

Boyd's Personal Narrative About Her College Experience and Student Development
in Relation to Formal Theories

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This paper is a self-reflection of my personal experiences as I began, developed, and completed my undergraduate degree. I will describe how I believe I developed in maturity, within my belief system, and the meaning I made of experiences that were vital to shaping my identity. Also outlined is the path that led to my decision to become a student affairs professional, and how this decision and the people around me influenced how I took advantage of opportunities as a student. At the end of each outlined item, a formal theory or research will be applied in order to analyze my development as a student.

Identity Crisis

In August 2008, I began my undergraduate degree at the University of Arkansas Fort Smith. Graduating from a class of 68 high school students, my first day attending a university with over 2,000 current students proved intimidating. I had chosen my major from a short list of suggestions given by my high school guidance counselor when signing up for a campus visit the previous year. In addition to adjusting to living outside of my stepfather's overbearing and oppressive presence, I was struggling to make sense of the new arrangements and people in my life, how they fit into my life, and how I fit into this new phase. In my first class, I knew only people I had seen at Cub Camp but had been too overwhelmed to actually make any connections with and was not remembered as a result.

However, I was mature enough to maintain a schedule, keep up with my classes, and retain hobbies like reading and keeping in touch with my hometown friends online. I did not attend any campus events during my first semester, which resulted in limiting my friend circle to

my older cousin (who served as my peer mentor), my roommates, and their friends who visited. I was also ignorant of how diverse people could be but intuitive enough to know of my deficiency. For both these reasons, and after a lot of encouragement from my grandparents, I decided to join a sorority the following semester.

At this time, I was in crisis about my personal identity but had made no commitment to any pronounced choices, values, or goals that would shape my identity (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). According to Marcia and Josselson, this would indicate that I was in a state of Moratorium (Evans et. al., 2010). In terms of Marcia's theory, it is evident when I mention that I was "struggling to make sense" of my new environment and peers, trying to figure out my new role and purpose. This is evidence of my crisis as well as my noncommittal status. I also was questioning my parents' values when I was adjusting to living outside of my parents' household and standards. According to Josselson, I was taking to time find my identity and my response was to experiment by joining a sorority.

Meyers-Briggs Personality Type

After being accepted into Gamma Phi Beta Sorority, I found myself surrounded by over sixty diverse women. I spent several months learning about their values and behaviors in order to process the concept of "sorority life." In the beginning, I enjoyed the social aspect and was later voted "Miss Love" by the chapter due to my happy and gregarious attitude. From weekly chapter meetings to monthly recruitment training over the summer to recruitment weekend itself, I watched these women bond and disagree with one another all in the name of finding members and maintaining the values of the sorority. Values is an important concept in Greek Life, and it became one that drastically changed my belief system and how I make meaning of life even now.

It is also the reason I ran for a position on the executive Panhellenic team after less than a year of membership.

As Vice President of Records, my main task was to attend several meetings and take minutes. This gave me an inside look to how sororities functioned on a larger scale when I attended the National Association of Fraternal Leadership and Values Conference. I learned about Multicultural and Pan-Hellenic organizations' values and traditions that set them apart from traditionally white fraternities and sororities. I was exposed to a plethora of diversity and values-based knowledge about life and leadership, and I left the experience enlightened and inspired to cultivate this type of culture on my own campus.

I had changed my major to Graphic Design at the end of my freshman year, but my conference and sorority experiences, coupled with the observations of my advisor's influence in my peers' development, made me realize that my new major was not in line with my passions. So, by the end of my sophomore year, I changed to Studio Art and met with my advisor and asked him how I could have his job one day.

In the Meyers-Briggs Theory of Personality Type, I am an ENTJ. This means that I am more externally oriented and stimulated by the world around me (Evans et. al., 2010). This would explain why I enjoyed interacting with my sorority sisters, which led to my "Miss Love" award. In terms of perceiving function, I am intuitive about perceiving information on an unconscious level and rely on symbols, connections, imagination, and possibilities, as well as inferred relationships (Evans et. al., 2010). This explains my intuition that advising in Greek Life was my future career. As a thinker, I use organized information and make decisions based on facts, evidence, and logic (Evans et. al., 2010). Meyers-Briggs states that judging is an indication

of my orientation to the outer world (Evans et. al., 2010): Although I was observing my peers (typically a perceptive association), I was doing so in order to take in information quickly and to determine which women had personalities and values that I found inspiring and supportive. ENTJs are said to be natural born leaders who are career-focused, decisive, and are a workforce for achieving their goals ("Portrait of an," 1998). This description of being a "natural born leader" explains my need to adapt a large leadership position so early in my student involvement experience.

