

Examining Self-Authorship in Seasonal Work: A Study of Summer Camp Employment and Developmentally Effective Experiences

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ABSTRACT

Self-authorship describes holistic development in epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal dimensions. Individuals who are self-authored have an integrated identity across all dimensions and act from an internally defined orientation. Developmentally effective experiences are central to self-authorship and create cognitive dissonance, prompting individuals to reconsider their existing beliefs and understanding. After these experiences, individuals move forward relying on internal definitions of understanding the world, themselves, and their interactions with others. These concepts have not been considered in seasonal employment settings for emerging adults. Using a case study approach, five participants with varying experiences with summer camp were purposefully selected from a study of camp employment. Each individual participated in four interviews over two years. Transcripts were coded to identify developmentally effective experiences. We found camp employment is rich in experiences in the intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions, and thus this type of employment may be a complementary setting for self-authorship and holistic development.

KEYWORDS: emerging adulthood, holistic development, seasonal work.

Young people develop at different rates physically and psychosocially based on life experiences in various settings (Benson & Elder, 2011; Coatsworth et al., 2006). This range in development contributes to an individual's ability to form a coherent sense of self, and therefore leads to different rates of holistic identity development (Benson & Elder, 2011). Characterized by a feeling of in-betweenness and exploration, emerging adults—individuals aged 18-29 years (Arnett, 2004)—are discovering who they are in love, work, and worldviews (Arnett, 2000). The important process of identity development occurs during the late teen years and often reaches its peak—or integration—during the third decade of life (Benson & Elder, 2011; Meeus, 2011). There have been many critiques to the concept of emerging adulthood. For example, Schwartz (2016) commented that it is a life stage for affluent white people only, however, scholars largely agree that, regardless of what this period of life is labelled, critical development occurs. As there is greater variability among today's young people, many are experiencing identity integration much later in life (Shanahan, 2000). This indicates that many individuals are not prepared for the demands and

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expectations of adulthood. This delayed identity integration impacts young people's abilities to be successful during adulthood. Emerging adults who productively explore who they are and who they are becoming in various settings, including employment, are more likely to flourish (Blustein, 2019), as opposed to flounder in adulthood (Nelson, 2020). One developmental framework applicable to emerging adulthood is self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 1992, 2001, 2004a). Self-authorship and experiences that contribute to the process of self-authorship are not often discussed in non-educational settings such as seasonal employment. Therefore, the aim of this study is to identify developmental experiences thought to promote progression toward self-authorship present in emerging adult summer camp employment.

Identity Development

Adults need to have a deep understanding of the world around them, who they are, and how they want to relate to others (Erikson, 1968). These cognitive or epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal aspects are foundational components to identity, a concept that has long been studied. Various identity models have been conceptualized throughout time, including stage-based models (e.g., Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1993). The focus of these models is linear stage progression, that is, the idea that individuals move progressively from one stage to the next, for example, through the resolution of conflicts (Erikson, 1968) or through exploration and commitment, leading ultimately to identity achievement (Marcia, 1993). Although these models provided the foundation for identity-based research, they fail to address current challenges that emerging adults face, such as delayed identity integration (Shanahan, 2000). More recent approaches to identity development are cyclical (Meeus, 2011), holistic (e.g., Baxter Magolda, 2001; Kegan, 1994; McAdams, 2013), and integrate constructivist and discovery perspectives (Schwartz, 2002). In particular, self-authorship is a common framework that takes into account various dimensions of being and understanding as well as possible regression through levels (Baxter Magolda, 2001).

Self-Authorship

The concept of self-authorship originated from Kegan's (1982, 1994) cognitive based theory of the development of consciousness, which "requires of adults a qualitative transformation of mind" (Kegan, 1994, p. 11). In his writing, Kegan explained that his theory is rooted in ideas of constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978) and developmentalism (Piaget, 1936/1952). For people to develop into adults who are able to handle life's challenges successfully, they must engage in a process of transforming their minds from the instrumental to the socialized mind (Kegan, 1982, 1994) Eventually, individuals may take ownership of their lives and act in self-authored ways. This is only possible when individuals acknowledge that how they understand reality is based on their own interpretation of events and the meaning they assign to them, a cognitive capacity typically possible in the 20s and beyond (Kegan, 1994).

Baxter Magolda and colleagues (Baxter Magolda, 2001, Baxter Magolda, 2004a, Baxter Magolda, 2004b, Baxter Magolda & King, 2012) expanded upon Kegan's framework. In their approach to self-authorship, identity development is positioned within a holistic level-based perspective that acknowledges some individuals may cycle through previous positions during the process of self-authorship (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). Within this framework, identity is multifaceted and the process of integrating one's identity across three dimensions (epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal), into a holistic view of oneself is emphasized (Baxter Magolda, 2004a).

The epistemological foundation is described as “how people use assumptions about the nature, limits, and certainty of knowledge to make knowledge claims” (Baxter Magolda, 2004a, p. 8). It requires individuals to understand that knowledge is contextually constructed, recognizing that multiple perspectives and therefore understandings of knowledge exist (Baxter Magolda, 2004a). An individual’s own view of themselves and their identity form the intrapersonal dimension of development. As individuals reflect on and select personal values, they are developing a coherent identity and sense of self. An internally regulated identity does not depend on external formulas or authority (Baxter Magolda, 2004a). The interpersonal dimension of self-authorship refers to how people view themselves as relating to others and their construction of respectful, mature relationships with peers. An understanding that different perspectives exist and valuing this in others is important. Although others may have a system of values and beliefs that do not align with one’s own, a self-authored individual recognizes and considers other views, but does not rely solely on external perspectives during the process of shaping their own views (Baxter Magolda, 2004a). Self-authorship is aligned with key markers of the transition to adulthood, specifically, the development of personal beliefs and values (Arnett, 2001).

Self-authorship has most recently been described as a three-level model with 10 positions along a continuum (Baxter Magolda et al., 2012). The three levels of self-authorship are external meaning-making, crossroads, and internal meaning-making. Throughout the process of self-authorship development, individuals struggle with three questions: how do I know (cognitive), who am I (intrapersonal), and what relationships do I want with others (interpersonal; Baxter Magolda, 2001)? By reflecting on these questions, individuals are able to make meaning of their own lives and identities, actively constructing their own experiences (Baxter Magolda, 2004b). Initially, young people let others make meaning of their experiences for them. That is, they follow external definitions of who they are, without the need to consider otherwise. There comes a point when an individual feels that other people’s definitions of them are no longer aligned who they feel they are becoming.

Crossroads

Individuals enter the crossroads when events begin to prompt them to consider their personal perspectives on the three questions (Pizzolato, 2006). At this time, individuals recognize the need to develop their own beliefs and determine how to integrate them into their meaning-making (Pizzolato, 2006). They question authority, reconsider what they believe, and begin to make decisions based on their own internal views. The crossroads is a period of transition from primarily external definitions of oneself to primarily internal definitions. Individuals may stay at the crossroads for a long period of time, cycling and re-cycling throughout four developmental positions on the journey toward self-authorship (see Baxter Magolda et al., 2012 for a visual representation).

