

My Personal Development Project

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There are many theories we have studied this semester that could apply to the growth I encountered over the years. For the purpose of this assignment, we will first focus on Schlossberg's Transition Theory, followed by Kim's Asian American Identity Development Model, and Baxter Magolda's Theory of Self-Authorship.

Goodman et al. (2006) defined a transition as "any event, or non-event, that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles" (p. 215). Looking back at the transitional periods I had in my life and taking this definition into account, I can apply Schlossberg's theory to my development. Evans et al. (2010) describe several different types of transitions in the textbook. There are anticipated transitions, unanticipated transitions, and nonevents. In the previous narrative, I discussed the transitional periods I had encountered – living in seven different states growing up, uprooting from one living arrangement to another because of financial woes, my mother getting brain cancer, father leaving the family, attending high school in a rural Texas town, moving to a big city to be the first in my family to attend college, and moving cross-country to attend graduate school. These periods of transition were anticipated and unanticipated, with other expected events not happening.

The text also notes the importance of context and impact – whether the transition is in relation to me or someone else and what the implication of said transition would be. The transitions were positive and negative in nature, all having a role in my development. Goodman, building on the groundwork laid by Schlossberg, presented a set of four factors that influence an individual's ability to cope in transition. The 4 S's include: situation, self, support, and strategies. When I transitioned to The University of Texas at Austin in the fall of 2009, I had become comfortable living in a small, rural town in Texas with a population of nearly 10,000. I started to

feel connected with the community and enjoyed my experience. And yet, the path I chose was to attend college several hours away. This was a big transition for me considering many people from El Campo do not leave the town. I would be one of a handful transitioning to an institution with more than 50,000 students in a city with nearly a million people. The situation here not only impacted me, personally, but also my family whom I was leaving and the community I was moving away from. Although an anticipated event, the situation proved to be timely with me having control over most of the transition. At this stage of my life, I was accustomed to moving but also felt a lot of concurrent stress at the time. As an individual, I welcomed the transition and did not know what to expect. I was only beginning to become aware of my identities and felt more comfortable with my demographic characteristics.

The support I received made my transition to college easier. Schlossberg talks about relationships, family units, networks of friends, and various institutions and communities (p. 217). In reflecting back now, I recognize my ability to cope with this transition came very early on in college – by maintaining relationships and communication with my friends from high school and frequently visiting the El Campo community a couple times a month. My transition also was supported through organizations I would join in my first year in college. If I would not have been selected to be a part of a first-year interest group – a non-residential honors learning community for first-generation and underrepresented students – my experience would be very different and much more difficult to navigate. Having a strong support system from my high school community and creating a new one through organizations and involvement assisted in my transition. The support I received and found can also be utilized as a strategy. As my investment and time at UT-Austin continued, I began to build a stronger community locally and began to travel back ‘home’ less frequently. Strategies which included managing my stress and adapting

to my new environment and creating a community of support really assisted in my transition to The University of Texas. I was able to apply the strategies and experiences from previous transitions I had to make in life to the ones I had forthcoming, including when I had to leave Texas to attend Florida State University for graduate school. That transition to Florida was particularly difficult because my previous two big moves occurred when I came to Texas at the end of 7th grade and when I left my high school community to attend college. This time, I had to leave the state where I grew and developed the most and had the strongest sense of community and essentially begin again in a new environment. Despite the great challenges this provided, I knew the importance of building community and having self-care to facilitate the transition. The strong cohort model and coming in with a fellow Longhorn in the program greatly assisted in the transition. Schlossberg and Goodman et al. suggested that transitions happen in phases and an individual may constantly be in the process of “moving in,” “moving through,” or “moving out” (p. 216). I find myself in constant motion, continuously transitioning. The major difference between the end of high school and now is that I am more self-aware and have a better understanding of how to manage the transitions.

The second theory I will focus my personal development paper on is Kim’s Asian American Identity Development Model. Although the basis of the research findings stem from experiences of Japanese-American women, I believe this model serves as the closest racial identity development model based on my racial and ethnic backgrounds. Evans et al. (2010) describe Kim’s (2001) model as having “five conceptually distinct, sequential, and progressive stages” (p. 265). The text goes on to describe the stages as: ethnic awareness, white identification, awakening to social political consciousness, redirection to Asian American consciousness, and incorporation. Since I was born in Pakistan and immigrated to the United

States when I was two years old, I did not have a strong identification with my racial or ethnic background – especially since I moved so frequently growing up. My immediate family unit was stronger when I was pre-teen and as such, I only knew that I was Pakistani living in the United States. As Kim would suggest, this is the point where I identified with how my family identified (p. 265). Once I started attending school and becoming exposed to other students and identities, I became less comfortable and confident with my Asian American identity – whether I realized it or not. It became evident to me I was different because of the color of my skin, the food I would bring for lunch, and the clothes I would wear early on. After going through a period of social struggles, I began to reject my Asian American identity. In fact, I began to normalize myself with my peers and the institution in order to feel accepted. This falls in line with Kim’s second stage where the “desire to be accepted leads to the rejection of their Asian identity and internalization of white standards” (p. 266). I teetered between the second stage and third stage for much of my pre-college years, especially after experiencing September 11, 2001. This was a day that I became most aware of my identity as being South Asian and realized the attitudinal and behavioral shifts from some of my classmates, instructors, members of the community, and especially the media. I started to have social political awareness and realized that my life would never be the same because of the color of my skin and the racial and ethnic background I embodied. And yet, I continued to tolerate the racist messages, laugh at jokes, and even join in on the “poking fun” because I wanted to fit in and feel included. I did not realize the extent of the system and racist social structure in place, but I knew if I wanted to be a part of the ‘in-group’ and feel safe, I would have to conform the norm.

