

SPEED BUMPS ON THE WAY TO A CAREER:  
HOW REJECTION SHAPES DECISIONS OF COLLEGE STUDENTS

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Submitted to the graduate degree program in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies and the Graduate Faculty of the University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Date Approved: April 16, 2012

### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to understand how undergraduate students manage the barrier of being denied admission to a School of Education at a particular university, how they make career choices, and how they come to understand their decisions. Marcia (1966) and Josselson's (1987) identity development statuses, Baxter Magolda's (2000) development of self-authorship, and the Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994, 1996), were used as theoretical frameworks to examine and describe college students' career decision making processes. A basic qualitative design was utilized to collect data from participants. Eight students who were denied admission to a large, Midwestern, research university's teacher preparation program agreed to an interview for this study. These interviews were used to create cases to describe their perspectives of the denial decision and how they understood their career options. Themes across cases identify a reciprocal relationship between identity and cognitive development levels and how these influence career decision making. How interests, choices, and goals develop prior to a career barrier is explored, as well as decision making following a barrier. This study focused on an objectively defined barrier to students achieving career goals which differs from research on perceived career barriers. A variety of responses emerged to the objective barrier based on the student's development, however, all participants maintained an interest in teaching. Implications from this study exist for higher education as well as for alternative certification programs.

## Acknowledgements

This degree could not have been accomplished without the assistance of many people. I'd like to thank my dissertation advisor, Lisa Wolf-Wendel, as well as my dissertation committee, Susan Twombly, Tom Krieshok, Dongbin Kim, and Tamara Coder-Mikinski, for their encouragement through this process. I would also like to thank my colleagues, mentors, friends, and family for their personal and professional support over the years, especially my sister, Karen Haynes. My love and appreciation goes to my children, Kaylee and Dylan, and my husband, Dwight. Without your patience and dedication, this degree would not have been possible. Finally, I'd like to thank my parents, Marguerite and George Moore. Your unconditional love and faith have made my goals possible. You taught me the importance of education, hard work, and commitment.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

People face many career development tasks in their life and “choosing a satisfying career is one of the key developmental challenges” (Nauta, 2007, p. 446). Constructing a career goal is an important aspect of college and an individual’s identity development, with the selection of a major as a formal step in this process (Pizzolato, 2007). The impact of major choice has consequences lasting beyond student learning and satisfaction (Porter & Umbach, 2006). Chase and Keene (1981) found that the earlier students declare a major, the more likely they are to do well in their academic objectives. Even if a student chooses to change his or her major based on new or additional information (e.g., coursework, internships, etc.), changes or compromises are usually voluntary. A different situation arises, however, when students are denied admission to their major. Using identity development theory (Josselson, 1987; Marcia, 1966), Baxter Magolda’s (2000) development of “self-authorship,” and the Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994, 1996), this study examines and describes how individuals denied admission to their major of choice reflect on and approach this barrier.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to understand how undergraduate students manage the barrier of being denied admission to the School of Education at the University of Kansas, how they make career choices, and how they come to understand their decisions.

Specific research questions include:

- How does the identity and intellectual development of prospective teacher education students influence their understanding of the denial decision and their subsequent career choices?

- How do prospective teacher education students' career interests, choices, and goals develop prior to and after the barrier of being denied admission to the School of Education? What choices do these students make after facing this barrier?

This study considers a specific group of people (college students who wish to be in a teacher education program), within a particular environment (one university's School of Education), who have faced a specific, objective barrier to their career development (denied admission to the program). These students were asked to describe their choice processes and examine how they made meaning of their choices and situation.

### **Context for the Study**

The university selected for this study is a comprehensive educational and research institution with more than 2,100 faculty members and 29,000 students. The University includes a main campus, a Medical Center, a satellite campus, a clinical campus of the Medical Center, and research facilities throughout the state. Students come from all 50 states, with 69.1% from the home state. There are over 1,500 international students from over 110 countries. There are more than 170 fields of study in 14 schools: College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, the Graduate School, and the schools of allied health, architecture and urban planning, business, education, engineering, fine arts, journalism and mass communications, law, medicine, nursing, pharmacy, and social welfare.

For an incoming freshman in-state student to gain admission, students are only required to achieve an ACT score of 21 or an SAT score of 980, earn a 2.0 GPA in high school, or rank in the top one-third of their high-school class. As long as a student can meet one of these requirements, he or she is admitted to the institution, making the institution basically an open access institution. Gaining a higher education is seen in America as a democratic path to

equality and opportunity, however, top educational programs often have to limit the number of students to a program because of available resources, such as space, equipment, and faculty, so additional criteria are added to limit the number of students in these programs (Bissett, 1995; Pitter & LeMon, 1991). External standards, such as state requirements for teacher certification also dictate higher requirements in a school of education (Pitter & LeMon).

Although the university is open access, the School of Education teacher education program has more rigorous admission standards. Students are only admitted to the program once each year with students applying to the program in their sophomore year and entering the program as juniors. Students who are rejected have the choice to remain at the University to apply the following year, change institutions for a different School of Education, or change majors.

How students come to make and understand their career decisions is complex and varies from individual to individual. A basic qualitative design was chosen because of its flexibility in identifying recurring patterns or themes as these emerge from the data (Merriam, 1998). Using a qualitative method can reveal how individuals perceive and understand the rejection from the School of Education.

The research is designed to inductively build upon the existing theories and literature (Merriam, 1998). In order to obtain depth of understanding, the research design was semi-structured, leaving enough flexibility to accommodate information as obtained, adapt to the participants' experiences, and adjust to the emerging data (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Three theoretical frameworks informed this study and assisted in interpreting the data. The first is Baxter Magolda's (1990, 1998b, 2000) development of self-authorship based from



her Epistemological Development model. The second theoretical framework is identity development as researched by Marcia (1966) and Josselson (1987). The third framework is the Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent et al., 1994, 1996). Exploring the relationship between epistemological and identity development allows for a deeper understanding of how these college students approach a career barrier.

Kegan's (1994) constructive-developmental framework explains how individuals move through "orders of consciousness" to create their own meanings of the world. Baxter Magolda (2000) uses this framework in combination with her Epistemological Reflection Model (1990) to describe how college students construct knowledge. Both models use the term "self-authorship" as the way individuals organize and interpret their experiences to make meaning. As a qualitative study, this research sought to describe the meanings students gave to their experiences by describing how they organized and interpreted decisions and choices. Although students may not be "self-authoring" during college, the process of moving through the Epistemological Reflection Model towards "self-authorship" was examined in relation to their career choices. Students who have moved closer to Baxter Magolda's stage of self-authorship have a greater understanding that knowledge is constructed within social contexts, within themselves, and in relation to the world (Baxter Magolda, 1998b; King & Kitchener, 1994). How people organize and understand their experiences as well as how they share their meaning systems with others comprises their identity (Josselson, 1987).

The second theoretical framework to inform this study is identity development as explored by Marcia (1966) and Josselson (1987). Using Erikson's (1963, 1968) adolescent crisis of identity versus role confusion, Marcia and Josselson studied identity development using the criteria of crisis versus commitment. Marcia's study of college men attempted to operationalize

Erikson's understanding of identity development by proposing four identity statuses: identity achieved, identity differentiated, moratorium, and foreclosure. These statuses are differentiated by the degree to which a person has committed to a sense of self and undergone an identity crisis. Josselson later added a female perspective to Marcia's identity statuses. This study describes the relationship between identity development and cognitive development as participants faced a potential career crisis. By studying how students organize and interpret their career decisions and choices, the student's identity and cognitive development can be integrated into career theory to build a more comprehensive perspective of college student career development.

A third framework to inform this study is Lent, Brown, and Hackett's (1994, 1996) Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT). Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986) explains human functioning in terms of "a model of triadic reciprocity" where an individual's personal and cognitive factors, as well as environmental influences interact as determinants of each other. Lent, Brown, and Hackett's SCCT builds links between theories of career development by conceptualizing career-related interest, choice, and performance processes as interlocking with Bandura's personal and cognitive factors, and then considers aspects of individuals, their environment, and their learning experiences to explain how an individual makes career choices. The SCCT also adopts the idea that there is mutual influence among these variables.

SCCT provides a perspective on how an individual's career interests, choices, and goals develop, paying attention to personal and cognitive factors, as well as the environment and learning experiences the individual encounters. Although this study uses a specific environment and a specific career development barrier, the person's identity and how he or she construes the environmental barrier and themselves can have a positive or negative influence on career

decisions. Using these broad theories allows this study to conceptualize where a college student is developmentally in the career choice process.

### **Importance of the Study**

“No, you can’t do that.” What impact do these words have on people? How do they react? What do they do next? How do they make these choices? When a college student is denied admission to a competitive teacher preparation program, he or she is essentially hearing these words. How the individual reacts to this barrier in his or her college career is new territory for research to understanding college students and career development. Utilizing identity and cognitive development models to determine how college students make career choices allows for a greater understanding of students, as well as how these constructs are interrelated. This study also considers how college student development impacts career choices, particularly when an objective career barrier arises. The results of this research also have implications for competitive degree programs, as well as teacher preparation programs.

How students perceive new situations or problems is often determined by their internal perceptions of themselves or their identity. In order for a college student to move through the stages of cognitive development to self-authorship, the individual’s identity development is significant. Having an identity individuated from others allows a student the ability to think through problems from multiple perspectives, getting inside an issue and separating from it at the same time. There is a reciprocal link, however, that a student’s intellectual development mutually influences his or her identity development. How an individual thinks about his or her role in problems or situations will impact identity. This study aims to describe college student’s development from identity and intellectual developmental theories in order to provide higher

education professionals a more clear perception of how students consider choices and make decisions.

Integrating these theories with the Social Cognitive Career Theory allows for a more contextual understanding of a college student's career development, as well as how a student perceives a career barrier and career choices. The career barrier literature to date focuses on perceived barriers. A different situation arises, however, when the barrier isn't perceived. When a student believes in his or her choice to pursue a particular career and that progress is being made toward the goal, an external barrier can be devastating. Recognizing how students manage this situation can be useful to university staff and provides a new perspective to the career barrier research. The results of this study can assist career educators and administrators in understanding where students are in their identity and cognitive development, how students are making choices, as well as how to guide students through the career decision making process.

Assisting students with career decisions becomes particularly important within competitive degree programs. If a student has not developed to a level where he or she would be successful in the program, having the tools to recognize the concerns areas, provide early feedback or interventions, or counsel the individual into other career fields, would be beneficial for the student. This study provides an awareness of the type of information students need and how to communicate with them.

Individuals who do not get accepted to teacher preparation programs are also an unknown group. Where do they go? Do they lose their interest in teaching? Having a greater understanding of this group could also provide foresight for state alternative certification programs. If a student is denied admission to a teacher preparation program and goes on to have a career in another field, would he or she at a later time still become a teacher? With such a

variety of routes into the teaching profession, it is plausible that these students could come back to teaching. Having a greater sense of how they make choices and the careers they choose after the barrier of being denied admission could provide insight to who comes back to teach later in life through alternative methods.

When the college environment presents a barrier to achievement, how students interpret and understand that environmental barrier as well as their career choice options, will impact career progress and academic success. A student's cognitive development and his or her sense of identity underscore how the individual may explore options and personal interests in order to move in a direction that combines the two (Baxter Magolda, 2000). Utilizing identity and cognitive development models and the Social Cognitive Career Theory provides a new lens for analyzing how college students react to an objective career barrier.

### **Conclusion**

Baxter Magolda's (2000) research on the development of self-authorship discusses how a college student's life begins to take a specific shape, providing a path to follow until a new experience reshapes it. The student processes the new experience in the context of his or her identity (Baxter Magolda, 2003). Career development theorists are also emphasizing this same concept by focusing on the "cognitive and agentic mechanisms in career development" (Lent & Hackett, 1994, p. 82). Social Cognitive Career Theory hypothesizes that individual, environmental and behavioral variables affect one another through complex and reciprocal linkages (Lent, Hackett, & Brown, 2000). Considering the combined influence college students' intellectual and identity development have on career choice processes as described by Social Cognitive Career Theory contributes to the literature to provide a greater understanding of college student career development.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

This study considers college students who applied to a competitive School of Education teacher education program and were denied admission. In considering college students' career choice processes, it is important to understand how they think about themselves and their world. Three theoretical frameworks that inform this study follow a review of the literature on college student major selection. Intellectual development literature beginning with Piaget (1950) provides an historical perspective to enhance understanding of Baxter Magolda's (2000) development of self-authorship through her epistemological development model. Marcia (1966) and Josselson's (1987) identity statuses are then reviewed. The Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986) is then discussed as the underpinnings of the Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1996). The chapter ends with a review of the relevant career barrier research. Merging intellectual development and identity development within the Social Cognitive Career Theory, this study provides an in depth description of how college students think about themselves and their choices as they face and recover from a career barrier.

### **Academic Major Selection**

Many students begin college with only a vague notion of why they are attending (Tinto, 1987). Some job recruiters and educators say technical and cross-disciplinary skills are more important than a specific course of study (St. John, 2000). However, the choice of major "determines where students will take most of their courses with in an institution, thus in turn affecting much of their interactions with faculty and other students" (Porter & Umbach, 2006, p. 429). Major selection also impacts student learning and satisfaction, later job stability and job satisfaction, as well as career opportunities and rewards (Porter & Umbach).

“Choosing a major and setting career goals are often among the most difficult decisions that college students face” (Korschgen & Hageseth, 1997, p. 50). The challenge is matching the students’ interests and abilities with professions and majors (Korschgen & Hageseth). Interest in the subject matter has been shown as the greatest influence on major choice (Beggs, Bantham, & Taylor, 2006; Malgwi, Howe, & Burnaby, 2005; Tracey & Robbins, 2006). Congruence between interests and choice of college major has also been shown to predict academic performance (Tracey & Robbins). Other factors influencing major choice include personality traits, gender, personal values, socioeconomic status, interpersonal skills, and parental occupation (Malgwi et al.).

In choosing a major, the student chooses a career path, which should signify the end of one period of career exploration (Pizzolato, 2007). Making this decision can cause a student stress and perhaps cause a student to choose a major in less-than-ideal ways (Beggs et al., 2006; Galotti, 1999). Galotti found mixed results for how well college students choose an academic major. On average, students considered very few criteria in making their choice. By considering fewer options, students can make choices more quickly with less discomfort.

Chase and Keene (1981) find that students who declare a major earlier in their college career are more likely to do well in their course of study. When students are struggling with identity development, however, they may not have had adequate opportunities to explore interests, strengths and weaknesses, or career opportunities (Kimweli & Richards, 1999). Selecting a college major is an important formative step in the “career identity-achieving process” (Pizzolato, 2007, p. 201).

Once a major choice is made, often students will change majors based on new information, the natural maturation process, or changing personal or environmental dynamics

(Pizzolato, 2007; Southerland, 2006; Tinto, 1987). Making changes is often voluntary in these situations. When a student is forced to change their career goal because of a barrier, a different situation arises where students face failure (Pizzolato). Pizzolato studied how college students coped with this problem to understand self-development as they face obstacles. This study differs from Pizzolato's by looking at how students understand and make choices and decisions, rather than with how they cope.

The inability to achieve career goals may leave a student feeling rejected and disappointed. These feelings can eventually impact commitment to work and work performance (Tsaousides & Jome, 2008). Having a sense of congruency between career aspirations and an obtained career is "a crucial source of gratification and fulfillment" (Tsaousides & Jome, 2008, p. 193). Choosing a college major is the first step for an individual to attaining a connection between aspirations and career goal attainment. Understanding a student's perceptions of their choices and themselves in this process can provide greater insight for how practitioners can assist students in making these decisions.

### **Cognitive Development**

How people make meaning of their world has been explored over the years by various researchers including, Piaget (1950), Perry (1970), and others. Reviewing this literature provides insight to the evolution of intellectual development, how this study adds to the existing literature, and how thought processes can be described to inform our understanding of how college students develop meaning. This historical perspective leads to a greater understanding of Kegan (1994) and Baxter Magolda's (2000) research as used as a perspective for this study.

Piaget (1950) described intelligence as taking "the form of a structuring which impresses certain patterns on the interaction between the subject . . . and near or distant surrounding



objects” (p. 167). Intellectual development can be seen in terms of these qualitatively different thought patterns through which individual’s make meaning (Kegan, 1980; Baxter Magolda, 1998a). These patterns include assumptions about the limits, nature, and certainty of knowledge, assumptions which were later labeled epistemic (Baxter Magolda, 1998a). Attempts to expand these patterns to explain development through the college years relied on the assumption that these more complex cognitive configurations are best seen through the individual’s personal frame of reference (Baxter Magolda, 1988).

Perry (1970) offered the first theory of intellectual development for adults, describing how students think (cognitive structures) and the types of experiences that promote change. Perry described nine cognitive structures which he organized into four categories: dualism, multiplicity, relativity, and commitment. Dualism represents a dichotomous perspective of the world. Individuals in relativism recognize possibilities and uncertainties, eventually acknowledging that information is related to the context. Choosing how to implement commitments and understanding the ongoing nature of such commitments characterizes the final phase (Perry). The frameworks provided by Piaget and Perry suggest a series of cognitive constructions of the world (Kegan, 1980).

Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) offered a differing view from Piaget and Perry because they researched the development of women. Their focus was on linking identity, voice, and ways of knowing for women. Belenky and colleagues describe development as a movement from accepting the words of authorities to the insight of constructivist thought, that “all knowledge is constructed, and the knower is an intimate part of the known” (p. 137). Unlike Perry’s (1970) developmental scheme, college women seek confirmation and community

in the learning environment (Belenky et al.). The ability to integrate various perspectives and utilize external data allows a woman to construct her own reality.

King and Kitchener's (1994) intellectual developmental model describes seven stages of certainty of knowledge, how knowledge is gained, and how beliefs are rationalized. Each of these stages, or assumptions, describes the development of individuals as they become more adept at evaluating knowledge, and in explaining and defending their perspectives. "Each successive stage is posited to represent a more complex and effective form of justification, providing more inclusive and better integrated assumptions for evaluating and defending a point of view" (King & Kitchener, p. 13). Each stage is also associated with a strategy for problem solving with the more advanced assumptions allowing more complete and complex information to be integrated into solutions (King & Kitchener).

Development then, moves from acceptance of knowledge from authority figures as correct, to making personal judgments based on evidence and inquiry (Baxter Magolda, 1998a). Considering the intellectual development literature as the predecessors of the development of self-authorship, we can see an expansion of complexity of thought moving from children recognizing patterns in which individual's make meaning, to experiences promoting change in cognitive structures, to linking an individual's identity to the construction of reality. In each moment then, we are not just responding to a stimulus, but rather using a common organizing system or principle that makes up our way of knowing (Kegan, 1994).

College can feel chaotic, because by taking on new skills or modifying their learning style, students may have to alter the whole way they know themselves (Kegan, 1994). In helping students to acquire personal authority, students need to "put at risk the loyalties and devotions that have made up the very foundation of their lives" (Kegan, p. 275). This study describes

where students are developmentally, in these moments when making career choices, facing barriers, and making new decisions.

Moving from intellectual developmental frameworks into the concept of how students develop self-authorship accomplishes a more in depth characterization of student development in career decision making moments. From Piaget's patterns of interaction through the more complex structures of Perry and King and Kitchener, the intellectual development research has been expanded and explained in more diverse and complex schemas. These theorists provide the foundation for Kegan (1994) and Baxter Magolda's (2000) concepts of self-authorship.

### **Self-Authorship**

The development of self-authorship was selected for use in this study because it is a comprehensive model of the cognitive development of college students. From Baxter Magolda's (1990) Epistemological Reflection Model into the development of self-authorship, her work is the most inclusive cognitive theory of how college students develop within the collegiate environment. Baxter Magolda's research participants were also the most comparable to the participants of this study. Her research provides an appropriate lens to describe the cognitive development of the college students in this study.

Baxter Magolda (2000) builds on Kegan's theory to expand on self-authorship as a way of understanding college student's construction of the world. Building on this intellectual development history then, Kegan's theory (1994) integrates intrapersonal, interpersonal, and epistemological dimensions of development. He describes five developmental "orders of consciousness" of how individual's make meaning. Among adults his third and fourth orders of consciousness are prevalent. In the third order of Kegan's theory, people co-construct meaning with others. As people participate in shared realities, they internalize other persons' viewpoints,

which creates a position of being dependent on their relationships for meaning in their life. It is in this third order of consciousness that a person becomes a citizen. It is this level that is “the culmination of adolescence, makes one both capable of, and vulnerable to, socialization” (Kegan, p. 288). It is then in the fourth order where the individual moves to an internal meaning making. A person in the fourth order can separate from relationships and reflect upon these (Kegan). It is in this fourth order that the person is no longer made up by the shared reality of others, but rather authors their own reality (Baxter Magolda).

Baxter Magolda (1998a, 1999a, 1999b, 1999c) uses Kegan’s constructive-developmental framework in understanding college students, specifically in how “students construct knowledge by organizing and making meaning of their experiences” (Baxter Magolda, 1999d, p. 6). It is their identity and these learning experiences that make up a student’s self-efficacy or belief in their ability to be successful in college and their outcome expectations or what they expect to achieve in college. Students bring these into the college environment and rely on these perspectives as they interact with and make sense of the world. In using these perspectives, students construct knowledge within “the context of their evolving assumptions about knowledge itself” and their role in creating it (Baxter Magolda, 1999d, p. 6).

An early work by Baxter Magolda (1990) provides the basis for self-authorship. She developed the Epistemological Reflection Model. In this study, three levels of knowing emerged: absolute, transitional, and independent. Gender patterns also emerged in each of these three levels of knowing. Some students used a more relational approach (attachment and connection) where others approached knowing from an impersonal mode (separation and abstraction). Although these are gender-related patterns, used more frequently by one gender or the other, these were not gender exclusive (Baxter Magolda, 1992, 1993, 1995).

Absolute knowers believe that knowledge is certain and learning means acquiring information from authority figures. It has two patterns, receiving, listening and recording information, which is relational, and mastery, actively practicing, which is impersonal (Baxter Magolda, 1992, 1993, 1995, 1998b).

Transitional knowers view knowledge as partially certain, so learning changes from obtaining to understanding. Again, two patterns unfold, the relational approach of the interpersonal, hearing and collecting others' ideas, and the impersonal approach, expression of own views, debating views, and thinking. Interpersonal transitional knowers emphasize uncertainty and resolve it through personal judgments where impersonal transitional knowers demonstrate balance on certainty and uncertainty and use logic and research to resolve it (Baxter Magolda, 1992, 1993, 1995, 1998b).

Independent knowers in Baxter Magolda's theory, view knowledge as uncertain. Learning comes through independent thinking and developing one's personal perspective (Baxter Magolda, 1992, 1995, 1998b). The relational and impersonal patterns here are in interindividual and individual patterns (Baxter Magolda, 1993, 1995). Interindividual independent knowing is marked by a focus on other perspectives, but does include the individual's own thoughts. The individual independent pattern focuses primarily on the individual's own perspectives (Baxter Magolda, 1993, 1995). Both forms of independent knowing share the belief that multiple arguments exist, but the individual decides what to believe by comparing personal opinions to others' opinions (Baxter Magolda, 1993, 1995).

