Intersecting Identities: A Model of Self-Authorship Exploring the Interactions of Spiritual and Religious Life and Civic Engagement

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Introduction

Who am I? Why am I here? What really matters? These questions reflect the quest for meaning that has traditionally been a significant part of higher education. The search for meaning, purpose, and values is increasingly becoming an important goal for college students (Parks, 2000). Closely related to this search is the spirituality movement in society that reflects one’s hunger to explore the spiritual dimension of their lives and has pushed educators to examine the link between spirituality and learning in addition to the role of spirituality in the development process (Love, 2002). Within institutions of higher education, four out of five college students indicate an interest in spirituality through either active involvement or inquiry within spiritually centered activities (Chickering, Dalton, & Stamm, 2006).

Peoples’ abilities to assess, nurture, and express the spiritual dimension of their lives has been found to impact how they engage with the world and foster within them a heightened sense of connectedness that promotes empathy, ethical behavior, civic responsibility, passion, and action for social justice (Lindholm & Astin, 2008). Acknowledging those expressions of one’s spirituality and/or religion, in association with one’s civic engagement, we believe college students develop stronger levels of self-esteem and self-efficacy leading to the development of self-authorship during the college years. Through an extensive review of literature and examination of the intersections between spiritual and religious life and civic engagement, we explain our model relative to the development of self-authorship.
Review of Literature

In this section, a discussion of current research on religion and spirituality, civic engagement, and self-authorship reveals the intersections present between these identities and acknowledges the development of self-esteem and self-efficacy through the process of defining one’s sense of self. Through recognizing intersectionality as a theoretical approach in research and reflecting on the components that foster these identities, one is provided with a broader and more theoretically based understanding of the relationships between spiritual and religious life, civic engagement and how this intersectionality promotes a student’s sense of self or self-authorship.

Religion and Spirituality

In order to review current literature, it is important to understand that religion and spirituality are two separate entities, but often used interchangeably. Spirituality pertains to a sense of meaning, purpose, and morality, while religion concerns a specific system of standardized beliefs, practices, and experiences connected to one’s spirituality (Tan, 2005). According to research, college students develop in their faith and religious identities through a series of stages. During these stages, students tend to recognize a process of separating their identities from their worldviews and “demythologizing” their experiences, inclusive of religion and spirituality (Barry & Nelson, 2005). The importance an individual places on specific religious beliefs reflects a variety of factors such as family ideologies, public involvement in institutional religions, personal importance of their belief system, maternal influence, socioeconomic status, and gender (Pearce & Thornton, 2007). Although these factors affect one’s identification with a specific religious identity, Barry and Nelson (2005) recognize that emerging adulthood may characterize a time during which college students question familial
beliefs, recognize spirituality as more important than religious affiliation, and select aspects of religion which suit them best. Through these developmental experiences, students may begin to use spirituality as a way to define their sense of self and confront ultimate questions about the nature, purpose, and meaning of one’s life (Kiesling, Sorell, Montgomery, & Colwell, 2006). Through exploring spirituality and religion in greater depth, one is able to understand how these two identities help to facilitate and develop a sense of purpose and meaning in a student’s life.

**Spirituality and Spiritual Development**

Helminiak (1987) believed that spiritual identity and development involved the whole person and their commitment to wholeness, authenticity, and genuineness. In 1996, he identified spirituality as a central element of all human experience. Astin (2004) defined spirituality as pointing to our interiors, having to do with our consciousness, and involving our affective experiences. He stated that it has to do with our values that we hold most dear, our meaning and purpose in life, and our sense of connectedness to each other and to the world around us. For Astin, spirituality can also be related to aspects of our experience that are not easy to define or talk about, such things as intuition, inspiration, the mysterious, and the mystical. Within this broad definition virtually everyone qualifies as a spiritual being.

Love and Talbot (1999) further elaborate on spirituality and define it as several important and integral propositions relative to a student’s holistic development. Similar to Astin (2004), spiritual development for Love and Talbot involves an internal process of seeking personal authenticity, genuineness, and wholeness. Through this process of development, a student recognizes a sense of self that is unitary, consistent, congruent with one’s actions and beliefs, and true to one’s sense of self. Besides establishing a sense of self, spiritual development also involves a process of transcendence and a greater connectedness to one’s self and others through
relationships with one’s community. During one’s process of spiritual development, a person continuously learns and grows from life’s challenges in order to learn more about themselves and their holistic identity. While challenging one’s self relative to one’s experiences, one’s community and connectedness with others remains important. Spirituality is rooted in connectedness, relationship, and communion with others. The paradox of spirituality is that its experience is personal, but only finds its fullest manifestation in the context of an ever broadening, mutually supportive community.

