

The Role of Parent-Child Relationships in Developing Self-Authorship Among Korean College Females⁺

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Abstract : The purpose of our study is to explore dynamic mechanisms within families and self-authored decisions among Korean female college students. In particular, we investigated how parent-child interactions influence the development of self-authorship and self-authored decisions within Korean culture through interviews with 14 female college students. Results showed unique cultural influences on how female college students interacted with parents and interpreted and reflected parents' opinions in their self-authored decisions. These results suggest further research on gender differences and complex family influences on self-authored decisions within cultural contexts.

Key Words : self-authorship, parent-child relationships, female college students

I. Introduction

Understanding the theory of self-authorship provides insight into the process of decision-making (Baxter Magolda, 2002). In her definition, Baxter Magolda (1998) explicitly identifies the link between self-authorship and decision-making: *self-authorship* is “the ability to collect, interpret, and analyze information and reflect on one’s own beliefs in order to form judgments” (p. 143). Although some researchers have conceptually supported the linkage between self-authorship and decision-making (Bock, 1999), very few empirical studies have examined the development of self-authorship in decision-making processes. In

addition, previous empirical studies have primarily focused on the intrapersonal and epistemological dimensions of self-authorship and less attention has been paid to the interpersonal dimension (Creamer & Laughlin, 2005).

Recently, some studies are beginning to emerge recognizing the role of self-authorship in decision-making. Meszaros, Creamer, Burger and Matheson (2005) investigated career decision-making among high school girls and their mothers using the theoretical framework of self-authorship. Creamer and Laughlin (2005) used the framework of self-authorship to analyze the interview data of 40 female college students. Both studies identified the importance of the

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interpersonal dimension, especially the role of parents, in the decision-making processes. Meszaros *et al.* found that high school girls primarily listened to their mothers' non-directive career advice when the girls sought career information. Creamer and Laughlin also found that female college students were strongly dependent on parents' opinions, which led students to reject well-informed advice from their academic or career advisors. They interpreted this strong parental influence on career decisions to be a lack of cognitive complexity to negotiate diverse viewpoints. This finding challenged the previous assumptions that those in the early phase of self-authorship were more likely to consider their career advisors as the absolute authority related to career decision. In addition, Creamer and Laughlin found that parents and immediate family members influenced the lives and the decisions of American female college students, but these close relationships were not necessarily dependent ones. They distinguished the difference between 'unhealthy dependent relationships' and 'healthy interdependent relationships' with parents among these female students. Since there are very few empirical studies that examine the relationship between parental influence and self-authorship in the decision-making process, further investigation is needed.

Interpersonal relationships with parents that influence self-authored decisions among college students can be recognized differently depending on the cultural context. Since an individuals' decision about what to do is a by-product of psychological traits, the value of options, and relationships with people (Gati, Garty, & Fassa, 1996; Gati, Krausz, & Osipow, 1996), cultural and social factors can directly influence individuals' decision-making processes. Reybold (2001) argued that culture shapes identity and epistemological development. In his study of Malaysian women, Reybold found that women experienced conflicts in the decision-making process when individual and cultural identity were different. This finding extends to Korean society.

Korean society has been experiencing a rapid

transition of ideology and value in individual and family life during the several decades. While Korean culture has traditionally placed a high value on family based on Confucianism, current Korean society has been drawn to individualism. Since behavioral changes are generally slower than the changes in ideology and value, both traditional collectivistic family values and individualism exist at the same time (Lee, 2002). These co-existing value systems have complicated impacts on Koreans' family values (Hahm, 2002). Investigating parental influences on the development of self-authorship within this unique cultural context will contribute to further development of research on self-authorship.

The purpose of our study is to explore the role parent-child relationships on self-authored decisions made by Korean female college students. In particular, we investigated a) what are the most important decisions for female college students at Seoul National University, b) how parent-child interactions influence the development of self-authorship and self-authored decisions, and c) what is unique in the relationship between parent-child interactions and self-authored decisions in Korean culture.

II. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical construct of self-authorship explains how individuals interpret and make meaning of their experiences. Kegan (1994) originally developed the term *self-authorship* and Baxter Magolda (1998; 2001; 2004a) further developed self-authorship in her longitudinal research on personal and educational experiences among American college students. Self-authorship refers to the integration of three dimensions: a) developing cognitive ability to construct and evaluate knowledge claims in context (epistemological dimension), b) developing ability to construct an internal identity separate from but sensitive to external factors (intrapersonal dimension), and c) developing ability to genuinely consider others' perspectives

<Table 1> Journey Toward Self-Authorship

External Formulas	Crossroads	Self-Authorship
Dependent relations with others are source of identity and needed affirmation.	Growing sense of responsibility for choosing beliefs. Evolving process for weighing knowledge claims.	Genuinely consider other's perspectives in making decisions consistent with internally defined belief system and identity.

without being consumed by them (interpersonal dimension) (Baxter Magolda, 1999). Baxter Magolda (2001, 2004a, & 2004b) outlined the journey towards self-authorship, which starts with reliance on external formulas. In this phase, individuals lack awareness of their own values and identity and make judgments based on others' opinions. They are more likely to focus on looking for "the right answer." Individuals at the crossroads, or the next phase of the journey, begin to suspect the limitations of dependent relationships, to define their own identity by exploring diverse information, and to be responsible for evaluating knowledge and choosing beliefs. In the final phase of development, individuals become mature in all three epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal dimensions. Individuals in this phase engage in interdependent relationships with others, value diverse input from others, generate a sense of self, and trust the authority of their own voice without disregarding the needs of others. <Table 1> summarizes these three phases of self-authorship development. This table was developed by the authors based on Baxter Magolda's theory.

III. Methods

1. Procedure

The participants in the study were 18 female college students, primarily juniors and seniors, at Seoul National University (SNU) in Korea. Only female students were selected due to the nature of funding that supported this research. A graduate research assistant at

SNU served as a liaison for the research. Face-to-face interviews lasting approximately 30-40 minutes were conducted in Korean at SNU between June and July 2004. Each participant received and signed an informed consent form written in Korean, indicating her agreement with the stated conditions.

The two primary researchers of this research project constructed and pilot-tested an eight question semi-structured interview protocol. The questions were developed from the 2001 first interview protocol of the Women in Information Technology (WIT) project, which was created in consultation with Dr. Baxter Magolda (Creamer & Laughlin, 2005; Meszaros *et al.*, 2005). Additional questions about parents were added. The interviews were audio taped and a graduate student fluent in both English and Korean prepared a verbatim translation transcript of each. The Korean researcher verified the transcriptions and translations.

2. Analysis

The two primary researchers of this project developed a coding scheme by using both deductive and inductive methods. Four incomplete transcripts were discarded, leaving 14 interviews that were analyzed using an iterative process of coding. After agreeing on the coding scheme, the two researchers coded separately until a level of agreement was established. Themes emerging from the analysis were identified and agreed upon. As a final step, the data were entered in the qualitative software ATLAS-TI, and all the researchers in the WIT project dealt with both the original transcripts and the ATLAS-TI printouts of the key variables in the study.

IV. Results

1. Major decisions

All of our participants were juniors and seniors, aged between 22 and 26, from 14 different majors. These majors are: architecture; civil, urban, and geosystem engineering; clothing and textiles; communication; consumer and child studies; crafts and design; earth and environmental sciences; electrical engineering; history education; Korean language and literature; linguistics; nursing; political science; and sculpture.

One half of our participants identified choosing their majors as one of the most important decisions that they had ever made ($n=7$). While one made her career decision in her college sophomore year, most of the participants had decided their majors before college. They experienced difficulty since they had little information about possible majors and their parents, teachers, or other family members had different ideas about the best majors for them. Their parents wanted them to have stable jobs after graduating from college and preferred they go to a medical, law, nursing school, or police academy rather than choosing a major in social science or engineering. This was in direct conflict with the desires of several of the participants.