Receiving, interpersonal, and interindividual patterns are relational knowing because of the focus on the connection to others in the knowing process. According to studies done by Baxter Magolda (1992, 1993, 1995), these patterns are used more frequently by women than

men. The mastery, impersonal, and individual patterns were found to be used more by men than women. These more abstract processes are marked by “objectivity and separation of knower and known” (Baxter Magolda, 1995, p. 208). Each approach is an equally complex way of knowing (Baxter Magolda, 1993, 1995).

The fourth way of knowing, later added to Baxter Magolda’s model, is contextual knowing. Contextual knowing builds on the lower levels and begins to appear towards the end of the college years where the relational and impersonal patterns converge into a contextual way of knowing (Baxter Magolda 1993, 1995).

Contextual knowers viewed themselves as capable of constructing knowledge. They did so by looking at all aspects of a situation or issue, seeking out expert advice in that particular context, and integrating their own and others’ views in deciding what to think (Baxter Magolda, 1995, p. 209).

Relational and impersonal patterns are evident in this level because there is an emphasis on personal experience and perspectives, considering others’ perspectives, and getting inside an issue, and at the same time separating from a situation to abstractly process information and experience (Baxter Magolda, 1993, 1995). The balancing of personal and others’ perspectives requires self-identity as a foundation. Contextual knowers learn how to dialogue with others without losing their self-identity (Baxter Magolda, 1993, 1995).

Baxter Magolda used these early studies as the start of a longitudinal study, which has yielded numerous articles (1993, 1995, 1996, 1998a, 1998b, 1999a, 1999d, 2006, 2007) on ways of knowing or epistemological development in college students, which extends to the post-college years. She uses Kegan’s (1994) definition of self-authorship as a sense of personal authority or internal identity that coordinates, integrates, acts upon, or invents beliefs, values,

generalizations, convictions, ideals, abstractions, relational loyalties, and intrapersonal states (Baxter Magolda, 1996). Self-authorship, then means that knowledge construction is made up of how an individual organizes and interprets experiences. Based on relevant information, evaluating such evidence, and having the capacity to make decisions is how knowledge can be constructed within a context. In addition, how an individual constructs and uses knowledge is tied to his or her sense of identity. A person must maintain interdependence with others in order to acquire access to others' perspectives. The individual must also perceive him or herself as having the ability to construct knowledge (Baxter Magolda, 1996, 1998b). "As a result, self-authorship is more than a skill; it is a way of making meaning of one's experience" (Baxter Magolda, 1998b, p. 41).

This study describes how college students construct their world in order to assess their development as they approach career choices and decisions. We must also consider how the context or collegiate environment where students are making these choices impacts how a particular student makes meaning of their experiences.

Early in college, students believe in authoritative knowledge and even fear self-expression because of what others may think (Baxter Magolda, 1996). Transforming their self-image from what they have incorporated from authority figures to a self-definition of values, purposes, and meanings requires more than rote memorization of information and gaining skills (Baxter Magolda, 2007). Students can move from absolute knowing into transitional knowing by utilizing an authority's perspective in areas they feel information is certain and then follow an authority's lead through uncertain areas (Baxter Magolda, 2002).

In an environment that encourages individuals to come to a self-definition and model intrapersonal growth, knowledge construction becomes a mutual endeavor (Baxter Magolda,

2002). The authority figure, the individual, and peers, are all “invited to actively share expertise” (Baxter Magolda, p. 6). Students can then understand situations from their own expertise as well as have an authority to act as a guide toward more complex knowledge construction based on the external world as well as on internalized beliefs and values (Baxter Magolda, 2003).

Moving through independent knowing into contextual knowing then, means that knowledge is increasingly viewed as related to the context and based on an evaluation of relevant evidence (Baxter Magolda, 2002). Responsibility for making meaning in one’s life and how to frame it within a context moves from the external environment to the internal thought processes (Baxter Magolda, 1998a). Once this process becomes internal, an individual is able to act within the environment more effectively (Baxter Magolda, 1998a). Describing how students facing an environmental career barrier comprehend their situation, allows for insight into the complexity of his or her knowledge construction. How independent are the individual’s thoughts? Can the individual see multiple perspectives to the situation? Does he or she rely on others opinions? Is there an attempt to gain additional information? This study answers these questions to gain a depth of understanding how college students make meaning of decisions and choices.

Self-authorship requires “the internal capacity to define one’s belief system, identity, and relationships” (Baxter Magolda, 2007, p. 69). When learners are able to bring their self-identity into the learning environment, they can work through new complexities and become autonomous (Baxter Magolda, 2002). An internal self-identity “grounds the construction of knowledge, self, and relationships” (Baxter Magolda, 2002, p. 4). Describing a college student’s perception of self-identity, then becomes particularly important in this study, because a student’s background or personal identity impacts career decisions. Baxter Magolda’s (1999b, 2003) perspective on



the influence of self-identity on intellectual development can be strengthened by examining identity development in relation to intellectual development or the student's development toward self-authorship as students make critical career choices.

### **Identity Development**

One cannot self-author without having a clear sense of self or an individuated identity. Utilizing Marcia (1966) and Josselson's (1987) identity development model in this study allows for a comparison of where students are in their identity development compared to their cognitive development. Do these constructs develop in positive directions at the same time? Or can these develop in isolation from each other? There are no studies that compare these two theories. Identity development was also selected for this study to determine how identity is connected to career decision making.

Identity exploration is both a cognitively focused process and an intuitive examination of alternatives to discover "one's true self" (Schwartz, Kurtines, & Montgomery, 2005, p. 312). This study explores and describes the identity development of college students as they face a potential occupational crisis. Erikson (1963, 1968) first distinguishes identity versus role confusion as the main crisis of adolescence. Marcia (1966) and Josselson (1987) extend and define four identity statuses: identity achieved, identity diffused, moratorium, and identity foreclosed which classify the identity of college students.

"Identity is the stable, consistent, and reliable sense of who one is and what one stands for in the world" (Josselson, 1987, p. 10). Identity integrates one's meaning of oneself and one's meaning to others (Josselson). Considering that an individual's identity is linked to how he or she constructs reality and knowledge (Baxter Magolda, 1996; Kegan, 1994), this study also

sought to describe the identity development of students facing a career barrier. Erikson (1963) identified the central crisis of the teen years:

The growing and developing youths, faced with this physiological revolution with them, and with tangible adult tasks ahead of them are now primarily concerned with what they appear to be in the eyes of others as compared with what they feel they are, and with the question of how to connect the roles and skills cultivated earlier in life with the occupational prototypes of the day (Erikson, 1963, p. 261).

Adolescence becomes a marked and conscious period between childhood and adulthood (Erikson, 1963, 1968). According to Erikson, people who have undergone identity exploration and committed to an identity are deemed identity achieved. People who have not explored nor committed to an identity are characterized by a sense of being adrift and lost and are termed identity diffused. The presence of a crisis or search and the absence of commitment to an identity is “essentially the mind of the moratorium” (1963, p. 262). Erikson (1968) also describes those who have committed to an identity, but who have never actively explored their identity, thus they have taken on someone else’s beliefs, roles, and values. According to Erikson, failing at this stage of development will lead an individual to role confusion or diffusion where a person appears adrift and lacks a cohesive sense of self. Successful resolution of this stage will lead to identity achievement, where a person has attained their own purpose, beliefs, and values.

Marcia (1966) elaborated on Erikson’s (1963, 1968) approach to identity development. He proposed four identity statuses differentiated by the degree to which a person has undergone a crisis (i.e., the process of identity exploration) and the degree to which a person has committed to a sense of self. Marcia defined exploration as an examination process and an awareness of

who one might be. This adolescent time of exploration is assumed to culminate in a commitment to a sense of identity (Schwartz et al., 2005). The two criteria Marcia used to establish identity status were crisis and commitment as derived from questions about occupational choice and political ideology (Marcia). “Crisis refers to the adolescent’s period of engagement in choosing among meaningful alternatives; commitment refers to the degree of personal investment the individual exhibits” (Marcia, p. 551). The identity statuses are not seen as stages an individual moves through from the least to the most sophisticated status. However, identity achievement cannot be attained without a crisis-based search and exploration which is associated with the moratorium process (Njus & Johnson, 2008). Therefore, as Serafini & Adams (2002) found, the moratorium and achieved statuses can be viewed as developmentally more sophisticated than the foreclosed and diffused statuses.

An identity-achieved individual has experienced a crisis and is committed to an occupation and ideology (Marcia, 1966). Identity achieved individuals will consider several occupational choices and make a decision on his or her own terms, even if the choice varies from parental wishes. Identity achievers subscribe less than the other statuses to authoritarian values and his or her self-esteem is less vulnerable to negative information (Marcia).

The identity diffused individual in Marcia’s theory (1966), by comparison, may or may not have experienced a crisis period and may lack commitment. Identity diffused persons haven’t decided on an occupation and are not very concerned about it. He or she may mention a preferred occupation, but seems to have little conception of the occupation’s daily routine (Marcia). “He is either uninterested in ideological matters or takes a smorgasbord approach in which one outlook seems as good to him as another and he is not averse to sampling from all” (Marcia, p. 552).

Two additional concentration points in Marcia's (1966) theory are the moratorium and foreclosure statuses. The moratorium subject is actively in the crisis where commitments are rather vague. He differs from the identity-diffusion subject by the appearance of an active struggle to make commitments. Adolescent issues preoccupy him and he attempts to make compromises among them, society's demands, and his own abilities (Marcia).

A foreclosure subject according to Marcia (1966) has not experienced a crisis, yet expresses commitment. It is difficult to distinguish where his parents' goals leave off and where his begin. Although not considered the opposite of identity achieved, it is foreclosure and not identity diffusion that occupies the lowest position in regard to identity achieving tasks (Marcia, 1966). This status' most outstanding characteristic is its belief in authoritarian values such as obedience, strong leadership, and respect for authority. The individual's self-esteem is vulnerable to negative information. Their response to failure tends to be unrealistic, maintaining unattained high goals. Certain rigidity characterizes his personality. If faced with a situation where his parental values were nonfunctional, he would feel threatened (Marcia).

Marcia's (1966) work with college-educated men was one of "the first and most enduring attempts to operationalize Erikson's (1950, 1968) understanding of identity for empirical investigation" (Schwartz et al., 2005, p. 311). Later, Josselson (1987) applied Erikson's theory to a sample of college-educated women, using the identity-status research created by Marcia. Using Marcia's four statuses of identity formation, Josselson studied women's identity development, not only considering the aspects of male development (occupation and political ideology), but also aspects of female identity decisions, including decisions regarding religion and sexual values.

Josselson (1987) interviewed sixty female college students over a period of three years. Her work showed “that women in the four identity-status groups differed consistently, reflecting different modes of negotiating the challenges of adolescence” (Josselson, p. 33). “Women’s epistemological sense is rooted in connecting reality to an ongoing sense of self. . . . To know is to connect with rather than to master” (Josselson, p. 24). Josselson added a female perspective to each of the four identity statuses.

The Identity Achievers were “women who could rework their childhood selves in a comfortable, tolerable way, defining a path for themselves that they felt they had truly chosen” (Josselson, 1987, p. 33). These women have already undergone the process of testing options and committing themselves to ways of being. They have separated themselves physically and emotionally from parents, as well as their childhood ties, and have formed individuated, distinct identities. They are free, but vulnerable. They feel the relativity and risk inherent in life’s decisions. These women have gone through the process of reshaping, modifying, adding, and mixing new elements of their identity together with older elements, integrating a new identity. These are women who have made choices about their lives after sifting through their options (Josselson).

Josselson (1987) found that women in the identity diffused status “showed a range of pathological problems and early developmental conflicts that made it impossible to work on identity-formation tasks” (p. 34). They had too few inner psychological resources to consider identity decisions seriously in their adolescence. These women experience neither crisis nor commitment. They seem adrift and lost, as Erikson (1963) and Marcia (1966) found with men. However, women tend to withdraw from situations and may passively accept a negative identity. Their ego development is low and they have high anxiety.

Women in the moratorium status according to Josselson (1987), were actively in a crisis or exploratory phase. The women tend to be interesting, lively, and engaging. They experience intense feelings and lower self-esteem. These women struggled to make commitments because they have not yet found the right ones for them. They are emotionally attuned to their options and know they can design their own lives, but they are unsure of how to turn their dreams into reality. The moratoriums are in search of a feeling of absolute rightness that eludes them. Life appears most complicated to Moratoriums (Josselson, 1987). “Emotionally sensitive and reflective, they experienced so much conflict about what to be, who to believe, and how to behave that they remained unable to choose a path for themselves (Josselson, p. 33-34).

Josselson (1987) found, as Erikson (1963) and Marcia (1966) had, that the identity foreclosure status is when an individual makes commitments in the absence of a searching or crisis phase. These women have carried their parentally derived expectations or childhood plans without questioning them. “The Foreclosures were women who could not psychologically leave home at all. Preoccupied with security, which was founded in an intense and early attachment to one or the other parent, they were unable to relinquish the gratifications of love and care that independent selfhood would require” (Josselson, p. 34). They are considered “Nest Builders” who remain attached to the religion they were raised in, carry emotional warmth and security of their childhood, and carry on traditions. These women hold deeply internalized values from their parents and are rigid and moralistic, though hardworking and high achieving. They have bypassed the exploration of their identity (Josselson).

This study describes the identity status of students facing a career barrier and explores the extent to which they view this barrier as an identity crisis. Merging identity status with cognitive constructions of reality can provide rich insight into students’ developmental processes as they

approach occupational choices. Using a qualitative approach for this study allows the epistemological and identity development concepts to emerge from students' voices.

### **Social Cognitive Career Theory**

In order to apply the identity and intellectual development concepts to students' career decision making processes as they face a career barrier requires a broad lens of career theory. Using Lent, Brown, and Hackett's (1996) Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) allows a wide perspective from which the students' stories can emerge. Social Cognitive Career Theory takes into account multiple considerations which were important for this study, including the individual's background, the context of where career decisions are being made, and the individual's agency in the career decision making process.

To fully grasp the Social Cognitive Career Theory requires first understanding Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory. Bandura explains human functioning in terms of "a model of triadic reciprocity in which behavior, cognitive, and other personal factors, and environmental events all operate as interacting determinants of each other" (p. 18). In this model, an individual's personal and cognitive factors, as well as environmental influences interact as determinants of each other. The environment is not fixed, but rather "influenceable, as is the behavior it affects" (Bandura, p. 29). An individual's behavior can determine which environmental influences come into play and the form of those influences (Bandura). The relations between these factors (the individual's cognitive and personal or affective states, the environment, and an individual's behavior) are essential to understand "the dynamic nature of person-context transactions" (Lent & Hackett, 1994, p. 84). From Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, Lent, Hackett, and Brown (1994, 1996) created the Social Cognitive Career Theory.

Social cognitive theory views career development as an interlocking process of choices, interest development, and performance. It also places greater prominence on cognitive processes, specifically on the role of cognition in motivation and behavior (Lent & Hackett, 1994). For the purpose of this research, the choice was to focus on the social cognitive career theory because of the interlocking variables it shares with cognitive and identity development. Identity, environment, and relationships all overlap in these theories and allows for a richer description of understanding the college student perspective, as well as the student's career choices, interests, and actions.

Within the social cognitive career theory (SCCT) (Lent et al., 1996), one can begin to consider how students' backgrounds and learning experiences impact their career choices. Interacting with Bandura's (1986) personal attributes of self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals, SCCT conceptualizes career-related interest, choice, and performance processes as interlocking, segmental models (Lent & Brown, 1996; Lent et al.). Adding another component of complexity, Social Cognitive Career Theory then considers these interplaying variables within the context of other aspects of individuals (gender, ethnicity), their environment, and their learning experiences (Lent & Brown). A model of the Social Cognitive Career Theory is represented in Figure 1 (Lent et al., 1996).

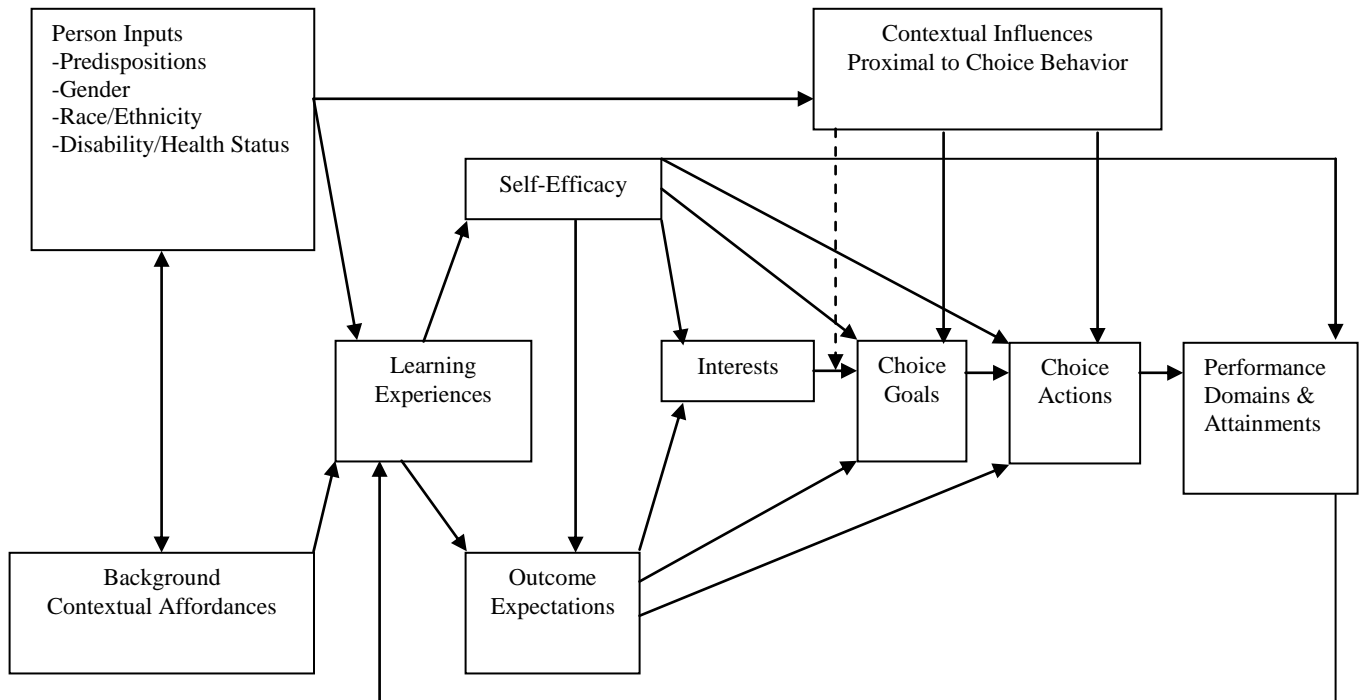
As shown, individuals bring their background into the learning experience which leads to their self-efficacy and outcome expectations to form their career interests (which also includes their aptitudes and values). These interests then form the individual's career goals, occupational choices, and performance processes. Throughout the model, the individual's background makes up the contextual factors which influence the entire process.

Bandura's (1986) "triadic reciprocal model of causality" is adopted in the SCCT which



Figure 1

## A Model of Social Cognitive Career Theory



*Figure 1.* A Model of the Social Cognitive Career Theory. Lent, R., Brown, S. & Hackett, G. (1996). Career development from a social cognitive perspective. In D. Brown & L. Brooks (Eds.), *Career Choice and Development* (pp. 373-421). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

states that personal attributes, external environmental aspects, and overt behavior operate as interactive sets of variables which mutually influence each other (Lent & Brown, 1996; Lent et al., 1996). Personal attributes are considered self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and personal goals. These are considered interrelated and mutually influence an individual's career behavior (Lent & Brown).

Self-efficacy beliefs are people's judgments about their ability "to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances" (Bandura, 1986, p. 391). From the Social Cognitive perspective, self-efficacy is not seen as static or fixed, but as dynamic beliefs about oneself regarding specific performance domains that interact in complex ways with

other person, behavior, and environmental factors (Lent & Brown, 1996; Lent et al., 1996). Self-efficacy is acquired and modified through four sources or types of learning experiences: personal performance accomplishments, vicarious learning, social persuasion, and physiological states and reactions (Lent & Brown; Lent et al.).

Outcome expectations are the personal beliefs about consequences of performing certain behaviors. These include extrinsic reinforcement (tangible rewards for successful performance), self-directed outcomes (pride in oneself), and outcomes from the process of performing a given task (Lent et al., 1996). Outcome expectations are relevant in career decision making as perceptions of outcomes from past experiences and information one acquires about different fields can have an impact on career choices (Lent et al.; Lent & Brown, 1996).

Vocational interests are individual's likes, dislikes, and indifferences regarding occupations and career-related activities (Lent et al., 1996). These opinions can develop through direct or vicarious exposure to activities (Smith, 2001). Social Cognitive Career Theory states that people form an enduring interest in those activities which they view themselves as competent and when they anticipate performing the activity will produce valued outcomes (Lent & Brown, 1996). As an individual develops an interest for a particular activity which they believe they can perform well (self-efficacy) and expect to perform it well (outcome expectation), then the individual is likely to promote a particular goal to sustain or become more involved in the activity (Lent et al.; Lent & Brown). Thus the individual develops a possible career interest. This process constantly changes throughout the life span, although occupational interests tend to stabilize in the teenage and early adult years, as in choosing a college major (Lent & Brown; Lent et al.).

Aptitudes and values also play a role in the process of forming interests, but their effects can be seen primarily through self-efficacy and outcome expectations (Lent & Brown, 1996; Lent et al., 1996). People's career interests are also "less a reflection of their objective capabilities than of their perceived capabilities" (Lent & Brown, p. 315). Rather than directly influencing interests, an individual's aptitude or ability (objective or perceived) affects their belief in how well they perform that activity, which then impacts their interest in the activity (Lent & Brown; Lent et al.). Values are preferences for work conditions or reinforcers, such as money, status, or autonomy and are incorporated into the concept of outcome expectations (Lent et al.). If one perceives that a particular career field will provide the values the individual is seeking, they are more interested in pursuing that occupation.

Personal goals are one's intent to engage in a certain activity or the determination to produce a particular outcome (Lent, et al., 1996; Lent & Brown, 1996). People set personal goals to help organize, guide and sustain their behavior. People exercise personal agency through their goals. Although the environment and personal history help in shaping behavior, it is not completely determined by reinforcement history, genes, or other factors, it is also motivated by the individual's self-directed goals (Lent et al.). Self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations can have an important affect on personal goals in the self-regulation of behavior (Lent et al.; Lent & Brown).

The Social Cognitive Career Theory also recognizes there are situations where career choices may not reflect personal interest, but instead avoidance of obstacles or perceived barriers (Smith, 2001). These personal and contextual variables, such as race/ethnicity, gender, physical health/disability, socioeconomic status, and genetic endowment are assumed to influence the social cognitive variables (self-efficacy, outcome expectations, occupational goals) and the

career development process (Lent et al., 1996). Gender and race/ethnicity are specifically cited as “socio-cultural conditions and processes that mold the learning opportunities to which particular individuals are exposed, the characteristic reactions they receive for performing different activities, and the future outcomes they anticipate” (Lent & Brown, 1996, p. 312). Race/ethnicity and gender are seen largely through self-efficacy and outcome expectations, or more specifically in the learning experiences which would develop these beliefs (Lent & Brown; Lent et al.).