Through one’s relationship with a community and personal transcendence, one derives meaning, purpose, and direction. Cognitive theories of development focus on the process of meaning-making, while spirituality gives focus and direction to those processes and a context in which to apply one’s increasing knowledge and advanced cognitive skills (Love & Talbot, 1999). While developing meaning, purpose, and direction, one also increases their openness to explore a relationship with the intangible and pervasive power or essence existing beyond human existence and rational human knowing. Spirituality relates to the relationship with and openness to the influence and forces that exist beyond one’s sense of self (Opatz, 1986). Taken together, the propositions described by Love and Talbot define spiritual development as an integrated process of seeking self-knowledge and centeredness, transcending oneself, being open to and embracing community, recognizing an essence or pervasive power beyond human existence, and having that sense of spirit pervading one’s life.

Religion

Before defining religion, it is important to reiterate religion and spirituality as two separate entities. As stated above, spirituality is seen as a sense of meaning, purpose, and morality, while religion concerns a specific system of standardized beliefs, practices, and
experiences connected to ones’ spirituality (Tan, 2005). Love (2001) defined religion as “a shared system of beliefs, principles, or doctrines related to a belief in and worship of a supernatural power or powers regarded as creator(s) and governor(s) of the universe” (p.8). Following with Loves’ definition, Greenfield, Vaillant, and Marks (2009) recognize religion as a formalized set of doctrines, values, and traditions of a religious group. Ideally, religion and spirituality significantly overlap. However, there are religious people tied so closely to dogma and doctrine as to be disconnected from issues of the spirit, and people who disavow any notion of or connection with religion yet are deeply involved in a search for meaning, wholeness, and purpose (Love, 2001). Religion may be spiritual at the core, but spirituality can stand apart from religion, leading some to classify themselves as spiritual, but not religious (Byant, Choi, & Yasuno, 2003).

Spiritual and Religious Engagement

Whether framed in a religious context, in philosophical questioning, or as a response to experiences of great sadness or joy, most students are compelled to wonder about the purpose of their lives, where their personal journey will take them, and what matters most in the choices they have to make. Although college students tend to struggle in regards to majors or future job opportunities, most have an inner sense that they are meant to do something special with their lives, if they can just discover the personal path that leads through the apparent maze of alternatives and possibilities (Dalton, 2001). The Kellogg Foundation report from 1997 argued that the biggest challenge that higher education faces revolves around developing character, conscience, citizenship, tolerance, civility, and individual and social responsibility in its students. Despite the much publicized desire for money and status, this current generation of college students also express great interest in helping others, finding a guiding philosophy of life, and
contributing to their community. Students have high expectations for both economic and personal success, and for making a difference in the lives of others (Dalton, 2001).

Daloz, Keen, Keen, and Parks (1996) report that individuals who have a high level of commitment to serving others through community service consider that call a spiritual imperative. Through the experience of caring for others and taking responsibility for helping to solve social problems, students are better able to stay in touch with their moral feelings and beliefs. The experience of seeing social problems in a deeply human context, up close and personal, is life changing. Beliefs foster commitments that have long-ranging implications for one’s life.

Bryant, Choi, and Yasuno (2003) found that familial connections and community service are positive predictors of spiritual values and religious involvement. Besides community service and familial involvement, Bryant, Choi, and Yasuno (2003) found two other college activities that related to the development of religiousness. Through the actual practice of religion that involves interacting with others in a community and the reading of religious texts and the accompanying commentaries, a students’ religious development is fostered.

College students who are able to develop their moral convictions and integrate their beliefs into career choices and lifestyle patterns are likely to be active participants in social and civic communities. Higher education institutions that ignore the spiritual dimension of learning and development not only inhibit students’ quest for a good life but are also less likely to produce graduates who will be engaged citizens willing to do the long and arduous work of creating a good society. In sum, an outcome of a higher education that integrates spirituality with intellectual and personal development is a life committed to moral and civic responsibility (Dalton, 2001).
**Promoting Spiritual and Religious Engagement**

If spirituality and spiritual development are inherent in all individuals, not just those religiously inclined, then we need to pay closer attention to this developmental process. This means considering how we create meaning, purpose, and direction in our lives, and the types of communities to which we belong. Students’ involvement in social, volunteer, leadership, and community service activities may be a manifestation of their spiritual development and quest for meaning. Religious activity and other spiritually related activities may be manifestations of students’ search for meaning and purpose (Love, 2001). Bryant, Choi, and Yasuno (2003) found that spiritual self-perceptions are enhanced for students who pray and meditate, attend religious services, discuss religion, and spend time with their families, but these are not the only means toward this development.