The first two of the four crossroads positions are dominated by external meaning-making, first with the awareness of the need for internal meaning-making and secondly with active work toward internal meaning-making (Baxter Magolda et al., 2012). The next two positions are focused on internal meaning-making, first prioritizing listening to an internal voice amid strong external perspectives. Secondly, focusing on the internal voice and consciously preventing others’ perspectives from dominating (Baxter Magolda et al., 2012). At this point, they engage in internal meaning-making: “the internal capacity to define one’s beliefs, identity, and social relations” (Baxter Magolda, 2001, p. 269).

An internal capacity allows individuals to make decisions guided by an internal compass in different life settings. Once an individual can integrate all three dimensions and regulate their beliefs and actions based on their internally defined and integrated identity, they are thought to have achieved self-authorship. The development of a strong foundation and self-authorship allow individuals to navigate difficult life experiences, build genuine personal relationships, and contribute to success in adulthood (Carpenter & Peña, 2017). It is with developmentally effective experiences (DEEs) that individuals progress through the crossroads toward internal meaning-making and self-authorship.

Developmentally Effective Experiences

People require time and experiences to progress through self-authorship, and some experiences and settings may catalyze or promote this progression. In particular, DEEs are important in the self-authorship process. DEEs often involve a “jarring disequilibrium” (Pizzolato, 2005, p. 625) on behalf of the individual, leading to cognitive dissonance (Barber & King, 2014; McGowan, 2016). King and colleagues (2009) consider an experience to be a DEE “if it prompted the [individual] to see or think about the world (the cognitive dimension), themselves (the intrapersonal dimension), and/or their relationships with others (the interpersonal dimension) in more developmentally advanced ways” (King, Baxter Magolda, Barber, Kendall Brown, & Lindsay, 2009, p. 111). After experiencing a DEE, individuals would act from more internal definitions and rely less on external authorities (King, Baxter Magolda, Barber, Kendall Brown, & Lindsay, 2009). During this experience individuals move from relying on what they are told to believe about the world, themselves, and their interactions with others, termed “authority dependence” (Baxter Magolda et al., 2012), to questioning and identifying what they internally believe without influence from others. Finally, self-authored individuals move forward committing to newly self-defined ways of doing so (Pizzolato, 2005). DEEs in each dimension are necessary for individuals to progress through self-authorship (Pizzolato & Olson, 2016).

Barber and King (2014) sought to further understand the components of DEEs and the settings in which they occur. In their study of 139 DEEs from 68 students, the authors commented that “there is a wide range of contexts in which student learning takes place” (Barber & King, 2014, p. 438). Beyond classroom and college residence experiences ($n = 51$), DEEs occurred in co-curricular activities ($n = 24$), at work ($n = 14$), with friends ($n = 12$), during international experiences ($n = 4$), and with family ($n = 3$). The authors found that many DEEs are characterized by challenge and support; however, in some cases, individuals do not receive support during a challenging experience, and thus both components are not required for changes in meaning-making processes to occur (Barber & King, 2014). DEEs can be one-time events or repeated experiences that promote developmentally advanced ways of meaning-making in each dimension. Examples include racism, sexism, or other significant personal events (Carpenter & Peña, 2017), such as the death of a close friend or family member (Barber et al., 2013). Although authors have acknowledged that progression in self-authorship occurs in other settings (e.g., Barber & King, 2014), collegiate experiences have been the focus of efforts to understand the role of DEE’s in self-authorship. Thus, there is a greater need to expand this understanding to a range of settings and life experiences (Barber et al., 2013).

Self-Authorship Research

Since the introduction of the concept of self-authorship in the late 20th century, there has been a proliferation of research in this area. Much of the concept of self-authorship emerged from Baxter Magolda's (1992, 2001, 2004a) longitudinal study. A critique of the original development of the framework is that it was based primarily on data from white students at a midwestern public university. Scholars have thus sought to apply the theory to a more diverse student population, reflective of college students in the 21st century. This includes women (e.g., Creamer & Laughlin, 2005), Latino/a college students (e.g., Torres & Hernandez, 2007), lesbian students (Abes & Jones, 2004), Black feminist perspectives (Okello, 2018), low-income first-generation students (Carpenter & Peña, 2017; Jehangir, et al., 2012), diverse groups of students at liberal arts institutions (e.g., Baxter Magolda, et al., 2012; King, Kendall Brown, Lindsay, & VanHecke, 2007), and intersectionality of different aspects of identity and social groups (Jones, 2010). Although emerging adult college students engage in many different settings, the bulk of self-authorship research remains in college and other educational settings such as outdoor and experiential education (McGowan, 2016; Ricks et al., 2020).

Non-Collegiate Emerging Adult Settings

Emerging adulthood is an important developmental period during which individuals should purposefully engage in "growth promoting choices" (Nelson, 2020, p. 8) to promote flourishing in emerging adulthood and beyond. Out-of-school time settings are key for both youth (McNamara, et al., 2020) and emerging adult development (Nagaoka et al., 2015) to prepare young people for adulthood. Although college is one common setting for emerging adults, another common life setting for these individuals is employment. Approximately 43% of full-time and 81% of part-time college students are employed throughout the academic year (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019) and research has identified employment as a valuable developmental setting and experience for emerging adults (e.g., Mayseless & Keren, 2014; Nelson, 2020). Within employment settings individuals learn important skills, engage in relationships with others, and find meaning in their lives (Mayseless & Keren, 2014). Scholarship about emerging adults emphasized important identity exploration that occurs in this setting (Arnett, 2000). Although researchers have long commented that identity development occurs at work (e.g., Arnett, 2000; Blustein, 2019; Erikson, 1968), scholars have only recently begun to identify the complementary nature of work to other developmental settings (e.g., Povilaitis et al., 2021), including how participation in various settings is beneficial for holistic development. Although self-authorship researchers have called for an understanding of this process in settings beyond educational ones (Barber et al., 2013), this work is only beginning to address employment (e.g., Berger, 2012) and has yet to be applied to seasonal employment experiences, such as summer camp.