Occupational choice in the SCCT assumes that under ideal, supportive environmental conditions, people select career options consistent with their interests (Lent & Brown, 1996; Lent et al., 1996). It is evident however, that individual’s career choices do not always reflect interests. Economic need, lack of familial support, educational limitations, discrimination or other considerations may limit a person’s pursuit of their interests or preferred career goals (Lent & Brown; Lent et al.).

The role of personal goals in career choice making is highlighted in the Social Cognitive Career Theory, however there are limits to an individual’s “free agency in making career choices” (Lent et al., 1996, p. 392). Contextual factors such as physical, material, cultural, and social features of the environment create an opportunity structure which can influence a person’s ability to move their interests into occupational goals and goals into actions (Lent & Brown, 1996; Lent et al.). Additional environmental conditions can have direct effects on career choices, such as the “glass ceiling,” discrimination in hiring, cultural practices where careers are chosen by an individual’s parents, etc. (Lent et al.). This study explores students’ perceptions of how background or contextual factors such as these may have impacted the denial decision.

Career related performance processes in the SCCT are concerned with two aspects of performance, the level or quality of a person's accomplishments and the persistence in a work activity or career path (Lent & Brown, 1996; Lent et al., 1996). Ability is seen as affecting performance through its impact on self-efficacy and outcome expectations. In turn, self-efficacy and outcome expectations affect the level of performance goals that an individual will set (Lent & Brown; Lent et al.). However, as previously mentioned, individuals develop self-efficacy, outcome expectations, abilities, and goals within a socio-cultural context which is affected by the structure of opportunities (educational access, social supports, economic status), gender role socialization, and community and family norms (Lent & Brown).

In some cases, however, if the student's self-efficacy is low, the student can perceive greater barriers to career success. Within the SCCT, the concept of self-efficacy serves as the most influential affect on behavior (Smith, 2001). Self-efficacy affects career choice goals indirectly through interests, so higher career self-efficacy leads to a lower perception of career barriers (Smith). Most research to date has focused on these perceptions. This study examines a specific barrier and how it impacts components of the SCCT.

When a student has not perceived any barriers, he or she has high self-efficacy and outcome expectations, so the student sets a goal. The student begins taking actions toward that goal but is then told no, the path to that goal is blocked. What happens next? Social Cognitive Career Theory provides a comprehensive view of the career decision making process, but might it be altered when a barrier is presented? Are there components of SCCT that might help us to understand the career decision making process after a barrier?

## Career Barriers

In order to appropriately describe an individual college student's self-concept within the SCCT as they confront a career barrier, it is valuable to review relevant career barrier research and how it relates to the SCCT. The earliest discussion of career related barriers was by Crites (1969). Crites discussed potential career barriers as "thwarting conditions" which impede a person's career development. Crites identified internal conflicts such as motivation or self-concept and external frustrations such as wages or discrimination. In 1981, Gottfredson's theory emphasized the importance of a person's recognition of and response to career barriers. As an individual recognizes a career barrier, they cope by compromising their goals (Gottfredson).

A study by Swanson and Tokar (1991) considered the types of barriers college students perceive. Using 48 undergraduate college students their findings suggest three categories of perceived barriers: social/interpersonal, attitudinal, and interactional, which were distributed among six topics (choosing a major, getting a degree, getting the first job, advancing in career, balancing work and family, special concerns for women). Although individuals recognize self-concept or attitudinal factors and environmental constraints to career aspirations, these may be perceived as a challenge for some and as being defeated by others. They also commented that it is still unclear what compromises people make as a result of confronting such barriers (Swanson & Tokar).

In creating the Career Barriers Inventory, Swanson, Daniels, and Tokar (1996) discuss the potential the Social Cognitive Career Theory presents for understanding career barriers. The emphasis on "cognitive appraisal processes in guiding vocational behavior" (p. 221) provides an opportunity to conceptualize barriers as a self-reflective process or as a person's perception of the environment. The perceived barrier categories (social/interpersonal, attitudinal, and

interactional) presented by Swanson and Tokar (1991) also fit well in the Social Cognitive model.

Luzzo (1996) examined the relationship between perceived occupational barriers and career decision making attitudes, knowledge of career decision making principles, and career decision-making self-efficacy of college students. Using 188 community college students he found, as Swanson and Tokar (1991) did, that perceived career barriers may not impede the career development of all college students (Luzzo). In contrast to Gottfredson's (1981) theory, perceived barriers may be perceived as defeating for some but as motivating to others (Luzzo; Swanson & Tokar).

Albert and Luzzo (1999) take a social cognitive perspective in examining perceived career barriers. They discuss how contextual factors constitute the perception of career opportunities within which vocational plans are created and implemented. Perceived career-related barriers can then inhibit career interests becoming choice goals and goals becoming actions (Albert & Luzzo).

Lent, Hackett, and Brown (2000) further clarify the Social Cognitive Career Theory as a framework for studying career barriers. Revisiting the SCCT objective and perceived environment, Lent et al. posit that individuals can be beneficially or adversely affected by their environment, but how a person construes their environment and themselves allows for personal agency in career development. Thus "it is important to attend to the person's active phenomenological role in processing both positive and negative environmental influences" (p. 37). Paying attention to the environment as well as how a person makes sense of and responds to that environment becomes important for career development theorists as well as research (Lent et al.).

Looking to the career barriers research, Lent et al. (2000) suggest that intrapersonal and contextual barriers need further clarification since the focus on barriers research has been on perceived barriers rather than on objectively defined barriers. There is an opportunity to clarify how contextual barriers become internalized and how counseling strategies can be modified to assist individuals in coping with and confronting environmentally imposed barriers (Lent et al.).

Lent et al. (2000) also suggest locating barriers to career development in time. Distal or background contextual factors affect learning experiences which lead to self-efficacy and outcome expectations. Proximal influences are more relevant during active educational or career decision making (Lent et al.). They suggest approaching studies of distal and proximal barriers through various research methodologies, including qualitative interviews or longitudinal research.

Relevant questions for this research have also been posed by Lent et al. (2000). They discuss how research has often “sidestepped the somewhat subtle, but crucial question: Barriers to what? That is, what is a given barrier deterring an individual from doing?” (p. 39). They also pose the question, “what types of barriers, encountered by which persons and at which stage of the choice process, will have what kinds of impact?” (Lent et al., p. 40). It is these questions that this study hopes to address. By linking a student’s developmental perspective of how they view their world and themselves to the SCCT, this study describes the impact of a specific career barrier to the student’s career choice process.

## **Conclusion**

Considering the literature, the researcher used a qualitative research design to describe the career interests, choices, and goals of a group of college students who hoped to major in education. By describing how students bring their identity to their perceptions and



understandings of the college environment, it becomes possible to explore how a student then uses these perceptions to describe an environmental barrier to academic success and career choice. Many vocational studies include samples of college students. The studies rarely, however, consider the student's development within the process of career choices and decisions. Placing a student within a developmental framework, such as the development of identity and self-authorship, allows for greater insight to how college students cognitively perceive and understand their choices following a career barrier.

Social Cognitive Career Theory provides a perspective on how an individual's career interests, choices, and goals develop. Since most theories of vocational development ignore contextual factors or the identity and cognitive development of the individual, the SCCT is more encompassing of the diverse nature of today's student body. For students, the college years are a time of self-exploration and learning, as well as a time to prepare for a career. Given these complex interactions within student variables, and between student variables and collegiate environments, Social Cognitive Career Theory is utilized to examine these multiple relationships.

Exploring the relationships between cognitive and identity development theories simultaneously, while examining college students' career decisions provides an opportunity for rich description of participants' experiences. Although self-authorship discusses the development of identity, the two theories have never been compared. While SCCT discusses an individual's background factors, development theories have not been considered in the research. An objective barrier related to these theories has never been considered. Using these theories allows for a new analysis of how college students develop and make decisions as they face career decisions.

Gaining this type of understanding is important for educators, administrators, and counselors who are attempting to assist students in career decision making, college or major selection, or in retaining students within particular fields or institutions. Describing students' development in facing a career barrier provides greater depth in understanding how students make career choices.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

The purpose of this study is to understand how undergraduate students manage the barrier of being denied admission to the School of Education at the University of Kansas, how they make career choices, and how they come to understand their decisions.

Specific research questions include:

- How does the identity and intellectual development of prospective teacher education students influence their understanding of the denial decision and their subsequent career choices?
- How do prospective teacher education students' career interests, choices, and goals develop prior to and after the barrier of being denied admission to the School of Education? What choices do these students make after facing this barrier?

#### **Method & Data Source**

The teacher education program selected for this study is an extended five-year program with students applying to the program in their sophomore year, entering the program as juniors, and graduating with a Bachelor of Science in Education (BSE) degree. Students are only admitted to the program once each year, applications are available in mid-November and the deadline to apply is February 1.

Although the program only requires a 2.75 GPA, the cumulative GPA for all applicants over the three years prior to this study was 3.34 on a 4.0 scale and for admitted applicants is a 3.39. For the academic years 2006-07, 2007-08, and 2008-09, 569 students have applied to the School of Education with 457 being admitted or provisionally admitted or 80% of the total applicants. Of these 569 student applicants, some declined admission, withdrew from the application process, or were wait listed to the program, which accounts for 26 students over these

three years or 4.6%. The number of students deferred or denied admission was 86 or 15% of applicants. The average GPA for students denied admission during these three years was 2.92. Although this number was lower than the average GPA for admitted students for these same years, 3.33, it is still higher than the published 2.75 requirement for the department (S. Martinez, personal communication, March 2, 2009, March 10, 2009, December 12, 2011).

Students in the teacher education program graduate with a strong general education background, extensive study in their content area, and a thorough grounding in the foundations of teaching and student learning. Field experiences in schools are an important aspect of the program. Students observe and participate in various settings throughout their program, which familiarizes them with many educational environments. Students who are rejected have the choice to remain at the University to apply the following year, change institutions for a different School of Education, or change majors. Currently there is little research on facing a career barrier such as this or how students make these choices.

This study used a basic qualitative research design to describe how students' interpret and understand their experiences. Interviews were conducted and then transcribed to create a description of each participant (Merriam, 1998). Each description includes information about the participant, how he or she discuss career choices both prior to and after the barrier of the School of Education denial decision, and an explanation of intellectual and identity development as these impact career decisions. Using these descriptions, a cross-analysis was completed using the existing research and theories to draw conclusions on how identity and intellectual development influence the career decisions of these college students.

Purposeful sampling was used to select participants. With the help of the School of Education, undergraduate students who were denied admission within a three year period were

contacted via an e-mail from the School of Education (Appendix A). Not all 86 students denied admission were able to be contacted. Many emails were returned undeliverable. This could be due to the student leaving KU or not updating contact information. Participants received a \$25.00 American Express gift card in exchange for their participation.

The researcher attempted to use snowball sampling. At the end of interviews with students who responded to the School of Education e-mail, an attempt was made to identify other possible participants. This did not, however, yield further participants. To reasonably explore the topic the goal was to interview approximately 10 current or former students of the 86 who at one time applied to the School of Education and were denied admission. Eight students agreed to participate. Despite the limitation this sample size places on research findings, the sample is representative of the specific nature of the study and establishes reasonable coverage of the phenomenon (Merriam, 1998).

Once participants were identified through the School of Education, respondents were asked to sign the consent form (Appendix B). Interviews were audio taped and lasted approximately 60 minutes. The researcher maintained interview notes and all interviews were transcribed as completed.

### **Data Collection**

A semi-structured interview format was used to interview participants. The topics discussed were structured to narrow the focus of the interview and ensure comparability of data (Maxwell, 2005). However flexibility of the interview questions and modifying questions throughout the research allowed discrepant data to be tested and a more contextual understanding of the participant's experiences to emerge (Maxwell).

Considering the research questions, the literature on intellectual and identity development, and the Social Cognitive Career Theory, five main lines of inquiry were established for use in the interview (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). These questions were created to make the participant feel comfortable, establish a general understanding of the student's background and personal interests, how they originally made the decision to come to KU and become a teacher, their reaction to the career barrier they faced, and their career choices since that time. The interview questions are listed in Appendix C. Questions were not asked verbatim rather used as a guideline for discussion with each participant. Follow up questions were also used to elicit affective information, participant opinions, clarification, or to explore possible themes or interpretations (Merriam, 1998; Rubin and Rubin).

The first two interviews were conducted as a pilot study to test the interview questions and ensure that these initial questions elicited the experiences and knowledge of the participants as related to the admission process and career choices (Rubin and Rubin, 2005). After transcribing these two interviews, the decision to use a case approach to analysis was made, to first describe each participant individually and then to consider what the cases represent collectively.

In order to explore the participants' individual cases, it is necessary to place each in time from the rejection letter to the time of their participation in this study. Table 1 provides this information.

The differing time frames could influence the results of this study. More recently rejected participants may express more emotions than those with longer time frames since the denial decision. Older college students would also hopefully, reveal higher levels of cognitive development than younger students. The distance from the rejection could allow some students

to now contextualize the denial that they couldn't at the time it occurred. Despite the time frame differences, participants' experiences and understanding of the barrier can be explored to provide insight to college students' career decision making processes. By first exploring each participant in a case format, themes across participants were then examined further.

Table 1

Time from Denial Decision to Participation in Study and Current Major

	Denial Decision Date/Year	Study Participation Date/Year	Amount of Time from Denial Decision to Study Participation	Current Major
Kelly	March 2008 Junior	March 2009 Senior	1 year	Applied Behavioral Science
Amanda	March 2009 Sophomore	September 2009 Junior	6 months	English
Dana	March 2009 Junior	April 2009 Junior	1 month	Mathematics
John	March 2009 Sophomore	October 2009 Junior	7 months	Economics
Claire	March 2009 Junior	April 2009 Junior	1 month	History
Megan	March 2009 Sophomore	April 2009 Sophomore	1 month	Education
Alyssa	March 2007 Junior	May 2009 Fifth year Senior	2 years/2 months	Education
Carolyn	March 2008 Sophomore	April 2009 Junior	1 year/1 month	Education

### Trustworthiness of Data & Data Analysis

The researcher attempted to design this study to be reliable and trustworthy. The interviews were analyzed as collected so that leads could be followed and themes further explored (Merriam, 1998). As each interview was conducted, interview tapes were transcribed and analyzed on an individual basis to create a description of each participant. When all

interviews were completed and all cases compiled, the researcher then grouped the information from each interview to analyze how existing theory provided a lens to view the cases.

Data were first reviewed and coded for the various aspects of identity development and the student's intellectual processing of his or her career choices. The researcher first examined each student's career choices and decisions. Using Baxter Magolda's (2000) development of self-authorship concepts (absolute knowing, transitional knowing, independent knowing, contextual knowing) and Marcia (1966) and Josselson's (1987) identity development statuses (identity diffusion, identity achieved, moratorium, identity foreclosed), the researcher then used these theories to explain and describe each participant's understanding of the denial decision as well as their own career decision making process. Applying these descriptions to the Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent et al., 1996) allowed for an examination of where each student was in the career development process after the denial letter. The researcher then identified the commonalities and differences among participants' identity and intellectual development to describe potential influences on career development and career choices.

### **Validity**

As Merriam (1998) states, validity focuses on "how findings match reality" (p. 201). There were two processes used to increase the validity of the findings in this study. First, clarification of researcher bias (Creswell, 2003; Maxwell, 2005). I considered my own experiences to create "an open and honest narrative" (Creswell, p. 196). I attempted to clarify my biases and how these may influence the study.

I have worked in higher education for over 12 years. My work has taken me to four different mid-western cities at three different types of institutions, mid-size four year public institutions, a large public research university, and a national proprietary school focusing on



technology and business. My experiences range from living with students in student housing, adjudicating discipline, advising student activity groups, academic advising, career counseling, and teaching. I have a genuine interest in learning about college students, their development, and helping them to be academically and vocationally successful.

My experiences have given me an opportunity to work with professionals in all levels of higher education and in a variety of campus offices. I think academic professionals often create personal theories of how students develop based on their own experiences, myself included. When we think back on our own choices and consider what was important throughout our college career, we have a tendency to believe that others make choices and decisions in the same ways we did. I don't necessarily believe this is the best way to help students. As we study college student development we can alter those personal theories to create more realistic perspectives on today's students and the world they face. I have a genuine interest in learning more about where students are developmentally in the career decision making process and I believe this type of research can begin to establish a more realistic and tested perspective of college student career development.

While conducting this research, I am also working on a degree in Counseling Psychology. Counselors utilize theories to contextualize clients and diagnose. As I construct the cases about the participants in this study then, it is more natural for me to contextualize each within the theoretical frameworks being used as part of this study. As a part of this qualitative study, I know that my perspective as the researcher will influence how the research results will be presented.

Peer debriefers were also used to increase validity (Merriam, 1998; Creswell, 2003). Four colleagues were asked to comment on findings and discuss emerging themes, perceptions,

and attitudes. In this way, confirming views and conclusions of the data was made in more confidence. Using peer debriefers also helped in exploring the biases and perspectives previously mentioned. The four peer debriefers range in experiences and educational background. The first has a master's degree in education with a focus in counseling. She has worked in higher education for over 10 years. The second peer debriefer has worked in a variety of counseling settings and is currently completing a master's degree in counseling psychology. The third has an MBA with a focus in human resources and is starting a PhD in higher education. She has worked in higher education for over 10 years. The fourth has a master's degree in Agricultural Education and a PhD in Comprehensive Occupational Education emphasizing Policy and Leadership. She has taught at both the secondary and post-secondary levels. She has worked in career education for 30 years with 15 years at the university level.

### **Limitations**

There are several limitations to this study. First, is the scope of the research questions related to the theoretical orientations referenced. Baxter Magolda's (1992, 1993, 1995, 1998b) work and Marcia (1966) and Josselson's (1987) research focus on multiple lines of inquiry (academics, career decisions, politics, gender relations, etc.). This study only targets career decision making, therefore interview questions were only aimed to discover participants' perceptions around career decisions. If other lines of inquiry were followed, different conclusions may be drawn regarding intellectual or identity development characteristics.

A second limitation is that this study was only conducted at one large mid-western university and included participants from only one competitive college major. Any comparisons to other schools or career fields may not be applicable.

There are also several limitations regarding the sample of participants. The sample in this study included one male and seven females. Additional research is needed to more accurately describe gender differences. The participants in this study were also all traditional aged college students. Older students may fall into different levels of intellectual development or identity statuses. This study also does not take culture into account. A student's culture impacts perspectives on the world, family interactions, and values. All of these influence identity and cognitive development and how well particular theories can be used to describe development.

Another limitation is the varied time frames between participants being denied admission and when each participated in this study. Participants who had more time between the denial letter and their interview may have been able to contextualize the situation more clearly in time than those who were only denied a month prior. That many of the 86 students who were denied admission were not able to be contacted is another limitation. The denied students could still be at KU, have transferred, or have left higher education. The inability to reach possible participants limits study involvement and the scope of the results.

Given these limitations, care should be given to generalizing the results of this study to other schools or students. Although these limits hinder the study's external validity, this study does add another perspective to the existing literature on how college students know themselves and their world. Describing how students make career decisions within their identity and intellectual development was also achieved. This research also adds another perspective to the career barrier research in identify a specific, objective barrier and exploring how students approach post-barrier choices.

## Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study is to understand how undergraduate students manage the barrier of being denied admission to a School of Education at a particular university, how they make career choices, and how they come to understand their decisions. Of the 86 students who were denied admission to the School of Education within the three year period, 2006-2007, 2007-2008, and 2008-2009, eight students agreed to participate in this study. In order to fully explore the research questions, a brief case of each participant is presented along with descriptions of the individual's intellectual and identity development characteristics. To protect the identity of individuals, pseudonyms were used. The cases are presented based on developmental levels. The students who displayed lower levels of cognitive and identity development, such as Identity Foreclosed and Absolute Knowing, are presented first. The cases then move through the identity development statuses and intellectual development levels to the final cases, which present identity achieved and contextual knowing.

### Case 1: Kelly's Story

Kelly is a middle-class, female, senior now majoring in Applied Behavioral Science with an emphasis in early childhood education and a concentration in art history. Kelly grew up in the suburbs of Kansas City with her adoptive parents, an older sister, and her twin sister. Her father graduated from the University of New Mexico and is now a financial planner and her mother went to KU and is a Special Education teacher. Kelly's older sister went to the University of Virginia and now works as a financial analyst. Her twin sister also attends KU and although unsure, Kelly thought she was pre-law.

When asked why she came to KU, she said that she "was kind of just raised a Kansas [university mascot]" and that she "only applied to KU." She also talked about the distance to get

back home and how much her mom liked the campus. She first came to KU on a scholarship for dance and although she mentions it as an interest, she has stopped dancing. Since being at KU, she says her sorority and participation in Rock Chalk Review have had the greatest influence on who she is today because these activities helped her form her group of friends.

Kelly says that she's always had her mind set on being a teacher and mentions that growing up, her parents thought she would be a teacher too. She mentions her patience and how she works well with others as the reasons she would be a good teacher.

Kelly applied to the School of Education during her junior year and received her denial letter in March of 2008, about a year prior to this study being conducted. She recalls being depressed, sad, and crying a lot when she got her letter.

I was a junior and I didn't get in, and I'm like, shoot, I don't have a back up plan. I thought I would get into the School of Ed. I'm never going to graduate college. What am I going to do with my life? So, I think I got my letter in March so kind of just for the rest of the semester I didn't put forth any effort into my classes anymore because I was so discouraged, I just didn't know what to do, and then I kind of figured it all out.

When asked how she started to "figure it all out," she talks about her older sister doing research for her and telling her about her options. She talked it over with some friends and her parents. She also met with a School of Education advisor to explore her options. Her dad went with her to her advising appointment because she had her wisdom teeth removed the same week and admits that she doesn't remember much of the meeting. During the advising meeting they discussed where she was on the waiting list and the possibility of transferring to another school or changing majors.

Kelly knew she didn't want to leave KU because of her friendships, how much she loves the campus, and she wanted "to graduate from KU." Her parents told her that she needed to figure out another path then. She considered psychology, but "Science just isn't my thing," so she ruled it out. She likes math, but "didn't even come close to meeting the credit hours needed so that wasn't an option." She admits that she was also interested in business, but it would increase the number of years she would have to be in college and she wasn't interested in that.

After ruling these options out, Kelly met with the Director of the Applied Behavioral Science (ABSC) program. She mentions that "he was just so passionate about it [ABSC]" that it got her interested and "that's how I kind of chose the different major." Her sorority sisters told her more about the program, professors, and the requirements. She also talked more with her dad and her older sister.

After taking one course over the summer, she went back to the director and says "we kind of scheduled out my classes, and actually he planned out the rest of my college education until I graduate. So he helped out a lot." When asked how she feels about her decisions now, she talks about how many more courses she has left and not being able to graduate with her friends. She mentions a continued interest in becoming a teacher and possibly going to "Teach for America," but her parents don't really want her to do that because she would have to teach in inner city schools that they consider unsafe.