Focusing on enhancement of students’ cognitive and psychosocial development will also contribute to their spiritual development. The close relationship between faith development and other student development theories, especially cognitive development theory, allows student affairs staff to create experiences, activities, and environments that enhance overall growth, as well as spiritual development. Parks (2000) describes the potential of community influence on the spiritual development of students, especially through mentoring relationships. Chickering (2006) reiterates this belief in stating that spirituality is positively associated with charitable involvement and social action, connections to humanity, reducing pain and suffering in the world, and the acceptance of others (Chickering, 2006).

Astin (2004) states that almost all aspects of a student’s academic, personal, spiritual, and moral development are influenced by participation in service learning. Since these experiences are built around connectedness and reflection, these experiences seem to be particularly relevant...
to the development of spirituality, and later, self-authorship. Communities redirect our attention in the direction of human connectedness that is basic to both the learning process and spirituality. The most powerful service learning experiences turn out to be those combining individual reflection with group sessions, both fostering the development of one’s meaning and purpose in life. In sum, spiritual and religious engagement seems to be promoted through communities of service, practice, and intentional self-reflection.

The Intersections of Spiritual, Religious, and Civic Engagement

Brimhall-Vargas and Clark (2008) suggested that integrating a multicultural spirituality into curricula content and pedagogy could ignite students’ desire to be civically engaged, facilitate the development of students’ comfort with decision-making, and inspire meaningful educational experiences for all students. Kuh (2006) examined spirituality as it relates to student engagement. Factors that affect student engagement included spiritual practices and interactions with diverse peers, as well as dealing with aspects of religion and spirituality. Kuh found that students who frequently engage in spirituality-enhancing practices also participate more in a broader cross-section of collegiate activities, are somewhat more satisfied with college, view the out-of-class environment more positively, and spend more time in extracurricular activities. Through Kuh’s research, he did not find any negative effects on other desirable activities, such as studying, deep learning, or extracurricular involvements.

Kuh (2006) found that spirituality-enhancing activities do not seem to hinder, and may even have mildly salutary effects on, engagement in educationally purposeful activities and desired outcomes of college. In actuality, involvement in spirituality-enhancing activities during college is strongly linked to a deepened sense of spirituality across all types of students (p. 46). Contemplative practices allow for a deep commitment to civic and social issues because they
emerge from the heart, not just the mind, and reflect our search for meaning in life and our hope for making a difference (Kirsch, 2009). Through these deep commitments, the development of spirituality and civic engagement seem to be synergistic (Chickering 2006). As we strengthen one of these domains, we are very likely to strengthen the other (p.4). The intersections between religion, spirituality, and civic engagement interact and complement each other in the development of a student’s holistic identity.

Civic Engagement

*Spirituality and Civic Engagement*

The founding father of psychosocial theory, Art Chickering (2006) expounded upon Sandy and Lena Astin’s national surveys examining college student and faculty spirituality. He stated that 78 percent of students had discussed religion or spirituality with friends, 77 percent prayed, 73 percent felt that religious or spiritual beliefs played a part in developing their identity. Additionally, a positive correlation was shown between spirituality and, Self-esteem and “Equanimity;” charitable involvement and social activism; reducing pain and suffering in the world; feeling connected to all humanity; compassionate self-concept; helping others in difficulty, understanding others, believing in the goodness of others, and helping friends with personal problems; accepting others as they are, becoming a more loving person, and improving the human condition; the importance of promoting racial understanding, attending a racial/cultural awareness workshop, ability to get along with people of different races/cultures, and growth in tolerance during college (p. 3).

These values are all closely related to the outcome of civic engagement indicating a connection between spirituality and civic engagement.
Eighty-six percent of youths between ages 11-18 state that they believe religion is a central part of their life (As cited in Kuh, 2006, p.3). College is an exciting time in the life of a student to learn more about viewpoints and perspectives of other religions and spiritualities and determine their own beliefs. One method of developing spirituality among students in college is through participation in service learning programs (Kuh, 2006). Unfortunately there is very limited research on service learning and religiosity (Davidson, 2009).

*Civic Engagement Defined*

Despite the frequent use of the term, civic engagement carries with it many meanings and much ambiguity. The term “engagement” itself is the source of various interpretations, even within the context of higher education (Steele & Fullagar, 2009). Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) even use the terms “engagement” and “involvement” interchangeably in *How College Affects Students*. Wolf-Wendel, Ward, and Kinzie (2009) state that engagement is a process between two parties “who enter into an agreement about the educational experience… [it is about] what the student does and what the institution does” (p. 413). The process goes beyond simply being present. Harper wrote that students can “show up and could legitimately claim that they are involved but they are not really engaged… engagement is amount plus depth, which leads to favorable outcomes” (As cited in Wolf-endel, Ward, & Kinzie, 2009, p. 418).