Summer Camp

Many college students engage in summer employment and a common seasonal work experience for emerging adults in the United States is summer camp (Browne, 2019). Nearly 1.5 million individuals are employed at summer camps every year (American Camp Association, 2016). Summer camp employment allows young people to forge close relationships with youth to facilitate positive developmental outcomes for campers (Rubin et al., 2022) and offers emerging adults the opportunity to engage in meaningful work experiences (Warner et al., 2021). Not only is summer camp an opportunity for emerging adults to impact youth positively, but it also provides

developmental opportunities for staff as well. Researchers have begun to position camp employment as a complementary developmental setting in which emerging adults learn skills they do not report learning as frequently in college or in other employment settings (Povilaitis et al., 2021). Specific skills have been identified as outcomes of the camp work experience, including interpersonal skills (e.g., Ferrari & McNeely, 2007; Povilaitis et al., 2021), leadership skills (e.g., Duda, 2009; Povilaitis et al., 2021), and job or career related skills and awareness (e.g., Duerden et al., 2014; Richmond et al., 2020). The camp employment setting is also ripe for identity explorations as researchers have also commented that camp employment prompts self-exploration and identity development (e.g., Garst et al., 2009; Johnson et al., 2011; Waskul, 1998).

The Current Study

Previous research has sought to understand camp staff identity exploration, has not been grounded in theory, or was framed within Erikson's (1968) model of identity development. A holistic model such as self-authorship is important to frame emerging adult camp employment experiences. In conjunction with existing outcomes-based work, this type of scholarship will allow for a more comprehensive understanding of how camp employment can contribute to preparing emerging adults for success in adulthood. In particular, a focus on developmentally effective experiences, will allow for a greater understanding of different types of emerging adult experiences and their potential to impact self-authorship development. Studies such as this one will allow for practitioners who employ emerging adults to create experiences that encourage and support development in preparation for adulthood. The aim of the study is to identify experiences that impact developmental progress in an employment setting for emerging adults. Therefore, the research question guiding this study is: what examples of self-authorship, particularly developmentally effective experiences, occur in summer camp employment?

Methods

In this study, we use repeated semi-structured interviews with participants from a larger longitudinal study of summer camp employment. Repeated interviews are common in case studies of self-authorship (e.g., Baxter Magolda 1992, 2001, 2004a). After IRB approval, staff who worked at the camp in the summer 2018 were recruited from a national stratified sample of summer camps. The study included day and overnight camps, for-profit and not-for-profit, agency and independent camps, and those with specialty foci (e.g., medical, arts-based, single gender). These participants ($n = 254$) completed twice annual surveys during which they were asked about outcomes of the camp employment experience, transfer of learning, and experiences in other settings such as college and non-camp work. After completing the surveys, participants were provided the opportunity to participate in follow-up interviews. From the larger study group, participants who completed all interviews (Fall 2018, Spring 2019, Fall 2019, and Spring 2020) were considered potential participants for this study. The interviews, participant selection, and analyses presented in this paper were primarily completed by myself (the first author); thus, much of this section is written in the first-person.

To select cases (study participants), I reviewed detailed interview notes for types of camp experiences (e.g., never attended as a child to multi-year camper experiences, positive or negative employment experiences) and the presence of descriptions of concepts relevant to self-authorship. I chose five individuals to represent various types of engagement with summer camp and experiences of self-authorship and developmentally effective experiences (DEEs). With the permission of participants, interviews were audio recorded and subsequently transcribed. I

analyzed interview transcripts to identify concepts relevant to self-authorship and DEEs, and I engaged in rigorous qualitative analysis procedures, such as data triangulation, reflexive practices, audit trail, and note-taking.

Case Study Approach

In this paper, we use a case study approach (Merriam, 1998), with participants as specific cases. After reviewing detailed interview notes, I purposefully selected five individuals as cases of interest (Merriam, 1998), as these cases represent different types of camp experiences, and the individuals were in various stages of college, career, life, and self-authorship. Each individual participated in four interviews from 2018-2020. The focus of this paper is on garnering a deep understanding of participant experiences, including DEEs related to their college, career, and life trajectories and how working at summer camp may or may not have impacted self-authorship. Transcripts from participant interviews were reviewed to identify participants' use of external formulas and internal meaning-making to guide decisions. We acknowledge that, as self-authorship is a non-linear process, participants may transition between externally and internally guided ways of being and thinking regularly. Participants may not achieve self-authorship during this study. We used a similar qualification to King, Baxter Magolda, Barber, Kendall Brown, and Lindsay (2009) to identify developmentally effective experiences as those in which participants describe a more complex way of meaning-making (i.e., moving through crossroads to internal meaning-making) in any of the dimensions (cognitive, intrapersonal, interpersonal) of self-authorship as a result of the experience.

Merriam's (1998) approach to case studies includes an emergent study design, promoting early and ongoing analysis of data and continual data collection, and is based on constructivist ideals that emphasize meaning-making. Following this approach (Merriam, 1998), a case may be a program, a group, a policy, or a person. A case study approach bridges both narrative techniques and constructivism and focuses on interviewing, and in particular, asking good questions, probing, and interactions between interviewer and interviewee. Merriam's approach (1998) is most appropriate to use for this study and offers methodological coherence (Mayan, 2009) as it strongly aligns with my personal research position and the foundations and key concepts of self-authorship: constructivism and individual meaning-making processes.

Selection of Cases

I reviewed detailed interview notes from participants within the larger study to identify potential cases or individuals of interest. The individuals that were selected as case studies completed all four interviews and provided detailed descriptions of their time employed at camp and in other life settings and experiences. These individuals represent a range of demographic backgrounds (e.g., age, gender, race), college majors/intended careers, and experiences with summer camp as youth campers and employees. Table 1 provides demographic information of study participants.

Interviews

Data from this paper comes from five participants' phone interviews at four timepoints throughout the longitudinal study. There was a total of 20 interviews. Interviews lasted approximately 40-75 minutes and were conducted by the first author. Each interview was semi-structured with overarching questions about participants' summer camp employment experiences

to guide the discussion. The interviews were follow-ups to participants' completed surveys for the larger longitudinal study; however, for many of the interview timepoints, there were questions on the overall survey that specifically pertained to this study. For example, an open-ended question about impactful experiences prompted discussions about how the decision was made and who supported the participant in making the decision. At another timepoint, questions on the survey were about experiences of challenge and support in their lives. During the follow-up interview, I asked participants to describe the experience and provide additional details. Participants were also asked about concepts within self-authorship, including beliefs and values, decision making processes, and experiences of challenge and support in their lives. In addition, as COVID-19 began to greatly affect the world in Spring of 2020, questions pertaining to the pandemic and its impact on some participants were also included in the final round of data collection. I also followed other interesting lines of inquiry as they arose and asked further probing and clarification questions. Interview transcripts are available upon request.

Table 1
Participant Demographic Information

	Gender	Race	Age	Camper history	Working at same camp attended?	Summers working at camp	College Major/Intended Career
Alexis	F	White	23	Day and overnight – total 5 weeks	No	2	Biology
Brianna	F	Black	21	Day – approx. 50 weeks	No	1	Performing Arts/Dramatic Writing
Courtney	F	Multi-racial, Black	18	None	-	2	Elementary Education (added focus on secondary)
Dan	M	White	18	Day and overnight – total 31 weeks	Yes (attended 10 summers)	2	Biology and Neuroscience
Edwin	M	White	19	Day and overnight – total 11 weeks	No	2	Elementary Education

Note. This demographic information is from the beginning of the study, the summer of 2018, prior to the first interview. As participants aged during the two-year span of interviews, some have graduated college and begun working in their chosen career or field.