Kelly's denial decision occurred a year ago. She is currently finishing her bachelor's degree in the ABSC program and expects to graduate in 6 months. She is unsure of her next steps after graduation, saying that she might move home to avoid paying rent or possibly stay in Lawrence. Within the next five years she hopes to have a teaching job and be "living in a new city that I really like."

**Intellectual development.** Kelly demonstrates the characteristics of absolute knowing in looking to the authority figures in her life for answers on what to do when she faced the career barrier that the School of Education denial decision presented (Baxter Magolda, 1992). She talks about her older sister conducting research for her on other ways to become a teacher, “she did research and told me . . . that I didn’t have to like be in the school of ed to become a teacher.” Even attending a meeting with a School of Education advisor about the denial decision, Kelly brought her father along and “was still kind of drugged up” after having her wisdom teeth removed. She seems to rely on authorities to do research and give her the “right” answers. She also tends to rely on authorities in choosing a different major. She seems to first be influenced by the director of the Applied Behavioral Science program saying, “he was just so passionate about it . . . he just got me interested in it, so that’s how I kind of chose the different major.” She then went back to meet with her advisor, who “planned out the rest of my college education until I graduate.”

The two gender patterns that seem to emerge in absolute knowing are receiving and mastery (Baxter Magolda, 1992). Kelly illustrates characteristics of the receiving pattern as she seems to rely on her friends for support and encouragement and depends on peers as a network to listen and ask questions. She reveals this as she talks about her sorority sisters supporting her in making the change of major to Applied Behavioral Sciences. She also displays characteristics of the receiving pattern when she discusses what attracted her to KU’s teaching program, “I liked the whole concept of like cadres or whatever. You just have like kind of a group of people that you become familiar with and study with.” The mastery pattern involves demonstrating interest to authorities and valuing evaluation to improve mastery of information (Baxter Magolda). Kelly does not seem to display signs of this pattern. As she explains her interactions with

authorities, her focus is on the information they provide, not how she demonstrates her interest. This can be seen in her conversations with authorities such as her meeting with the Applied Behavioral Science director who “explained it [the Applied Behavioral Science program],” her sister who gives her “other options,” and her meeting with the representative from Teach for America, “so I had an interview with her and she explained it.” The focus for Kelly seems to be on the information she can receive from authorities.

Kelly also seemed self-assured and confident. She didn’t give the impression of questioning her choices or thinking twice about the direction she was headed. Knowledge for Kelly seemed certain. Even in her new major, she was faced with an assignment “to either write like a huge research proposal or we have to be a research assistant, and I chose the research assistant . . . I have like graduate students above me that just tell me what to do.” Rather than choosing a transitional knowing type of activity that a research proposal would pose, Kelly seems to make the choice which maintains the certainty of what she knows and allows for authorities to tell her what to do.

The only hint that there may be a shift in Kelly’s thought processes in the future is when she’s asked if there are things she’s learned that she wants to incorporate into her own classroom. She responds that, “having my own classroom kind of scares me . . . I don’t know. I mean, I’m really creative, so I’ll probably plan a lot of hands on activities for them to learn.” This is the only point in the interview where she admits uncertainty. There was little indication during Kelly’s interview that she was trying to understand information as transitional knowers do. She seemed satisfied with parentally derived expectations and the knowledge others could give her.

**Identity development.** Characteristics of Kelly’s identity seem to be best described by the identity foreclosure status as described by Marcia (1966) and Josselson (1987). Identity



foreclosed individuals tend to carry out childhood plans without question (Josselson, 1987).

Becoming a teacher for Kelly seems like a choice made early in life by her parents, “I think they just always thought I would be a teacher.” Just as Kelly seems to turn to authorities to think through her decisions, she also appears to maintain authoritarian values and beliefs without question even stating that her family is the most important value in her life (Marcia, 1966). Josselson (1987) found that identity foreclosed individuals are “Nest Builders,” maintaining attachments to parents and their home. Kelly displays these traits saying that her parents still influence her and that as a fifth year senior she still goes home, “maybe once a week, maybe once every other week.”

Although hard working and often high achieving, identity foreclosed individuals tend to have a self-esteem that is vulnerable to negative information (Marcia, 1966; Josselson, 1987). Kelly tends to display this characteristic in talking about her reaction to the rejection letter from the School of Education, “I was kind of at a loss, like I didn’t really know what I was going to do. I was a junior and I didn’t get in, . . . for the rest of the semester I didn’t put forth any effort into my classes anymore because I was so discouraged.”

The identity foreclosed status is also marked by a commitment without a crisis (Marcia, 1966; Josselson, 1987). Although Kelly was faced with a career barrier that could have caused her to express more questions about herself and her career goals, Kelly instead seems to decide that she needs to find another way to graduate and states, “I kind of figured it all out.” Even when asked about her future, she talks about being at KU for half of the following year and then,

The other half, hopefully I’ll have a job lined up so . . . I will just either move home and not pay rent or maybe I’ll stay in Lawrence and get a job and just earn some money that I can have. In the next like 5 years, hopefully living in a new city that I really like, in my

own place, I can't wait to live by myself . . . I'd like a teaching job. I don't know where, I don't want to say a place, because I don't want to jinx it.

Kelly does not express any questions or uncertainty in her comments as the moratorium or identity formation status would suggest. She seems to move from the rejection letter to making new career choices bypassing any identity exploration.

### **Case 2: Amanda's Story**

Amanda is a middle class, female, who is a junior majoring in English. She enjoys reading and watching television and tries to babysit as often as possible. She was involved with sports throughout her life and specifically gymnastics for about ten years. She grew up with both parents and her two younger brothers in the suburbs of Chicago, IL. Both parents graduated from the University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign. Her mother was also an English major and worked for a newspaper, and although Amanda doesn't mention her father's college major, he works in advertising.

When asked about the greatest influences on her in the past two or three years, she states that her parents have “greatly affected who I am as a person.” Amanda goes on to discuss how the foundation of morals her parents have given her influence the relationships she now develops, talking about “friends who have very different kinds of families, like divorced parents, or just . . . other issues.” She thinks it is cool to get to know people from different states and towns and to have the opportunity to learn from them.

When asked why she wanted to be a teacher, she states, “just the fact that I had a lot of really good teachers growing up. And I always thought that would be cool if I could like, influence kids that way.” Before teaching was her career choice, she discusses journalism or marketing as career options. “It was one of those things where I was like, I would like to . . .

think that I could do that, it interests me and I think it's cool, but I didn't know if it was something that I would really want to do." Amanda's only work experience is in babysitting and being a nanny for a number of years. As she looks ahead she believes, "I'm going to have to do some things to put on my resume."

Amanda went to the University of Iowa for her freshman year because it was only three hours from home, but after a bad roommate situation and "some floor drama," decided to travel the eight hours to KU. She loves it here and says it's "the best decision I ever made."

While at the University of Iowa, she was undecided about her major and took her general education courses. She transferred to KU undecided. When she transferred, she took a journalism course, but says that she knew she wanted to major in education. She talks about the choice in somewhat simple terms,

Like I've thought about it. I had been like babysitting and being a nanny like forever and . . . it was always like in the back of my mind, but I was sort of like, I didn't know if there was something else I wanted to do more. So, I finally decided it was what I wanted to do.

Amanda received the denial letter from the School of Education prior to Spring Break and says she was upset and "freaking out." She admits that when she applied to the School of Education that she was rushing to get the application completed and take the test. She knew that she didn't have the core coursework completed. She states, "I just sort of assumed, like, I hope this works out and I'll get in. Like I just sort of thought it was going to be okay." She was surprised and shocked by the rejection letter because she's always thought, "oh, it'll work out." She states when it didn't work out that she had "to think of another plan."

When asked how she went from the rejection letter to becoming an English major, she says, "I was trying to think of what . . . would be the most logical major to have that would still

kind of apply to teaching.” She has an aunt who is a high school English teacher and only majored in English and after talking with her, Amanda decided that was a good idea. She likes English and even if she decided not to teach, “I would be fine with being an English major and doing something that comes out of that.”

Since Amanda is only at the beginning of her junior year, she still has at least two years before she will graduate. When asked what the future holds, since the denial decision six months ago, Amanda comments that she can’t believe how “college is just flying by.” In the future she would like to “go back to Chicago and get an apartment in the city with my friends.” She again mentions the possibility of teaching, but questions if she could handle the challenges of inner city schools.

**Intellectual development.** Amanda emphasizes uncertainty throughout her interview, which would eliminate the possibility that she represents in Baxter Magolda’s (1992) absolute knowing stage. She actually says the phrase, “I don’t know” more than ten times. Other phrases demonstrating uncertainty include, “just kind of,” “just sort of,” and “I wasn’t sure.” When asked about her career plans now, Amanda again displays uncertainty, first talking about going on after KU to obtain a teaching certificate while substitute teaching, then says, “Yeah, I don’t know. I don’t know where the art history thing is going to go,” referring to her minor.

Amanda does display the characteristics of transitional knowing-interpersonal pattern (Baxter Magolda, 1992, 1993, 1998b). Amanda seems to prefer to collect others’ ideas and resolve uncertainties with personal judgments. This differs from the impersonal pattern that prefers to use logic or research to resolve uncertainties (Baxter Magolda, 1992). One example is when she talks about receiving her denial letter. She listed others’ ideas and thoughts in order to understand her future decisions. She first talks about her mom’s perspective in comforting her,

“Cause I was like, oh no, what am I going to do now? Like freaking out, and my mom was like, settle down, we’ll figure it out. If this is really what you want to do, you can find another way to do it.” Amanda then talks with her aunt who is a high school English teacher, as she tries to determine what she should major in,

I knew that if I wanted to teach anything it would be English . . . and I had talked to, my aunt was actually an English, a high school English teacher, and she was an English major in college, and she was just telling me, like how that happened for her, like what she did. And I was like well, that makes sense. It seemed like a good idea. And I like English, even if I decided not to be a teacher.

In both cases, Amanda listens to their ideas, uncertain with the path she should take, and seems to resolve the uncertainty with her personal conclusions that she does like English. Unlike absolute knowing, Amanda seems to understand that there are choices for her, even though she is uncertain of the direction to take. She collects her mother and aunt’s perspectives in order to make a personal conclusion. Amanda does not seem to have reached independent knowing, however, because she appears to maintain her reliance on the perspectives and opinions of authorities in order to resolve her uncertainties (Baxter Magolda, 1992). She does not take the next analytical step of thinking about others’ ideas in relation to her own.

**Identity development.** Amanda displays characteristics of Marcia (1966) and Josselson’s (1987) identity formation or moratorium status. She gave the impression of being actively in a crisis and exploratory phase, struggling to make commitments. This would be absent if she were identity diffused or identity foreclosed. In discussing her career plans after the denial decision, Amanda displays this crisis in first laying out a plan, but then questioning it,

I'm an English major and I'm actually an art history minor now . . . as of now, I'm thinking, I'll graduate with my English degree and probably go back to Chicago and I was trying to look at schools, there are smaller colleges that are in the city . . . where you could get just a degree in education, so I think I would do that.

Although she lays this out as a plan, she goes on to say that she's unsure where the art history minor may lead, and then says,

The only other thing I really thought about was like . . . a lot of companies . . . that aren't English based, look for English majors, like you can write the company newsletter, you can be the person who helps people do any sort of writing . . . I don't really know what other options I have as an English major and I don't even know if that sounded like something I could do.

Amanda has selected English as her major with a minor in art history, but she seems to struggle to determine what her major means to her career. Although she makes comments about still wanting to be a teacher, she also contradicts herself saying, "I guess I could use my English major some other way" and "I don't really know what other options I have."

Amanda was an engaging and lively woman. She had an insightful story to share about her career choices, but also made comments indicating a low self-esteem and self-efficacy. She makes comments throughout her interview, "I don't even know if that sounded like something I could do" and "I just don't know if I'd be good at it."

She appears to have awareness that she has choices and to be emotionally attuned to her options, but is also in some ways paralyzed by her awareness. She says "It also freaks me out that I'm that old. You know, that I'm going to have to actually get a job soon or something."

Later in the interview when asked about her future she states, “Oh my gosh, that’s crazy. . . . it freaks me out to think about the future.”

Amanda seems to be in the process of testing her options. She contradicts and doubts herself, and seems paralyzed by the choices she may have. There were no indications of an identity achieved status, as she seemed uncertain throughout her interview and there were no hints that she had integrated the idea of becoming a teacher into her identity. Even in closing she comments, “I don’t even know the alternative routes to becoming a teacher.”

### **Case 3: Dana’s Story**

Dana is a middle class college student. She is from a small farming town in northwest Kansas, graduating high school with only eight other students. She says that where she comes from has had an immense influence on her, because it is “Podunk Kansas,” which is not what she wants for herself. As she says, “there’s not much to grow there . . . I want to grow.”

Throughout her life, Dana felt that her parents instilled the values of having a strong sense of family, working hard, and setting goals to achieve. She has three siblings, an older sister who graduated from Fort Hays State University with a bachelor’s degree in Political Science, an older brother currently graduating with a bachelor’s in business also from Fort Hays State University, and a younger brother graduating from high school with no college plans. Although her parents were divorced when she was in middle school, she feels both parents raised her as she went back and forth between them. Growing up, her father was “a city man” but also farmed with her uncle. Her mother was a stay at home mom. Neither parent had a college education.

She started her college career at Wichita State University majoring in math, although she admits she wasn’t really thinking about a career when she started, rather she was just taking

classes. She states, “I wanted to go to college and that’s what you did. I didn’t really have a goal in mind then.” After a year and a half she decided to transfer to Kansas State University (K-State). Although still majoring in math at K-State, she began to consider teaching as a career. She decided “I wasn’t happy with the direction I was going at K-State and I really do want to pursue education.” She transferred to University of Kansas in the middle of the 2008-2009 academic year as a junior and during that same semester applied for the School of Education. One of her reasons for transferring to KU was “to get into the education program.” It is a “high ranking program in the State of Kansas . . . and I love the campus.”

In talking about her interests, she talks about her love of sports, her job in an office, working with computers, working with people, and being around children. When she talks about her decision to become a teacher, she says, “I’ve always said that I want a career that can let me give back . . . [and] let’s me have a family.” When asked how she finalized teaching as her career choice, her response is geared more for the love of her subject matter though. “I’ve worked so hard to complete all these math classes, which I love to do. If I could do math everyday and not have to take any other classes I would.” She never mentions an interest in teaching or the tasks involved in teaching. Her initial choice of teaching as a career really comes more from the idea of how teaching can fit into her future and her uncertainty of other careers she could pursue in math. She states an interest in working with children, having time off in the summers, and the idea of teaching not being “a closed option.”

Teaching seems more like an experiment for her, “I wanted to see if I could get it done. Like I wanted to see if I was able to do it.” She never imagined actually getting accepted into the School of Education.



I didn't really think I was going to get in, so it wasn't a big surprise. I mean there was still a little hope, like maybe, you know, I am a high need person, math and science, and so I thought maybe I might be an exception, but when I got it [the rejection letter], I was like oh, I guess I figured . . .

After talking with an advisor Dana has now decided to transfer back to K-State to complete her Bachelor's degree in math and then apply for graduate schools in education. She says that the denial decision has "definitely put a big damper in my road." She says she currently feels nervous about her career choices since getting the denial letter last month. Stating that, "I'm going to get through summer . . . I'm just worried about that right now." Within the next few years she sees herself teaching and possibly moving out of Kansas.

**Intellectual development.** Dana can best be characterized as a transitional knower – impersonal approach (Baxter Magolda, 1992). Dana mentions family values, however, she refers to "a sense of closeness and togetherness" rather than a reliance on her parents. Even when asked how her family feels about her future plans now, the only indication of their influence on her is that "they're very supportive." Dana did not seem to rely on authorities for knowledge as an absolute knower would. She even discusses how she "had been ill advised in the math department," almost distrusting authorities.

Dana seems to see knowledge as partially certain as a transitional knower would (Baxter Magolda, 1992). She focuses on expressing her thoughts, debating, and thinking about information as in the impersonal approach. She makes no comments about collecting others opinions as an interpersonal pattern would suggest. She also seems to value fair and practical evaluation, another characteristic of the impersonal pattern of transitional knowing. This is

implied in the final comments of her interview when she discusses not getting into the school of education,

I told my advisor that, I said . . . I know my GPA is low . . . there's nothing to blame but myself. I said but, you know, there are reasons for it and I can explain, and she said you know, try to implement them in your essays . . . it's always good to own up to it. . . . And it was really hard to implement it into my essays because it really wasn't directed to, "You have a low GPA, why?" So, I did. So I guess that's kind of the negative thing I felt about it is, they just kind of look at what's on paper, and they don't look at the extra. You know, and I guess that's part of what the essay is for, and the advisor did come back and tell me, you had great essays, great recommendations, it all came down to the GPA. And I really wanted to be like, well, can I explain it? You know, can you give me a chance to explain it?

When asked how she decided to become a teacher, she demonstrates the characteristics of transitional knowing, as well as her uncertainty in making choices.

And so it kind of came down to like, what am I going to do with my life? You know? And I was looking down and I was like, ughh, it's a dead-end road. So, I thought of education, . . . there's it's not just sitting in a classroom teaching, there's so much more that you can do with it. And so, that's basically what led me to it, is that, it wasn't just a closed option. Like it definitely, if I got my education degree it could open up a lot more doors.

Dana seems to question herself, respond through rationalizing, and come to a decision which she believes is logical, "it wasn't just a closed option." Later in her interview, she expresses her views again in a laundry list of multiple options she could choose after the denial

decision, UKanTeach (a program to prepare secondary math and science teachers), a bachelor's degree in math, transferring back to K-State, and going to graduate school for teaching. She appears to logically deduce her decision by the amount of time each option would take. After thinking through each option, debating the pros and cons of each, she states,

I decided I should go back to K-State, I can finish by December and by that time I can apply for graduate school. So, by the time, if I finish in December, get into grad school in January and complete that within two years, it will be two and a half years, I'll have my BS and my masters done, rather than just a BS.

Dana's uncertainty here seems to be resolved through logic. Although she doesn't give the impression that she believes authorities are the source of knowledge, she also doesn't seem to acknowledge and have an appreciation for others' opinions as an independent knower would. Independent knowing is marked by an exchange of ideas with others (Baxter Magolda, 1992). Dana seems so focused on her own thoughts and resolving uncertainties through logic, that others' opinions don't appear to even be considered. The only minor reference made to another person's perspective is when Dana says, "my sister and my mom, they would love to see me in education. I mean they've said so numerous times, they'd love to see me either teach or be within a school or college." Although she hints at some acknowledgement of their perspective, there is no indication that she compares her family's reasons for wanting her to become a teacher to her own thoughts as an independent knower would do. Instead Dana seems to see this as one more piece of information to rationalize her own perspective.

**Identity development.** Dana has made commitments to becoming a teacher and to transferring back to K-State. These transitions require an application, which requires a commitment in itself. This would indicate that Dana does not represent the characteristics of the

identity diffused status (Marcia, 1966; Josselson, 1987). The identity foreclosed status would not describe Dana because she seems to have separated herself from the opinions of her family as she finds her own voice and rationale. She also expresses uncertainty about the future, which suggests a crisis or the identity formation status. She displays this as she discusses how she sees her future,

I don't know. That's a little scary to think of. Within the next year, don't know. Within the next five, five to ten, I just consider myself to be teaching somewhere. Teaching, family, you know, I don't know necessarily in Kansas, I haven't traveled that much and I'm open to moving and going anywhere.

Here she seems to display a continued interest in exploring and testing her options and what she wants from life. She appears to still be merging new ideas of who she is with older ones. This exploration would not be characteristic of the identity foreclosed status. This uncertainty would be more representative of the moratorium status (Marcia, 1966; Josselson, 1987).

The School of Education denial decision seems to have caused a crisis as described in the identity formation or moratorium phase (Marcia, 1966; Josselson, 1987). She comments about her current career plans after the denial decision from the School of Education,

I don't know what I'm going to do with my degree now. You know, if I just get my regular BS and not have an education degree, I don't know if I'm going to go back to grad school right away, I don't know if I should . . . get a job and then go back to grad school. I don't know what I'd do. So it's definitely put a huge like red flag in that area and I'm kind of at the unknown.

Although an engaging woman, she gives the impression of being uncertain about her future. She seemed emotionally aware of her options, but contradicted herself regarding career goals and

plans. When she discusses her reasons for becoming a teacher, she comments that an education degree “could open up a lot more doors.” However later in the interview she comments that having a bachelor’s degree in math and a master’s in education has “a little more versatility.” Although she admits that the School of Education has to have qualifications and “set the line somewhere,” she passionately ended her interview stating, “I’ll do it, some way, some how, somewhere.”

#### **Case 4: John’s Story**

John is a middle class male from Chicago, IL. He is a junior now majoring in Economics. He moved to Chicago with his family when he was six. He has one older brother who recently graduated from the University of Iowa with a degree in Economics. His brother is still living in Iowa looking for a job. His parents live in the suburbs of Chicago. His mother works as a tailor and his father works at a printing press, neither has a college degree.

Coming to KU was a financial choice for John. He was choosing between Indiana University and University of Kansas and Kansas met his financial needs. He believes though, that living in Lawrence has had an influence on who he is today. “It’s definitely nothing like Chicago . . . , it has a little bit like a small town feeling, but at the same time there are big events like basketball. Whenever there’s a basketball game, or even a football game nowadays, . . . everyone from all over . . . is going to come to here, to Lawrence and just to watch KU.” John enjoys the community and the school spirit at KU.

Growing up John’s father tried to influence his career choices, encouraging law or medical school, “where the big bucks are.” John states that his dad “always just kind of had that little push . . . why don’t you go into this area or why don’t you go into this area.” Besides teaching, John also considered going into the ministry and becoming a youth pastor. His reason

for not taking that route was “Cause ministry definitely takes a lot of commitment, . . . a God’s calling,” which overwhelmed him. He does have a passion for helping people though. He says that he definitely enjoys giving others smiles or compliments to brighten their day.

When asked what’s attractive to him about teaching, he talks about being “an influence” and a role model. He feels that the teachers he had who became mentors focused on having a “real relationship with students.” He still wants to be able to do that. Ironically, John talks about his high school days as being the student who didn’t like getting up in the morning or going through a full day of classes. He says, “as soon as that bell rang, I was the first one out of the school.” When he came to college though, his perceptions changed. He talks about the process of declaring a major and making the choice to go into education,

I personally like explaining things to people. And just kind of helping them to understand something that I know . . . kind of have expertise in . . . that’s what kind of made me want to do teaching and go into education. And all throughout high school I had great teachers who kind of motivated me and taught me, just taught me how to work through my struggles, and kind of hardships . . . it definitely encouraged me through high school and . . . here I am.

