

THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF INTERNS AND THE JOURNEY TOWARD SELF-
AUTHORED CAREER COMMITMENTS

by

MARY JOAN ROBERTS

(Under the Direction of Laura Dean)

ABSTRACT

Using the theory of self-authorship as the theoretical framework, this phenomenological study examined the connections between the internship experience and the development of self-authored career commitments in college students. In previous literature on self-authorship, Baxter Magolda (2001) and others had suggested but had not provided empirical evidence that the internship experience provides a crossroads or developmental challenge that could facilitate self-authorship, particularly as it relates to career choice.

Eleven traditional-aged college students completed interviews and reflection journals to share their lived experience of completing an internship and then transitioning into their senior year and conducting their professional career search, which included both jobs and graduate school opportunities. This study provided evidence that when students participate in internships, they develop self-authored or internally defined career commitments. Four themes emerged when analyzing the data that answered this research question: How does participation in internships contribute to the development of self-authored career commitments of traditional-aged college seniors? These four themes

were clarifying career commitments, establishing a professional identity, influences professional career search, and developing an internal belief system about career choice. Additional findings included what motivated the research participants to complete an internship and the value that they placed on experiential learning.

INDEX WORDS: internships, experiential learning, career choice, career exploration, career decisions, career commitments, self-authorship, high-impact practice, phenomenology, employers, cooperative education, preparing college students for the job market

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to

To my father, Henry Roberts, who left this earth just as I was starting this doctoral journey, but has been with me in spirit every step of the way. Thank you for being the kind of dad who modeled the importance of charting my own path and choosing a career that I love.

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AND

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

When traditional-aged students enter college, friends and family often inquire about their major and occupational plans. Friends and family offer their opinion about these plans, often questioning what they intend to do with their major. On some level, students have always experienced societal pressure and anxiety to commit to a major and career path as soon as they matriculate (Brown & Strange, 1981). College graduates of the 21st century have experienced increased pressure and anxiety as they prepare for a new workforce driven by a new information economy (Hart Research Associates, 2014). The recession of 2008 created an uncertain job market and increased unemployment among new college graduates (Spreen, 2013). Employers have reported that in this new economy, a candidate's ability to "think critically, communicate clearly, and solve complex problems is more important than their academic major" (Hart Research Associates, 2013, p. 1). However, students continue to choose majors that they think equate to a specific type of job. Rather than basing their career decisions on personal values and interests, today's traditional-aged college students are likely to base their initial career and academic decisions on messages they have received from external authorities such as parents (Baxter Magolda, King, Taylor & Wakefield, 2012; Parks, Rich, & Gretch, 2012; Simmons, 2008). In her longitudinal research, Baxter Magolda (2001) found that graduates followed these external messages until they began working professionally.

Through high-impact practices such as service-learning, research with faculty, senior capstone experiences, study abroad, and internships (Kuh, 2008; Kuh, Kinzie,

Schuh & Whitt, 2005/2010; NSSE, 2013), students can use practical experience and reflection to consider and evaluate career paths. Through these deep learning experiences, students internalize and make what they have learned a part of their identity (Kuh et al., 2005/2010). In addition, these experiences have helped students take the external messages that they receive about careers and integrate them into the internal belief system they are developing (Baxter Magolda, 2004; Laughlin & Creamer, 2005). As students move away from external formulas and build an internal foundation for making decisions, they move closer to making self-authored decisions (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Pizzolato & Ozaki, 2007) and take responsibility for their academic and life choices (Baxter Magolda & King, 2008; Pizzolato, 2008).

In this chapter, I have provided an overview of how traditional-aged students approach career decision making. Then I discussed the characteristics, history, and benefits of work education opportunities such as cooperative education and internship programs in the United States. To lead into the problem, purpose, and research question guiding the study, I have provided an overview of the theory of self-authorship and its relationship to making career commitments. Lastly, I discussed the theoretical framework and paradigm that guides the study as well as delimitations and significance of the study.

Career Decision Making

In the literature, researchers and developmental theorists provide a foundation for understanding how traditional-aged college students approach career choices. When they enter college, many students have neither explored nor committed to a career (Shaffer & Zalewski, 2011). If students in this situation have relied on authorities for direction, they

could expect career and academic advisors to point them toward specific majors or career options (Baxter Magolda & King, 2008; Pizzolato, 2008; Shaffer & Zalewski, 2011). In fact, Baxter Magolda and King (2008) have suggested that advisors who prescribe formulas for success rather than providing tools to help students explore and choose a career path on their own keep students from reaching self-authorship. In contrast, some students reject assistance from advisors because they appear to have a clear career path although they have not explored or researched the career on their own (Shaffer & Zalewski, 2011).

While students may expect advisors to provide directed career advice (Pizzolato, 2008; Pizzolato & Ozaki, 2007), many have an interest in how college could prepare them for their future careers. For instance, 47% of first-year students have reported that they want career counseling (Noel Levitz, 2014). First year students, who participated in the CIRP Freshman Survey, indicated an interest in careers as well when 86.1% of them reported that the main reason they chose to attend college was “to get a better job” (Eagan et al., 2014, p. 38). College seniors have also expressed an interest in career counseling. For instance, in their annual student survey, the National Association of Colleges and Employers [NACE] (2014b) reported that the number of seniors who visited their career services offices multiple times increased from 42.8% in 2013 to 49.8% in 2014. The 2014 percentage was the highest in the history of the NACE student survey. As students show a renewed interest in career planning, higher education professionals can create environments where students are encouraged to research and explore careers so that they make choices based on a “grounded sense of self” (Savickas, 2011a, p. 13) rather than perceived employment prospects (Levine & Dean, 2012).