Analysis

Merriam (1998) explained that data analysis is “the process of making sense out of the data” (p. 178) and includes consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what participants have said in interviews. During data analysis in this study, I followed the analysis steps as described by McCormack (2000). As I conducted the majority of the interviews over the longitudinal project, I was quite familiar with the participants and the content. I intentionally engaged in thorough analysis steps, which included active listening (through repeated listening of audio and immersion in the data), considering the language of the text, acknowledging the context of the interview, and identifying unexpected moments (McCormack, 2000). I read interview transcripts once while listening to the audio to gain an overall perspective of the individual and then again while being analyzed for key concepts of self-authorship, primarily changes in meaning-making structures and DEEs. Often times these concepts overlapped in stories and moments that were repeatedly

discussed at different timepoints. Experiences that were discussed multiple times greatly impacted participants and the evolution of meaning-making was evident as participants came to make sense of these moments and engage in developmentally advanced ways of thinking and being.

According to Merriam's (1998) approach to case study research, traditional ideas of validity and reliability are not a primary concern, as these concepts originate from a positivistic tradition and cannot be aligned with a constructivist paradigm. Strategies to ensure trustworthiness were considered, including triangulation, use of an audit trail, ongoing member checks, disclosure of researcher bias, and use of thick description. Throughout the analysis, I continually discussed my interpretations with another interviewer who is familiar with the project and concepts of self-authorship to identify any biased views, misinterpretations, or unfounded conclusions I may have made. Further, Baxter Magolda and King (2012) also suggest reflecting on personal assumptions and biases to identify how they may act as sensitizing concepts throughout the analysis process. Another researcher is helpful to consult during this process. As such, during analysis, I considered participants' survey responses alongside interview transcripts, kept a reflexivity journal, and took extensive notes. I am a white woman who grew up in a Westernized society in an upper-middle class background. As such, I recognize that I do not share experiences with participants of color, those who have experienced poverty, or individuals who had formative experiences growing up internationally. In a personal reflexivity journal, I detailed how this lens impacted my analysis procedures. In addition, I continued to discuss my reflexivity with another interviewer.

Findings

In this section, each participant's story is presented, and DEEs are described. DEEs occurred in a variety of settings that led to developmentally advanced ways of meaning-making in each dimension. As the focus of the longitudinal study was on summer camp employment, each participant commented on DEEs that occurred in this setting, among others such as childhood and additional employment settings. The dimensions that were most impacted by each DEE are noted throughout the text and in parentheses.

Alexis

Alexis is the oldest case study participant at 23 years old. She is a white woman who attended approximately 5 weeks of day and overnight camp as a child. She worked at camp for both summers of the study. Most of the DEEs Alexis reflected on occurred during her work at summer camp.

Throughout the two summers of camp employment, Alexis had many small DEEs during which all three self-authorship dimensions were challenged and developed. In particular, she explained how her cognitive dimension was impacted, saying, "I learned so much both from my actual hands-on experience working with kids but also so much from my other peers... I was able to see a new perspective on how things can be done." This was also important in developing her confidence working with children in the outdoors (intrapersonal and interpersonal). Alexis also reflected on an especially poignant moment during her second off-site trip during her first summer working at camp. She said,

There was a time we were at a gas station. I happened to look at myself in the mirror. I remember thinking for a split second that I didn't recognize myself. Not in a negative 'she looks awful' way, but just there was something in a way, I don't know, that I piled my hair on my head or... I

was probably a lot tanner than the last time I looked at myself in the mirror. At first, I was thinking, 'who is this person?' I remember thinking in my head, 'this is who your students see.' My students see this person who is maybe a little bit messy but in charge and on top of it... But they don't know the rest of me. It was a little bit like, 'Oh my gosh, this person who I am becoming - this is who my students see.' They don't see the quiet insecurities in my head or the fact that I'm like, 'This is only my second time. Don't tell anybody that I might not know what I'm doing.' I was just like, 'Oh my God, they see this awesome person who's in charge. I didn't realize that person was in there.'

This experience made her confront her imposter syndrome (intrapersonal) and preconceived notions of who she was and overcome them as she realized she was capable of succeeding in the role. Every small moment she was successful, for example, “getting to the river rafting location” or “picking up unaccompanied minors at the airport,” led to a greater sense of empowerment and confidence that she did not previously have (intrapersonal). Alexis experienced DEEs in the interpersonal dimension as well, particularly in relation to teamwork. During one trip, she was working in a team of three and they had to split responsibilities evenly, which challenged her ideas that working partnerships always included a hierarchy of leadership.

Overall, Alexis came into the experience with previously developed ways of learning that were changed through the camp employment experience. Alexis recognized the benefit of role modeling and observation (cognitive), understood and overcame imposter syndrome as a youth leader (intrapersonal), and learned better ways of communicating and working with her peers (interpersonal). She explained that although she graduated from college more than a year before the time of the final interview, much of her personal development came from her experiences at camp. Alexis exhibited progression through the crossroads and began making meaning using internally defined formulas when she said that camp shaped her decision-making process. Due to her experiences and personal growth working at camp, she began to make decisions based on what she feels is best for her, not what others were doing. Alexis commented,

When I think I know what I want to do if it's a big or little thing, I try really hard not to hesitate, not to have all the mental back and forth of should I? I think I should—It feels like a good idea, but I don't know.

Instead, she said, “I don't really care what other people think, big picture. I'm not worried about it.” For example, “I've got other friends who are going back to grad school. Cool. Best of luck to them. Grad school is not really in the cards for me.” She was making decisions based on internal meaning-making and what felt best for her.

Even though she had moved through the crossroads toward achieving self-authorship, Alexis craved additional DEEs that would contribute to her personal development in all three dimensions and thus, she decided to enroll in the Peace Corps. Reflecting on why she chose to do this, she said,

I knew that if I did Peace Corps, my future, goals and desires, or an avenue that I wanted to work in and more direction of what I wanted to do with my life, would arise from that. So, I had always liked and been interested in the idea of the experience, but I truly went into it wanting more of the personal growth and development and knowing that that would come from it.

Unfortunately, due to COVID-19, all Peace Corps volunteers were evacuated from overseas and Alexis left Madagascar after three weeks to return to the United States. Regardless, she is hopeful that when the opportunity arises, she will return.

As Alexis described many experiences in which she made decisions based on her internal compass without regard for external formulas, she has progressed through the crossroads into the latter stages of self-authorship. She actively searches for opportunities to make decisions that allow her to exercise her internal meaning-making. She no longer considers external views and authors her own life.