When he received the denial letter from the School of Education he talks about being devastated. From his current job in another campus department, he knew that acceptance letters tend to be shorter and that decline letters are longer with more information. When John opened his letter, “the letter was kind of long . . . when I was reading it I was kind of like, ugh. Like, I was just standing there reading it and then I kind of read it out loud ‘cause my roommates were there too, and then my roommates were like, no way.” He talks about just sitting there “soaking up the fact, the reality.”

He decided to put the letter aside for the time being, but started to consider his purpose in attending KU. In weighing his options after the denial letter, one of the choices was returning home. During spring break he went home and decided to visit some friends at other schools. He decided that “just taking the train to classes was not my thing.” Then John considered the University of Illinois, but in thinking about attending another big school, decided “base line is I want to stay.”

In choosing a new major in economics, he talked with his older brother in Iowa who was in his last semester as an Economics major. His brother encouraged him to try economics because John seemed to enjoy it, he enjoyed it, and their uncle was an entrepreneur with a similar background. “And my brother’s like you might give it a try, it might work for you too.” John realized from taking economics courses in high school and in college that he found these classes relatively easy and interesting. He decided, “here’s an opportunity, let’s just take it.”

John met with a number of people in making his decision, his advisor, a School of Education advisor, and an economics advisor. He decided that economics would give him flexibility to try some different things. “I’m definitely up for new adventures and . . . seeing how it works out and if I don’t like it I would love to have options to move away from it [economics] or try different things.” He now sees the School of Education denial decision seven months ago as “an eye opener for me to rethink what I’m going to do in life.”

John’s current plan is to try to find a job after college, but if he doesn’t find one, then apply to graduate schools in education. Even if he does find a job in his new career field after college, he is considering still getting a master’s degree in education while working and eventually teaching. He justifies his thoughts by saying “I can’t say no to a high paying

position,” but sees the possibility in the future of teaching economics to high school juniors and seniors.

**Intellectual development.** John seems to view knowledge as partially certain. He does not appear to believe that authorities have all the answers as absolute knowers would, but rather he tends to see some information as fixed rather than subjective. He exemplifies this in discussing why he chose economics as his new major. He shares his perspective that economics “is not simple per say, but you can understand it.” He continues saying,

It makes sense. Like everything kind of makes sense, it’s not like history where you can have different perspectives on things or like, or literature where you can analyze different things, like econ and math kind of go together, it’s this because it’s this, there’s no other way around it.

In this example, John implies that history and literature are more subjective and open to interpretation, but mathematics and economics are fixed subject matters. In this way, he seems to view knowledge as partially certain. This is characteristic of transitional knowing (Baxter Magolda, 1992).

John also seems to represent the impersonal approach, because even though he collects others ideas, he seems to focus on expressing, debating, and thinking over his own views. There seems to be a balance between certainty and uncertainty with the use of research and logic to make choices (Baxter Magolda, 1992). One example of this balance is in conducting research over his Spring Break to decide what to do.

I went back during spring break and during that time a lot of my friends were still in school, because the breaks were kind of off schedule. And like I kind of visited them in school just to . . . see for myself what it’d be like to go to a Chicago school or a city



school or something like that and just taking the train to classes was not my thing.

[laughter] I was like, I wouldn't see myself getting up in the morning, having the motivation to just get on the train and then get off the train and walk another couple of miles and doing all that stuff every morning. So, I was just kind of . . . maybe like, a city school won't be for me, so what about like University of Illinois? Like all the big schools like that, and I just kind of thought about it more and more, and I was just like well, I really do just want to stay . . .

After conducting his Spring Break research to determine if he wants to stay at KU, John goes on to talk with his current academic advisor, a School of Education advisor, and an economics advisor to obtain “feedback and input” on his change of major decision. Although there is an indication that he emphasizes thinking for himself as in independent knowing, he still seems to view knowledge as partially certain and to turn to authorities for information which is more characteristic of transitional knowing (Baxter Magolda, 1992). He rationalizes his decision saying, “I was kind of already . . . in the process of finishing that degree already . . . so I wasn't really losing a semester or losing any time or wasting any time, so I was just like, well, I don't want to waste anymore time.”

**Identity development.** John was an energetic young man who seemed to be in tune with his choices, and more than willing to share his story. Although he gave the impression of being confident in himself, he seemed to be actively struggling and searching for his identity, which would eliminate the identity diffused and identity foreclosed statuses (Marcia, 1966; Josselson, 1987). John most closely seemed to reflect Marcia and Josselson's identity formation/moratorium identity status. He appears to find some sense of who he is, however, as a KU student,

The fact that I can say that I go to Kansas or like when I got back home during winter break or summer break I'm like one of the ones in my group of friends in Chicago that went out the farthest . . . I'm still going to go there, and the fact that I can come back every break and say that, and people are like, "oh, you're back," you know and give you that warm welcome . . .

Although he makes the choice to stay at KU and to major in Economics, he suggests that he is still searching for what the future may hold. He talks about becoming a bank teller or a senior banker, a teacher, working in accounting, or working in a cubicle for a company. He continues to explore his options even stating that "not getting into the School of Education was an eye opener for me to rethink what I'm going to do in life and just kind of have more options."

Josselson (1987) found women to display maladaptive behaviors such as lower self-esteem. John, as a male, does not seem to display any behaviors which could be construed as maladaptive. He appears to be a positive and confident young man. He even states, "it was an experience and in life, you definitely need to get rejected sometimes from big things and goals need to be shattered in front of your face so that you realize that you need to kind of get over it and go for something bigger."

John seems to be aware of his options and still exploring where his new major could lead. Where John appears to show the most contradictory thoughts is in his career choices after college. "I kind of see just like, something in business, like the cubicle kind of thing, I kind of see that happening . . . I wouldn't honestly mind being in a banking or a senior banking position." Later he talks again about his career plans for the future, "well I'm kind of hoping I don't get a job right out of college because I still, I want to go to grad school and get a teaching degree and teach as my first career." Although John expresses economics as the right major

choice for him, he also seems to continue to explore his career options, even thinking in contradictory ways about those options.

John does not seem to represent the identity achieved status, because he still seems to be testing options before committing to a way of being. As he talks about his choices within economics now, he states, “it’s a more universal option more kind of like open road and I can take different things and if I don’t like this way then I can go this way . . . if I do like that one thing, then I will kind of stick to it, but if I don’t like it then there’s got to be different options.” This suggests that he has yet to really integrate his career choice into his sense of self and commit to a path for himself. He seems satisfied at this point with having “different options.”

#### **Case 5: Claire’s Story**

Claire is a middle-class female. She grew up in Kansas City and went to private schools prior to attending University of Kansas. She believes she grew up in “a really sheltered environment.” She enjoys painting, hanging out with friends, taking walks, and traveling.

Traveling is one of her favorite things to do right now. She recently studied abroad in Australia and was returning for a visit during the summer break. She talks about the experience of being in Australia for five and a half months as impacting who she is,

I think that really changed me and made me realize that there’s a lot of places outside of Lawrence, Kansas and I’ve been in Kansas my whole life, so it kind of made me want to get away and just go experience new things and go see new people . . . that’s real important to me now, traveling and just seeing the rest of the world.

She has one older sister who recently graduated from Furman University in South Carolina with a degree in political science. Her sister is currently working as a paralegal in a law firm and applying to law schools. Claire’s parents were divorced when she and her sister were

young. Her father then remarried to a woman who had two sons. Even though her father is now divorced from their mother, Claire still feels close to her step-brothers. One is the same age as Claire, attends KU, and is undecided on his major. The other attends a school in Missouri where she thought he majored in political science. Claire's father has remarried again to a woman with a daughter, but Claire doesn't feel close to her new step-sister. Claire's mother never remarried, but she has lived with someone and has a son. As Claire says, "he's my half brother, but I consider him my little brother." Her brother is going into high school in Kansas City. Claire's mother went to college in Colorado, has a master's degree in teaching, and is currently a teacher. Her father went to Duke University and currently works as the vice president for a company based in Tennessee.

Growing up, Claire was involved in sports and arts and crafts. There was a time that her dad wanted her to go into business, but she says that once she got to high school, he "realized that I wasn't really falling for that." Her parents have always encouraged her to follow her artistic interests and she spent the summer before college working as an arts and crafts teacher at an all boy's camp in North Carolina. Throughout her life Claire remembers always wanting to be a teacher and comments, "that's just what I've always thought I would do." She believes that her mom and her mom's mom being teachers have always made teaching prominent in her life and an attractive career option. When asked what's attractive about teaching, she comments, "I have always been babysitting and I love being around kids, I loved working at the camp with kids and I just think kids are the best thing ever." She had never considered other career options and states, "I had my heart pretty much set on it [teaching]."

Although Claire had never considered other career fields, she did consider other colleges. She did not originally want to attend KU. She had applied to a number of schools in North

Carolina, but when the one she had her heart set on attending fell through, she decided to “just go to KU and see how it goes.” She thought that if she hated KU she could later transfer. She admits that when she received that one college rejection she “just kind of gave up on other schools.” She remarks with some regret that she wished she had looked into some of the other schools in North Carolina. She’s enjoyed KU so far, but wishes it wasn’t in state.

During her freshman year, Claire spent time having “fun.” She says, “I just didn’t really know myself that well and I was just kind of all over the place having fun. . . . I tried, but I didn’t try as hard as I could.” When it came time to apply to the School of Education her sophomore year, she decided not to because her “fun” had impacted her GPA. She says that she decided to really focus and work hard on her classes and was able to raise her GPA quite a bit because she knew the GPA was a requirement. When she did apply in her junior year, she felt good about her application. Claire felt that she met the GPA requirement, had experience working with kids, and felt her essays were well written.

She had an advising appointment scheduled during spring break, so when she returned for her appointment, she received her denial letter. She remembers getting the letter and that she “just started bawling.” She went to her advising appointment still upset and crying. She says, “it was just something I really wanted to do and I’ve been working for it really hard for the past two years . . . and it was just shattered.” Claire was going to schedule an appointment with an education advisor to discuss the letter, but felt that she had her “fill of the KU School of Education.” Talking to her current KU advisor and family members, Claire was encouraged to get the teaching certification elsewhere if she had her heart set on it. Her family even commented that it could be “a blessing in disguise” because Claire didn’t want to live in state long term anyway. Despite the support and encouragement, Claire feels hurt and embarrassed.

Many family and family friends, including her references, knew she was applying to the School of Education. Since teaching is not as competitive of a major at many schools, she feels “it’s just a little embarrassing to be like, no, I didn’t get in.”

Since Claire wanted to be a secondary history and government teacher, she has decided, “I’m just going to major in history and then figure out something to do after that.” Her ultimate goal is to get her teaching certificate, but she’s not sure of the route to attaining it since the rejection. She comments on her current plans with confusion,

after I didn’t get in, I’m just kind of lost as to what I should be doing now, and I feel like I have a plan, but um, I don’t know, like I really want to travel and see what else is out there and see if that will help me figure out what I would like to do longer in life.

Claire received her denial letter only one month ago. She says that she still expects to graduate from KU and hopes “by the time I graduate next year I’ll have a whole different perspective on what I want to do with my life.” She mentions a variety of ideas from an historian to getting a master’s degree to possibly still teaching. Beyond those ideas for the future, she says, “I don’t know, it’s kind of open ended.”

**Intellectual development.** Claire appears to be extremely uncertain about the future. When asked about her future plans, she states, “I don’t know, I don’t really have a set plan, it’s whatever’s going to make me happy, whatever I want to do at the time.” Although this represents a similar uncertainty to transitional knowers, Claire seems to view her voice as equal to the authorities in her life. This is implied from her comments about her options after the denial decision,

I talked to an advisor, just like a normal KU advisor, and she was like, there’s a lot of different ways that you can get around, you know, becoming a teacher and doing that if

that's really what you want to do. And I figured I might as well specialize and get my major in something that I really like, cause I was going to do secondary, well, I wanted to do secondary history and government, so I thought that would really be a good option.

There seems to be a movement here from simply collecting and acting on others' perspectives to a balance between her advisor's thoughts and her own (Baxter Magolda, 1992).

Claire's comments seem to best be characterized by Baxter Magolda's (1992, 1993, 1995, 1998b) independent knowing – interindividual pattern. The interindividual pattern focuses on both the views of others and on her own perspective where the individual pattern focuses more on independent thinking (Baxter Magolda). After receiving the denial letter, Claire discusses her situation with her mom, dad, grandma, and sister to collect their thoughts. “They were saying that maybe it's a blessing in disguise since I didn't want to live here and it might be better I didn't spend another year and a half or whatever, finishing it up here.” However, Claire collects these thoughts and then seems to focus on her own perspective,

I am going to get my history major and minor in geography and then just, I think I'm going to go to North Carolina and look at schools there to get my teaching certificate and see, I haven't really looked too much into it, I mean I'm going to this summer, but I've just been focusing on other things. So, I think I'm going to look into doing it somewhere else, just not in Kansas, because I never wanted to live in Kansas after all. When I graduated, I've always wanted to move out of this state, because I have a lot of family in North Carolina, as well as my sister's there. So, I'm just going to look at maybe the schools there and programs there to see.

There appears to be an incorporation of the ideas of others into Claire's thoughts, but that her thoughts are her own. Even when asked how her family feels about her plans now, she states, "they've just been pretty understanding about what I'm thinking about doing."

Claire does not, however seem to contextualize information yet. There is no indication that Claire is able to integrate information to apply to her current situation. Rather than having established criteria or even a perspective to make decisions, she seems "just kind of lost" (Baxter Magolda, 1992).

**Identity development.** Claire's feeling of being "lost" is just as relevant to her identity as it is to her cognitive development. Marcia (1966) and Josselson's (1987) moratorium identity status seems to describe Claire and the crisis she is facing. The denial decision appears to have caused a crisis for Claire as she states, "after I didn't get in, I'm just kind of lost as to what I should be doing now, and I feel like I have a plan, but um, I don't know." She seems to have made commitments despite her uncertainties which would preclude her status from being identity diffused, but the suggestion of actively feeling "lost" would also eliminate the identity foreclosed status as a descriptor for Claire (Marcia; Josselson).

More so than the other students of this study displaying characteristics of the moratorium status, Claire seems emotionally in tune with her options and to be actively struggling to determine what she should do. Her emotions came through in her interview as she held back tears. She appears to think through her options since the denial decision, saying,

I don't know what to do now. Now that I haven't gotten in, I was thinking about maybe traveling and doing something like that for a little until I find my niche and see if I want to still do teaching or if I want to do something else.



She honestly doesn't seem to know what she wants to do. Claire's demeanor suggested that she is anxious and unsure how to turn her dreams into reality. "I mean I have a goal to be a teacher ultimately and that's what I really want to do, but just how I get it is just going to be, I don't know, I haven't really thought about it to the extent that I should."

Although she appears to be in tune with her options, she also seems paralyzed by her choices. For Claire there seems to be a tug of war between the dream of teaching which she's held her entire life and the opportunities which she's started to explore. "After traveling, it really made me want to travel more and really made me want to see what else I can do." She comments that her recent travels have made her "more open to new things and wanting to try new things and just not . . . conforming to what I think I should be doing. I don't know."

Although she attempts to make definitive choices such as "I'll definitely go somewhere and get my teaching certificate," she also seems to contradict herself, "after these history classes, maybe I'll love, absolutely love history and want to be a historian and do something like that." Besides these contradictions, she also gives the impression of making choices which don't fulfill the expectations she has for herself. She states, "I was dead set on not going to school in Kansas and getting out of Kansas," yet she remains in Kansas for college. When she talks about the School of Education rejection, she talks about meeting with an education advisor, "I mean I should meet with them, I just, I've been kind of resentful like I said before and I haven't really thought about scheduling an appointment and talking about it, bringing it up again." She also comments that people ask her about her career plans with her new history major, "I'm like, well, I don't really know yet . . . it would be a good idea to meet with them [history department] and I probably will at some point, but just haven't yet." These comments display characteristics of how Claire is actively seeking a balance between her perceptions of society's expectations and

her personal abilities, low self-esteem about experiencing any additional emotional turmoil, and a paralysis in taking appropriate career actions.

The active struggle between what she wants to do and who she wants to be seems to preclude Claire from representing characteristics of the identity achieved status (Marcia, 1966; Josselson, 1987). When asked about other options she's considered, she states, "I mean, in the back of my mind when I was applying, I kind of thought, okay if I don't get in, I'm just going to major in history and then figure out something to do after that . . . but um, I don't know." She seems to earnestly be trying to discover herself.

### **Case 6: Megan's Story**

Megan is a middle-class, junior. She loves animals and reading, and enjoys playing Frisbee, cooking and her job. Megan's parents were divorced when she was young and she grew up in Springfield, MO with her mom, step-dad (who she calls dad), and her step-brother. Her real father remarried and she has a younger half brother, but she never sees them.

Her mother and her real father graduated from Missouri State University and her step-dad went to a college in Arkansas for two semesters and then dropped out. Her parents (mom and step-dad) both own their own businesses, her mom in interior design and her dad in architectural salvage. Her older step-brother graduated from the University of Missouri (Mizzou) and works with her dad in architectural salvage. Megan chose to attend KU for a couple of reasons. She mentions that she didn't want to stay in Springfield and she didn't want to do what all her friends were doing by going to Mizzou. She liked the idea of being close to Kansas City and she liked the town when she came for a visit. She felt that "it was the perfect distance away. I still felt like I was out doing my own thing, but then I can still come home."

Growing up, Megan's mother and grandfather pressured her about her career. She discusses her mother's influence on her career considerations saying, "I've been around that [interior design] like my whole life and she's kind of pulling me that way because she has her own business and she wants me to . . . take over for her." When asked about other majors she considered, Megan also discusses her grandfather pressuring her to go into architecture,

My grandpa is an architect and I had always liked that. . . . I felt kind of pressured into that . . . he had given me all this architecture stuff for Christmas . . . these original blue prints, . . . hand drawn prints, and I was like 'thank you,' but I don't know. So I have no idea why I did that. . . . I'm not that kind of person at all.

When asked about her attraction to teaching, she comments about being excited about setting up her own classroom and about working with kindergarten through second graders. She says,

And I guess that's just what I want to do. I don't know, it's just so fun and that age group where they're still goofy and they think silly things are silly and they're not like, "that's stupid," you know. They're not at that awkward stage where they have to be cool yet.

When Megan first came to KU, she was undecided about her major. She reflects on her first advising meeting when she told the advisor "it was between architecture, education, or business" and admits that education "wasn't as strong of an option . . . I just kind of threw it in there, like oh, maybe." She decided on teaching as her career path from her current job at a local child care center.

It was my job. . . . I'd always thought about it and just going to an actual professional child center, and then having to go do observations to be a lead teacher there, and you have to go to all the different centers and then we get to go to some of the schools, too,

and the more I got to see, the more I knew it was what I wanted to do. . . . when you're in a classroom full with 15 [kids] or whatever, you get to see how it would just be you in there with the 15 kids.

Although Megan didn't believe she was going to get in to the School of Education, she was hopeful because "everyone else did." She understood that there were many applicants with high GPAs and experience. She says, "I'm just not that perfect." When she received her School of Education letter she discusses how she felt,

Oh, I was super sad. You know, because I had just planned on, I've been here for three years, you know, and I just planned on staying here and graduating and maybe starting my student teaching here, and I just hadn't thought about other options or anything. I just thought of KU as where I was gonna stay. I guess I just really felt like really hopeless, I just, everything I had ever, I just felt upside down because I had a plan and then, you know, it didn't work.

After receiving the denial letter from the school of education, Megan considered the suggestions made by the School of Education in the rejection letter and made an appointment with the career center, but decided that was a premature move because "that was more about, like about [other] career opportunities, not where I needed to be now. . . . that was not what I needed to do." So she then started to do her own research to consider other schools "cause I still wanted to try to get into another education program." She was prepared when she went to an appointment with an advisor in the School of Education, stating

I went online and printed off the UMKC checklist or whatever for the education program and I brought that to my advising meeting with this other lady, and she printed off my arts form and we put the two pages side by side and she checked off which classes would

transfer to UMKC and I kind of told her that I would be totally fine and open to moving to Kansas City. That would be exciting, but sad. But, she was glad to hear that because she said she gets so many people who are like set on staying at KU, not being [open to] options I guess.

Megan went on to make personal choices and change her goals into actions by making an appointment with an academic advisor at the UMKC School of Education, “I went to their website and sent them a copy of my transcript and they sent me an email saying that they wanted to set up an advising meeting with me. So I did that. And that’s it. . . . They said I could get in.” Although she was sad to be leaving Lawrence, KU, and her job, she felt that her goal of becoming a teacher was the most important consideration at this time and she was set on making that goal a reality.

Megan received her denial letter a month ago, but has already planned her move over the summer to Kansas City. She plans to graduate in 2012 and sees herself having a teaching job. She sees herself eventually moving back to her hometown of Springfield, Missouri but that she wants to “do my own thing first.”

**Intellectual development.** Megan indicates an understanding that knowledge is uncertain and that authorities represent a range of possibilities, characteristic of Baxter Magolda’s (1992, 1993, 1998b) independent knowing – individual pattern. Megan appears to exemplify this when she talks about first going to see a career counselor after the rejection letter, but then deciding for herself “that was a premature move.” She recognizes that the counselor provided valuable information, but not in the direction she needed. Megan states, “She [the counselor] gave me a lot of good websites and they have books and things and other, you know, kind of teaching material and that kind of stuff, but not what I was going to do now. So that was

not what I needed to do.” This perspective that her voice and opinions held as much value as authorities is not a characteristic of transitional knowing, it would be an independent ability to create her personal perspective (Baxter Magolda, 1992).

Independent knowing also maintains gender patterns in the interindividual and individual patterns. The individual pattern values conversations with peers and authorities, but focuses on one’s own thoughts where the interindividual mode focuses on a balance of personal views with others perspectives (Baxter Magolda, 1992). Megan seems to understand that multiple arguments exist, but to decide for herself what to believe, giving the impression of creating her own thoughts and perspectives, as the individual pattern suggests. She clearly expresses her own thoughts and opinions throughout her interview and in how she has made her choices. This is exemplified as she discusses her family not supporting her decision to become a teacher, “I didn’t get very much initial support, like when I told them I wanted to be a teacher because they thought I could do better than that I guess or whatever. It wasn’t really looked highly upon or something, but I mean it – just as I kept going and going I just realized that’s just really what I want to do . . . .” Despite any family objections, Megan seems to choose for herself.

Even in her application process, she discusses her thoughts compared to others, stating, “I didn’t think I was going to get in, but everybody else did . . . I felt like I had a good chance but, just not that high.” When asked if there were others who influenced her decision to transfer to UMKC, she mentions having a friend in that area of Kansas City, but then tends to focus on her own thoughts, saying “I don’t want to move to St. Louis or somewhere, and it was in Missouri, so in state tuition, and Kansas City, so it’s a little bit closer to home. So, I don’t know it just fit. Not excited about being a Kangaroo, but you know, but everything else.” Rather than focusing

on others who may have influenced her throughout these examples, she seems to focus on what she thinks.