Two participants considered joining clubs [Dong-A-Ri] and two participants mentioned taking intensive language courses in the U.S. or Canada as their most important decisions. These decisions reflect a unique Korean college culture. Dong-A-Ri is similar to a fraternity or sorority in the U.S., but has as its main goal to contribute to a social movement. Having physical surgery due to hearing difficulty, leaving home for education, and finding suitable careers were other categories of decisions identified by our participants. <Table 2> summarizes our participants' major decisions.

2. Phase of self-authorship

Some participants made statements that reflected the

<Table 2> Students' Major Decisions

Major Decisions	f (%)
Choosing college & major	7(50.0)
Studying Abroad-language course	2(14.3)
Joining Clubs [Dong-A-Ri]	2(14.3)
Finding suitable career	1(7.1)
Deciding cochlear implant	1(7.1)
Returning home	1(7.1)
Total (%)	14(99.9)

first phase of self-authorship where external authority is most important (external formulas). Six participants said that they would "not listen" to advice (19 quotes). *Some decided primarily according to what they desired to do instead of listening to the advice of others.* One participant *didn't even hesitate to think about what they [her parents] tell her to do and just ignored their opinion.* These statements represent a characteristic of the phase of external formulas in different ways. Reflection about identity is a key characteristic of a fully self-authored person and the participants in the above mentioned example statements did not reflect a clearly defined sense of self.

Contrary to the belief that college-aged students automatically accept direction from respected authorities like teachers (Creamer & Laughlin, 2005), the majority of our participants (37 quotes from 13 participants) positioned themselves as being unlikely to accept the input of someone outside a selected circle of "trusted others" on matters of opinion. These participants often indicated that they mostly relied on the opinion of "trusted" others because they thought that they had their best interest in mind.

"I didn't have a chance to talk to experts who I can trust. Both of my parents don't have a college degree and the way our teachers consulted with us didn't seem like they really cared that much ... In that sense, I needed an expert to talk to who is very experienced and really cares and is interested in what I do. If there was someone who can give me [advice] that I can trust, I might have followed their advice. But I felt there weren't any. ... I felt uncomfortable

getting help and advice from someone I wasn't close to.”(#5)

One of our participants prematurely foreclosed on a decision recommended by “trusted” others.

“That [choosing a nursing major] is what my parents expected me to do. My parents expected me to have a stable job. I was thinking of a research job position, but my parents worried about getting a job after I graduate and I ended up choosing a field where a job was guaranteed.” (#11)

Forty-four comments from 10 participants reflected the second phase of self-authorship, crossroads, because they had started exploring their own identities beyond external authority. Students in this phase of self-authorship have an increasing sense of responsibility for making personal decisions, but at the same time, they struggle to distance themselves from dependent relationships with others.

“...I told them [my friends] how important it [joining a club] was to me. But they just didn't understand. Because it was my first time to disobey my parents, one time one of my best friends asked me if I had to disobey my parents over something that seemed less important to her than it did to me. Friends around me told me to give up joining that club. ... What is the best for me is the first thing I think about and of course if I think my parents are not going to like it, it influences my decision a little bit.” (#7)

In addition, our participants were often unreceptive to advice because they internalized cultural messages that it is important to be independent and to make their own decisions.

“I have this kind of pressure that I have to be always independent and have to make my own decisions. That should be something that everybody must naturally feel, but I am too obsessed with the idea. For that reason, if someone makes a suggestion on what I should do and doesn't give me a reasonable reason for that

suggestion, I usually do the opposite even though that isn't what I wanted to do in the first place.” (#5)

Eight statements from 2 participants reflected the final stage of fully developed self-authorship in decision-making. One of our participants considered several viewpoints from a wide range of people, including her teacher, close friend, aunt, and parents. Even though she had some conflict with her parents while consulting all those people, she was confident in effectively dealing with these conflicts and convincing her parents of her interests. Her sense of self-direction and agentic behavior reflects key elements of self-authorship.