The most widely used source of student engagement comes from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), which is administered to first-year students and seniors from 1,200 institutions across the United States, who respond to questions set to establish levels of student engagement (Kuh, 2001). While the benchmark of student engagement, NSSE is not without its controversy. Steele and Clive feel the NSSE survey is more representative of the educational experiences of students rather than a “theoretical explanation of student engagement” (p.6). In
response to some of the controversy surrounding the use of the NSSE surveys, George Kuh stated “I am not as concerned with [precision of definition] as I am with trying to leverage institutional change towards focusing more on the things that matter and we can change and less on the things we can’t influence” (Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Kinzie, 2009, p. 421).

Defining the term of civic engagement, education scholar Thomas Ehrlich (2000) now of The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching wrote that it is “working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes” (preface, vi).

By comparison, Barbara Jacoby (2009), a respected voice in the field of service learning and the Director of the Office of Community Service-Learning at the University of Maryland presented a different, though not contradictory perspective, stating civic engagement is:

Acting upon a sense of responsibility to one’s communities. This includes a wide range of activities, including developing civic sensitivity, participating in building civic society, and benefiting the common good… Through civic engagement, individuals-as citizens of their communities, their nations, and the world-are empowered as agents of positive social change for a more democratic world (p. 9).

Though a means of obtaining civic engagement, service learning is yet another piece of the puzzle of the engaged student. Jacoby (1996) defined service learning as a “form of experiential education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs together with structured opportunities intentionally designed to promote learning and development” (p. 5).
Outcomes of Service Learning

Chickering (2006) wrote that students who participated in service learning programs developed positive, socially beneficial attitudes and behaviors much like those significant to spirituality described above. He stated that students “became more racially aware and concerned about equality issues, and more concerned about poverty and larger socio-economic dynamics. They became more politically active and engaged with community issues. [and]… spent more time studying… and had more frequent contact with faculty” (p. 3-4).

Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) found that a student’s social activism is enhanced by involvement in service learning programs. Service learning promotes a significant use of advanced thinking and a broader perspective among students examining a particular social issue. Other research indicates that students participating in a service-learning program earned statistically significant better grades than those who did not participate in the program. Additionally students involved in service learning programs demonstrated “significantly greater growth in principled moral reasoning… than did the section without the service-learning component” (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 358). Still other research points to increases in civic responsibility and decreases in social prejudice among students involved in service learning as compared to students who did not participate in such programs.

Einfeld and Collins (2008) wrote of a correlation between service learning and the outcomes of “self-confidence, social responsibility, civic-mindedness, self-esteem, and personal efficacy” (p. 96). Other reports found the development of interpersonal skills such as “empathy, patience, attachment, reciprocity, trust, and respect” connected to a student’s involvement of a service learning program (Einfeld & Collins, 2008, p. 95). They also wrote that research shows a
positive correlation between the number of hours spent in service and the positive effects of service learning.

One criticism of this research claims that it represents a “dormocentric” perspective, one that applies only to “traditional aged college students” (As cited in Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Kinzie, 2009). There is question whether the research regarding engagement applies to all college students regardless of gender, race, culture, sexual orientation and especially age. Older students may not have the opportunity to get involved in service learning programs, but yet may be civically engaged within their local communities. Another criticism of typical student engagement research is that the “over emphasis on the student and the activities in which he or she is involved or engaged (or not) and if he or she is integrated (or not) places too much emphasis on student attributes or deficits and not enough on practitioners and practices that promote student development and learning” (Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Kinzie, 2009, p. 421).

**Promoting Civic Engagement**

While a body of literature exists expounding upon the benefits associated with student participation in service learning, limited research describes the conditions necessary for promoting those benefits and the outcome of civic engagement. One environmental condition that is recommended for enhanced civic engagement is an intentional effort by educators – whether they are faculty members or university staff members – to promote an understanding of civic engagement (Einfeld & Collins, 2008). As it relates to a classroom promotion of civic engagement, faculty play a crucial role in a student’s development. The subject, course material, course structure, and the professor’s method of instruction all play a role in the development of a student and then in their eventual engagement. “Faculty members, as the designers and
facilitators of learning activities and tasks, play a key role in shaping students’ approaches to learning” (Steele & Fullagar, 2009, p. 471).

Additionally, the opportunity to reflect and process individual experiences are crucial to the development of civic engagement (Jacoby, 1996). Utilizing verbal discussion groups, written reflection papers, journals, or online blogs give students the chance to digest the learning they have absorbed and allow that new knowledge to become a part of their own perspective and outlook. Recommended topics for focus groups include the “clarifying of student roles, addressing anxieties, discussing student-client relationship building and clarifying specific planned assignments or service-learning activities unique to the project” (Diambra, et. al., 2009, p. 120).