Although career development is a lifelong process rather than a one-time event (Super, 1980), many traditional-aged students approach it as such. For many, career development is limited to choosing a major as a freshman and looking for a job as a senior. Developmentally, freshmen students may be less committed to making career decisions and need guidance from advisors on how to explore career options (Nevill & Super, 1988). By continuing this guidance and opportunity for career exploration throughout all four years of college, higher education professionals could help traditional-aged students increase their commitment to choosing and pursuing a career (Nevill & Super, 1988). Savickas (2011a) outlined a four-step career exploration model to guide the career decision process. Through exploration activities, students expand their self-understanding and perceptions about future career possibilities. As students explore careers through information gathering, observation, and participation, they begin to crystallize or determine the fit between their sense of self and preferred occupations. Next, students must conduct further research to specify a career choice that they believe represents themselves to others. In the final step of exploration, students actualize their choice by trying out an occupation through internships or part-time jobs. By completing these opportunities, students could identify their own interests and values as they pertain to career choice (Barber, King, & Baxter Magolda, 2013; Barnett, 2013; Baxter Magolda, 2001). In addition, students who go beyond their required academic coursework and develop transferable skills through internships and co-curricular opportunities are more likely to meet the needs of employers in the new economy (Chegg.com, 2013; Hanneman & Gardner, 2010; Hart Research Associates, 2013; Nutting, 2013).

Internships

For many traditional-aged college students across the United States, completing practical work experience is an important step toward entering the professional world of work. In this section, I discussed the characteristics of internship and cooperative education programs as work education experiences, the history of these programs in the United States, and the benefits these programs offer employers and students.

Characteristics of Work Education Programs

Within the context of a college or university, over half of students report that they have completed internships or cooperative education (co-op) experiences by the time they graduate (NACE, 2014a; NSSE, 2014). Internships and co-op experiences are work education experiences that advance student learning by integrating acquisition of academic knowledge and related practice experience (Gardner & Bartkus, 2014). In function, internship and co-op experiences share many similarities and are often grouped together in national surveys (NACE, 2014a; NSSE, 2013). Both internship and co-op experiences provide students with the opportunity to gain professional work experience related to their academic program of study within a highly supervised and structured environment (Gardner & Bartkus, 2014). However, internships provide students, employers, and institutions of higher education with more flexibility. In cooperative education programs, most students complete paid work experiences with the same company for a specific length of time that alternates with planned coursework in order to obtain professional training in a specific field (Cedercreutz & Cates, 2010). In contrast, students could complete several different internships throughout various times in their

academic career more for the purpose of career exploration than training for a specific profession (Gardner & Bartkus, 2014).

For the purpose of this study, I drew upon literature that refers to both cooperative education and internship experiences since these work-education delivery methods share a similar goal of preparing students for the transition to the professional world. However, I used the term “internship” to refer to both experiences throughout the study. Although students get the benefit of exploring their intended career through a co-op experience (Zegwaard & Coll, 2011), internships are more often discussed in the literature as a career intervention for gathering career information and exploring career paths (Cord, Bowrey, & Clements, 2010; Dolinsky, Quay, & Serpa, 2011; Gardner & Bartkus, 2014; Neapolitan, 1992; Savickas, 2011a). Furthermore, in my professional experience in career services, I have observed a decrease in cooperative education and an increase in internship opportunities for liberal arts and business students.

History of Work Education Programs

By integrating applied work experiences such as internships and cooperative education into their academic programs, institutional leaders have created a bridge between higher education and industry (Cedercreutz & Cates, 2010). When industry leaders in the late 1800s needed colleges and universities to offer specialized training to support new technology, institutional leaders responded by offering practical education courses focused on particular fields (CEIA, 2013). To enhance the training of students studying to become engineers, Herman Schneider created the first cooperative education program at the University of Cincinnati in 1906 (Cedercreutz & Cates, 2010; CEIA, 2013). Since then, over 900 universities in the United States have developed cooperative

education programs in engineering and other fields (Cedercreutz & Cates, 2010; CEIA, 2013).

By the 1960s, colleges and universities began to expand opportunities for students to receive relevant, practical experiences as part of their academic programs (CAS, 2012). In addition to structured cooperative education programs that followed similar standards across the nation, colleges and universities included internship programs as a curricular option (CAS, 2012). As budgets began to tighten in the 1990s, institutions cut back on their cooperative education programs (CEIA, 2013) because they required high levels of funding to pay faculty and staff who taught, managed, and coordinated the programs. Overtime, both experiences have remained popular among employers and students. Of employers participating in a national internship and co-op survey, 92% had internship programs, and 45.1% had cooperative education programs (NACE, 2015). In national surveys, 52% (NSSE, 2014) to 61% (NACE, 2014a) of traditional-aged college seniors complete internship or cooperative education experiences.

Benefits of Internship Programs

Through the internship experience, students explore potential career options as well as develop transferable skills and gain experience that prepares them for the transition from college to work (Barnett, 2012; Cord, Bowrey, & Clements, 2010; Dolinsky et al., 2011; Neapolitan, 1992; Zegwaard & Coll, 2011). By trying out a career before entering professional life, students have the opportunity to use their own experience to evaluate and define their career choices (Savickas, 2011a). This opportunity is of particular importance for students who have pursued majors and considered career options based on family, peer, and faculty influence rather than their

own internal belief systems (Baxter Magolda et al., 2012; Parks, et al., 2012) or factual career information (Beggs, Bantham, & Taylor, 2008). In fact, Baxter Magolda (2001) has suggested that students who explore careers and complete internships have a greater chance of making self-authored or internally motivated career commitments.

Self-Authored Career Commitments

As a high-impact practice, internships also provide students with a meaningful, life-changing out-of-class experience that facilitates their intellectual, social, and personal development (Kuh, 2008; NSSE, 2013). Baxter Magolda (2001) has stated that the purpose of a 21st century education is to provide an educational experience and environment that promotes the development of self-authorship in graduates. When students achieve self-authorship, they have developed “the capacity to internally define their own beliefs, identity, and relationships,” (Baxter Magolda, 2001, p. xvi).