Identity Achievement

Part of my advisor's career advice was to obtain as much leadership experience as possible. So, I planned Panhellenic recruitment as well as held the Panhellenic presidency and membership in committees like the "Greek Life Research Committee" and the "CAS Evaluation Committee." Eventually, I had opportunities to write an article for an Association of Fraternal Association newsletter and presented a workshop at the conference that initially inspired my new direction in life.

I also utilized the assignments in my Speech minor classes in order to learn more about student affairs and leadership development. I outlined the several stages of integration into a Greek organization in the "Organizational Integration Theory" for my Foundations of Communication class. For Critical Listening, I created a bibliography of articles that described the importance of advisors listening to their students. In Culture and Communication, I wrote a paper about Black Greek Life Organizations' histories as a subculture in the fraternity and sorority community as well as created a protocol for respectful interactions of the traditions and values BGLO members uphold.

Once I made a commitment to my choices, values, and goals in terms of my career path, I was able to reach Identity Achievement. In Marcia's Ego Identity Statuses Theory, this means that I faced my crisis of not knowing my role in life after sorting through several alternatives (majors) and made a firm choice (Evans et. al., 2010). Josselson's theory adds a little more dimension to my new status: Now that I was committed to a career path, it became my way of expressing my values and myself in class assignments, in leadership positions, and in my personal development (Evans et. al., 2010).

Kolb's Learning Theory

Another aspect of my collegiate experience which influenced my student development was the major of Studio Art. The professors and students in my classes were very different from my advisors and peers in the student affairs part of my world, and these worlds were very different from one another. Many of my professors and academic advisors did not take me seriously as an art student in light of my desire to lead a career outside of the arts. Most of my peers were not involved in campus activities and saw me as a "sorority girl" instead of their academic equal. On my part, I grew up with a brother who was constantly struggling with his personal identity and once portrayed himself as "gothic." I made connections with other peers in identity crisis in my high school art classes. Since I understood their perception of me, I worked harder to make connections with my classmates and to contribute to the learning environment in a productive manner for my professors' benefit. When I was in my art classes, I knew that even though each student may have a different approach to portray a single subject, everyone is working towards the same goal of creating a successful work of art. I made this attitude evident by encouraging others and giving constructive critique in order to create a community.

In Kolb's Learning Theory, I would be classified as a Converging learner due to my extroverted, thinking personality type. He mentions that this type has an adaptive competency for decision skills and that I use abstract conceptualization and active experimentation (Evans et. al., 2010). This experience in my major is a good example of how I exerted my efforts in relation to classroom behaviors: I knew how my professors and peers thought of me due to my experiences with my brother and friends in high school so I decided to use my actions in order to change their perceptions and create a more positive learning environment.

Grandparent-Grandchild Relationship

A major source of support throughout my collegiate experience was obtained from my grandparents. Due to the relationships with my step-parents, my relationships with my mother and father were very rocky during much of my life. Therefore, much of my emotional, academic, and financial support came from my grandparents and gave me the freedom to develop as a person without the pressure of overbearing values and opinions. For them, they wanted to see me develop into an independent, strong person so that I could have the best chance to lead a happy life in the future.

There is little research on the influence of support from grandparents to grandchildren; however, one researcher did reveal some interesting information. Mansson's literary research stated that grandparents with emotionally close relationships with their grandchildren influence the morals, values, and attitudes their grandchildren have towards school and also have a significant impact on the overall mental health, social development, and orientation a student has towards other people (Mansson, 2012). With this information, I can conclude that since their

attitudes towards my education were that I find something that makes me happy and succeed on that path, I was more inclined to have those attitudes and goals for myself.

Conclusion

This assessment of my own student development has opened my eyes to how I interacted and reacted to different people and situations in college. Investigating my time trying to find my purpose and role during my Moratorium status to realizing my career path and finding Identity Achievement was insightful in terms of how I react to crisis and how firmly I can commit to values, attitudes, and choices. Learning about my personality on a deeper level in relation to my sorority and in leadership helped me understand how I relate to others and how I view the world and my career as an ENTJ. As a Converging thinker, it was interesting to learn that I think about the world in terms of abstract conceptualization and do things with active experimentation. Last, the support of my grandparents and how their influence has shaped my own attitudes and goals about school as well as my orientation towards others has influenced my passion about life and education. All of these are insightful for understanding how other students may move through their college experience as well as how I will relate to them as a student affairs professional. I think that knowing where we come from and how we interact with the world helps us understand our strengths, weaknesses, and where our path may lead.

References

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