

**Get out there: Self-authorship development across a 13-day photography course**

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### Introduction/ Need for Research

Photography is an important competency of agricultural communications graduates (Terry & Bailey-Evans, 1995; Morgan, 2012). Students perform better in field-based photography courses (Kennedy et al., 2017) and are more likely to understand photography skills than students in a classroom-based instructional format (Kennedy et al., 2018). This study focused on students enrolled in an experiential, 13-day photography course at Texas Tech University that used three days of lecture to introduce students to their cameras and key photography concepts, then primarily consisted of field excursions. Trips included excursions for night photography, portraits, and ag operations, and concluded with a four-day trip where they photographed cattle branding and landscapes. The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of a field-based, experiential course on students' self-authorship.

### Conceptual Framework

Built upon constructivist-developmental pedagogy (Kegan, 1994), self-authorship develops over time as, "the internal capacity to define one's beliefs, identity, and social relations" (Baxter Magolda, 2008, p. 269). Students' progress through cyclical phases of self-authorship acquisition (Baxter Magolda, 2004). Catalysts for such development in undergraduates are perception-challenging, novel situations accompanied by sufficient faculty and peer support systems (Hill et al., 2019). Personal characteristics and diverse experiences also impact a student's unique self-authorship growth path (Baxter Magolda, 2008). Self-authorship theory is applicable to experiential learning environments because students are situated within Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Cycle and challenged to face and reflect on concrete experiences (Myers, 2020). Self-authorship helps students meet the challenges of adult life; therefore, it should be focused on in higher education and associated research (Baxter Magolda, 2008).

### Methodology

The 13 students enrolled in the photography course took a series of three Self-Authorship Questionnaires (SAQ) (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .085$ ): a pre-, mid-, and post- survey to measure each self-authorship (SA) dimension: situational coping, interpersonal leadership, self-efficacy, and knowledge creation (FERENCEVYCH, 2004; MCGOWAN, 2016). Each dimension was measured on a Likert-scale (1= *This statement doesn't describe me at all; it isn't like me at all* to 5 = *This statement describes me very well; it is very much like me*) with a series of statements averaged to represent each SA dimension. Data was analyzed in SPSS using paired  $t$  tests to understand how students' SA changed throughout the course ( $p < .05$ ). To determine the effect size, Cohen's  $d$  was interpreted using small ( $d = .2$ ), medium ( $d = .5$ ), and large ( $d = .8$ ) levels (Cohen, 1988).

### Results/ Findings

The class ( $N = 13$ ) consisted of three males (23%) and 10 females (77%) ranging from ages 19 to 22. There were seven seniors, five juniors, and one sophomore in the course. One student did not complete the mid-course survey, so they were excluded from analyses. One outlier was identified in the first analysis (Table 1) but was included because exclusion did not affect the outcomes.

**Table 1***Paired t tests and effect sizes of Self-Authorship Dimensions Pre- to Mid- Test (N = 12)*

Dimension	Pre-test		Mid-test		<i>t</i> (11)	<i>p</i>	Cohen's D
	M	SD	M	SD			
Situational Coping	37.00	5.69	36.67	3.37	.23	.826	.42
Interpersonal Leadership	33.75	4.09	34.00	3.62	-.19	.851	.12
Self-efficacy	28.92	3.85	29.83	3.33	-.93	.374	.14
Knowledge Creation	11.17	1.99	11.33	1.88	-.25	.806	.09
Overall	110.83	12.53	111.83	9.73	-.28	.785	.19

**Table 2***Paired t tests and effect sizes of Self-Authorship Dimensions Mid- to Post- Test (N = 12)*

Dimension	Mid-test		Post-test		<i>t</i> (11)	<i>p</i>	Cohen's D
	M	SD	M	SD			
Situational Coping	36.67	3.37	39.25	3.96	-3.34	.007	.96
Interpersonal Leadership	34.00	3.618	36.33	3.68	-2.29	.043	.66
Self-efficacy	29.83	3.33	30.42	3.63	-.64	.538	.18
Knowledge Creation	11.33	1.88	11.25	3.31	.09	.930	.03
Overall	111.83	9.731	117.25	12.79		.064	.59

Two outliers were identified in comparing pre- and post-test results (Table 3), so a sign test was run because distribution was not symmetrically shaped (Laerd, 2015).

**Table 3***Sign Test Self-Authorship Dimensions Pre- to Post- Test (N = 13)*

Dimension	Pre-test Mdn	Post-test Mdn	<i>p</i>
Situational Coping	37	38	.152
Interpersonal Leadership	35	36	.122
Self-efficacy	30	29	.504
Knowledge Creation	11	10	.554
Overall	118	113	.312

### **Implications/ Recommendations/ Impact on Profession**

Students did not experience statistically significant self-authorship development during the course, possibly because of the short duration of the class (McGowan, 2016). Students' interpersonal leadership and self-efficacy dimensions decreased between the middle and end of the course, perhaps due to the complex, cyclical nature of self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2004; McGowan, 2016). The generalizability and statistical significance of these findings are limited by the small sample size. Nevertheless, agricultural communications educators may use these findings to enhance course opportunities for students to develop self-authorship for adulthood success, which also offer an area for future research. Different types of experiential activities, as well as a control group, should be examined to determine to what degree each activity influences self-authorship. A qualitative approach to exploring self-authorship development is also recommended (Baxter Magolda, 2008).

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