The journey toward self-authorship consists of four phases: following external formulas, experiencing a crossroads, becoming the author of one’s own life, and establishing an internal foundation (Baxter Magolda, 2001). Traditional first-year college-aged students are likely to enter the major and career decision process in the following formulas phase (Baxter Magolda, 2001). In this phase, students depend on authorities to tell them what they should know and how they should think. When students experience a crossroads or developmental challenge, they are more likely to develop their own internal foundation or belief system and move toward self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2001, 2008). In her longitudinal study, Baxter Magolda found that many of her participants did not reach self-authorship until they experienced a crossroads in their professional work (Baxter Magolda, 2001, 2008). Once her participants began to

work in their fields, they experienced a crossroads because they realized that they chose careers based on an externally defined belief and value system (Baxter Magolda, 2001).

In several studies on self-authorship, researchers have suggested that internships could provide students with the crossroads moment they need to move toward self-authorship (Barber, 2014a, 2014b; Barber & King, 2014; Barber et al., 2013; Baxter Magolda, 2001; Creamer & Laughlin, 2005). While many researchers have attempted to prove the value of internships through studies on skill development (Barnett, 2012; Cord, Bowery, & Clements, 2010; Dolinsky et al., 2011; Peterson, Wardwell, Will, & Campana, 2014; Tse, 2010; Sweitzer & King, 2013; Wood & Kacynski, 2007), they have not focused their research on understanding the lived experience of interns and their developmental journey toward self-authored career commitments. Although researchers (Chickering & Reiser, 2003; Kuh et al., 2005/2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005;) that have focused on the intellectual, social, and personal development of college students refer to the value of internships, they have not provided empirical evidence that shows how these experiences contribute to career commitments.

Problem Statement

In her longitudinal research, Baxter Magolda (2001) found that the graduates in her study who did not reach self-authorship prior to graduation experienced a crossroads during their first professional work experience. When she conducted follow-up interviews with these graduates, they revealed that they had made career commitments based on external messages rather than their own voices (Baxter Magolda, 2001). From these stories, Baxter Magolda (2001) has suggested that internships could provide students with an opportunity to reach this crossroads and move toward self-authored

career commitments prior to graduation. However, few researchers have studied the development of self-authorship in college students (Pizzolato & Ozaki, 2007). Laughlin and Creamer (2005) studied self-authorship and career commitments of college students, but they did not study how internships influenced self-authorship. Although Egart and Healy (2004) conducted a study on the self-authorship of students who completed an internship program, career commitments were just one part of their self-authorship assessment. In a similar study, Jones and Abes (2004) provided evidence of how experiential learning opportunities can lead to self-authored career commitments, but they focused their study on service learning rather than internships. The value of internship experiences coupled with the lack of empirical evidence supports the need to examine the potential connection between internships, self-authorship, and career commitments.

Purpose of the Study

Employers have said that they prefer to hire graduates who have completed internships because they can solve real-world problems in the workplace (Chegg.com, 2013; Hart Research Associates, 2015; Gardner, 2013). In addition, researchers have suggested that internships expose students to multiple challenges and perspectives that could help them make internally defined or self-authored career decisions (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Creamer & Laughlin, 2005). Through this study, I investigated the suggestions of these researchers by exploring the ways in which internships influence how traditional-aged college students establish self-authored career commitments. Through a qualitative study, I captured the lived experiences of students who have completed internships and are considering career decisions during their senior year of

college. This study added to the literature about self-authorship by looking more specifically at the connections between internships and self-authored career commitments.

Research Question

For this research study, I pose the following research question: *How does participation in internships contribute to the development of self-authored career commitments of traditional-aged college seniors?*

Research Paradigm

A paradigm or worldview is a set of philosophies that describes how one constructs knowledge during the research process as well as in student affairs practice (Guido, Chavez, & Lincoln, 2010; Jones, Torres, Arminio, 2014). For this study, I used a constructivist paradigm as a framework to guide my research methodology for data collection and analysis as well as my relationship with my participants. This framework aligns with the constructivist oriented theoretical framework that I have chosen to guide the study. By applying the theory of self-authorship, I listened for how the students make meaning of their internship experience in terms of their career commitments (Baxter Magolda, 2001). Using a constructivist paradigm, I want to go beyond knowing *what* students experience in their internships and expand my knowledge to *how* students interpret their experience (Baxter Magolda, 2001), in regard to their career commitments

Theoretical Framework

To guide this study, I used Baxter Magolda's theory of self-authorship to explore how the internship experience influences how traditional-aged college students establish self-authored career commitments. The theory of self-authorship drives the purpose of

the study. This theory emphasizes the social construction or co-construction of knowledge with participants (Baxter Magolda, 2001); and therefore, offers a framework for understanding the experiences of the participants through a constructivist lens. Through written reflections and interviews, the participants and I co-constructed meaning of how internship experiences influence self-authored career commitments.

Operational Definitions

Career commitment: Career decision/choice/plans/goals/interests.

Crossroads: A developmental crisis or conflict that causes individuals to question external formulas and evaluate internal beliefs (Baxter Magolda, 2001).

External formulas: Ideas and plans acquired from the outside world rather than from an internal belief system. External influencers include authority figures, peers, and other societal influences that one uses to guide his or her individual perceptions and decisions in relation to careers (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010).

High-impact practices: Provide students with meaningful, life-changing out-of-class experiences with diverse others that facilitate their intellectual, social, and personal development through frequent feedback (NSSE, 2013). These include “special undergraduate opportunities such as learning communities, service-learning, research with a faculty member, study abroad, internships, and culminating senior experiences” (NSSE, 2013, p. 1) that positively influence learning and retention (Kuh, 2008).