Self-Efficacy and Self-Esteem

*Self-Efficacy and Self-Esteem amongst Spirituality, Religion, and Civic Engagement*

Besides demonstrating a strong synergistic relationship, scholars have inferred that religious practice and community have positive implications for general well-being, including stability in one’s spiritual life (Bryant & Astin, 2008). According to Chickering (2006), spirituality is positively associated with self-esteem and a compassionate self-concept. Kamya (2000) found that spiritual well-being was related to higher self-esteem and recognized the relationship between spirituality, religiosity, and self-concept. Greenfield, Vaillant, and Marks (2009) suggested that religious participation and spiritual perceptions exhibit independently important associations with better psychological well-being. Continuing in this thought, Hayman et al. (2007) found that a spiritual identity leads to more positive feelings of self-worth and self-efficacy encouraging one’s engagement in the community. Zullig, Ward, and Horn (2006), reflecting on the positive connections between spirituality, religion, and self-efficacy, suggested
that college personnel could encourage students to reflect on their lives, purpose, and personal ideologies. Through these reflections, they believe students could grow in their spirituality, religiosity, and increase their exposure to other developmental assets, such as engagement. Spirituality, religion, and civic engagement, through their interactions, encourage the development of one’s self-esteem and self-efficacy as one examines their meaning and purpose in life.

Intersectionality

Literature in student development recognizes the complexities and intersectionality between interpersonal, intrapersonal, and cognitive development. Abes, Jones, and McEwen (2007) state the importance of understanding a fluid intersection of cognitive, psychosocial, and social identity domains of development. Focusing on only one domain does not allow for a holistic understanding of the multiple intersections of identity, especially concerning spirituality, religion, civic engagement, and one’s sense of self. Social Constructionism considers identity to be socially, historically, politically, and culturally structured. Intersectionality utilizes those structures simultaneously to recognize a multifaceted approach toward identity.

Abes et al. (2007) recognize the dynamic construction of identity and the influence of changing contexts on the relative saliency of multiple identities. A key tenet of intersectionality is that the process of identifying with more than one social group produces new representations of experience, not reducible to the original identities that contributed to them (Diamond & Butterworth, 2008). Student affairs educators have recognized that issues of privilege and oppression based on race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation cannot be addressed without considering the role religion plays in the development of an individual’s values and beliefs. Religious beliefs and identities often interact with racial/ethnic, gender, and sexual identities in
complex ways, and ignoring religion is simply no longer an option for professionals who work to ensure that students are not oppressed or marginalized on campus based on their personal identities (Harper & Quaye, 2009). Through our model, we recognize the intersections between one’s spiritual and religious life, civic engagement, and the steps toward fostering self-authorship during a student’s experience in higher education.

Self-Authorship

*Self-Authorship Defined*

Self-authorship is the ability to integrate beliefs, values, identity, and social relations internally (Baxter Magolda 2001; Kegan 1994). Mezirow (2000) suggests that self-authorship occurs through transformational learning whereby students learn to operate on the basis of their purposes, beliefs, feelings and meanings rather than those they have acquired through external authorities. However, Baxter Magolda (2008) claims that most traditionally aged college students do not possess this capability and suggests that one of the goals of higher education is to help students down the path of self-authorship.

Kegan (1994) proposed three dimensions of development ingrained in self-authorship. The epistemological dimension of development refers to how individuals use assumptions about their surroundings and certainty of knowledge to form their beliefs. The Intrapersonal dimension refers to how individuals develop a sense of identity based on their surroundings. Finally, the interpersonal dimension refers to the ability to have mature relationships. A self-authored individual is able to build internal belief systems through active construction and evaluation of their knowledge and is able to advocate for their own beliefs while maintaining genuine relationships.
Baxter Magolda (2008) also offers an internal process a student goes through as they build a self-authored system. First, a student needs to learn to trust their internal voice. This requires them to realize that they are in control of their reactions to the situations occurring around them and that they have the ability to choose their reaction to reality and create their own meaning. Once students are able to trust their internal voice they are able to use it to build an internal foundation. This foundation helps them build their identity and develop mature relationships. The final stage is securing internal commitments where students learn to live their internal commitments and a personal authority is achieved.