Brianna

Brianna is a young Black woman who worked at a summer camp for one season. Although on her initial survey she indicated a long history of interacting with camp as a child (over 50 weeks of day camp), she never mentioned any childhood camper experiences in her interviews, but instead focused primarily on experiences as an emerging adult.

Working at summer camp offered Brianna many DEEs. She commented that upon beginning work at camp, she immediately noticed a “culture gap” between many of the children attending camp and herself, as a Black woman (cognitive). She expressed, “some of the things [campers] say, no one has told them that those things are not okay” and that many of the comments were “racially motivated.” For example, she explained that campers would regularly comment that Brianna and the two other Black women at camp must all be related. These interactions led Brianna to confront her previous understanding of how to interact with others in these situations (interpersonal). Turning inward, this impacted how she interpreted comments and interacted with others. She said, “it helped me to sit back and think maybe this person really didn’t mean what they said. Maybe they just don’t know that what they’re saying isn’t okay.” She reconsidered campers’ comments in light of their backgrounds and experiences to give them the benefit of the doubt.

Brianna also experienced racism, discrimination, and a lack of responsiveness to her needs and experiences as a Black person at various staffing levels. Multiple times across all four interviews she reflected on the same three instances: discrimination from a nurse when she went to the health office for a basic medical request, the camp director’s offer to give her private swimming lessons although she passed the swim test, and other counselors’ perception that during off days in town that “if you don’t do anything to the cops, they won’t do anything to you.” When referencing the comment about police, Brianna said, “to me, that was just so dismissive of a person of color’s experience... it was a slap in the face,” and it prompted her to question her own safety and support from others in the camp environment. Each of these experiences are individual DEEs with implications for Brianna’s process of self-authorship, however, collectively, they had the largest impact on her intrapersonal dimension, impacting how she viewed herself as a Black woman and how she engaged with the rest of the world. She said,

I learned that I can't run from my race, which is kind of a crazy thing to hear. But honestly, I was applying for summer camps in California, because I thought that getting out of the South would be safer. And I wouldn't have to deal with so many racially charged things or inequality and stuff like that. And what I learned is that, that's not true. Because obviously my race and my color follow me. And there are going to be people all over this planet that are going to treat me differently for something like that, something that I didn't choose.

Brianna had wanted to be a summer camp counselor for many years and describes her employment as “a really unfortunate time” and expressed that “the negatives outweighed the positives.” She mentioned how the experience of having such high expectations that were not met impacted the way she made decisions in her life moving forward. She said, “I think about that when I make decisions about places that I want to go or things that I want to do. I just remind myself this is how you want it to be, but this might be how it actually is.” Her experiences of discrimination at camp impacted the way she saw herself (intrapersonal) and how she chose to move forward with others and in the world (interpersonal). She moved forward recognizing competing internal and external formulas and strove to follow her internal compass only but acknowledged that she was not yet able to fully do so. She was in the crossroads, moving toward achieving self-authorship but was not yet there.

Brianna also mentioned that although she discussed negative experiences during interviews, as time has passed, she has been able to reassign meaning to them and they are no longer at the forefront of her mind. Instead, she recognized the positive aspects, such as fulfilling a dream of working at a summer camp and spending two and a half months “living in the mountains.” For Brianna, her experiences of racism and discrimination at camp revolved around her identity as a Black woman. Over time, she reflected on these experiences and has moved forward following internal meaning-making and doing what she knows is best and right for her. She commented,

I'm pointing them out to you, because of the questions but it's not anything that keeps me up at night - it's not anything that I dwell on all the time. I'm really more focused on how I can better myself as a person and within my career and making connections. And I do think that sometimes factors like race do inhibit that, unfortunately, but it's not something that makes me give up. I'll keep trying until essentially, I get what I want.

Brianna’s experiences indicate that she is in early stages of the crossroads. Although she is in the process toward self-authorship, many of her comments indicate that she continues to allow external formulas to dominate her meaning making process. Much of her focus surrounds demonstrating to others that she is not the person that others view her to be.

Courtney

Courtney entered the study at 18 years old and described herself as a multi-racial Black woman. Although she did not have any experience as a camper, Courtney majored in elementary education and worked both summers at camp. The DEEs she described occurred during childhood, while working at camp, in her teaching practicum during college, and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Courtney had some formative experiences as a child, and in particular had supportive non-familial adults in her life as teachers that allowed her to recognize more internally defined ways of understanding herself. She commented that “we’re all born with our own individual setbacks and unfortunately, I had a lot of setbacks, being a woman of color, being born into poverty, and being born into a single-parent household”; however, when she attended school, that did not define her. She described how her intrapersonal dimension was impacted when she said, “[school] was another place where I gained confidence, found myself, and definitely thrived.” This largely came from teachers who saw her outside of the things that she was born into and couldn’t control, gave her “unconditional love and acceptance,” and believed in her. Courtney commented that school “became a place where I really learned how powerful I could be as an individual, and how I could

advocate for myself.” These self-realizations were different from what society told her a young Black woman born into poverty could be. These realizations led her to acknowledge her desire to become a supportive person for other children who had a similar upbringing or identity and prompted her to pursue education in college (intrapersonal and interpersonal).

Through her college years, Courtney worked for two summers at camp, during which she had many impactful experiences that allowed for more self-discovery (intrapersonal). She said,

To me camp is the place where I really found myself. I found out what I did like and what I didn't like, who I wanted to be, and who I didn't want to be, just because of all of these experiences, regardless of whether they were positive or negative.

Courtney described having challenging conversations with youth at camp about race and discrimination that made her question why these topics have previously been taboo or “no-nos” for adults and children to talk about (cognitive). Originally, she described the conversations as “tough” but came to acknowledge the power of creating positive relationships with youth and engaging in these types of conversations (interpersonal). Courtney provided the example of a trip the group took, saying,

We went to the south [from Indianapolis, Indiana to the backwoods of Tennessee] with a very diverse group of kids, we had a lot of Black and brown kids. It was an interesting experience. When they did interact with people in the south, they felt different vibes and things as the other white kids. So, we had to have a lot of conversations about their experiences and how that affects them, and certain boundaries between what they felt the white kids could say to them... just giving their perspective on a lot of things that the white kids were confused about or had misconceptions about.

She explained that this was different from any experiences she had as a child when adults in positions of authority avoided these types of discussions. Courtney explained, “I learned there is nothing wrong with talking about it, and a lot can come from it.” During this experience, she moved from external ways of making meaning to the crossroads as she began to question why this topic was taboo and recognize the value for herself and others in these discussions.