“I got tired of fighting with my parents and went to my teacher to get some help... I explained that my mom wants me to do this and my father wants me to do that, but I want to do something else. I asked my teacher and he was someone who trusted me. A junior in high school is relatively young, but in spite of my young age, my teacher trusted me. I was able to settle [on a decision] at a time when I was lost [as to] what to do. Anyway, as we talked, my teacher encouraged me that if there is something I really want to study, continuously going in that direction and persuading my parents instead of being forced to do something I don't want.” (#9)

This finding is similar to the results of Baxter Magolda's (1998; 2001) longitudinal study on self-authorship among young adults and Creamer and Laughlin's (2005) study that expanded Baxter Magolda's theoretical framework of self-authorship by addressing the issues of parental influence on self-authored decisions.

3. Parent-child interactions and self-authored decisions

The theory of self-authorship provides insights into a way of understanding how people analyze what happens to them and how they interpret what these

experiences mean to them. A self-authored decision reflects complex ways of seeing oneself and one's relations with others (Baxter Magolda, 2004a). In particular, three dimensions of self-authorship are intertwined, but the interpersonal dimension most directly addresses the nature of an individual's relationships with others. Although Baxter Magolda explored the interpersonal dimension of self-authorship, her main research focus was on studying how college students made meaning of their experiences in the classroom and with teachers. The nature of personal relationships, including with family and friends, was not a central focus of Baxter Magolda's longitudinal work with college students (Creamer, Lee, & Laughlin, 2005). Creamer and Laughlin (2005) however, empirically found for the first time that young women were more likely to depend on the views of those with whom they felt trust and affection while making decisions. Young women resisted listening to well-intended advice from those outside of their immediate circle of trusted others that included their parents and immediate family members. This finding affirms the importance of exploring how the relationship with parents influences the developmental process of self-authorship among young women.

While our participants were making important decisions, they experienced conflicts in *negotiating* different ideas with their parents. Having different ideas made their decisions difficult, but it also gave the participants opportunities to think about their own identities and their relationships with their parents, moving some to the crossroads phase of self-authorship. Our participants interacted with their parents while making decisions in three ways. First, some participants were actively involved in gathering information and interacting with their parents as they struggled in making their decisions. They *read books, visited professional content providers, and talked with their friends, teachers, or other significant adults* in order to receive advice and get detailed information. As we saw in the previous section (a quote of #9), one of the participants *got some help from her high school*

teacher when her parents and she had different ideas about her future major. She explained *her scores on her college entrance exam to her teacher, what her mom and dad wanted her to do, and what she wanted to do*. This resulted in her *gaining the courage to talk with her mom very seriously about what she wanted to do*. Later, her mother *met her teacher and had a serious talk with her father*. This negotiation moved her further along in the fully self-authored phase of self-authorship as she began to assert her voice after listening to others.

Second, active involvement of both students and parents in the decision-making process produced positive synergy effects. Parents became *good supporters and advisors* for their children *and were happy when their children were satisfied with their decisions*. In turn, parents' encouragement also made the women *feel confident and satisfied with their decisions*. Our participants were motivated to do their best in *being responsible for their decisions and not disappointing their parents*. That is, self-authored students or students in the crossroads turned their parents into good supporters and advisors who encouraged them to make self-authored judgments.

Finally, several participants were unable to negotiate with their parents or to seek others' opinions. Their common way of interacting with their parents was to first decide what to do and then notify their parents of their decisions. One participant said she *felt more comfortable with making her decision first and then telling them later*. Some participants *did not trust* their parents because they thought their parents *did not have any professional viewpoints in their fields*. When their parents *did not have a college degree*, this happened more often. Some participants were *too eager to be independent and were not likely to listen to what their parents said* when making decisions. Clearly, when these participants confronted conflicting situations, they either looked for the right answers or avoided listening to others' opinions. These statements show the general characteristics of students who are operating from external formulas.

