

Examining Self- Authorship of First Generation Female Student Leaders

*Dana Calandrino, Kathryn Dunn, & Caroline Horste
Eastern Michigan University*

Theoretical Orientation: Baxter Magolda's Theory of Self Authorship

Self-Authorship: "the internal capacity to define one's beliefs, identity, and social relations."

Who am I? How do I develop thoughts & opinions? How do I cultivate relationships with others?

We selected Baxter Magolda's theory because of the emphasis that it placed on self-discovery.

Theoretical Orientation: Baxter Magolda's Theory of Self Authorship

Baxter Magolda conceptualized four stages of self-authorship:

1. Formulaic Patterns
2. "Crossroads"
3. Burgeoning trust in one's self
4. Commitment to belief system

These four stages can also be interpreted to represent a shift from external definition to internal.

Intended Outcomes

We hypothesized that:

1. Women and first-generation students were both populations that would have to work very intentionally to shape their identity while at college;
2. Dynamics of these identities would intersect when these students began developing as leaders.

Methodology

1. Pre-screening Survey: 3 objectives
 - demographics
 - preparation for focus group conversation
 - providing quantitative data
2. 90-Minute Focus Group Session: providing space to share and explore narratives

Data Sample - Focus Group

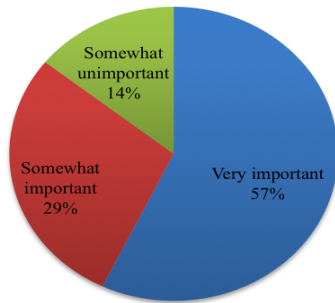
Woman?	Leader?	1st Gen?	Race	Ethnicity	Age	Year	Politics	Religion
yes	yes	yes	Biracial	French Canadian/ Afr. Amer.	22	5th	Liberal	n/a
yes	yes	yes	Caucasian	Urban/ Rural	26	Senior	Open	Open
yes	yes	yes	Caucasian	Italian/ Russian/ Polish	34	Grad	Independ- ent/ Liberal	Mother - Jewish, Father Catholic
yes	yes	yes	White	Arab	20	Senior	Democrat	Muslim
yes	yes	yes	Black	[not reported]	23	Senior	Constituti- onalist	Christian
yes	yes	yes	White	American	21	3rd	None	Christian
yes	yes	yes	Black	Multi- ethnic	23	Grad	n/a	Christian

Major Findings From Pre-Group Survey

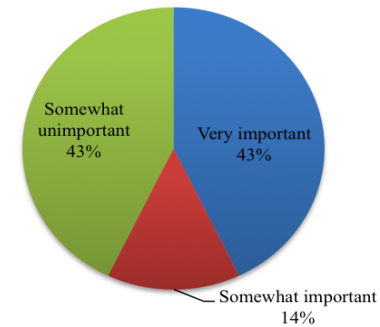
1. Although 4/7 respondents indicated that as a child, their favorite game of imagination involved a career, rather than being a wife or a mother, 0/7 respondents indicated that their main goal as an adult involved a successful career, rather than being a wife or a mother.
2. Most respondents indicated that they had received messages that a woman's domestic role and a woman's professional role were both important, but most respondents had also received messages that balancing these roles is very difficult.

Major Findings from Pre-Group Survey

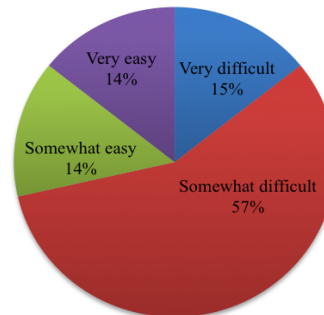
What messages did you receive from your family while growing up in terms of the importance of a woman's domestic role?



What messages did you receive from your family while growing up in terms of the importance of a woman's professional role?



What messages did you receive from your family while growing up in terms of the difficulty of balancing domestic and professional roles?



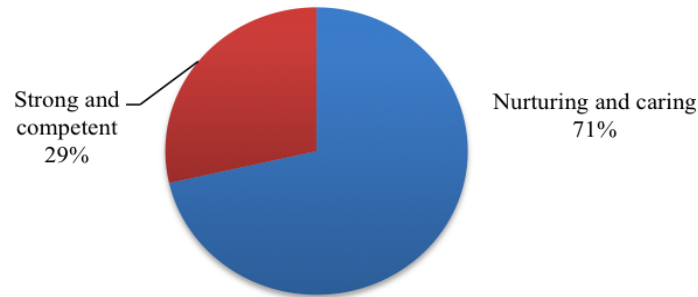
Major Findings From Pre-Group Survey

3. All respondents indicated that after both college and their leadership experience, their confidence in their ability to lead either “increased” or “greatly increased.”

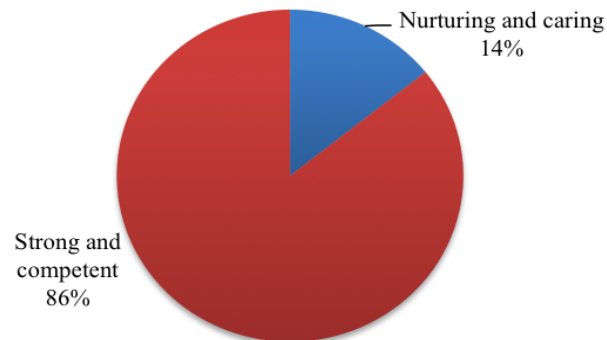
4. As a leader and as a woman, most respondents indicated that they would like to be perceived as “strong and competent,” but also indicated that they believed that they were perceived instead as “nurturing and caring.”