She was able to take this learning to her student teaching opportunities and have discussions with youth who had questions about their transgender teacher. She engaged in the conversation openly, honestly, and from an internally directed space of approaching previously “taboo” topics with youth in a kind and compassionate way to normalize them and “dismantle stereotypes.” Her student teaching also offered a DEE when she misgendered a child based on their presentation. She said that experience made her “question a lot of things about this unconscious bias,” allowing her to become more internally defined in the cognitive dimension. She continued, “I needed to take this opportunity and learn from it and figure out things about myself that I had hidden inside of me and correct those thoughts and behaviors.”

COVID-19 and its impacts meant Courtney had to move home during college. Courtney had a “full ride” as a low-income student and now had to take on additional work to cover expenses incurred living at home. These choices offered moments for Courtney to progress toward self-authorship and exercise internally guided decision-making. She was offered a job at a YMCA, and although she wanted to work with youth, she had discovered that in her previous camp job, she was not provided with the supervisory support that she needed when she moved into a leadership role.

During her second summer, Courtney was promoted to a leadership role and discovered that personally, to be successful, she needed greater support and training from senior leadership (intrapersonal). This experience redefined her understanding and perspective of supervisor-staff working relationships (interpersonal). She openly discussed her need for management support during interviews with the YMCA and was told she would be placed at a location where the director would be unavailable for periods of time throughout the summer. With this knowledge, she reflected on what success would mean for her in this employment and decided that, while the job would satisfy her desire to work with youth, she would not be supported in ways that she needed and thus, this would not be the best employment for her. She decided to take another job.

The DEEs that Courtney described indicate that she is progressing through the crossroads and that she is on her way to self-authorship. She has had experiences that prompt her to question and contrast who others believe she is with who she feels that she is. These DEEs have allowed her to turn inward and begin trusting her own internal meaning-making. Although, at times, she still reflects on external formulas, she is not dominated by them and instead makes decisions from a position of internal meaning-making.

Dan

Dan, an 18-year-old white male, has a long history with summer camp. He attended the same camp for a total of 31 weeks over 10 summers as a child. He continued to work at the camp that he attended, completing both summers of the study as a staff member. The DEEs that Dan described occurred in childhood, as a camper and as a camp staff member.

Dan had a very impactful experience as a child that changed the way he understood and related to the world and others (cognitive and interpersonal), as well as how he understood himself and viewed his future (intrapersonal). When he was eight years old, his cousin, with whom he was close “like a sibling,” passed away from brain cancer. During the funeral, his grandfather mentioned “this idea about healing others and not letting [cancer and death] happen to any other kids. So that’s just defined what I wanted to do. My career and job is to help and heal others.” Dan explained how this impacted his identity and career choice (intrapersonal) and more when he said, “I wanted to do something to honor his memory, and that manifested itself best in neurosurgery” and that his cousin’s death was “the impetus in a lot of decisions I’ve made and pretty big deciding factors in my relationship with different clubs, people, and activities” (interpersonal). This experience indicates Dan was at the crossroads as he followed external formulas from his grandfather’s comments, but he also began forming his own ideas of who he wanted to be (intrapersonal) and how he would interact with the world (interpersonal).

Similarly, Dan attended camp as a child for ten years and had other important experiences during this time. His third summer going to camp, his step-father dropped him off and commented, “do something big this summer and go out of your way to make something of yourself a little bit more this summer, as opposed to just floating on with the rest of the camp.” Dan explained that this led him to reconsider who he was and commit to being anything but average (intrapersonal). In addition, his camp directors’ perspective of “disruptive moments” as the ones outside your comfort zone that frighten and change you in positive ways, led Dan as a camper to question how he was engaging with the world (cognitive) and if his experiences were “reasonable and safe risks” that pushed his development and made him “the best version of myself.” He described carrying this into other areas of his life and seeking out romantic partners that, regardless of whether they attended or worked a camp, had this “camp condition” mentality. Again, Dan was at the crossroads, beginning to question ideas of who he wanted and how he made sense of the world, however, he was still somewhat dependent on others’ views.

During his time working at camp as an emerging adult, Dan had DEEs during which he learned vulnerability (intrapersonal) and communication (interpersonal). He explained that in his second summer of camp employment, his definition of leadership changed as he was working in a co-director partnership and was working from the perspective of needing to take charge and show his capabilities as a leader. His co-director explained to him that she was not feeling respected and valued because Dan would take over and not allow her to contribute. During this experience, Dan learned that he was “keeping her down” and that “a good leader can recognize those different skill sets and utilize them to the best capacity, rather than try to make all of them his own, or her own.” To be successful as a team, he had to be vulnerable with her interpersonally and express to her his need for support. This DEE of working with a co-director led Dan to more developmentally advanced ways of understanding leadership (cognitive and interpersonal). He no longer relied on ideas of the “storybook leader” he was taught as a child, but instead understood the value of “moral leadership” as well. While a storybook leader is someone who is valiant in front of challenges and gives a “rousing speech,” a moral leader is someone who works behind the scenes to make things happen. This redefinition allowed Dan to recognize different types of leadership and be the appropriate leader that’s needed in various situations. Although Dan has had DEEs in all three domains, during his interviews, he did not describe acting fully from internally defined and integrated ways, indicating that he has yet to reach self-authorship.

Edwin

At the beginning of the study, Edwin was a 19-year-old white male who had multiple camp experiences. He attended both day and overnight camp as a child for a total of 11 weeks. Although he did not continue to work at any camp he had attended, he had employment experiences at a day and overnight camp. He worked at the same overnight camp for both summers of this study. The DEE’s Edwin described occurred in his childhood and in the camp employment context.

As a child, Edwin’s parents divorced and he was left moving between each parent’s house, without a solid community footing. When his mother began to date again, she had a partner who was “mentally and emotionally abusive” toward Edwin and caused “irreparable damage” when the partner told Edwin that he was undeserving of respect. This experience was quite jarring for Edwin because it led him to confront external formulas of who he was and what he thought of himself internally. It prompted Edwin to reconsider two dimensions of self-authorship: who he wanted to be (intrapersonal), how he wanted to interact with others and the world (interpersonal). He then rebuilt his self-image, choosing to pursue a career that allows him to pour into and support young people on their own journeys and seek out a lifestyle in which both contributes to and receives the support of a strong community.

One “really transformative time” of his life was when, as an early emerging adult, Edwin was working at a youth out-of-school-time organization. While he described many experiences that prompted him to stop and reflect, one in particular was very impactful. Two children were discussing the concept of the earth’s creation when one boy explained the ‘big bang’ theory, turned to Edwin, and said, “right, Edwin?” This prompted him to confront his own belief system. He grew up “in private Christian schooling,” attending “bible class every single day for eight years” and had previously never doubted what anyone told him about the creation of the world. Edwin said “it wasn’t until I had a ten-year-old look at me and directly question me... that I felt like I really needed to figure out what I believe and make it my own or completely denounce it.” He explained that the situation acted as “a domino effect to really become cemented in what faith I do believe.”