Reflecting back on the years from my childhood until I graduated high school, I can definitively say that I did not reach Kim’s fourth stage of redirection to Asian American

consciousness. Rather than having a sense of pride and affirming my racial and ethnic identity, I essentially rejected it and assimilated into the culture of the folks around me. I became involved and excelled in high school, having friends from all backgrounds. I would join in on the jokes and microaggress people with different identities and perpetuated stereotypes of people from South Asia. I did not re-realize my identity as a South Asian American until graduation my senior year. This realization fueled me into thinking about my racial and ethnic identity and propelled me into the fourth stage: redirection to Asian American consciousness. My time at The University of Texas at Austin definitely assisted in my exploration and re-acclimation to my identifying as an Asian American. As Evans et al. (2010) noted through Kim, this is when individuals “move beyond the oppressed group designation” and begin to “establish a sense of pride in whom they are” (p. 266). I surrounded myself with people who identified as South Asian for the first time in my life, joined the Pakistani Student Association, and embraced different cultures. As mentioned in the initial paper, I really thrived and learned extensively through my involvement with the orientation program at The University of Texas at Austin. This is where I first learned about social justice and subsequently began to gain a passion in the area. Despite the experiences I had at UT-Austin, I have never reached the final stage of Kim’s model: incorporation. I am still learning about my racial and ethnic identity and will require more time and persistence for incorporation to truly be achieved. While I may identify with certain aspects of this final stage, I cannot confidently say I have reached the stage.

The third and final theory I will mention is Magolda’s Theory of Self-Authorship. There are four phases on the “journey toward self-authorship:” following formulas, crossroads, becoming the author of one’s life, and internal foundation (p. 184). I can name many examples where I followed the formulas laid out by others and instances where I the aforementioned plans

would not really work out for me. I attended college, I became involved, I disagreed with ideas and certain people, I graduated, and I saw the need to obtain my master's degree to secure a good job. Instead, I will focus this section on talking about how I am in the third phase and working on becoming the author of one's life.

If you recall earlier and in the previous paper, I mentioned a few challenges I had encountered in life: living in seven different states, financial woes, mother being diagnosed with brain cancer, and a ton of family issues among many other things. I became the head of the household my sophomore year in high school. I took care of my ill mother, ensured she received medical assistance, worked so we could make it through the end of the month, and cared for my younger sister. My father and uncle both walked out on the family for the last time and I had to take ownership. I sought assistance through government sponsored programs because we were eligible. I worked hard in high school – academically, socially, and in the community to earn a paycheck and be ready to move to the next step. I became the first in my family to attend and graduate college. I had to deal with figuring out my life and being the primary caretaker for my family. I rejected the idea of the religion and background I grew up with and understood that “belief systems are contextual, can change, and are never as clear as one would wish” (p. 186). I chose to believe in values I had because of the experiences I had, not because they were affixed on me. When I took a risk and was on my way to attending college, I secured American citizenship for my mother so she would receive better medical assistance and arranged for her to see her family in Pakistan. My sister joined my mom and they would be overseas for a few years.

All these instances – pre-college, even – had no elements of formulas I could follow. These were real issues that I had to take ownership of because they not only impacted me, but also my immediate family. In a sense, the level of ownership and responsibility I had – and still

have to this day, frankly – empowered me to mature quickly and inspired me to have a strong commitment to my education and bettering myself so I could be in a position to better support me and my family. The University of Texas at Austin provided me avenues for growth where I did follow formulas and run into crossroads often. The mentors, support system, and community I had, and the knowledge and experience I gained continuously challenged me and yet made me sure of my becoming an author of my life. I chose to pursue medical or law school until the spring of my third year in college. I chose to pursue higher education and student affairs after being inspired by my mentors and the work I was doing, and also because I saw the need for there to be more South Asian student affairs professionals in the field to help other first-generation college students, and all students for that matter. I am in the driver's seat of my own life. I may not know exactly where I am going or how I am going to get there, but I do know that I choose my own beliefs, values, and am true to myself in any relationship I am in and I will continue to adapt and create opportunities as needed to ensure I get where I need to be. I may never fully reach the fourth phase of internal foundation in Magolda's Theory of Self-Authorship but I know I will experience elements of the theory as my "responsibility to others, based on [my] own sense of responsibilities, are clearly a part of [my] internal foundations" (p. 186).

While I understand there are countless theories I could have focused this paper on, I chose to breakdown and describe my personal development through Schlossberg's Transition Theory, Kim's Asian American Identity Model, and Magolda's Theory of Self-Authorship. It is my hope that I continue to learn about myself, challenge myself to develop personally and professionally, and recognize how my own learning can assist people I encounter – especially as I am on my way to becoming a student affairs scholar practitioner.

References

Evans, N. J., Forney, D. S., Guido, F. M., Patton, L. D., & Renn, K. A. (2010). *Student development in college: Theory, research, and practice* (2 ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. (NOTE: Be sure to get SECOND EDITION)