Major Findings from Pre-Group Survey

How do you think people perceive you as a leader?

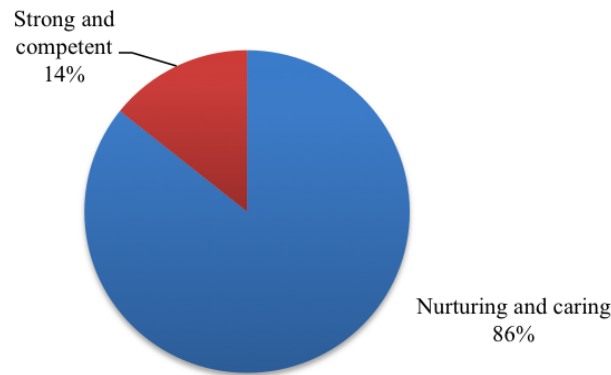


How would you like to be perceived as a leader?

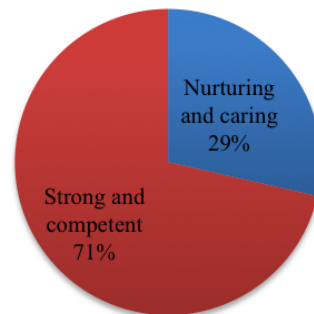


Major Findings from Pre-Group Survey

How do you think people perceive you as a woman?



How would you like to be perceived as a woman?



Major Findings From Focus Group

- Seven major findings
- Each were divided into a theme, as well as a statement that encapsulates them.

Major Findings From Focus Group - Theme #1

Support Systems: Although different students reported different levels of salience in terms of parents vs. peers, no student reported making a career or school choice without the support of either family, friends, or school.

Major Findings From Focus Group - Theme #2

Challenges unique to first-generation students: Many students reported a lack of knowledge and/or support regarding choosing their career path as their biggest obstacle when deciding whether and where to go to school.

Major Findings From Focus Group - Theme #3

Work-Life Balance: All students reported hearing messages deeply rooted in childhood about the importance of having a family, although students differed on their opinions of the importance of having a career and of balancing their professional and personal lives.

Major Findings From Focus Group - Theme #4

Image of Leaders vs. Self-Image:
Although each student we interviewed was referred to us by someone who named them as a campus leader, many students were hesitant to call themselves leaders because their idea of a “leader” differed from their own self-image.

Major Findings From Focus Group - Theme #5

Perceptions of Women as Leaders: Many students expressed frustration with the difficulty of striking a balance as a woman between being “aggressive” and being “nurturing;” the word that each student used to describe their ideal perception of women as leaders was “competent,” but no student indicated that she believed she was perceived as such.

Major Findings From Focus Group - Theme #6

Perceptions of Women in the Work Place: Regardless of a desire to go into a “female-oriented field,” such as teaching, or a “male-oriented field,” such as technology, students expressed anxiety about whether or not they would be perceived as effective.

Major Findings From Focus Group - Theme #7

Changes to Career Goals: Several students reported a feeling of “scaling back” their career goals once they realized the challenges that would await them as women, but other students reported that as they grew up, they felt more able to make choices that weren’t supported by their families.

General Implications of Study

- Importance of role models, support systems, and mentors - intersectionality is paramount
- Sharp decrease in career-oriented goals for women as they aged - why??
- Uncertain as to generalizability of findings

Professional Implications of Study

- **Intentional reflection:** “Students who worked with advisors who encouraged reflection in goal setting and intentional planning and discussed with students their nonacademic life experiences were more likely to develop abilities and perspectives associated with self-authorship” (Evans et al., 190)
- **Outreach:** direct specifically at women and first-generation students when implementing first-time leadership programs

Questions?

Thank you!

References

- Baxter Magolda, M.B. (2001). Making their own way: Narratives for transforming higher education to promote self-development. Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Baxter Magolda, M.B. (2008). Three elements of self-authorship. *Journal of College Student Development*, 49. 269-284.
- Creamer, E.G., & Laughlin, A. (2005). Self-authorship and women's career decision making. *Journal of College Student Development*, 46(1). 13-27.
- Egidio, R.K., & Boatwright, K.J. (2003). Psychological predictors of college women's leadership aspirations. *Journal of College Student Development*, 44(5). 653-669.
- Evans, N.J., Forney, D.S., Guido, F.M., Patton, L.D., & Renn, K.A. (2010). Student development in college: Theory, research, and practice (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Mehta, S.S., Newbold, J.J., & O'Rourke, M.A. (2011). Why do first-generation students fail? *College Student Journal*, 45(1). 20-35
- Pizzolato, J.E. (2003). Developing self-authorship: Exploring the experiences of high-risk college students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 44. 797-811.
- Pizzolato, J.E. (2006). Complex partnerships: Self-authorship and provocative academic-advising practices. *NACADA Journal*, 26(1). 32-45.
- Ward, R.M., DiPaolo, D.G., & Popson, H.C. (2009). College student leaders: Meet the Alpha Female. *Journal of Educational Leadership*, 7, 100-117.
- Ward, R.M., DiPaolo, D.G., & Popson, H.C. (2010). Defining the alpha female: A female leadership measure. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 17(3). 309-320.