Internal formulas: Personal value system that guides decision making once someone develops an internal foundation for making career commitments and other decisions (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Evans et al., 2010).

Internal foundation: An internal belief system that individuals develop once they trust their internal voice and integrate it with external messages to make decisions (Baxter Magolda, 2008).

Internships and Cooperative Education (Co-op): For the purpose of this study, the term “internship” applied to both internship and co-op programs. An internship is a paid or unpaid, structured practical or applied-learning experience that integrates academic knowledge and field-related practice in a highly structured and professionally supervised work environment (CAS, 2012; Gardner & Bartkus, 2014; NACE, 2011).

Self-authorship: “The capacity to internally define [one’s] own beliefs, identity, and relationships,” (Baxter Magolda, 2001, p. xvi).

Traditional-aged college student: Ages 18 to 24 (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2014)

Work-education: A term coined by Gardner & Bartkus (2014) to represent the multiple experiences that combine practical work and education. This term describes a variety of experiences related to internships and cooperative education. The experiences described by this term include work-integrated learning, work-based learning, cooperative and work-integrated education, vocational education and training, career and technical education, work placement, project-based learning, experiential education, experiential learning, professional development, and community/civic engagement (Gardner & Bartkus, 2014) Programs that deliver work-education include cooperative education, internships, externships, apprenticeships, practicum, and service-learning (Gardner & Bartkus, 2014).

Assumptions and Delimitations of the Study

Because of the nature of a phenomenological study (van Manen, 1990), my study focused on a small sample of students so that I could focus on capturing thick, rich descriptions from their internship experiences (Moustakas, 1994). My research participants were traditional-aged college students who attended Liberal Arts University (LAU), a predominantly White institution in the Southeast. By using a small sample of students from a homogenous campus within a qualitative study, the results are not generalizable to all students. However, I hope that the experiences of my participants offer a starting point for further research and discussion for understanding how completing an internship influences the way students develop self-authored career commitments.

Significance of the Study

Through this study, I plan to contribute to the research that suggests traditional-aged college students can reach self-authorship through high impact, work-education experiences such as internships. Many researchers have suggested that self-authorship can occur when an individual enters the world of work through their first professional internship or full-time job (Barber, 2014a, 2014b; Barber & King, 2014; Barber et al., 2013; Baxter-Magolda, 2001; Laughlin & Creamer, 2005). Others (Egart & Healy, 2004) have studied interns but looked at self-authorship in broad terms rather than specifically on career commitments. Furthermore, the literature on internships as a high-impact practice has focused on specific college and university programs but not on specific student experiences (Kuh et al., 2005/2010). By exploring how internships influence how traditional-aged college students make self-authored career commitments, I have

contributed to the empirical research that examines the connections between internships, self-authorship, and career commitments.

Subjectivity Statement

As a professional within the career services field who has worked closely with internship programs, I came into the research process with knowledge and experiences that could influence the research process. For instance, knowing that the field needs more literature on the developmental nature of internships fueled my interest in the research topic. Furthermore, my connection to the career services field made it difficult to separate myself from the research topic. However, I bracketed any preconceived ideas I had about the value of internships and went into the research experienced on focused on making meaning of the participants' experiences (Creswell, 2014) and joining with participants to co-construct new knowledge through their multiple perspectives (Guido, Chavez, & Lincoln, 2010). Although my professional experience drove my interest in the research topic, my constructivist approach acknowledged the varied experiences students have in their internships and the value of understanding each one from the perspective of the student.

Chapter Summary

Traditional-aged college students enter college with the pressure to commit to a major and career path (Brown & Strange, 1981; Shaffer & Zalewski, 2011). However, most traditional-aged students have based their major and career decisions on the advice of others rather than through their own research or exploration activities (Baxter Magolda et al., 2012; Parks et al., 2012; Shaffer & Zalewski, 2011). As a result, Baxter Magolda (2001) found that participants in her longitudinal study did not achieve self-authorship or

an internal belief system until they entered their professional careers. The individuals in her study experienced a crossroads or challenge when they realized they had chosen a career that did not match their interests and values. In fact, she and others suggest that practical experiences such as internships could move students toward self-authorship while they are in college. While some researchers have examined internships and self-authorship (Egart & Healy, 2004), further research could provide insight into the relationships between completing internships and establishing self-authored career commitments. Through this qualitative study, I have explored the ways in which internships influence how traditional-aged college students establish self-authored career commitments. To gain this understanding, I captured the lived experiences of students who have completed internships and were considering career decisions during their senior year of college. Their stories may provide additional insight into internships as a high-impact practice that can help students achieve self-authorship.

In the remaining chapters, I first reviewed the literature that binds the concepts of internships, career decision making, and self-authorship. Then, I outlined the methodology for the study in Chapter 3 and provided findings from the study, which included descriptions from the participant interviews in Chapter 4. In the final chapter, I discussed implications as well as recommendations for practice and further study.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

For the purpose of this study, it is important to understand the theoretical framework and research that connects the constructs of self-authorship, career decision making, and the student internship experience. First, I will provide an overview of Baxter Magolda's theory of self-authorship to provide a framework for understanding the research on self-authorship and career decision making in the literature. Then I will review the literature that establishes a connection between career decision making and self-authorship, which includes an overview of how work education programs and high-impact practices relate to these constructs. In addition, I will review the career development and career counseling theory literature to provide a framework for understanding the career decision-making process. From the literature, I will review the factors that influence career-decision making, which includes internships as a career exploration tool. Lastly, I will provide an overview of the literature on internships and provide insight on their role in enhancing employability and influencing self-authorship.