He explained another incident with the same camper that prompted him to begin working at the overnight camp and described it as “all part of some divine plan” as this camper “really triggered me to reevaluate my value system and my faith,” which contributed to his passion for teaching and camp. Edwin had another conversation with that camper while volunteering at a Boys and Girls club, during which the boy said, “you should be a counselor at Camp X.” Edwin responded, “What, am I just that good?” and the camper “looked at me with the most genuine pair of eyes and said ‘yes’”. This moment in the crossroads ultimately led to Edwin developing stronger internal definitions in cognitive and intrapersonal dimensions. He took this external perspective of who he was and reflected on his internal voice to determine whom he wanted to be moving forward.

Edwin reflected after his first summer working at camp, commenting that it “actually changed my life.” He said, “it’s both challenged me in terms of personal growth, but it has also helped me reaffirm who I am and the role that I want to play in the world around me” (intrapersonal). He also commented that a lot of smaller moments occurred that led to a great change. One especially moving DEE he recalled involved a young boy disclosing his strained relationship with his biological father, who suddenly wanted back in this child’s life. During that moment, Edwin reconsidered what the ‘right answer’ was and recognized in himself that he doesn’t have “all the answers” (cognitive). He can never tell someone what to do, but instead can only be supportive in helping them find their own answers. He described this experience as contributing to the belief that he isn’t perfect and that he’s always growing and learning, which is “okay.” He repeatedly referenced this story throughout multiple interviews and used it as an example of personal growth and realization while working at camp. Edwin summarized his first summer, saying, “I came out of the summer having a stronger sense of who I was and who I wanted to be, more clearly developed and defined value system” (intrapersonal). He was at a crossroads, considering external influences in light of his own views of himself.

In his second summer and beyond, the camp continued to act as an important setting for Edwin’s self-authorship. Edwin recounted when he began to face social ostracization at camp. He said, “I am vocal, and I mean what I say when I say my priorities are kids and supporting them and advocating for them at the camp. And I’ve had a couple of situations where people get frustrated by that.” He recounted hearing others gossip about him and although this made him uncomfortable, Edwin commented that he is honest and does what he believes to be right (intrapersonal and interpersonal). In cases when he heard others speaking negatively about him, he chose to continue to stand true to his own beliefs about advocating for youth and decided to eliminate some social relationships with others who were mocking him. In these situations, Edwin was following internal meaning-making in the face of external pressures.

Considering working at camp for a third summer, Edwin applied for a leadership position and was passed up (for a second time) in favor of someone he viewed as a poor counselor. He commented that this counselor played favorites with campers, “was so discriminatory,” and regularly yelled at campers. He believed that this person was chosen due to ‘politics’ as this staff member had an older sibling who was also a long-time camp employee. Edwin vehemently disagreed with the decision and commented that he was “the most qualified” for the role and was ready for it. He recognized that he no longer viewed camp “through rose-colored glasses” and was questioning the camp directors’ intentions and motives and if that aligned with the type of people he wanted to have relationships with (interpersonal). Learning that this conflicted with his own internally defined values made Edwin reconsider future involvement with the camp. When making the decision to return or not, he said, “I’m already harboring a lot of resentment... [which] leads to a lot of disappointment and confusion and lack of faith in camp leadership. Am I in the right mental space to be the best counselor that the kids deserve?”

Edwin's final interviews indicate that he is making decisions based on an internal compass. Edwin is largely guided and motivated by a desire to "pour [energy and effort] into people" and facilitate positive relationships and community. He wants to have a career that is well aligned and integrated with his personal life and faith and hopes to be part of a well-connected support system for youth and emerging adults. He has been making meaning internally resulting in decisions to facilitate his personal and professional development for many years after some DEEs that prompted him to move through the crossroads as a young person and during his camp employment. Edwin has entered into the final stages of self-authorship.

Discussion

Findings in this study indicate that the case study participants experienced DEEs during camp employment that led to shifts in their internal compass from externally defined to the crossroads and for two individuals to be internally defined. That is, although most did not reach self-authorship based on camp employment experiences alone, they all experienced progress toward self-authorship while employed at camp. Much of the focus of self-authorship research is on collegiate settings and experiences. Our study supports the literature that mentions DEEs occur in work settings (e.g., Barber & King, 2014) and focuses specifically on work-based experiences contributing to self-authorship. Nelson (2020) advocated for "growth promoting experiences" (p. 9) for emerging adults, and experiences in work settings are essential for success in adulthood (Arnett, 2000; Blustein, 2019; Erikson, 1968; Mayseless & Keren, 2014). These participants indicated that the camp employment experience offers opportunities for DEEs and the development of self-authorship. In addition, participants experienced varying levels of support during DEEs while working at summer camp, which builds upon previous work exploring support during DEEs (e.g., Barber et al., 2013; Barber & King, 2014; Baxter Magolda, 2004a; King et al., 2009; Torres & Hernandez, 2007). We suggest that employers should recognize the role they have in offering young employees opportunities for development. Employers may be in a key position to support emerging adults in their holistic developmental journey.

Camp Employment and Opportunities for Self-Authorship

Engagement in a range of settings (Nagaoka et al. 2015) and "growth promoting experiences" (Nelson, 2020, p. 9) is essential for emerging adult identity development and flourishing. Employment has long been considered one of these important settings (Arnett, 2000; Blustein, 2019; Erikson, 1968; Mayseless & Keren, 2014). Many college-age students engage in seasonal employment during the summer months, and working at camp is a popular choice (Browne, 2019). With this paper, we are the first to investigate the holistic developmental framework of self-authorship in seasonal summer camp employment. In the current study, we find that experiences in a camp employment setting offer opportunities for self-authorship development in the form of DEEs in all three dimensions. As much of the self-authorship literature focuses on experiences in college, we sought to identify DEEs in non-collegiate settings. The findings in this paper highlight the importance of considering other settings for young adults to experience progression in self-authorship. We advocate for young adults to participate in a range of settings, such as college and employment, to experience myriad DEEs to allow for greater opportunities for holistic development.

Employment differs greatly in the characteristics of the setting. These characteristics may have an impact on occurrences of DEEs and progress toward achieving self-authorship. Reported characteristics of summer camp are the positive and supportive social and emotional climate

(Wilson et al., 2019), the presence of experiential learning (Povilaitis et al., 2021; Wilson & Sibthorp, 2018), and opportunities to interact with others from diverse backgrounds (Povilaitis et al., 2021; Wilson et al., 2019). In addition, summer camp has been described as an ‘intense’ environment due to living in a small community (Wilson & Sibthorp, 2018). Collectively these characteristics are not often found in other settings and they may function to create an environment that is particularly suited to facilitate DEEs. Other work settings with similar characteristics may also provide DEEs and be beneficial in promoting self-authorship for emerging adults outside of college. Employers of emerging adults may consider ways to incorporate elements of a positive and supportive social and emotional climate, moments for experiential learning, and opportunities to interact with people from diverse backgrounds. These work settings may then provide “growth promoting experiences” (Nelson, 2020, p. 9) and support emerging adults on their self-authorship journeys, ultimately contributing toward flourishing in adulthood.