Although she appears to accept that others have differing perspectives and that she can create her own opinions, she does not yet seem to have moved into contextual knowing. Her focus on thinking for herself does not appear to have merged with integrating and applying those perspectives to her context. For example, when asked about her future, she talks about the education program she is transferring to and their student teaching requirements,

I'll be able to do my student teaching classes and student teaching and stuff like that. So, . . . they try to place you in urban schools to do your student teaching and stuff, so I don't know if I'm going to like that or stay there, because I went to a private Catholic school, so I'm used to uniforms and that kind of stuff, you know. And I went to a private high school too, so we had uniforms there and just the different learning environment than urban schools, but I might like that, I don't know.

She seems unsure of her perspective on teaching in urban schools because of her lack of experience in that setting, but she also seems unable to consider how her experiences in one context could translate to another.

**Identity development.** Megan gives the impression that she has made a physical and emotional separation from her family in rejecting their career expectations for her and moving away from home. She also seems to have explored and tested a variety of options from her past employment, college majors, and choices after the School of Education denial decision. This would preclude her from being identified as identity foreclosed. Her commitment to becoming a teacher by applying to the School of Education and now transferring to a new school also seems to eliminate the identity diffused status as a descriptor for Megan. However, the School of

Education denial decision also does not seem to be causing a crisis for Megan. She comments on being “super sad” and calling her mom “bawling that I didn’t get in,” but rather than causing her to question herself, Megan decided “I need to figure out my other options to see if it’s time to enroll here . . . I did get that ball rolling quickly.”

In this way, Megan most closely displays the characteristics of Marcia (1966) and Josselson’s (1987) identity achieved status. She exemplifies her decision making ability as separate from her parents in her comments about how her parents first reacted to her decision to become a teacher, “I didn’t get very much initial support, like when I told them I wanted to be a teacher because they thought I could do better than that I guess or whatever. It wasn’t really looked highly upon or something.” Despite her family’s reaction, Megan decided from her position at the child care center that, “the more I got to see, the more I knew it was what I wanted to do.”

Megan’s exploration of her job and career field suggests that she has gone through the process of changing and reorganizing her identity to integrate her past experiences and familial expectations with who she is and wants to be. She seems to have already sifted through career options through a variety of jobs and majors. Her previous employment consisted of a fast food restaurant, working at her mother’s interior design firm, being a personal care assistant, babysitting, and teaching at the child care center. When asked how her family feels about her career decisions after the School of Education denial decision, she says, “they knew finally that they kind of see that this is what I want to do . . . so they’re excited for me.” In her comments about what attracts her to teaching, the integration of her identity with her career choice of becoming a teacher can be seen, “They’re [kids] just so fun. I just have a good time, I don’t know. I kind of find them an escape from the adult world and I like to stay in the little people



world.” In this example, Megan has integrated her idea of fun with her career choice. She clearly likes being with children and sees her time with children as enjoyable.

As the identity achieved status represents, Megan also seems to feel the relativity and risk in life’s decisions and understands that choices can be painful. She even mentions that when her denial letter came “it’s just scary not having a plan anymore.” She does seem to believe, however, that there is hope even when things don’t work out how she wanted. When she talks to her mom after receiving her denial letter, she talks about this hope,

She told me that, “well, I can’t remember how many things I looked back on in my life that I had hoped had worked out . . . but then I look back on now and say thank you. So glad that they didn’t work out the way that I wanted.” So, I’m hoping, and that’s what it feels like now . . . cause I’m really excited to move now and get away and just kind of start fresh.

### **Case 7: Alyssa’s Story**

Alyssa is a middle-class, fifth year senior majoring in math and working on her teaching license through the UKanTeach program. The UKanTeach program prepares secondary math and science teachers who are working on bachelor’s degrees in mathematics, biology, chemistry, earth and space science, or physics. She was involved in the marching band for the first two years of college, but stopped because of the time commitment. She currently works at a shoe store and likes training her new puppy in her spare time. Alyssa says that she is very close with her family and her sister is actually her roommate.

Growing up, she moved around Kansas, but says that the majority of her childhood was spent in Great Bend, KS. She grew up with both parents as the youngest of three with an older brother and an older sister. Her parents currently live in Kansas where her father is currently a

Director of Curriculum and Instruction for a school district. Her mother is currently retired, but was a secretary for an insurance company and a loan officer. Alyssa's brother is a youth minister and her sister was working as an academic advisor, but had just finished graduate school and student teaching, and was hired as a teacher in a suburb of Kansas City for the following year.

Alyssa's parents expected all of their children to go to college. She mentions how they were disappointed in her brother only obtaining an Associates degree and proud that her sister was getting a Master's degree. Although Alyssa never felt pressure about her education from her parents, she says that "I think there's more pressure now than there ever has been." This is due in part to her courses getting more difficult and partly because she's in her fifth year and still had more courses to take. She mentions that her parents think "maybe you should finish."

Alyssa remembers always wanting to attend KU, "since like second grade." She admits that even though she thought about applying to other schools, she only applied to KU. Her decision was based on the fact that her sister came to school here and she could remember coming to visit her on the weekends and in the summers, so she just wanted to be here.

When asked what is attractive about teaching, Alyssa talks about middle school children being an enjoyable group to work with, her experiences with teachers, and the stories her dad has told over the years. She says she's been exposed to what, "I want to do verses what I don't want to do" as a teacher. She is realistic in her understanding that as a teacher "you have to put up with a lot of stuff, but it's worth it in the long run, I think." In high school, she considered becoming a lawyer, but admits that she talked herself out of it. Entering KU, she originally wanted to be a music education major, but "freaked out" in the middle of her flute audition. She changed to political science, but admits "that was also undecided, so that was just to kind of take a couple of courses." Towards the end of her first year, she thought about math education, but

then switched her major into business. After being in the School of Business, she decided that an office job wasn't what she wanted, so she then changed to math education. When denied admission, she became a math major and began the UKanTeach program. She is still considering becoming an actuary at times because she does love math. She says throughout the changes in major that "teaching has been the main focus most of the time, it's just finding the subject, finding the age level."

She says that after being around education all her life with her dad, it was a somewhat easy decision to go into education, but that "finding the pathway to get there was the harder part." Alyssa is attracted to teaching math for sixth and seventh graders because she loves that age group, but she also considered that her favorite math subjects to teach are pre-algebra, algebra, and pre-calculus which would still be that age group. She was originally attracted to KU's teaching program because she heard other women in her hall her freshman year talking about the courses. When she took the first two classes, she enjoyed the experience and the professors. She also mentions that "people think really highly of it."

When Alyssa applied to the School of Education, she was hopeful about getting accepted, but was also realistic that her GPA was "borderline." She felt there might be a chance, but had also considered back up plans. When asked what some of her back up plans were, she mentioned the UKanTeach program, getting a math degree and then a Master's in education, and going back into the School of Business. She says though, "I think UKanTeach was actually already embedded into my brain, because . . . Dr. Neal has been, he's pretty much talked it up because it is a good alternative route to it [teaching]."

As soon as receiving the denial decision, Alyssa says that she called her dad "because I call him all the time" and then within a day or two had an advising appointment with

UKanTeach. As Alyssa says, “I jumped right from not getting into the School of Ed into UKanTeach because, actually I talked to well, my sister and Dr. Neal about it and he was like, if you really want to be a math teacher, there are so many other routes of getting there, we need math teachers, don’t give up.” Alyssa sees pros and cons to both the UKanTeach program and the School of Education program. She even states, “I think both programs have their benefits . . . it’s just the pathway I’m taking now.” Although she consulted a number of people about her options and choices after getting the denial letter, Alyssa felt that she was making the decisions and “they were just supporting it and giving me information on how to reach my goal.”

Alyssa received the denial decision from the School of Education two years and two months ago, so has had time to clarify her emotions and learn from her experiences. She hopes to begin teaching next year and is considering graduate school. She says in ten years she wants to move out of Kansas. She wants “to stay in a classroom for a while” as a teacher, but eventually hopes to become a principal.

**Intellectual development.** Alyssa seems to be able to construct knowledge for herself within a context. Baxter Magolda (1992) found in contextual knowing the gender related patterns seem to converge and the individual is able to not only think independently, but also think through issues and apply information within the context. In this way, the earlier levels of knowing build upon each other to allow the individual to contextualize a situation. Alyssa doesn’t appear to view authorities as having knowledge that she needs to acquire as an absolute knower would. She does collect others thoughts as characteristic of a transitional knower, but then she seems to be able to independently think through information and others’ thoughts in order to apply her perspectives to the context (Baxter Magolda).

This ability is characteristic of Baxter Magolda's (1992, 1993, 1995) level of contextual knowing or self-authorship. Alyssa appears to be able to look at all aspects of a situation, seek out others' opinions to integrate with her own, and make her own choices. One example is when she discusses her math major and her most difficult course, MATH 500,

I mean half the people in my class have dropped and the professor advised people to drop the course. I didn't go and talk to him this semester because I knew exactly what he would say to me because he advised all my friends to drop the course and we were doing the exact same, but I have to have the class, I only have a semester left, can't fit it in again, so I mean, I hope I pass. I like math a lot, I just don't like analysis. It's not math, it's writing proofs. It's not the same thing.

In this example, Alyssa appears to know the perspective of her professor as she has learned vicariously through her friends and she doesn't see his advice as the best choice for her. She also knows that she must have the class, so she has made a choice to complete the class, knowing there is a possibility of negative consequences. This example also indicates that Alyssa has independently considered the course content, assessed the value of that content within the context of being a math major, and drawn a conclusion about the class.

Although she wanted to get into the School of Education, Alyssa's focus seems to be more on her goal of becoming a teacher. She tends to focus on the bigger picture and finding an alternative route to accomplishing her goal. Characteristic of having identity as a foundation, Alyssa seems to be able to get inside a situation and still separate from it. She exemplifies this by acknowledging that she was "bummed" when she didn't get into the School of Education, but assesses the benefits and drawbacks between the School of Education compared to the UKanTeach program,

I feel like with UKan, you get a lot more opportunities to actually write a lesson plan and go out and teach it verses just talking about how you would do it. You actually do it. So I think that's one of the pluses from UKan to school of ed comparatively, but I think UKan actually lacks in special education and that kind of stuff, because I mean, with the school of ed you get to take SPED courses and like learn that kind of stuff. With UKan we talked about it for two days in one of my classes. And I have maybe two classes left for their program, so I feel like I don't have that much experience with it, so if we get out in the field and I do have a student with an IEP or a special need, I'm not going to have that much of an idea of what to do. So, I mean, I think both programs have their benefits, um, it's just the pathway I'm taking now. Comparatively, I like both programs though.

Here, Alyssa seems to be able to independently evaluate each program based on her experiences and within the larger context of becoming a teacher. This ability to think through comparisons and integrate the meaning into the broader context is characteristic of contextual knowing (Baxter Magolda, 1992).

**Identity development.** Alyssa appears to display Marcia (1966) and Josselson's (1987) identity achieved status. She seems to have gone through the process of testing and sifting through options and committed to a way of being. Her commitment to her courses, the UKanTeach program, and becoming a teacher, eliminate the characteristics of the identity diffused status. Alyssa's exploration of multiple majors exemplifies how she has tested her options despite the fact this increased the amount of time she was in college. By changing majors a number of times, from music education, political science, undecided, math education, business, to her current choice of math & UKan Teach, she seems to have been able to explore and learn about various subjects to find the subject she wanted to teach. She even states that the

decision to be a teacher was relatively easy, but “finding the pathway to get there was the harder part.”

Although she seems to maintain a physical and emotional bond with her family, which is a characteristic of identity foreclosure, Alyssa still appears to separate from her family in making her own decisions. They give her advice and suggestions, but she seems to draw a separation from them to make choices which an identity foreclosed individual would not do. She demonstrates agency throughout her interview with statements such as, “I don’t think anyone was trying to persuade me one way or another,” “I’d get it figured out,” and “I was making the decisions and they were just supporting it and giving me information on how to reach my goal.” As she talks about her family and even her friends, she says, “No one really, I don’t think has a big say in what I’m doing besides me.”

Alyssa appears to have already gone through the process of reshaping, modifying, and mixing new elements of her identity with the old much like the identity formation/moratorium status. She seems to have done this through her major exploration as well as her job. One example can be seen as she describes how her job and boss have had an influence on who she is, “I think working there made me a more confident person. My boss for three years was a, she’s so hard to explain. She’s like one of the nicest people I’ve ever met, but she’s very focused, so that kind of rubbed off and my work ethic got better.” Alyssa seems able to identify the specific qualities she’s gained from her supervisor and what she has incorporated into who she is.

Rather than the denial decision causing Alyssa to question herself and sending her into a crisis, the experience seems to have confirmed that becoming a teacher was a part of her identity, a characteristic of the identity achieved status. She states, “I mean, going directly from not getting into the school of ed. to going and doing the UKan program was absolutely the right

choice.” She reconfirms this, stating, “I think I’m in the right program for what I want to do.” Alyssa appears to have committed to herself and to becoming a teacher.

### **Case 8: Carolyn’s Story**

Carolyn is a middle class junior majoring in education. She applied to the School of Education her sophomore year, was denied admission, decided to reapply her junior year, and was recently accepted.

Carolyn is the oldest of three girls from an army family. She loves being outdoors, camping, hunting, and fishing. She is currently a resident assistant and works at a travel office when home for breaks. She has babysat and worked as a Nanny in the past and talks about these experiences as having an influence on her career interests. She talks about the diversity of the children she has worked with on military installations, “I babysat families with as many as ten kids and I also helped families who’s kids were in wheelchairs and had cerebral palsy or spina bifida or muscular dystrophy, and you realize how to reach those kids.” She has also worked on military bases in youth services as a tutor where she would help kids with their homework. In her nanny experience, she spent the summer with three boys under the age of 12 who lost their mother to breast cancer. Carolyn shared her experience with helping them learn to play the piano,

So throughout the summer, I eventually made it fun for them to play piano and they enjoyed it and they didn’t mind practicing and, you know, it’s not math, but it was so exciting to like see the changes that playing piano could do for them. Math was my passion and it’s a hard passion for a lot of kids and even adults, so if I can find ways to make kids passionate about learning it, at least understand it to get somewhere, it’ll help and that’ll feel better on my part.



Carolyn has had some medical concerns over the past three years, which she says has had an impact on who she is today. She has learned how to really balance work, school, and going to and from doctor's offices and hospitals. It's made her organize and prioritize her time and even allow it to have precedence over her school work on occasion.

Her mother has an Associates degree, but Carolyn couldn't remember what her major was, and her father received a Bachelor's degree from a New York University with a degree in Economics. Her father is in the Army and has achieved four Master's degrees throughout his career. Carolyn's mother is a stay at home mom, while her father works in Special Forces for the Army.

While Carolyn was growing up, her family moved nine times. She was born in Oklahoma, moved to North Carolina, then to Massachusetts. She moved back to North Carolina, then to Colorado, and then to Italy. Her family moved from Italy to Kansas, then to Georgia where Carolyn graduated from high school, and then they moved back to Kansas. Although her family was currently living in Kansas, they had just learned that her parents and youngest sister would be moving to Florida at the end of the academic year.

Carolyn describes her father's current job as "kind of a professor, but not." He currently works for the Army College at Fort Leavenworth where he oversees a group of army students in learning how to plan strategic operations. Moving to Florida he was going to be the Chief of Strategic Plans and Operations. As Carolyn stated, "if they need to do something, he'll plan it."

As a kid, Carolyn thought about becoming a veterinarian or an obstetrician, but as she got older her interests changed. Carolyn's original career interest when starting college was in Atmospheric Science. She learned how to track hurricanes in high school and loved it. When she was looking for colleges to attend after high school, she looked at KU, Notre Dame, and

Penn State. She ruled out Notre Dame as “too pompous . . . of an environment.” She found out that Penn State was the top Atmospheric Science school in the nation, but she would have paid out of state tuition. She talks about wanting to return to Kansas as something that had never happened to her during any of her previous moves, so she wanted to look at KU. She discusses her campus visit and making the decision to return, “Trees and grass, and beautiful architecture and it didn’t, it was huge, but it didn’t feel huge. . . . I love that aspect of it. So I was like, KU’s where I’m going.” Since she still loved Kansas and the cost to attend would be less, given the in state tuition, she decided to come to KU as an Atmospheric Science major.

In changing her major to teaching, she discusses the process of coming to her decision, “When I really got into the physics of it [hurricanes] here at KU, I was like no. This isn’t, because if I would have gone into it, it would have been more broadcast then based on research, so, and KU focuses more on research then the broadcast part of it, so I was like, yeah, that’s not for me. And I remembered all my math teachers in high school and that was one part of Atmospheric Science that I enjoyed, that I was going to be able to continue the math part of it. And then, I was like no. Math teacher is really what I want to do. I’ve always loved kids and always babysat and I was a Nanny, you know for a whole summer after my freshman year of college and I was like yeah, kids and math. If I can mix those two, it will be perfect.”

When asked what else is attractive to her about teaching, she talks about her love of filling “the void for people who don’t have something in their lives.” Specifically she talks about her experience observing children in poor communities who may have deficiencies at home.

And granted I can't fill all of those voids for those kids and I can't supply them all meals and food, but if I can get them through their education where most of them struggle in math, I can get them to provide for themselves someday, that would be a huge accomplishment.

When Carolyn first applied to the School of Education, she had her hopes up to get in. She had just made the decision to switch into education, but hadn't finished all the requirements. She spoke with other students and a School of Education advisor. Although she was hopeful about getting in, while she was applying she planned out her courses, knowing the decision could go either way. "I was expecting either or, and I'm very organized and nit-picky about my schedule and lay everything out, so in preparing to get in or not get in, I had my schedule laid out for what I need to do so I could still graduate on time."

If she wasn't accepted to the School of Education the second time, she admitted that she didn't have a back up plan the second time around and that "it was going to be interesting . . . I probably would have switched completely to math and gotten a math degree. I just, I didn't really plan for it." Fortunately for Carolyn though, after not being accepted last year, she was accepted last month. When asked about the future, Carolyn discusses her new position for the upcoming school year with an Algebra Program. She also mentions moving to a new apartment with her sister. She hopes to graduate next year and then work through her professional year. Within five years, she hopes to get married and "to teach in military schools."

**Intellectual development.** Individuals who can organize and interpret experiences to make decisions within a context are characterized within Baxter Magolda's (1992, 1993, 1995) contextual knowing level. Constructing knowledge within contextual knowing requires interdependence with others to gain access to others' perspectives. Displaying characteristics of

contextual knowing (Baxter Magolda, 1993, 1995) Carolyn is able to engage in conversations with others, gather others' opinions, and integrate these views with her own. She seems to do so without losing her self-identity. She displays this in her discussions with her father on becoming a teacher and when she talks about how she feels about her career choices, "everyone's like, oh, why'd you pick math? And I'm like, oh, it's what I enjoy . . . you can see the light bulb turn on in kids' faces. . . . Math's going to give me that flexibility to go anywhere, because I'm not good staying in one place. The Army's done that to me." Here, Carolyn appears to have integrated her identity with her passion for math. She seems respectful of what others may think or the questions they ask, but seems to make her own choice based on her interests and goals.

The ability to think independently and apply knowledge within a context moves beyond absolute and transitional knowing categories. Converging gender patterns from lower levels, the contextual knower is able to balance personal thoughts with others' perspectives as an independent knower would, but then places these within the broader picture to make choices (Baxter Magolda, 1992). These characteristics can also be seen in an experience Carolyn describes from a school observation,

I love being the void for people who don't have something in their lives. There's a lot of kids who don't have it good at home. . . . there's some kids who love going to school because they don't want to go home and it's really sad and, you know, and I just – I did my observations . . . when I took my intro course here at the school of ed which is [in] a very poor community and I was assigned to a special education classroom where these kids fought over winning a piece of candy because he hadn't eaten in three days. And that, I will never forget that. . . . he was like I need to win bingo today because that's all I'm going to eat. And granted I can't fill all of those voids for those kids and I can't

supply them all meals and food, but if I can get them through their education where most of them struggle in math, I can get them to provide for themselves someday, that would be a huge accomplishment.

Carolyn seems to consider the child's world and interpret this experience to gain a perspective of the role of teachers, how teachers can impact the lives of children, and how her passion for math translates into helping kids survive.

**Identity development.** From Carolyn's experiences on military bases, she has been exposed to diverse lifestyles which appear to have given her opportunities to see the risk and vulnerability in life. She's worked with children with disabilities, understands the impact a family death can have on children, and how difficult moving and transitioning from one place to another can be. These experiences seem to have caused Carolyn to search for her own values and to move out of the identity foreclosed status. When asked about her values, she uses a quote from her dad, "you're as big of a person as you are when you're alone in the dark, . . . so I try to build myself to be the best person to anyone. I'll be anyone's friend, I'll do what I can for anyone, give them the shirt off my back if I can, and if I can do that as much as I can, then I've lived my life." This commitment to her own ideals of who she wants to be would eliminate the identity diffused status as a descriptor for Carolyn.

These characteristics do display Marcia (1966) and Josselson's (1987) identity achieved status. This can be seen in Carolyn's decision to change majors, and even in her choice of college,

I applied to KU, Notre Dame, and Penn State. Because I found out Penn State was the top atmospheric science school in the nation. So, I was like, oh, I'll go there. And they ended up offering me more money than KU did to go, but I would have been out of state

tuition and at KU I would have been in state tuition and it, KU ended up being a better deal. And something about Penn State, I was just like, I'm not ready for that, I'm not ready to not be by any family or anyone we know, even if I'm moving away from home. Notre Dame was too pompous, I guess you could say of an environment for me. And KU, I missed [the state] really bad because we lived here before I moved to Georgia. . . . I would come back and visit friends and everything, and that had never happened to me before during any of our moves, so I was like KU. We'll look at KU.

Carolyn displays an ability here to sift through her college choices to make a decision which has logic and is reasonable, but one that also seems to resonate with who she is and what she wants. This ability to not only think independently but to also apply that information to the context with personal criteria suggests Carolyn is beyond independent knowing, displaying more of the characteristics of contextual knowing (Baxter Magolda, 1992).

Carolyn's level of contextual knowing is also indicated by the interdependent relationship she seems to have with her family. Although her parents live nearby and she values her family, she demonstrates characteristics of an identity which is individuated from her parents. This can be seen as Carolyn discusses a conversation with her father regarding her career choice, "My dad, he questions why I didn't just go into math . . . He's like, it's just so flexible, you can work anywhere. I was like, as a math teacher, I probably will be able to work anywhere. He's like, I know. I said, dad, kids, I love math, but the love for the kids comes first." Carolyn seems to be able to hear and understand her father's perspective, but maintain her identity to make her own choices, despite what her parents believe.

Carolyn also seems to be able to see multiple perspectives in situations in order to integrate new pieces of information into her identity. An example can be seen as she discusses her Nanny experience,

I was a Nanny the summer after my freshman year, and I loved it. Their mom passed away in 2001 from breast cancer and their dad did not want to put them in daycare for the summer . . . they were still in school for one week while I was with them, and they . . . came back and they're like, look how good I did on this thing, or they'd bring home their assignments and then there was this comment, so I had to go interact with their teachers sometimes and I got first hand, the parent side of teaching. You know I was always the student. I never thought about my mom's side. And then I really looked at it like, okay, how do I look to these kids, because I'm not they're mom.