Theoretical Framework

Self-authorship

The theory of self-authorship provides a framework for exploring how traditional-aged students in this study used their internship experiences to establish career commitments. When individuals reach self-authorship, they have achieved "the internal capacity to define one's beliefs, identity, and social relations" (Baxter Magolda, 2008, p. 269). Although most associated with Baxter Magolda, self-authorship originated as the fourth order of Kegan's model for helping people navigate the complexities of modern

life (Barber, King, & Baxter Magolda, 2013; Kegan, 1994). In both Kegan's model and Baxter Magolda's theory, people arrive at self-authorship when they begin to rely on an internal belief system rather than external messages or formulas (Barber, King, & Baxter Magolda, 2013; Baxter Magolda, 2001, 2008). Before students can establish this internal belief system, they must experience a crossroads or conflict that causes them to question the external formulas or messages that guided their original belief system (Baxter Magolda, 2001). In this research study, I applied the theory of self-authorship to explore how the student internship experience could serve as a crossroads for defining self-authored career commitments.

Self-authorship consists of three elements: trusting the internal voice, building an internal foundation, and securing internal commitments (Baxter Magolda, 2008). To trust the internal voice, students realize that they can control how they think and respond to external events (Evans et al., 2010). When students trust their internal voice, they develop an internal foundation that guides their decisions but adjusts as they experience new challenges (Baxter Magolda, 2008; Evans et al., 2010). Once students secure internal commitments, they integrate their internal foundation with external messages to live life by their own convictions (Baxter Magolda, 2008; Evans et al., 2010). This internal belief system guides how students construct knowledge as well as how they make meaning of their identities and their relationships with others (Barber et al., 2013; Baxter Magolda, 2001, 2008; Kegan, 1994).

Baxter Magolda (2001) found that participants in her longitudinal study experienced a crossroads or conflict during their first professional job. If students can participate in experiences that mirror professional life, they could gain the ability to move

away from prescribed formulas for success so that they can make their own academic and career decisions (Baxter Magolda & King, 2008; Baxter Magolda et al., 2012). When students begin to make self-authored decisions, they have the ability to consider the viewpoints of others without losing their personal identity (Baxter Magolda, 1999; Creamer & Laughlin, 2005). When students establish an internally defined identity, they achieve “a developmental capacity that help meet the challenges of adult life” (Baxter Magolda, 2008, p. 269). When students have made career commitments based on their internal foundation or belief system, they have moved away from relying on authorities when making decisions (Baxter Magolda et al., 2012). In the following section, I discussed studies that have explored the relationship between self-authorship and career decision making in college students.

Self-authorship and Career Commitments

As students move toward self-authorship, they begin to form an internal belief system that can help them arrive at independent career decisions. When Baxter Magolda (1992) first studied the knowing and reasoning of college students, she found connections between self-authorship and career exploration activities. She found these connections in future studies as well (Baxter Magolda, 2001), and other researchers have continued to explore these connections. In this section, I have provided an overview of the literature that connects self-authorship with career decision making.

In her initial research, Baxter Magolda (1992) applied her epistemological reflection model to various college student experiences, including internships and student employment. Baxter Magolda (1992) and Bock (1999) have used the model to describe how students process knowing and reasoning in the career-decision making process.

Most first-year students present as absolute knowers who see their career advisor and others as the authority who can tell them what to do with their lives (Bock, 1999). As students move to transitional knowing, they continue to value the opinion of others in the decision-making process, but the students at this stage want to exchange ideas with friends and authority figures in order to evaluate how the decision has influenced their lives (Baxter Magolda, 1992; Bock, 1999). Upperclassman students are more likely to be in the independent knowing stage (Bock, 1992). At this stage, students who have completed internships independently evaluate their experience and acknowledge that they have multiple career options (Baxter Magolda, 1992). Independent knowers want to share ideas with support systems and seek assistance from advisors to help them explore options (Bock, 1999). Students who become contextual knowers are open to new ideas and appreciate the freedom to choose in multiple areas of their lives, including employment options (Baxter Magolda, 1992; Bock, 1992). At this stage, students have gained confidence in their abilities (Baxter Magolda, 1992) which makes multiple options in their lives possible to them. Students who reach the contextual knowing phase realize that they are picking more than a major and that their life and work intertwine to influence the world around them (Bock, 1992).

Through her longitudinal study, Baxter Magolda (2001) examined the journey of self-authorship for participants from age 18 to their thirties. When these participants were in college, they showed minimal movement toward self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2001). As she continued her study with participants into their thirties, Baxter Magolda (2001) looked beyond epistemological or intellectual development and included interpersonal and intrapersonal identity development. From her research, Baxter

Magolda (2001) argued that the purpose of a 21st century education is to help students develop an internal sense of self in addition to intellectual development. As participants described their development of an internal sense of self or arrival at self-authorship, their environments included three common themes (Baxter Magolda, 2001). In education and employment environments, participants moved toward self-authorship when authority figures validated their knowledge and ability to contribute knowledge within the environment. In these environments, educators and employers also provided participants with the opportunity to use their knowledge in a practical experience. Lastly, educators and employers constructed knowledge with participants to achieve higher-level thinking. While some institutions have created environments that support the intellectual and developmental growth of students (Kuh et al., 2005/2010), Baxter Magolda maintained (2001, 2007) that many college environments do not provide the guidance or the experiences that help students move from an externally to an internally defined belief system. Institutions of higher education could create environments that help students arrive at self-authored career decisions.

Since her seminal study (Baxter Magolda, 1992; Baxter Magolda, 2001), Baxter Magolda and several others (Abes & Jones, 2004; Barber, 2014a, Barber & King, 2014; Baxter Magolda & King, 2008; Creamer & Laughlin, 2005; Egart & Healy, 2004; King, Baxter Magolda, Barber, Kendall Brown, & Lindsay, 2009; Meszaros, Burger, and Creamer, 2005; Pizzolato, 2005; Pizzolato, 2008; Pizzolato & Ozaki, 2007; Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004; Torres & Hernandez, 2007) have continued to research how college students arrive at self-authorship. While some of these studies have not focused entirely on career choice, many (Barber, 2014a, Barber & King, 2014; Baxter Magolda &

King, 2008; Creamer & Laughlin, 2005; King et al., 2009; Meszaros, Burger, and Creamer, 2005; Pizzolato, 2008; Pizzolato & Ozaki, 2007; Torres & Hernandez, 2007) have used examples of students making major and career decisions or suggest that career interventions such as internships could help the students move toward self-authorship.