Students should be engaged in self-authorship for various reasons. In one study, four themes were identified as a result of experiences that lead to developmental growth (as cited in Baxter Magolda & King, 2007). The themes include increased sensitivity to diversity; establishment of one’s own belief system; development of one’s self/identity; and increased participation in one’s own learning. Students will be able to identify these themes in their own learning and experiences if they are engaged in the process of self-authorship. In addition to the dimensions of development mentioned above, the ability to develop internal belief systems, recognize self identity and build mature relationships are also benefits of self-authorship. Baxter Magolda (2008) also emphasizes the “potential of self-authorship to help adults meet the challenges of adult life effectively warrants a better understanding of the nature of self authorship” (p. 270). Inherent in Baxter Magolda’s opinion is the idea that self-authorship has the ability to help individuals progress through developmental obstacles in life.

*Self-Authorship through Elements of Civic Engagement and Spirituality*

Research supports self-authorship as one of the products of service learning. For example, in one study, the students’ definition of self-identity was centered on helping others (Jones &
Abes, 2004). Students noticed a change in focus towards others as a transformation of their identity. Furthermore, the relationships that the students developed were seen as “integral to their evolving sense of self” (Jones & Abes, 2004, p. 154). This evolving self, based on interactions through a service project, points to construction of a personal belief system, spirituality, new meaning or purpose, and hence, self-authorship. Students in the study struggled with the guilt of having more privilege than those that they were serving. Through their experience and reflection on the fact that their privilege allowed them to help others, the students learned a sense of civic responsibility.

This is particularly true in the case of Hannah, one of the students in the study, who was involved in a local community service project. She shared:

I feel less guilty because of being aware of all the complex societal issues that lead to that privilege makes me feel less individually responsible for the privilege, but only individually responsible for the awareness and pro-activity in inequality…. Learning the web of issues that surround privilege, I then feel a greater sense of responsibility to work on that (Jones & Abes, 2004, p. 155).

The direct influence that service learning has on student identity development is demonstrated by Hannah’s complex thinking and higher level of cognitive development. The process through which, students shift from a sense of guilt to that of responsibility and purpose is what Baxter Magolda (2001) and Kegan (1994) would describe as self-authorship or meaning-making. In the aforementioned example, Hannah, through reflection, is able to articulate the change in her attitude toward the individuals she served and examine more closely the role privilege plays in social inequality.
Kim, another student involved in service learning through an AIDS service organization had the following to say about her experience:

It just kind of set me off from there… opened my eyes to so many other opportunities and got me involved in new experiences, meeting new people, new ideas, that sort of thing…. I don’t think I would have ever been so involved in everything that I have been involved with…. It just enables me to do a whole bunch, meet a whole bunch of people, new ideas all at once. Whereas without it, I would still be chipping away at the new things I believe (Jones & Abes, 2004, p. 155).

This is yet another example of a student’s thought process that has led the student to realize the transformative change she has gone through after participating in a service-learning project. In both cases, there is evidence of self-awareness within the students. Recognizing one’s ability to be a productive member of society and create change is crucial to the development of self-efficacy and self-concept, both fostered by spirituality and civic engagement. Particularly, in the case of Kim, who experienced a lack of self confidence prior to getting involved in service learning, an increased sense of self-efficacy and self-concept was the additional benefit of engaging in reflection which is one of the most comprehensive ways in which students can begin to engage in self-authorship.

Encouraging Self-Authorship

Baxter Magolda and King (2008) point out that the key to encouraging effective self-authorship is “encouraging students to make sense of their experience rather than the educator making sense of it for them” (p. 9). It is important to realize the role of the student in his or her own meaning-making. This requires taking into consideration what the student thinks is an important experience to reflect on and structuring the reflection activity around the context of the
material that the student presents (Baxter Magolda & King, 2007). A successful conversation that allows reflection on the part of the student is outlined by Baxter Magolda and King (2008). The authors suggest that the conversation should start with getting acquainted and building a rapport. The goal is to make the student comfortable and ask less complex and more descriptive questions.

Once a certain level of comfort is reached, the student is encouraged to reflect on important experiences. Although still descriptive in nature, the students are asked to concentrate on key events and think about their relevance and affect. Later in the conversation, students are asked to interpret these reflections. This leads to making larger connections between the events and the developmental change in the student if any has occurred. Finally, the conversation would end validating the student’s experiences and encouraging them to continue reflecting.

Finally, when involved in a reflective conversation or activity, an educator should be able to probe the student to provide deeper and less superficial answers (Baxter Magolda & King, 2007). Furthermore, the educator should also be patient and give the student a chance to reflect; this may mean being comfortable with silence. The educator should also have a good ear to recognize when a reflection is being made and recognize when the exercise is strenuous on the student so they can provide the appropriate support. Other creative ways can also be employed to encourage students to think and write reflectively.