Carolyn seems to see multiple perspectives of this situation, how she looks to the children, how to interact with teachers in a different role, and her mother's perspective of school. She integrated this information into her identity and contextualized this experience suggesting that she views herself in a teacher's role.

### **Conclusion**

The eight cases presented provide insight to particular student's intellectual and identity development as each faces the career barrier presented by the School of Education denial decision. Using Baxter Magolda's (1992, 1993, 1995, 1998b) and Marcia (1966) and Josselson's (1987) theories, characteristics of the intellectual and identity development of these individuals can be identified and explored. Each participant has made decisions as to the next step in college, but perhaps continues to struggle with what future careers may contain. Further

comparison of these cases for themes reveals how the cognitive and identity development characteristics of college students impact career decision making.



## Chapter 5: Cross-Case Results

Moving beyond descriptions of individuals to find commonalities and themes within the eight cases portrayed, allows for a greater understanding of how a career barrier is perceived and how future career decisions are formed. How prospective teacher education students' intellectual and identity development intersect and influence their understanding of the denial decision and their career choices is first explored. An overview of how prospective teacher education students' career interests, choices, and goals develop prior to the denial decision is then presented, along with the decisions each participant made after the denial decision, and how they made these post-barrier choices. Considering themes across cases establishes an understanding of students' perceptions and actions on career decisions when a career barrier is presented. The variables of the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) then provide a lens to further describe the impact on career decision making (Lent et al., 1996).

### Cognitive & Identity Development

The personal characteristics individuals bring into the career decision making process have an influence on their interests, choices, goals, and ultimately the actions of the individual. Where a person is in their cognitive and identity development provides a basis for their perceptions of the environment and others within that environment. Identifying how the two development processes intersect and mutually influence each other, provides a new perspective of the predispositions college students bring into the career decision making process and allows for a greater understanding of their choices in the face of a career barrier.

Table 2 shows the intersection of identity status and intellectual levels reflected in the participant cases presented in chapter 4. The intellectual level gender pattern is shown in parenthesis.

Table 2

Intersection of Intellectual Development Level and Identity Development Status

		Identity Development Status			
		Identity Diffused	Identity Foreclosed	Identity Formation/ Moratorium	Identity Achieved
Intellectual Development Level	Absolute Knowing		Kelly (Receiving)		
	Transitional Knowing			Amanda (Interpersonal) Dana (Impersonal) John (Impersonal)	
	Independent Knowing			Claire (Interindividual)	Megan (Individual)
	Contextual Knowing				Alyssa Carolyn

This study shows a relationship between identity status and intellectual development. It seems that as one's intellectual level increases there are changes among identity status. Those who exhibited lower levels of intellectual development had a reciprocal lower identity status. Conversely, those with higher levels of intellectual development were more committed to themselves as in the identity achieved status. There were no cases in this study where a participant was high on one level or status and low in the other. This supports Baxter Magolda's (1998b, 2007) assertion that an internal self-identity is necessary for self-authorship.

There were no participants in this study who displayed the characteristics of the identity diffused status, which was not surprising. Identity diffused individuals have not had a crisis, but they also have never experienced a commitment (Marcia, 1966; Josselson, 1987). Considering the competitive nature of the School of Education program at University of Kansas, if a student was adrift, felt lost, and wasn't committed, he or she would not have completed an application. The intersection of identity and cognitive development allows for an examination of how participants processed the barrier and their choices. Two themes emerge from the data relevant

to this relationship between cognitive and identity development: Uncertainty and Others' Opinions.

**Uncertainty.** Facing a career barrier can be anxiety producing because of the uncertainty it presents. Seven of the eight participants expressed uncertainty during interviews, however it was expressed by participants in different ways.

Kelly commented that, "I don't know what I want to do with my life." She discusses being "at a loss" and asking herself, "What am I going to do with my life?" She discusses not being motivated to complete her courses the semester she was rejected because she couldn't see the point. Unlike other participants, however, Kelly's uncertainty ended as soon as she decided on her new major.

Amanda also experiences uncertainty, both in making her choices after the denial decision, but also after selecting her new major. She comments about the rejection letter, "I was like really upset that I didn't get in. 'Cause I was like, oh no, what am I going to do now? Like freaking out . . ." She makes a personal judgment that English makes sense for her, especially if she does want to teach, but still shows uncertainty about what she could do with her new major. "I don't really know what other options I have as an English major . . ." Amanda was still actively thinking through her options and making judgments as to what she may want to do in the future.

Dana and John expressed uncertainty within the decision making process. Dana expresses her uncertainty in making choices after the rejection letter,

So, after I didn't get in, . . . I didn't know, I was like, well, I can try a different degree, which I wouldn't be happy with. Or I can go another two and a half years either just getting, waiting a year and applying again for the school of education, that's waiting a

year and then another two and a half years on top of the program, doing the UKAN teach program which would be another two and a half years or doing the BS which would be another two and a half years.

John talks about receiving his letter and opening it with his roommates, “I kind of read it out loud ‘cause my roommates were there too, and then my roommates were like, no way. . . . man, I didn’t know what to do.” He, like Dana, began to think through the uncertainty in a logical way, “Over spring break, I just kind of thought about it and basically kind of laid out all the options that I would have.” Both Dana and John are still uncertain exactly what the future brings, but seem confident that they will be able to think through their options to make future decisions.

Of the eight study participants, Claire’s uncertainty was the most profound. She was at a loss, stating, “I don’t know what I want to do now. Now that I haven’t gotten in, I was thinking about maybe traveling and doing something like that for a little until I find my niche and see if I want to still do teaching or if I want to do something else.” She has selected a new major based on a content area that she likes, but states that,

I feel like I have a plan, but um, I don’t know, like I really want to travel and see what else is out there and see if that will help me figure out what I would like to do longer in life. . . . I mean I have a goal to be a teacher ultimately and that’s what I really want to do, but just how I get it is just going to be, I don’t know, I haven’t really thought about it to the extent that I should.

Claire was the most lost of the eight study participants, even in selecting her new major, she comments that, people “ask me what I’m going to do with my major as a history major, and I’m like, well, I don’t really know yet.”

Alyssa and Megan express uncertainty, but as a thing of the past. Alyssa comments almost in hind sight that even though she changed majors many times, that “teaching has been the main focus most of the time, it’s just finding the subject, finding that age level” which has been her uncertainty. Megan expresses uncertainty, stating that “it’s just scary not having a plan anymore.” Alyssa had a back-up plan in place prior to the school of education rejection letter and although Megan didn’t have a back-up plan, she took her uncertainty and quickly focused it into a new plan.

The only participant who did not express uncertainty was Carolyn. Carolyn applied to the program when she first decided to change her major to education. She had high hopes, but also knew, “I did not have all of my requirements completed.” She talks about her expectation of “either or” – either getting in or not getting in. She states,

In preparing to get in or not get in, I had my schedule laid out for what I need to do so I could still graduate on time. So, not getting in, now I have to cram all my ed courses into my senior year, but I was able to get all my math and gen eds out of the way.

Having a plan in place prior to the school of education rejection letter eliminated the uncertainty of what she would do if she didn’t get in. She immediately went to her back-up plan to stay on course to graduation and to becoming a teacher.

The combined influence of the individual’s identity status and level of cognitive development effected how each copes with the uncertainty the career barrier presented. For example, Claire and to a lesser extent, Amanda, were at a loss. Dana and John, however, viewed the uncertainty as something to logically think through. Alyssa and Megan used the uncertainty to clarify outcome expectations. The student’s identity and intellectual development in dealing with this uncertainty impacts how the student will handle career decisions following a barrier.

Uncertainty is a component of Baxter Magolda's Epistemological Development Model (1990) as well as Marcia (1966) and Josselson's (1987) theories. Baxter Magolda (1992, 1995, 1998b) discusses uncertainty within transitional and independent knowing levels.

**Others' opinions.** Study participants looked to others for opinions after they received the school of education rejection letter. Seven of the eight study participants discuss how others' opinions influenced their post-barrier decisions. Participants utilized others' opinions in a variety of ways depending on their epistemological and identity development.

Kelly uses others' opinions as her own, characteristic of both identity foreclosure and absolute knowing. She talks about her older sister doing research for her and letting her know that, "I didn't have to like be in the school of ed to become a teacher, I could you know, take two years afterwards and get my teaching degree." She talked with friends, her advisor, her parents, and the director. When she met with the director of her new major, he explained what the major was "And he just really got me interested in it, so that's how I kind of chose the different major."

There is no evidence of Kelly logically thinking through her choices or making a personal judgment. She was simply interested because of another's interest and decided to change her major. She does talk about "a couple of girls in my sorority are ABSC majors and I didn't really know it. . . . So I would kind of talk to them and they would tell me about certain professors . . . you're definitely going to have her, and she's really awesome to work with." Her friends' opinions are used to determine how much she'll like her new major, rather than as information from which to make decisions. The authorities in her life provided her with the decision she needed.

Amanda uses others' opinions to make decisions, but unlike Kelly, she doesn't take others' opinions as her own, rather she takes others' opinions to determine if she likes the ideas

they present or not. She talks about first talking with her mom, who told her to “settle down, we’ll figure it out. If this is really what you want to do, you can find another way to do it.” She then talks to her aunt who is “a high school English teacher, and she was an English major in college . . . And I was like, well, that makes sense. It seemed like a good idea.” Rather than just choosing a major based on another’s opinion, Amanda decides for herself if it’s an acceptable idea and approach.

Dana and John also collect others’ ideas, but use these perspectives as research or a way to get additional thoughts to consider for themselves. Dana discusses talking to her family, but then just stating that their belief is to do “whatever’s going to make you happy, you need to decide to do it.” She talked with a teacher who also advises students, as well as her KU advisor. Dana’s main criterion was the time she would need to be in college. When consulting with her advisor, she stated, “I want to stay here, but I can’t do another two and a half years. And she was like, well, if you know that, we can go through every program here and see how long it will take you to get that degree . . . or you can consider your other options.” Dana takes this advice to think through her options relevant to time in college.

John first called his mom who told him, “it’s okay, you can’t really do anything now. But you know, we’ll talk in more detail about what you’re going to do later.” He then consulted with his brother, an economics major, who encouraged economics by relating to John and their family, “he was just telling me, well why don’t you try econ . . . it might run in the family.” John didn’t take his opinion though and simply make a personal judgment; he followed it up with his own research,

I talked to an advisor and then like made the decision . . . I also met with a school of education advisor here too, and just kind of asked her what are different ways . . . in

becoming a teacher or doing something else, just kind of getting feedback and input from a lot of different people.

The economics advisor gave John a list of careers and paths where economics can be useful. He was able to take the pieces of information from others to make a logical choice for himself.

Characteristic of the moratorium status, Amanda, John, & Dana didn't know who or what to believe. By collecting others' opinions and either making a judgment or thinking through the perspectives of others as in transitional knowing, each was able to make choices.

Claire consults with many others, "I talked to my mom and my dad, and my grandma, my sister. . . . they were all really supportive." She also spoke to a KU advisor. Her family and her advisor encourage her to find the "blessing in disguise" and to find other ways to become a teacher if she wants. Claire also has a focus on what other people might think of her. In not being accepted, she compares other schools to KU's School of Education, "it's not as competitive as it is here from what I've discovered and so, it's just kind of embarrassing sometimes to admit." Claire, however, unlike the other study participants, doesn't take others' opinions as information from which to make a decision. She uses their opinions to make herself feel better, but does not discuss these opinions as pieces of information from which to make a decision or judgment. Rather, she acknowledges that others have opinions, but that others' opinions are no more valid than her own.

Alyssa and Carolyn also discuss others' opinions in their decision making process, but they put those opinions into context. Both discuss an advisor at the KU School of Education who encouraged them to continue working towards becoming teachers. Alyssa discusses how he told her, "if you really want to be a math teacher, there are so many other routes of getting there." Carolyn comments on the advisor's encouragement and excitement about teaching.



They use these as components of their decision making process though, rather than how they made a judgment or why they chose to continue towards becoming a teacher. Both Alyssa and Carolyn discuss family influences. However, they both gather opinions and use those as pieces of information in their decision making process.

How others' opinions are viewed in the decision making process varies by cognitive level and identity status. On one end of the spectrum, Kelly looks to others for answers, and on the opposite end, Alyssa and Carolyn utilize others' opinions to contextualize their situation. How others' opinions can affect an individual's approach to a situation can in part be determined by the relationship between cognitive and identity development. Even the purpose behind an individual seeking advice is established by this connection.

The uncertainty and others' opinions themes presented by participants allows a greater understanding of how identity and cognitive development intersect and influence each other. Bringing this perspective into the career decision making process provides a basis for their perceptions and interactions within their surroundings. Having an awareness of the interaction between cognitive and identity development allows for a greater understanding of the decisions students make when facing a career barrier. Baxter Magolda (1993, 1995) discusses the relationship an individual has to others throughout the levels of cognitive development. Identity development as discussed by Marcia (1966) and Josselson (1987) also includes an element of others' opinions as the individual comes to understand him or herself within the world.

### **Interests, Choices, & Goals**

A second influence on a college student's career decisions in the face of a career barrier is how the individual's original interests, choices, and goals developed into the initial choice of becoming a teacher. Understanding the development of the original career choice gives a

perspective on the choices made both prior to a career barrier and following the barrier. If an individual has explored his or her original career interests, made choices consistent with his or her identity, and formed goals which are integrated with who the individual is, then options for post-barrier choices may look different from those who have not developed the same sense of integration. To further grasp how a college student comprehends decisions in the face of a career barrier, it is necessary to understand how original interests, choices, and goals develop.

Examining how these prospective teacher education students' career interests, choices, and goals developed prior to the school of education decision revealed four types of learning experiences which had the greatest influence on their initial choice of becoming a teacher. These four categories include parental influence, observations of the profession, employment, and school of education interaction. Each participant's choice following the school of education denial decision is then explored. This study describes how post-denial decisions are made within a student's intellectual and identity development.

**Parental influence.** Each participant was asked directly if they felt that while growing up their parents had expectations for their future careers. Kelly states that her parents "just always thought I would be a teacher." Kelly's goal of becoming a teacher seems like a parentally derived expectation. Because Kelly relies so heavily on her parent's and authorities, it is difficult to determine where her parents' goals end and where she has created her own goals.

Four of the participants thought their parents were encouraging and expected them to go to college, but that they didn't have exact plans for them. Claire and Alyssa had this experience, but also have parents who are teachers, which influenced their decisions as well. Claire discusses how her parents didn't have a set plan, but does discuss how her "mom was a teacher and her mom was a teacher, so that was pretty prominent when I was growing up." Alyssa states

that “I’ve always been around education stuff with my dad . . . it kind of made it an easy decision.” The parental influence for these two participants extends beyond simply giving these participants’ a different perspective on the teaching profession, but also gave participant’s vicarious learning experiences.

Claire talks about the prominence of teaching in her household, “I’ve just always seen my mom, you know, she’s always been in school and I’ve always been in school with her . . . I’ve just spent a lot of time there and it’s just a really rewarding profession.” Although she’s never had this experience directly, she knows of her mother’s experience within the profession and takes this perspective as her own. Alyssa also translates her father’s happiness as a teacher and the fond stories he tells, to her perspective that teaching will make her happy, “my dad, I know as a teacher he was really happy and he always tells me stories.”

Megan and John, in contrast to the other participants, discuss how their parents actively encouraged them toward alternative careers. Megan’s mom pushed her towards interior design and her grandfather encouraged architecture. Megan discusses going to work with her mom, she’d always try and teach me stuff and I’d always come to her jobs and all the houses and stuff that she would decorate and I’d come with her if I didn’t have school or something and she was always trying to teach me stuff, show me, you know, and she’d drop little hints here and there, like ‘see, you’re meant to do this after all.’

John’s father encouraged law or medical school, he states that “my dad always just kind of had that little push always, just, why don’t you go into this area or why don’t you go into this area.”

Although parental influence did not persuade any of these students directly into the teaching profession, a parental influence in participants’ decision making is clear. Parental

influence however, was only one category impacting how these participants made their initial career choice.

**Observations.** Participant's direct experience as a student allowed for many observations of the skills, qualities, and life of a teacher. Four participants, Amanda, Alyssa, John, and Carolyn talk about their impression of what it means to be a teacher from observations they've made about the profession. Alyssa and Carolyn specifically talk about the good and bad qualities of their past instructors. John and Amanda rely on the positive relationships they've had with teachers.

Alyssa states, "I think I've had a mixture of really good teachers and then had a mixture of really not good teachers and administrators . . . I know what I want to do versus what I don't want to do." Carolyn's experience in Italy, first in fifth grade where "the teacher was amazing . . . very encouraging" and then in sixth grade when her teacher was "rude," informed her decision that she wanted to help students be successful. The ability to recognize both the positives and drawbacks they've experienced provides a broad context for Alyssa and Carolyn to view the profession. Each knows that there are challenges within teaching but still want to contribute in a constructive way.

John talks about his observations as influencing him to want to become a mentor and have a "real relationship with the students." He states, "All throughout high school I had great teachers who kind of motivated me and taught me, just taught me how to work through my struggles . . . and it definitely encouraged me through high school." Similar to John's observations, Amanda talks about the influence of her teachers, "I had a lot of really good teachers growing up. And I always thought that would be cool if I could like, influence kids that

way.” These observations of teachers has helped John and Amanda relate to a particular aspect of the teaching profession.

**Employment.** Employment opportunities emerged as another theme for how these participants’ interests, choices, and goals developed. Amanda, Claire, Megan, and Carolyn each had job experiences which assisted in developing their choices. Claire worked as an art teacher at a summer boys camp, Carolyn worked as a babysitter, tutor, and nanny, Megan worked at a childcare center, and Amanda was a babysitter and nanny. Each of these participants discusses the significance of their past employment on their career decisions.

Claire mentions, “I have always been babysitting and I love being around kids, I loved working at the camp with kids . . . I just feel like I have a connection with them.” From her work experience, she’s encountered a connection and comfort in working with children. This was one of her reasons for pursuing teaching as a career.

Carolyn had vast work experiences as a babysitter, tutor, and nanny. She states that she “was a babysitter since I could” and talks about her summer nanny position. She was passionate about helping them learn, “it was so exciting to like see the changes that playing piano could do for them.” She also discusses being a volunteer tutor at youth services on a military base and helping students with disabilities, “I also helped families whose kids were in wheelchairs and had cerebral palsy or spinal bifida or muscular dystrophy, and you realize how to reach those kids.” Through these work experiences, Carolyn developed her interest and goal to become a teacher.

When asked what’s made her who she is since she’s been at KU, Megan directly responds, “my job.” She goes on to discuss a past job as a personal care assistant to a woman with cerebral palsy and then about her position at “a local child care center.” She discusses how

these positions have pushed her “to see what I can do and what I can’t do and what I want to do.” Megan connects her work experiences with her desire to be a teacher.

Although not as passionately connected to her past work experiences, Amanda mentions, “I try to babysit whenever I can when I’m here. I just like working with kids.” Unlike Claire, Carolyn, and Megan though, Amanda doesn’t see this experience as valid work experience. She states, “I’ve never had like a real working summer job. I’ve only ever been a nanny for people, so I’m going to have to do some things to put on my resume.” She sees her work experience as influencing her career decision to become a teacher, but considers it a hobby rather than an interest on which she can build a career. These prior work experiences influenced participants’ career interests, choices, and goals as each described these positions and the influence on pursuing teaching as a vocation.

**School of Education interactions.** Although not mentioned as frequently, two participants also discussed their interaction with the School of Education as influencing their career interests, choices, and goals. Alyssa states, “And then I took C&T 100 and 200 and so . . . they were good classes and I feel like I got a good experience out of it . . . So I was like, that’s good. So, I’ll try.” The influence of these introductory courses attracted Alyssa to KU’s School of Education and to becoming a teacher. Carolyn states, “everyone that I have met here at KU in the School of Ed has been so encouraging, so passionate, and it really opens your eyes to what you can expect.” Carolyn also discusses her interaction with an advisor, “he is so encouraging and so excited and passionate about teaching that you can’t help but become passionate about KU’s School of Ed.” The experiences these women had with the School of Education influenced their career choices and goals to specifically apply for KU’s teacher preparation program.

Parental influence, observations, employment, and School of Education interactions all had an influence on the participants' interest in teaching as a career, the choice made to major in education, and the goal of becoming a teacher. Social Cognitive Career Theory discusses the importance of learning experiences in developing an individual's self-efficacy and outcome expectations. Examining prospective teacher education students' development of career interests, choices, and goals, allows for a greater understanding of how these students then altered their plans when faced with the denial decision from the School of Education.

### Post-Barrier Actions

After the denial decision from the School of Education, each participant had choices to make. Within participants' decision making process, three themes emerge regarding their choices, including changing majors, transferring to a different school, or continuing towards becoming a teacher, although these are not exclusive of each other. Table 3 shows the choices of each participant after the School of Education denial decision:

Table 3

Participant Career Choices Following the School of Education Denial Decision

	Participant Options		
	Major Change	Transfer Schools	Continue Towards Teaching
Kelly	X		*
Amanda	X		*
Dana	X	X	*
John	X		*
Claire	X		*
Megan		X	X
Alyssa	X		X
Carolyn			X

Note: X indicates the current choice of the participant; \* indicates a continued interest in this choice.

Megan, Alyssa, and Carolyn, who are continuing towards teaching have made active steps to do so. Megan transferred to a different school of education, Alyssa enrolled in the UKAN Teach program, and Carolyn waited an extra year and reapplied to the School of Education and was accepted.

Although the other five participants changed their majors to pursue other options, all five made comments about the possibility of still teaching in the future. Kelly commented about the possibility of going into Teach for America. Amanda discusses getting a teaching certificate after her Bachelor's degree. Dana and John talk about working towards master's degrees in education. Claire is not sure how, but states, "I definitely see myself being a teacher."

The students' thoughts related to their post-barrier decisions, fell into three themes, Returning to Learning Experiences, Exploring Interests, and Becoming a Teacher.

**Returning to learning experiences.** Post-barrier actions for Kelly, Amanda, and Claire, include feeling uncertain, portraying the idea of "I don't know what I want to do now." These participants seem to differ in their intellectual development. Kelly portrays characteristics of an absolute knower – receiving pattern, Amanda portrays transitional knowing, the interpersonal pattern, and Claire is best represented by independent knowing – interindividual pattern. The commonality between these participants is that they seem to represent Baxter Magolda's (1993, 1995) relational patterns of knowing. These participants are unsure of what to do next. They seem to feel lost and uncertain and return to having new learning experiences to explore new career options.

Kelly views college and the barrier presented by the denial decision as things that will "just make me grow more and learn." She goes on to say, "hopefully it'll just make me more compassionate and understanding." Although Kelly viewed the situation as a set back, no real



career crisis occurred. Her choices are not being made based on how well she thinks she can teach. She even states, “having my own classroom kind of scares me.” The only true outcome expectation she has, which is parentally derived, is that she will graduate. She discusses a number of options for career goals, such as Teach for America, pursuing a master’s degree, using her art history minor to manage an art gallery, or just getting a job in town. Besides her goal of graduating from KU, she is still searching for the right goal, which has yet to be presented by an authority.