Creamer and Laughlin (2005) referenced Bock (1999) as the only other researcher before them to examine the connections that Baxter Magolda (1992) had made between self-authorship and career. In their study of high school and college women, Creamer & Laughlin (2005) examined the role self-authorship plays in career decision making. From their findings, Creamer and Laughlin (2005) suggested that experiencing the challenges of the workplace could propel individuals toward self-authorship. In addition, women study participants have revealed that they were more likely to rely on parents and relatives than counselors and teachers for career advice (Creamer & Laughlin, 2005; Meszaros, Burger, and Creamer, 2005). Because some of the women were likely to reject the advice of advisors, Creamer and Laughlin (2005) suggested that internship and other practical experience programs could expose students to new challenges that require them to approach them from multiple perspectives. Approaching such challenges in the workplace could help students develop an internal foundation for making career decisions (Creamer & Laughlin, 2005). In the following paragraphs, I have discussed the studies related to helping students gain multiple perspectives and providing practical experiences that help students move toward self-authorship.

Exploring multiple perspectives. Researchers have provided evidence that career-planning interventions can challenge the ideas that students have about careers by encouraging them to explore multiple viewpoints. Pizzolato and Ozaki (2007) examined

the experiences of students participating in an advising program focused on retention.

Although the majority of students in this study were juniors and seniors, they had not had a transformational experience that had facilitated their ability to make connections between disparate concepts, and as a result, they continued to view their roles in a dualistic manner (Pizzolato & Ozaki, 2007). Students at this stage have reported choosing a major based on an advisor's suggestion without individual exploration (Torres & Hernandez, 2007). Rather than provide directed advice, advisors could facilitate self-authorship by challenging the assumptions of students and giving them the opportunity to reflect on those assumptions so that they can make more informed major and career decisions (Baxter Magolda & King, 2008; Pizzolato, 2008). When students have had that type of advising relationship, they are more likely to move toward self-authorship and use independent thinking when they experience a crossroads moment that challenges their existing assumptions (Baxter Magolda & King, 2008; Pizzolato & Ozaki, 2007).

When students experience cognitive dissonance and reflect on how they had used external formulas to construct meaning, they begin to integrate external and internal beliefs to move toward self-authorship (Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004; Torres & Hernandez, 2007). Similarly, Barber (2012, 2014a) examined how acquiring the ability to make connections between disparate concepts and use them in multiple contexts could better prepare students for the complexities of life. Students in the beginning stages were unable to make connections between seemingly different concepts (Barber, 2014a). However, students who integrate knowledge successfully are able to “connect the domain of ideas and philosophies to the everyday experience, from one field of study or discipline to another, from past to the present, between campus and community life”

(Barber, 2012, p. 593). Barber (2014a) along with other researchers (Barber & King, 2014; King et al., 2014) analyzed interviews from the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education to identify transformational learning experiences that support integrated learning and self-authorship as students matriculated through four years of college. Although these studies have explored various transformative moments, the integration of multiple learning experiences and career decisions appeared as a theme. For instance, one student connected her work experience as a summer camp counselor to what she was learning in college and later applied it to the teaching job in her junior year that had confirmed her decision to become a teacher after graduation (Barber, 2014a).

Although their study focused on establishing a self-authored ethnic identity, Torres and Hernandez (2007) discovered that as students experienced cognitive dissonance, they began to look at multiple perspectives for many aspects of their lives. Students who had not experienced cognitive dissonance chose majors based on information from advisors rather than evaluating their internal value system (Torres & Hernandez, 2007). However, another student, who experienced a crossroads moment when she began to take pride in her nationality, decided that she could arrive at her career destination through multiple pathways (Torres & Hernandez, 2007). As students began to view themselves in multiple ways, they began to evaluate multiple career options and made decisions that aligned with their identities and internal belief system (Torres & Hernandez, 2007).

Practical experiences. Researchers have suggested that practical experiences such as internships provide the challenge students need to move toward self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Laughlin & Creamer, 2005). In their study on the relationship

between learning partnerships and self-authorship, Egart and Healy (2004) used students completing an internship through Miami University as their set of participants. Although not intended to be a study on internships as a means for moving toward self-authored career commitments, this study has been the only one that I have identified in the literature as providing evidence for the connection between internship experiences and self-authorship. In this study, learning partners used the internship experience as the crossroads moment that would transition the students from following formulas to being the author of their own lives (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Egart & Healy, 2004).

In a similar study, Jones and Abes (2004) examined how participating in a service-learning project helped students arrive at self-authorship. While they did not focus their study on how students make self-authored career commitments, Jones and Abes (2004) provided further evidence that students learn about their career interests through practical experience. All of the students in their study used their experience to arrive at an internally motivated decision to pursue service-oriented careers (Jones & Abes, 2004). McClam, Ciambra, Burton, Fuss & Fudge (2008) studied a service-learning internship experience and discovered that psychology students who taught a career planning course to community college students clarified their career commitments as a result of the experience. These studies indicate that practical, career related work experiences such as internships and service-learning could offer students the opportunity to explore multiple career pathways.

High-impact practices. Many institutions of higher education have implemented high impact practices such as service-learning and internship experiences that facilitate the intellectual, social, and personal development of students (NSSE, 2013). These

experiences provide the educational environment that Baxter Magolda (2001) and Barber (2014a) have identified as essential for a 21st century education. Mather (2008) provided additional support for experiential high-impact practices when he studied how previous experiential and academic experiences had influenced the self-authored career commitments of students in a humanitarian internship. Although his study participants were completing an internship, Mather focused his study on the high-impact practices students completed before the internship. He did not provide evidence that the internship experience helped students clarify career commitments, but he did enhance empirical knowledge that completing high-impact practices could help students clarify their career interests.