4. Being independent vs. being a good daughter

The most interesting finding in our study was that while participants intended to be independent, they felt a strong responsibility for being a good daughter and making their parents happy. Many participants *said that they would not do something that their parents told them not to do* before getting into college. Since *there had not been many differences between what the participants wanted and what their parents wanted*, there had been no problem so far between the participants and their parents. However, when they started considering their own interests and lives as priorities in college, both the participants and their parents started experiencing some conflicts emotionally.

Although *parents always said that they would not push their children*, they *seemed to be disappointed when their children made decisions by themselves*. Parents also felt that *their children changed* and sometimes the mothers *felt estranged from their children*. On the other hand, our participants *felt guilty* toward their parents, particularly their mothers, when they made their own decisions.

“The way how I listened to my friends and my parents are different. When my friends told me their opinion, I just listened to it and that was it. But in my parents’ case, because I felt sorry for not doing what they wanted me to do they used to influence my decision in some sense. ... For example, when my parents tell me to come home early and complain that has been hard to see my face and there is a important meeting that I must not miss, sometimes I choose to go home early because I felt sorry to my mother.” (#7)

In the process of making decisions, both our participants and their parents negotiated in order to deal with this issue. Parents, mostly mothers, *gave up some expectations of their children* and our participants *made decisions to meet their parents’ or mothers’ expectations*. Many participants tried *not to disappoint*

their parents.

In Korean families, parent-child relationships are given priority over marital relationships (Lee, 2002) and making decisions that would not damage their parents’ and families’ pride is very important (Wong, Yoo, & Stewart, 2005; Yang & Rosenblatt, 2001). Many participants were influenced by their parents because students were concerned about the impacts of their decisions on the well-being of their whole family and the expectations of their parents. Unless considering a Korean value system, it seems that all 14 of our participants remained in the phase of external formulas and heavily relied on parents’ authority so that their development of self-authorship was delayed.

“I think they [parents] play an important role when I am making a decision. I have two different images about my future. As I told you before, one is becoming a career woman. The other is living a liberal and naturalistic life. If I would happen to have a liberal life, I would be able to travel and do what I enjoy. However, I won’t be able to do that because...I have to look after my sister and family. So, whenever I make my decision, I first think about my family, and then postpone my plan if I think it is fatal to my family.” (#10)

As Parks (2000) mentioned, some forms of dependence on parents that our participants showed should not be considered as weakness, immaturity, or regression to an infantile relationship with their parents. We must carefully differentiate between dependence on external approval from their parents and genuine interests in listening to parents’ perspectives and considering their family situations.

V. Conclusion

Our study explored dynamic mechanisms between families, mostly parents, and self-authored decisions among Korean female college students. In particular, we investigated how parent-child interactions influence

the development of self-authorship and self-authored decisions within Korean culture through interviews with 14 female college students. Our findings showed unique cultural influences on how Korean college female students interacted with parents and interpreted and reflected parents' opinions into self-authored decisions. In particular, our findings show how our participants understood the co-existing traditional collectivistic family values and individualism and balanced their individual expectations and family values. This suggests that self-authorship may develop as Korean female college students struggle with a growing sense of independence and responsibility for making their own decisions within a culture of traditional collectivistic family values. These results suggest that the process of developing self-authorship is complicated and the appreciation of cultural contexts is required for better understanding of this complex process.

Our findings give some insights into interpreting the conflicting ideas of the authority between parents and career advisors (Bock, 1999; Creamer & Laughlin, 2005). Our participants had their own criteria to judge whom to trust and these were the people with whom they discussed their decisions. For our participants, one of the most important criteria used to judge advice was often the nature of their relationship rather than the experience or expertise of the person. Students acknowledged the important role of "trusted others" in their decision making process. In many cases, they were parents and other family members. However, "trusted others" could also be teachers, friends, or family friends. Therefore, further research on how female college students set up their own criteria in order to judge authority and on the ways in which family professionals, advisors, and teachers may build trust with students and support the capacity for self-authored decisions is required.

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