Amanda talks about a variety of careers she could pursue, from teaching to writing newsletters for a company to doing something with her art history minor. She has yet to learn about these options or to even consider her self-efficacy or outcome expectations in these occupations. She makes comments such as “I don’t even know if that sounded like something I could do” and “I don’t really know what other options I have . . .” She has selected an alternative major, but is still unsure how it will impact her career.

Although Claire might be characterized as an independent knower-interindividual pattern, a higher cognitive development level than Kelly and Amanda, she too has returned to having learning experiences. Claire’s uncertainty about her career interests and her acute awareness of the uncertainty of knowledge has led her to a hopeless feeling, “after I didn’t get in, I’m just kind of lost as to what I should be doing now.” Claire has decided to now major in History, but is still searching for her “niche.”

Students who return to having learning experiences after a career barrier seem lost and uncertain about their career choices. They seem to question themselves and what it is they want to do in the future. Rather than being seen as compromising their goals (Gottfredson, 1981) or as a feeling of defeat (Luzzo, 1996; Swanson & Tokar, 1991) using SCCT, this study instead

reveals a return to learning experiences. Exploring new career options in the cases of Kelly, Amanda, and Claire will allow the opportunity to gain greater self-efficacy and clearer outcome expectations for their future career decisions.

**Exploring interests.** The second theme to emerge under the heading of Post-Barrier Actions is portrayed by John and Dana. Both of these participants can be seen as transitional knowers-independent pattern and in the moratorium identity status. Dana and John have returned to exploring their interests. Each maintains their sense of efficacy and positive outcome expectations for careers in their new fields. Rather than returning to learning experiences, they are simply exploring their interests further in order to create new career goals.

Dana's first passion is math, as she states, "If I could do math everyday and not have to take any other classes I would." She is unsure, however, how to use a math degree in the future if she doesn't go on for an education master's degree. She talks about looking "for jobs online and I was like, man, I don't know what I'm going to do with my [math] degree now." Although she questions herself, it is really her career interests that she questions as she explores different ways to use her math degree.

John, like Dana, emphasizes exploring how to change his interest in economics into new career goals. He is unsure how he will use his economics degree, but discusses how the economic advisor he spoke with,

Gave me a list of just careers and different paths you can take with an econ degree and . . . I didn't expect it to be that long of a list, but . . . you can go into so many different areas, like accounting, banking, like business, or even like education per say. And I was like, huh, it's a little more universal fit for me.

Although teaching is still one of the options for John, he sees the School of Education denial decision as a new opportunity to explore his interests further. Albert and Luzzo (1999) discuss how contextual factors impact perceptions of career opportunities and how perceived career-related barriers can inhibit interests becoming choice goals. In the cases of John and Dana with the actual career barrier, their interests were only inhibited in their goal to become a teacher. SCCT (Lent et al., 1996) allows a new view of college students confronting a career barrier. When the student is cognitively able to collect information and apply his or her own logic to the situation, he or she may create new career goals from existing interests.

**Becoming a teacher.** The identity achieved participants had learning experiences, which led to the development of strong self-efficacy and outcome expectations. Carolyn's experiences with children on military bases, Megan's work at a child care center, and Alyssa learning vicariously through her father's career, allowed these three participants to integrate their knowledge of the teaching profession into their identity. The goal of becoming a teacher for these three women never wavered, even with the denial decision from the School of Education. Rather than questioning themselves, their interests, or their goals when the barrier was presented, each created a new path to achieving the goal.

Identity achieved participants quickly adjusted to the barrier presented by the denial decision to create a new pathway to become a teacher. When the path was blocked to achieving the goal, these students either had back up plans prior to the career barrier or were able to quickly consider options to make choice career actions. All three of these study participants were actively engaged in making their career goal of becoming a teacher a reality despite the career barrier. Alyssa enrolled in the UKAN Teach program, Megan transferred to a different

school of education, and Carolyn planned alternative courses in order to reapply and stay on track to graduation.

These participants considered the advice of others, family members, School of Education advisors and teachers in making plans, but clearly made the choices themselves. Megan, having characteristics of independent knowing, did not have a back-up plan in place, but was able to focus on her own perspectives after the barrier was presented. She quickly considered, “with the time of year it was and it was already time for me to enroll here, so I was like . . . do I need to enroll? I need to figure out my other options to see if it’s time to enroll here . . . so I did get that ball rolling quickly.” She researched other teacher education programs, met with a School of Education advisor and then an advisor at another school, and made the transfer decision.

Alyssa, focusing on the broader context of becoming a teacher, did not allow the denial decision to block her path. Before she applied to the School of Education, she had a backup plan in place, “I already knew about the UKAN program and so that was definitely a plan.” She was able to move directly from her original plan into her backup plan when her path was blocked.

Carolyn, like Alyssa, had a backup plan in place prior to the decision letter. As she states,

I’m very organized and nit-picky about my schedule and lay everything out, so in preparing to get in or not get in, I had my schedule laid out for what I need to do so I could still graduate on time. So, not getting in, now I have to cram all my ed courses into my senior year, but I was able to get all my math and gen eds out of the way.

These three women have had positive learning experiences, understand the tasks involved in teaching, can see themselves fulfilling those roles, have integrated their career choice with their identity, and overcame the career barrier to attain their goal. Unlike Gottfredson’s (1981) theory, these women did not cope with the career barrier by compromising their goals. The

barrier was not even seen as a motivator as Luzzo (1996) and Swanson & Tokar (1991) have suggested. Their identity was integrated with being a teacher, and each had the cognitive ability to consider new paths or actions to achieving their goals. Using SCCT (Lent et al., 1996), the perspective that Carolyn, Alyssa, and Megan were able to continue toward their choice goals through new actions becomes apparent.

### **Conclusion**

The reciprocal influence of intellectual development on identity development and identity development on intellectual development as Baxter Magolda (1998b, 2007) contends holds true in this study. The learners who seemed to have already tested options and committed themselves to ways of being as in Marcia (1966) and Josselson's (1987) identity achieved status seemed able to contextualize the complex career decisions faced by the School of Education rejection letter. The learners who did not display characteristics of the identity achieved status seemed to maintain reciprocal lower-levels of intellectual development.

Considering themes that emerge in this study in relation to SCCT (Lent et al., 1996), allows a more comprehensive understanding of students' reactions to career barriers. The relationship between the individual's cognitive and identity development provides a base for why individual's view career barriers differently. Identifying the particular factors which contribute to how a person's interests, choices, and goals originally develop provides insight to how a barrier to those choice goals might be difficult for an individual. Considering both identity and cognitive development and the development of interests, choices, and goals, allows for a more comprehensive perspective on how post-barrier decisions are made. SCCT (Lent et al., 1996) then provides a greater context to the career decision making process of college students who face barriers.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

In chapters 4 and 5, the researcher summarized the results of this study in eight case studies and a cross case analysis. The purpose of this study was to understand how undergraduate students manage the barrier of being denied admission to the School of Education at the University of Kansas, how they make career choices, and how they come to understand their decisions. Specific research questions included:

- How does the identity and intellectual development of prospective teacher education students influence their understanding of the denial decision and their subsequent career choices?
- How do prospective teacher education students' career interests, choices, and goals develop prior to and after the barrier of being denied admission to the School of Education? What choices do these students make after facing this barrier?

This study examined a specific group of people (college students who wish to be in a teacher education program), within a particular environment (one university's School of Education), who have faced a specific, objective barrier to career development (denied admission to the program). Through interviews, students were asked to describe their choice processes prior to and following the denial situation. Utilizing three theoretical perspectives, Baxter Magolda's (1998b, 2000) development of Self-Authorship, Marcia (1966) and Josselson's (1987) identity development model, and the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994, 1996), describing and exploring the research questions was possible. This chapter includes a summary of the findings, implications of the research, and future considerations.

## Summary of Findings

In exploring the career decision making process of eight college students facing the career barrier of being denied admission to their college major of choice, four major findings emerge from the results. Among college students, there seems to be a reciprocal relationship in the development of identity and intellectual levels. This development also seems to influence a college student's career choices. Using an objectively defined career barrier and the Social Cognitive Career Theory provides alternative views of career decision making from past career barrier research. Despite the barrier presented by the School of Education rejection, all participants also maintained an interest in teaching. The findings of this study add to the existing literature and provide direction for future research.

**Intersection of intellectual and identity development.** This study was focused on describing college students' identity and cognitive development in the face of a career barrier. Among the participants in this study, there does seem to be a reciprocal connection between an individual's identity status and intellectual development level. Baxter Magolda (2000) describes self-authorship as a way of understanding a college student's construction of the world. She contends that how an individual constructs and uses knowledge is tied to his or her sense of identity (Baxter Magolda, 1996, 1998b). However, there have not been studies directly addressing the relationship between identity and cognitive development.

Students who did not seem to be able to contextualize decisions and choices seemed to have turned to others for answers or entered an identity "crisis." These participants seemed to gain insight from listening to others' opinions or focusing more on personal thoughts to make decisions, rather than contextualizing their choice around their own identity. The students in this study who displayed characteristics of the identity achieved status did seem able to contextualize

their situation. These students were able to consider a variety of options and perspectives, think things through in advance, consider pathways to achieving their goal, and make choices for themselves. The participants who seemed to have progressed to this level also seemed to have an individuated, distinct identity as a foundation, being able to separate from the denial decision in order to create contextual solutions to achieve their goals. Although the relationship between the two constructs needs further exploration, this study does provide support for the idea that identity and intellectual development advance in parallel directions in similar time frames.

**Identity, intellectual development, & career decisions.** The connection between identity and cognitive development also seem to influence a college student's understanding of the denial decision and subsequent career choices. This is seen in the reaction to the denial decision, the options students considered, and how they utilized others in their decision making process. The impact of the uncertainty the students felt after facing the career barrier differed across developmental lines. The closer a student was to a more achieved identity status and contextual thinking, the more likely the student was to refocus and continue towards his or her goals. The options students considered were also influenced by their development. Students less likely to contextualize the situation turned to others to make decisions for them or made a choice based on logic or personal thoughts. These are not bad choices, as these cause students to gain additional learning experiences or further explore career interests. However, there tend to be different results when students are able to contextualize the situation or have the career goal ingrained in their identity. In this situation, the student seems to utilize others' opinions as a comparison to their own and to look for alternative routes to continue toward the original goal. Understanding how a college student's identity and cognitive development impacts career decisions has not been examined in this way through previous studies. This study provides



insight to how college students think through their choices following a career barrier and integrate their identity in making those subsequent decisions.

**Objective career barrier.** Utilizing the Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent et al., 1996) as a lens on how college students make career choices in the face of an objectively defined career barrier, a variety of possible responses emerged. Students' actions varied from having new learning experiences, revisiting interests to consider other career options, or finding new pathways for achieving the original goal. This finding differs from previous research that has been based on the perception of barriers. Previous research reports that individual's perceive barriers differently, possibly as defeat or motivation (Luzzo, 1996; Swanson & Tokar, 1991), inhibiting interests becoming goals (Albert & Luzzo, 1999), or in compromising goals (Gottfredson, 1981). By utilizing an objectively defined career barrier and the Social Cognitive Career Theory, the importance of interests and quality learning experiences in career development can be seen in how students redefine their career direction. This study adds to the career barrier literature by expanding on what is known about how people understand and approach decisions while managing the challenge of an actual barrier to career attainment.

**Interest in teaching.** Students in this study maintained an interest in becoming a teacher. Although denied admission and possibly selecting an alternative major, the call to teaching remained. The goal of becoming a teacher for these students developed through experiences they had with their parents, observations made about the teaching profession, job experiences, and interactions with the School of Education. After being denied admission, only three of the eight participants currently continued toward the goal of becoming a teacher. All of the participants, however, commented on their continued interest in teaching. This finding could be significant to universities and alternative certification programs in how to recruit teachers. If

individuals did not pursue teaching as a first career choice, but maintained the interest in teaching, will these individuals eventually return to the profession? This finding raises questions about identifying and recruiting alternative certification teachers.

### **Implications for Practice**

Competitive degree programs exist at many universities around the country. Students are denied admission to these programs each year. One has to wonder what students do when they receive that denial decision and how they make subsequent choices. By assessing where a student is developmentally when facing a barrier, programs and support systems can be established to better assist students in their career planning. Having a greater understanding of college student development in the career decision making process, particularly when a barrier arises, can help higher education institutions provide more comprehensive counseling and advising services.

Utilizing the Social Cognitive Career Theory to explore the career decision making process provides a new understanding of how students approach a barrier. Considering the student's development within that process, offers new insight for how students make choices and exert agency in career decision making. This study looks at a barrier many college students face, denial to a major. How an individual is able to contextualize this situation within his or her identity seems to influence the individual's reaction to the barrier and the subsequent choices made. For some, a return to learning experiences or exploring interests can assist students in making more informed choices. The effect of a career barrier seems dependent on both the individual's development and the environment. If institutions can consider the individual's needs and institutional support structures, students can develop improved career decision making

habits. Institutions can provide alternative career exploration programs, opportunities to take additional coursework, and reduce the pressure to graduate in four years.

When graduation rates are used as a measure of the university's success, institutions are eager to graduate students in four years. Using this as a measure of higher education success may not be an accurate reflection of today's world and students. Many factors influence the amount of time it takes a students to graduate, financial aid, family support, changing majors, transferring schools, etc. Related to this study, pushing students to graduate in four years may harm students who need the additional time to explore academic fields and careers.

Gaining a new appreciation for how students approach career decisions based on development, may also have university policy implications. Some schools offer financial incentives for students who graduate in four years or take a certain number of credit hours in a semester. If a student changes majors or wants to take a variety of courses, these opportunities could be reduced. The results of this study indicate that some students need to explore a variety of career fields. Creating new policies regarding the number of elective courses students take to allow for greater exploration during the first and second years of college, could provide students additional learning experiences to narrow their interest areas further and provide greater confidence to make difficult career decisions.

Although selection of a college major is seen as an important step in the "career identity-achieving process" (Pizzolato, 2007, p. 201), choice of a college major does differ in some ways from choice of a career. As research indicates, there are important connections between the two, but there are also differences which are important to note related to this study. Choice of major is one step toward career choice. Students want to major in a field of interest, interact with faculty and students with similar interests, and feel a sense of accomplishment while in college

towards their career field. However, students who major in English Literature later go to Law School, students who major in Communications go into business ventures, and students from multiple majors later become teachers. This study described students' perceptions and understanding of the barrier of being denied admission to a teacher preparation program. Some found other pathways to achieving the career goal of becoming a teacher. Others acknowledged their interest in teaching, but went on to explore another area of interest. This has implications for alternative certification programs.

After a barrier is presented, students who are looking for alternative pathways to teaching can find these new routes. However, given the continued interest in teaching following the denial decision, the question arises, at what point would these students return to teaching as a career option? Alternative routes to becoming a teacher are "state-defined routes through which an individual who already has at least a bachelor's degree can obtain certification to teach" without returning to college to complete a degree (National Center for Alternative Certification, 2010). Since the mid-1980's about 500,000 teachers have entered the teaching profession in the United States through alternative routes. Each state determines licensing or certificate credentials to teach (National Center). Often alternative certification processes are not communicated explicitly. The process can be confusing and states rarely advertise the process. Given the number of teachers who leave the profession as well as the findings of this study, it is possible that there are many professionals who once considered teaching who might be interested in returning.

### **Future Research**

It is difficult to take into account the multiple variables students bring into college and the career decision making process. Identity development and cognitive development are only

two developmental perspectives to be considered. Career barrier research utilizes college students as study participants, but rarely considers their personal development as a variable in the study. Taking identity and cognitive development into account in this study allows for a greater understanding of how students understand and integrate their career choices in the face of a barrier. Utilizing Baxter Magolda's (2000) development of self-authorship and Marcia (1966) and Josselson's (1987) identity development statuses, allowed the college student's development to be considered throughout the process of facing a career barrier.

Additional studies related to the relationship between identity and cognitive development beyond the lens of career choices are needed. Does the reciprocal relationship between these constructs hold up in other decisions college students make? Are there differences depending on the context of the situation? Besides making career choices while in college, students are also making decisions regarding their political views, relationship preferences, religious beliefs, etc. Exploring these other avenues may reveal similarities or differences about the relationship between identity and cognitive development.

The Social Cognitive Career Theory was selected for this study because of the breadth of insight it can provide to understanding the individual in the career decision making process. The theory integrates a variety of career development variables, making it one of the most comprehensive perspectives on career decision making. Given the variety of variables the model considers, however, it was difficult to truly explore the multiple components. Additional research is needed to continue exploring the multiple variables presented in the Social Cognitive Career Theory.

This study took place in one location and with one objectively defined barrier because all participants attended the same institution and were applying to the same degree program. Do

students in other competitive degree programs react to rejection in the same ways? Do students at other schools react in the same ways? Are there differences between students applying for undergraduate and graduate competitive programs?

Many studies have focused on the perception of career barriers. These studies postulate on what students would do if faced with an actual barrier. Differences between the perceived career barriers research and this study indicate a need for further research utilizing objective career barriers. Additional career barrier studies utilizing SCCT could provide additional clarification on the theory as well.

It would also be interesting, given the interest in teaching all participants continued to express, to explore career pathways of college students into the future. Will they return to teaching? Will they utilize their interest in teaching in other ways throughout their career? Or to explore this topic in another way, research on current teachers path into teaching could also provide insight to the career pathways of teachers.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to describe the career choices of undergraduate students who were denied admission to a School of Education, their decisions following a barrier, their narrative about how they made these choices, and how they came to understand their decisions. Utilizing Marcia (1966) and Josselson's (1987) identity development statuses, Baxter Magolda's (2000) development of self-authorship, and Lent et al.'s (1994, 1996) Social Cognitive Career Theory as theoretical frameworks, college students' career decision making processes were explored and described. As a qualitative study this research opens new areas to consider in the future and provides additional questions needing answers. Analyzing these cases, however, adds

new insight to the reciprocal relationship between identity and cognitive development, how development impacts career decision making, and objective career barriers.

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**Appendix A: E-Mail from the School of Education to Potential Participants**

At one time you applied to the School of Education teacher preparation program. I am a doctoral student who is interested in learning more about your experiences with the School of Education and your academic choices since then.

I would like to schedule a 60 minute interview with you. In exchange for your time, you will receive a \$20.00 American Express gift card.

Since the School of Education cannot release your name or contact information to me, I am asking you to contact me at [moore@ku.edu](mailto:moore@ku.edu) or 913-XXX-XXXX.

Additional information about this study and the informed consent statement will be provided prior to our interview. Thank you for your time.

Approved by the Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus, University of Kansas. Approval expires one year from 4/10/2009. HSCL #17983
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## **Appendix B: INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT**

### **College Students Facing Career Barriers: An Integration of Self-Authorship and Social Cognitive Career Theory**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The Department of Education at the University of Kansas supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You may refuse to sign this form and not participate in this study. You should be aware that even if you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time. If you do withdraw from this study, it will not affect your relationship with this unit, the services it may provide to you, or the University of Kansas.

#### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to describe what career choices undergraduate students who are denied or deferred admission to a School of Education make after confronting this barrier, how they make these choices, and how they come to understand their decisions.

#### **PROCEDURES**

Participants are asked to participate in one 60 minute interview with the researcher. Interviews will be audiotaped and then transcribed. Tapes will be stored in a locked cabinet and utilized only by the researcher. Once transcribed, the tape will be destroyed. The researcher will be the only one who will ever listen to the tape.

#### **RISKS**

No risks to participants are anticipated.

#### **BENEFITS**

The potential indirect benefits of this research will add to the literature about how college students understand their personal and career development in the face of a career barrier. Understanding how an individual's identity interacts with the environment can assist educators, administrators, and counselors in helping students interpret their experiences and making career decisions which would assist students' education and career preparation.

#### **PAYMENT TO PARTICIPANTS**

Participants will receive a \$20.00 American Express gift card in exchange for participation in the study. The researcher may ask for your social security number in order to comply with federal and state accounting regulations.

#### **PARTICIPANT CONFIDENTIALITY**

Your name will not be associated in any way with the information collected about you or with the research findings from this study. The researcher will use a study number or a pseudonym



instead of your name. The researcher will not share information about you unless required by law or unless you give written permission.

**REFUSAL TO SIGN CONSENT AND AUTHORIZATION**

You are not required to sign this Consent and Authorization form and you may refuse to do so without affecting your right to any services you are receiving or may receive from the University of Kansas or to participate in any programs or events of the University of Kansas. However, if you refuse to sign, you cannot participate in this study.

**CANCELLING THIS CONSENT AND AUTHORIZATION**

You may withdraw your consent to participate in this study at any time. You also have the right to cancel your permission to use and disclose information collected about you, in writing, at any time, by sending your written request to: Michelle Conrad, 7610 Hayes Street, Overland Park, KS 66204. If you cancel permission to use your information, the researcher will stop collecting additional information about you. However, the research team may use and disclose information that was gathered before they received your cancellation, as described above.

**QUESTIONS ABOUT PARTICIPATION**

Questions about procedures should be directed to the researcher listed at the end of this consent form.

**PARTICIPANT CERTIFICATION:**

I have read this Consent and Authorization form. I have had the opportunity to ask, and I have received answers to, any questions I had regarding the study. I understand that if I have any additional questions about my rights as a research participant, I may call (785) 864-7429 or (785) 864-7385 or write the Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus (HSCL), University of Kansas, 2385 Irving Hill Road, Lawrence, Kansas 66045-7563, email [dhann@ku.edu](mailto:dhann@ku.edu) or [mdenning@ku.edu](mailto:mdenning@ku.edu).

I agree to take part in this study as a research participant. By my signature I affirm that I am at least 18 years old and that I have received a copy of this Consent and Authorization form.

Type/Print Participant's Name	Date
Participant's Signature	

Researcher Contact Information  
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**Appendix C: Interview Protocol**

- Tell me a little about yourself. Where are you from? What are some of your interests/hobbies?
- What was most important in the last two or three years in terms of making you the way you are? What influenced you the most?
- Right now, what is the thing you like to do most?
- Tell me a little about your family. Older/younger siblings? Did you grow up together? Did you live with your parents? Where do you currently live?
- Did your parents go to college? Where? What do they do now? Occupations of other significant family members?
- Sometimes parents have plans for their children, things they would like them to go into or do. Did yours have any plans like that for you?
- How did you happen to come to KU?
- When did you come to decide on teaching as a career choice?
- Why did you want to become a teacher? What seems attractive about teaching?
- What factors attracted you to KU's teaching program?
- Did you ever consider anything else?
- When did you apply to the School of Education teaching program?
- How were you informed if you did or did not get into the program? Walk me through the process.
- How did you feel? What did you think at the time? What did you do?
- Who did you talk to?
- What options did you begin to consider? Who or what influenced your decision making process?
- Have you made any career choices since then/What career choices have you made since then?
- How do you feel about the career choices you have now?/How did you feel about the career choices you had?
- What are your current goals/plans for your career?
- How do your parents/family feel about your plans now?
- If you were to look ahead, how do you imagine your future in the next year? In the next five years? In ten years?