Career Decision-Making Factors

In addition to achieving a self-authored mind, several other factors influence how students approach career decision making. Beyond creating environments that facilitate high-impact practices such as internships, institutional officials also need to understand what motivates students to participate in activities that promote independent decision-making. In this section, I have discussed the literature on career development and career counseling theory, which provides a framework for understanding and guiding career exploration and decision-making in college students. In addition, I have provided evidence from the literature on the ways external messages, personal characteristics, and behaviors influence the career decision-making process for traditional-aged college students.

Career Development and Counseling Theory

Career development theorists such as Parsons, Super, and Holland have provided a foundation for understanding vocational behavior and career choice that career advisors continue to use today (Savickas, 2011a). Parsons (1909) introduced a process for gathering information about a person's background to determine abilities and interests and then matching them with suitable occupations. His focus on choosing a vocation through careful self-analysis and guidance (Albertson, 1909) continues to guide the career development field. Parson's model for matching individuals to occupations evolved into Holland's person-environment theory (Savickas, 2011a). In his theory, Holland (1997) maintained that people align with six personality types and environment types that share similar characteristics (Evans et al., 2010). People naturally gravitate toward people with similar characteristics as well as environments that allow them to use their talents and express their values (Evans, et al., 2010). Super developed a model of vocational development that emphasizes career development as a lifelong process rather than a one-time event (Savickas, 2011a).

Postmodern theorists such as Savickas integrated concepts from these early theorists to develop his career construction theory. In this theory, Savickas (2011a, 2011b) uses the stories of his clients to help them author their own career path. Much like the theory of self-authorship, career construction theory encourages individuals to author their own career story. Career construction theory provides a framework for helping individuals construct meaning through the three perspectives of actor, agent, and author as they share stories from their past work experience (Savickas, 2011a, 2011b). Clients can author their own story by exploring how others have influenced their

experiences and developing a sense of self that helps them navigate new occupational challenges (Savickas, 2011a). By reflecting on their past work lives, individuals increase their self-awareness, begin building a career identity based on their sense of self rather than how people view them, and achieve authority over their own careers.

Career Decision-Making Challenges

When students seek career counseling or advising, they have often completed a new vocational task such as an internship or have faced an occupational transition such as making career decisions prior to graduation (Savickas, 2011a). However, prior to completing an internship, students may encounter external messages that influence how they approach career exploration and decision-making. In addition, specific personal characteristics and behaviors influence the path students take toward completing an internship and arriving at self-authored career commitments.

External messages. As students begin to explore and establish initial career commitments, they may rely on external messages and authorities to provide meaning about the world of work. Researchers (Barber, King, and Baxter Magolda, 2013; Baxter Magolda et al., 2012) have found that first-year students looked to external authorities when making decisions related to majors and careers. However, other studies have shown that most students, even college seniors, used external meaning making structures, and those who did not were still in the beginning stages of self-authorship (King et al., 2009; Pizzolato and Ozaki, 2007). Students often make initial career decisions based on information and ideas that family and other influencers have provided them rather than personal research and reflection (Barber, King, & Baxter Magolda, 2013; Baxter Magolda et al., 2012; Parks et al., 2012; Pizzolato, 2008; Simmons, 2008). Before they

experienced a crossroads that forced them to consider more than just externally defined options, students used advice and feedback from family, peers, and other external entities to make meaning of career decisions (Laughlin & Creamer, 2005). Through critical analysis of multiple perspectives, students can develop an internal foundation for making decisions (Baxter Magolda, 2007). Similarly, Pizzolato (2008) has stated that if advisors and other learning partners can guide students toward a self-authored approach to choosing a major, then students were “more likely to choose majors ... appropriate and interesting to them [and] engage in critical thinking about their choices,” (p. 20). Prior to experiencing a crossroads, students make career decisions based on real and perceived external messages from their institutions, significant others, and future employers.

Institutional messages. Campus administrators, faculty, and staff send a variety of messages to students that influence how they approach career decisions. During the application and matriculation process, students often experience pressure to choose a major quickly because of institutional policies (Baxter Magolda, 2001). Many institutions encourage early major declaration because enrollment numbers influence the budget allotment for academic departments (Shaffer & Zalewski, 2011). Some institutions also award scholarships to students who enroll with particular majors (Brown & Strange, 1981; Shaffer & Zalewski, 2011). Such policies encourage students to commit to a major before they have had the opportunity to explore possible career pathways (Shaffer & Zalewski, 2011). To maintain their funding, academic departments have to retain the students they have recruited, which requires academic advisors to work within the limits of the institution to guide the students toward options without negatively influencing retention (Shaffer & Zalewski, 2011). Conversely, some majors have

become so popular that institutions have had to enact enrollment management policies that prohibit a student from pursuing a particular major (Gordon & Steele, 1992) even after the institution provided support for exploring and choosing a major that best fits the student's interests, skills, and abilities (McClean, Outing, Burton, & Crossley, 2011). To limit enrollment in over-subscribed majors, some academic departments have increased their admissions standards (Gordon & Steele, 1992; McClean et al., 2011). In such a case, students experience pressure to declare a major when they first enroll rather than after they have completed the exploration process and confirmed their interest in the major (McClean et al., 2011).

