students for college life because these women believe it is their duty to give back to their own community. Another faction of women do not want the main philanthropic cause to be linked to the Hispanic community because they want to show how the sorority has been able to integrate its values into the greater community as a whole. How would you use Torres’ model to influence the conversation you have with this particular sorority president? How do you see this model impacting other conversations you have with students?

FURTHER READING


CROSS’ MODEL OF PSYCHOLOGICAL NIGRESCENCE

Cross and Fhagen-Smith developed a model to explain how Blacks come to conceptualize their racial and ethnic identity. This model consists of six stages, which the author defines as ‘sectors’; infancy and childhood in early Black development, preadolescence, adolescence, early adulthood, adult nigrescence, and nigrescence. For the purpose of this publication, we will look at the stages within adult nigrescence, because that is the sector most college students will be in. This fifth sector is comprised of four developmental stages: preencounter, encounter, immersion-emersion, and internalization/internalization commitment.

- **Preencounter**: Low salience of race and presence of internalized racism. Students leave this stage when they have an encounter that forces them to reflect on their understanding of racial identity.

- **Encounter**: This is the encounter when someone feels discriminated in some way because of their race. The first time a student feels they have been treated different by others of a dominant racial group.

- **Immersion-Emerision**: Students have a clear understanding of their race, but struggle in understanding how to assume roles within this new identity.

- **Internalization**: Showcase a healthy sense of pride in their racial identity and seek out ways to advance political and social causes that concern the Black community.
CASE STUDY

A chapter president of one of the historically or predominantly White fraternities on campus has asked you to facilitate a dialogue on racial identity as a part of the chapter’s annual retreat. You want to make sure you structure this dialogue so that it meets the needs of Black members within this organization and does not tokenize the handful of members who do not identify as White. How will you be cognizant of these stages within adult nigrescence when you brainstorm questions for the students to think about?

FURTHER READING


D’AUGELLI’S MODEL OF LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

D’Augelli’s model of sexual orientation explains lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) identity as influenced by one’s social environment and the support one receives while beginning to conceptualize his/her sexuality. Unlike those before him, D’Augelli contended the process of developing understanding of one’s sexuality is not linear, but rather a complex evolution that occurs over one’s life span. For individuals who identify as LGB, life experiences vary greatly depending on external factors. In less homogenous environments, they may find more choices about how to live their lives. On that same note, it may be difficult for one to fully accept one’s LGB identity when interacting primarily with heterosexuals.
### Exiting Heterosexual Identity
One’s primary feelings and attractions become recognized as not heterosexual. Individuals may begin sharing their shifting orientation and identity with others.

### Developing a Personal Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual Identity Status
Individuals create distinct meanings about their LGB identity. Self-examination is important in this stage, as well as creating an understanding of LGB with others who identity as non-heterosexual.

### Developing a Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual Social Identity
This process is a period of exploring the roles of relationships with peers, friends, family, and intimate partners. To form this identity, a person must have a support network that understands and accepts his/her sexual orientation.

### Redefining Oneself as a Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual Offspring
Coming out to one’s parents and redefining the role as an LGB offspring. The extent of parental support from the time a person discloses is important to be successful in this process.

### Developing a Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual Intimacy Status
This step in the process focuses on how individuals come to explain their sexual relationship to others. Because the individual examining her/his status and his/her sexual partner may be at different points in the process of identification and disclosure, forming a relationship identity can be a time of exploration that leads to increased or decreased participation in the LGB community.

### Entering a Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual Community
Every individual makes a decision on how engaged he or she will be in social and political action surrounding the LGB community. This involvement can ebb and flow across the life span.
CASE STUDY

As a professional who works with the fraternities and sororities, you have decided that you want to develop a program for students who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. However, this is a difficult task because students will be at varying stages in their LGB identity development. What are some steps you could take when creating this group that would offer privacy and a place for exploration for fraternity and sorority members who are at varying stages of their LGB identity development?

FURTHER READING


GILLIGAN’S THEORY OF WOMEN’S MORAL DEVELOPMENT

After studying with Lawrence Kholberg at Harvard University, Carol Gilligan determined that men and women differ in their moral development. She conducted a study and found that women’s moral development is highly influenced by relationships. Her theory consists of three levels and two transitions. Development only happens in the transitions because that is when the person is experiencing cognitive dissonance.

Level 1: Orientation to Individual Survival: When in this level a student is self-centered and only concerned with their individual survival.

• Transition 1: From Selfishness to Responsibility: Students develop a connection and sense of responsibility to others.

Level 2: Goodness as Self-Sacrifice: When in this level students see survival as social acceptance. Students in this level see moral good as caring for everyone else before caring for themselves.