One such creative way is journaling and creating a portfolio. Portfolios can be used as a medium to document the experiences that lead to transformative learning and/or self-authorship. A learning portfolio can provide a structure for students to systematically reflect over time and develop skills and habits that are a result of critical reflection (Zubizarreta, 2004; Barrett, 2007). Barrett (2007) provides a formula for the evidence of learning: Evidence = Artifacts + Reflection
Validation. The sum of artifacts, reflection and validation provides evidence that learning has occurred. If students use such a formula to construct their e-portfolios, they are engaging in what Jon Dalton (2007) calls metacognition, “which is the process of reflecting on the meaning of what one does and how the various ingredients of one’s experiences relate to each other and contribute to one’s overall education and development” (p. 101). Such a viewpoint on e-portfolio development compliments the previous discussion on self-authorship, spirituality, religion, and civic engagement.

In general when designing educational programs and interactions with students, Baxter Magolda’s Learning Partnerships Model (LPM) can be used to promote and encourage self-authorship. Pizzolato and Ozaki (2007) offer the example of the Support to Enhance Performance (STEP) program initiated at a large public Midwestern research university. STEP provided students with one-on-one attention but also required students to participate in formal group sessions centered on topics such as time management, study skills, and career exploration. A program such as STEP modeled on the LPM is based on three principles; validate students as knowers, situate learning in students’ experiences and define learning as mutually constructing meaning. Students participating in the STEP program were encouraged by the program coordinator, to look into their interests and set aside the pressure from family and friends as they were choosing their major. The coordinator did not propose a formula for success but rather solicited the ideas and opinion of her students so that they could devise their own plan for success. Creating an environment based on the above mentioned principles of LPM will not only set students on a path to be a self-authored individual, but as they question external authorities and identify authority within themselves, they will also increase their self-efficacy and self-concept.
Self-authorship is a continuous process. Eyler (2001) emphasized the need for a frequent and continuous reflective process throughout a service-learning project. In her opinion, reflection leads to deeper understanding, critical thinking and perspective transformation. Eyler (2001) outlined activities that would promote reflection on an individual basis, reflection with classmates and finally reflection with members of the community they serve. It was also suggested that these three levels of reflection be carried out before, during and after the service-learning activity. Students are encouraged to keep a journal on their experiences during the activity and asked to write a reflective essay after the service project. Creative and interactive activities encourage reflection with classmates. Activities such as a giant Likert scale to discuss some of the social justice issues before the service project and theater and visual presentation for during and after the service project respectively. In order to shift the focus from the negative aspects on the community, Eyler (2001) suggested discussing the community partners’ assets before the service project. A presentation of lessons learned or possible future projects after the service activity would encourage positive and visionary thinking.

Encouraging self-authorship is not without challenges and misconceptions. A common mistake is to judge students at the early level of reflective thinking as incapable of more complex thought and meaning-making (Baxter Magolda & King, 2008). It is very important to understand the role that the external environment plays in terms of providing students with challenges to progress through higher levels of self-authorship. Students’ development reflects the level of response they have had to give to external demands. A student functioning at an early developmental stage may be in need of appropriate challenges. Self-authorship is also sometimes confused with egocentrism (Baxter Magolda, 2008). However, the development of self-identity through reflection of personal experiences offers the benefit of developing more meaningful
relationships with others, as seen within the components of spirituality, religion, and civic engagement.

It is more important to realize that self-authorship can and does occur within an individual independent of an external influence. According to Baxter Magolda and King (2008), when students encounter challenges that call into question their beliefs, values and assumptions; self-authorship occurs with reflection and support as they reassess their frames of reference. In such circumstances, students are forced to consider new and more complex structures. However, if self-authorship is to be induced, it is very important to keep in mind the student’s current meaning-making capability and provide appropriate challenge and support. Although college students are poised toward self-authorship through their engagement within diverse college communities, they still require the support of their educators and mentors.

Theoretical Integrations

*Connecting Spirituality, Religion, Civic Engagement, and Self-Authorship*

People’s abilities to assess, nurture, and express the spiritual dimension of their lives has been found to impact how they engage with the world and foster within them a heightened sense of connectedness that promotes empathy, ethical behavior, civic responsibility, passion, and action for social justice (Lindholm & Astin, 2008). Recognizing these intersections, one is able to comprehend the development of self-authorship, or the ability to integrate beliefs, values, identity, and social relationships (Baxter Magolda 2001; Kegan 1994). During those internal integrations, a person’s self-esteem and self-efficacy is affected and leads to more positive feelings of self-worth and overall engagement (Hayman et al., 2007). While engaging within a community, one is able to examine and reflect on their meaning and purpose, reiterating the synergistic relationship between spirituality and civic engagement (Chickering 2006). The
Intersecting Identities

intersections between religion, spirituality, and civic engagement interact and complement each other in the development of a student’s internalized identity. While journeying toward self-authorship, students encounter challenges as they engage in a variety of activities including civic engagement, that call into question their beliefs, values and assumptions, inclusive of acknowledging one’s spirituality and/or religion. Through these interactions, self-authorship gradually occurs through supportive reflection as students reassess their frames of reference and redefine their purpose and meaning in life.