Nature of Support in Developmentally Effective Experiences

Developmentally effective experiences are an important contributor to self-authorship (King et al., 2009) and researchers have begun to identify specific elements of DEEs (Barber & King, 2014). Common to all DEEs is a challenge to an individual’s previous ways of understanding and being (Barber & King, 2014) that leads to more advanced ways of meaning-making (Pizzolato, 2005). Support is often beneficial for navigating DEEs (Barber et al., 2013), and individuals can best be supported through the encouragement of personal, inward reflection (Barber et al., 2013; Baxter Magolda, 2004a; King, Baxter Magolda, Barber, Kendall Brown, & Lindsay, 2009). Barber and King (2014) identified support-seeking behaviors varied by self-authorship position and Torres and Hernandez (2007) commented that for some Latino/a/x students who faced overwhelming dissonance, support from a “trusted source” (p. 572) was a necessary element to prevent regression in self-authorship. Participants in this study reported different levels of support within the camp employment setting as they navigated DEEs. Some participants felt supported by peers and supervisors during DEEs (Alexis and Dan), while another was able to navigate challenging experiences on her own (Courtney). In Courtney’s case, there was value to the lack of concomitant support, as it provided an opportunity to turn inwards and reconsider her beliefs about her abilities, thus galvanizing newfound independence, confidence, and self-awareness.

The summer camp setting has often been described as a safe and supportive environment (e.g., Wilson & Sibthorp, 2018), where staff generally feel a sense of belonging. These statements may not be true for all camp staff. In particular, this may not be the case for individuals who do not fit in or are socially ostracized and for people of color who may face discrimination, as seen in the current study. An individual’s sense of belonging often functions as a source of support through difficult experiences such as DEEs (Barber et al., 2013). As such, individuals who face racial or social discrimination may not feel a sense of belonging and, thus, lack support during DEEs they experience while working at camp. This was seen in our case studies as Edwin felt ostracized from his peers when he followed internal meaning-making and advocated for his campers’ needs, and as Brianna had experiences of racial discrimination from both campers and staff. The discrimination she faced is reflective of the systemic and structural forces that shaped summer camp into a setting that often perpetuates and upholds dominant racial ideas (Perry, 2018). Over time, Brianna was able to reassign meaning to her negative experiences at camp and recognize how they helped her solidify her understanding of herself as a Black woman. Although this eventually occurred, if she had experienced support in this meaning-making during her camp experience, this may have helped her reach this understanding more quickly.

Practitioner Implications

Professionals working with emerging adults, such as camp employment supervisors, should consider the concept of self-authorship in their practice. For example, intentionally considering DEEs their employees experience may offer opportunities for professionals to encourage young people to move into the crossroads. Professionals may prompt staff to reconsider what others have told them about who they are, the world, and their relationships with others. When employees experience DEEs, such as moments of disequilibrium, confusion, or opportunities to make decisions that are internally guided, professionals can consider the best ways to support individuals. In some cases, this may be to allow the young person time to reflect, ask questions of their peers, family, and leaders, and consider the best way forward. Some individuals may not be ready to follow internal meaning-making, and may require high levels of guidance and support from others. If young adult employees are displaying non-productive coping mechanisms during DEEs or appear to be struggling, it is imperative that supervisors offer support. Barber et al. (2013) commented this includes respecting individuals' current meaning-making, prompting personal reflection and interpretation, and assisting individuals in making sense of their experiences.

The camp employment setting is rich in opportunities for young adult development (Povilaitis et al., 2021). Young adult staff may experience many DEEs during the course of a summer season. As this is an 'intense' setting (Wilson & Sibthorp, 2018) and employees may interact with many others from diverse backgrounds (Povilaitis et al., 2021), they will engage with others who have different perspectives. Connecting with others in this setting may prompt staff to reconsider what they have always believed to be true about themselves, the world, and their relationships with others. With time, personal reflection, and support from camp supervisors, these DEEs can contribute to individuals' progression through crossroads to self-authorship. Common strategies to support staff in these moments may include journal reflections with structured prompts or discussions with camp leadership team members to reflect on specific situations that disrupt employee's meaning-making structures.

Limitations and Areas for Future Research

Our study has a few limitations. The individual case approach is both a strength and a limitation as it offers opportunities to look deeply into individual experiences, however, these are not broadly representative of all experiences individuals may have in this setting. As generalizability is not the aim of this study, it is appropriate to have a smaller group of individuals as the focus, however, additional research could broaden the scope to more deeply understand commonalities of DEEs and self-authorship at summer camp and other emerging adult employment settings. Further, as this project had a focus on summer camp, much of the interviews focused on experiences within this setting. Therefore, it is possible that participants had DEEs in other settings that were not discussed. These DEEs may have affected their responses to their camp experiences. Although individuals were prompted on surveys to identify experiences when they felt challenged and supported in order to provide entry discussion prompts for interviews, given overall project aims and time constraints interviewers may not have focused as deeply on these experiences as those that occurred at summer camp. In addition, these questions may not have directly targeted DEEs. Some participants may have provided responses where they felt challenged, but these challenges may not have produced disequilibrium in how they thought about themselves, their world, or their relationships to others.

With this paper, we provide a foundation to indicate that DEEs can occur in summer camp employment settings, and thus we call for a broader scope of self-authorship research. Scholars

may work to identify examples of self-authorship in earlier life stages, determine examples of DEEs in various employment and other life settings, and understand self-authorship for individuals who do not attend college. Further, research that more deeply examines the nature of support and challenge in employment settings will help progress the field. With work of this type, practitioners will be able to structure experiences and provide the support that will best assist emerging adults on a pathway to successful adulthood.

Conclusion

Young people engage in a range of settings and experiences during their emerging adulthood years, many of which offer opportunities for positive development. Holistic development is a key task of emerging adulthood and a contemporary framework that has gained popularity is self-authorship. With previous work focusing on self-authorship, researchers have found that college is a key experience for young people and that throughout college, students are presented with many opportunities that promote the process of self-authorship (e.g., Barber & King, 2014; Baxter Magolda, 2001; Pizzolato, 2003). In this study, we find that other experiences in various life settings, including summer camp employment, can also be impactful. A range of settings and experiences are important for self-authorship and identity development and integration broadly, and these settings can function in complementary ways. Summer camp employment is one of those settings. In particular, summer camp employment offers developmentally effective experiences that contribute to the process of self-authorship. Practitioners and researchers may use these findings to create opportunities in work settings, including seasonal employment, for emerging adult holistic development. These types of opportunities will support individuals on their path to flourishing and success in adulthood.

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Notes on Contributors

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