• Transition 2: Goodness to Truth: Students move out of level 2 when they start to experience cognitive dissonance where the students start to question the amount they care for others versus the amount they care for themselves.

Level 3: Morality of Nonviolence: In this level moral good is seen as understanding that the student can care for themselves and for others.
CASE STUDY

You are sorority advisor and are working with the executive board to prepare for the upcoming formal recruitment. After meeting with the executive board you notice that your recruitment chair has not completed any of her responsibilities; instead the president has been fulfilling both roles. You meet with the president and discover that she has been skipping class and is falling behind in her school work because she has been spending her time preparing for recruitment. How would your understanding of Gilligan’s theory shape how you would handle this situation with both the president and the chair of recruitment?

FURTHER READING


BAXTER MAGOLDA’S THEORY OF SELF-AUTHORSHIP

Baxter Magolda’s theory of self-authorship is a cognitive structural theory, which examines how one constructs meaning from the event happening around them. Self-authorship consists of three dimensions in which young adults create knowledge construction (epistemological), develop a personal identity (interpersonal), and form relationships with others (interpersonal). This occurs at four developmental levels that are discussed below. The process begins in post-adolescence and continues for some time after, usually actualizing by age 30.

- **External Formulas**: Students use the “external formulas” developed by others and learned from society to make decisions. Even though students have developed more complex ways to make sense of things cognitively, they still look to others to define their sense of self.

- **The Crossroads**: This crossroads represents the time in which a student moves from dependence on external pressures to the threshold of self-authorship. Students must work to create an evolving sense of self not defined by the ideas of others.

- **Self-Authorship**: The internalization of skills to ground one’s decision-making process in one’s own sense of self and the understanding of interdependence. These skills emerge from previous experiences that have shaped the person’s sense of self.

- **Building an Internal Foundation**: Building an internal foundation requires three elements: trusting the internal voice, building an internal foundation, and securing internal commitments. Through the process, a person acquires increased self-confidence that allows for a consistent story of self to be enacted in diverse environments.
CASE STUDY

Because this is a newer theory in the profession, there are many questions that we must ask ourselves in order to assist students in developing a better understanding of their lives and progressing through the stages of self-authorship. Below are some critical questions to think about in terms of applying this theory to our work with members of fraternities and sororities.

- Can a student begin to author individually unique stories in a fraternity or sorority?
- What are the environmental conditions that support or prohibit self-authorship in college students who are members of fraternities and sororities?
- How does the fraternity or sorority experience relate to other experiences students have in college that impact self-authorship?
- How can I, as a professional, encourage growth toward self-authorship?

FURTHER READING


STRANGE AND BANNING’S ENVIRONMENTAL THEORIES

In 2001 Strange and Banning wrote *Educating by Design*, where they outlined environment theories that impact a student’s educational experience. Three of those theories are organizational environments, aggregate environments, and constructed environments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organizational Environments</th>
<th>Universities similar to fraternities and sororities are organizations with clearly defined missions and stated goals. There are six structures that characterize an organization and impact a student’s experience: complexity, formalization of rules, stratification, production, efficiency, and morale.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aggregate Environments</td>
<td>The aggregate environment looks at how humans interact with their environment and each other. The members of the environment often impact the environment of the organization. Understanding how students are attracted to, are satisfied, and maintained in certain environments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructed Environments</td>
<td>Individuals construct their own experiences in an environment. Students are impacted by certain aspects of the environment: environmental press, social climate, and campus culture all impact how a student constructs their experience.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CASE STUDY

You have recently started working at a new institution in the fraternity and sorority life office. You notice that the community lacks diversity, and you know efforts to recruit members of different racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and religious backgrounds will help enrich the fraternal experience for your students. Understanding Strange and Banning’s environmental theories create a plan to help make fraternity and sorority more inviting to all students so that each chapter and council is more diverse.

FURTHER READING


We know that the work you all do is not easy. This field demands that you give of yourself and your time to engage students in difficult conversations around choices, actions, and values. We hope that you have found this theory-to-practice handbook beneficial in engaging students in the important work that you do. For a more in-depth discussion of student development theories please refer to the complementary *Issues in Focus* resource guide. While familiarizing (or reacquainting) yourself with student development theory may seem daunting initially, the knowledge gained is instrumental in being intentional in your work with students. More conversations are happening about student development theories in the Association’s online knowledge community, and we encourage those interested in discussing these topics more to join that community. By keeping student development at the forefront of all actions and decisions, we as fraternity/sorority professionals can continue the slow, but necessary, work of elevating the fraternal movement.
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