Explaining the Model of Self-Authorship

Figure 1. Model of Self-Authorship
After reviewing current literature on spirituality, religion, and civic engagement, the environmental integrations fostering the development of our outcome, self-authorship, are recognized within our model (see Figure 1). Furthering Chickering’s (2006) recognition of the synergistic relationship between spirituality, religion, and civic engagement, our literature review revealed environments that foster these identity characteristics within college-aged students. Although the relationship between these identities does seem to facilitate and further one another, the environmental integrations also foster the development of a student’s self-authorship, or ability to integrate their beliefs, values, identity, and social relations (Baxter Magolda, 2004; Kegan, 1994). The environment, encompassing the human aggregate, organizational environment, constructed environment, and physical environment, facilitates the development of a student’s spirituality, religious beliefs, and civic engagement, while furthering one’s ability to self-author (Strange & Banning, 2001). While maintaining one’s original identity characteristics, as seen within the two columns labeled respectively, spiritual and religious affiliations and social and civic engagement, a student may engage within a variety of environments and activities such as intentional reflections and communities of practice seen within the central area of the model. Through these integrations, one engages in a process of identity development, respective of purpose and meaning. During these processes, through one’s engagement with communities of practice and their original values, one develops in self-esteem and self-efficacy. As seen within the figure, as one continues to engage and reflect on their experiences, one continuously furthers their development toward and of self-authorship. Besides the integration of their identities, beliefs, and values important to a holistic understanding of themselves, students who engage in self-authoring activities are also able to engage in higher-level cognitive explorations (King & Baxter-Magolda, 1996). Although our model identifies the
pathways toward the development self-authorship, without the facilitation and environmental integrations provided by faculty, staff, and student affairs practitioners as a whole, students may never experience these abilities.

*Integrations for Practitioners*

Recognizing the work of student affairs practitioners, Abes et al. (2007) recommended the inclusion of meaning-making capacities and identity perceptions in order to provide professionals with a deeper awareness of how students understand themselves and the contexts to which they are connected. Acknowledging the relationships between spirituality, religion, civic engagement, and their effect on self-authorship, may provide practitioners with a way to utilize existing identity characteristics to help students facilitate a greater understanding of their internal selves, inclusive of their meaning and purpose in life. Rogers and Love (2007) state how institutions, specifically faculty, need to increase visibility of spirituality on campuses and intentionally create spaces where spiritual exploration can occur, both in and out of the classroom, possibly through self-reflection and civic engagement.

Encouraging these identity explorations will allow students to not only define themselves, but also accomplish a larger goal held by institutions of higher education and noted in the 1997 Kellogg Report. Encouraging these searches will allow students to develop in character, conscience, citizenship, tolerance, civility, and individual and social responsibility. Lindholm and Astin (2008) indicate that faculty and staff have a central role in shaping institutional culture and climate and their values lie at the heart of higher education’s capacity to change. In sum, student affairs practitioners should utilize models of students’ holistic development and determine ways to integrate students’ cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal development in order to offer the potential for more complex understandings of college student development and
the designing of environments that enhance the complexity of a students’ development, possibly using our model of self-authorship.

**Conclusion**

The search for meaning, purpose, and values is increasingly moving to center stage amongst college students (Parks, 2000). The spirituality movement in society reflects one’s hunger to explore this dimension of life and it has pushed educators to examine the link between spirituality and learning and the role of spirituality in the development process (Love, 2002). Within institutions of higher education, four out of five college students indicate an interest in spirituality through either active involvement or inquiry within spiritually centered activities (Chickering, Dalton, & Stamm, 2006). People’s abilities to assess, nurture, and express the spiritual dimension of their lives has been found to impact how they engage with the world and to foster within them a heightened sense of connectedness that promotes empathy, ethical behavior, civic responsibility, passion, and action for social justice (Lindholm & Astin, 2008). Acknowledging those expressions of one’s spirituality and/or religion, in association with one’s civic engagement, we believe college students develop stronger levels of self-esteem and self-efficacy leading to the development of self-authorship during the college years. Through an extensive review of literature and examination of the intersections between spiritual and religious life and civic engagement, our model explains a student’s development of self-authorship.
References