Messages from significant others. Many students look for advice and approval from family members and peers when making major and career decisions. In fact, several studies have shown that students are more likely to seek advice from parents and other family members than their campus advisors (Creamer & Laughlin, 2005; Gardner, 2012; Simmons, 2008). For instance, students often look to parents for career guidance and choose majors that align with a career path that receives praise and validation from parents (Shaffer & Zalewski, 2011; Simmons, 2008). In their study, Creamer and Laughlin (2005) found that their participants looked to their parents for career advice because they knew their parents had their best interest in mind. Researchers have found that many students saw themselves in the image of their parents and gravitated toward career paths where their parents had been successful (Creamer & Laughlin, 2005; Feldt & Woelfel, 2009). However, when participants disagreed with their parents about career choice, they lost confidence in their ability to make a good decision (Creamer &

Laughlin, 2005; Pizzolato & Osaki, 2007) and were likely to change their career choice if their parents disagreed with it (Li & Kerpelman, 2007).

In her research, Baxter Magolda (2001) found that individuals who chose majors and careers because of family influence without first identifying their own interests could experience disappointment in their career choice in the future. Similar to Baxter Magolda (2001), Laughlin and Creamer (2005) and Simmons (2008) found that students had not achieved self-authorship while in college and continued to rely on parents for career advice and direction. Although the students in Simmons' (2008) study said that they had the freedom to choose a major and career they wanted, most reported that their parents encouraged them to choose majors with a defined career path and a lucrative salary (Simmons, 2008).

However, parents and family members can positively influence self-authorship. Knowing that a parent has had success at a particular career increases the student's confidence that he or she could also be successful in the career (Feldt & Woelfel, 2009). With the parent's encouragement, the student could have the confidence to explore the career and make the decision to pursue that career based on his or her internal belief system. In addition, in their study on the role of self-authorship in women choosing information technology careers, Meszaros, Burger, and Creamer (2005) found that the women in their study had parents who encouraged independent thought, responsibility, and various career interests. Women students in their study chose careers that matched their interests (Meszaros et al., 2005) instead of ones that reflected the background of their parents (Feldt & Woelfel, 2009).

In the college environment, students also receive messages from peers about career choice. For instance, many students experience pressure from their peers to choose a major that leads to a prestigious career (Baxter Magolda, 2001). For many students, their major is also a significant way for them to communicate their identity to peers and other significant people in their lives (Brown & Strange, 1981). Once students have a significant work or internship experience that clarifies career commitments, they are less likely to rely on family and friends to know which career choice is right for them (Baxter Magolda, 2001). After students completed career exploration activities such as a career planning course (Parks et al., 2012), a service-learning experience (Jones & Abes, 2004; McClam et al., 2008), and an internship (Egart & Healy, 2004), they established their own career interests and stopped relying on peers to shape their career identity.

Messages about the workforce. In recent surveys of students and employers, researchers have found that many students also have misconceptions about the skills and experiences they need to get their first job. Although employers reported hiring individuals who have leadership skills and experience from extracurricular and internship experiences, students assumed that personal connections, the prestige of their university, and academic success were more likely to get them a job offer (Chegg.com, 2013). Students also assumed that hiring managers put more emphasis on knowledge they acquired from their academic major than the experience they achieved through internships, part-time jobs, and campus leadership roles (Hart Research Associates, 2013). Both parents and students often perceive that employers are more interested in hiring individuals with specific academic knowledge in business, technology, engineering, science, and healthcare. These employers have reported that many new

college graduates applying and interviewing for positions have a skills-gap that they could have improved through applied learning experiences (Hart Research Associates, 2015). When surveyed, many employers reported that they are more likely to hire individuals who have completed applied learning experiences such as internships (Chegg.com, 2013; Hart Research Associates, 2015; Gardner, 2013). By completing internships throughout their educational experience, students can develop transferable skills and explore their interests before committing to a specific major or career (Kuh et al., 2005/2010).

Characteristics and behaviors. In addition to the external messages that students hear about careers, they also have personal characteristics and behaviors that could influence their approach to career decision making. Researchers have found that students with certain dispositions and behaviors are more likely to participate in career exploration activities that contribute to career decision making (Stumpf & Colarelli, 1981). In the following section, I discussed how characteristics and behaviors influence the career decision-making process.

Career maturity. In their study, Nevill & Super (1988) found that one's commitment to or interest in work had a direct relationship to their career maturity or readiness to make an independent career decision (Super & Kidd, 1979; Prideaux & Creed, 2001). For instance, when a parent encourages a student to seek assistance from career services, but the student lacks interest in the process, the student is not ready to make an independent career decision. When students showed higher levels of interest in work, they were more prepared and motivated to make a career decision (Nevill & Super, 1988). In fact, Nevill and Super found that most first-year students were not ready to

make a career decision and required more guidance on career exploration. However, juniors and seniors who had participated in more career exploration activities showed a great commitment and interest to work (Nevill & Super, 1988).

Career self-efficacy. Similarly, individuals with high levels of goal stability and career self-efficacy or confidence in their ability to be successful in a career are more likely to participate in career exploration activities (Blustein, 1989; Feldt & Woelfel, 2009). Through his study, Blustein (1989) found that students who were goal-directed wanted to participate in exploration activities. However, Blustein discovered that one's level of self-efficacy had an even greater influence. Perhaps students with more confidence in their ability to be successful are more motivated to set goals because they believe they can achieve them. From his research, Blustein suggested that individuals with internalized goals and values were likely to have the career self-efficacy and confidence to engage actively in career decision making and career exploration (Blustein, 1989). Similarly, students who completed co-op experiences reported greater confidence in their ability to make career decisions and control career outcomes (Delorenzo, 2000). Although those who make early career commitments could appear more confident, Saks (2005) found that individuals with low self-efficacy were the first ones to accept a job because they did not expect to receive another offer. Experiential learning interventions could help individuals increase their self-efficacy in exploring career options (Blustein, 1989; Delorenzo, 2000) because they have had the opportunity to test their skills in the workplace.

Career exploration. Stumpf and Colarelli (1981) found that individuals who participated in career development programs approached the career decision-making

process in an intentional way and were more likely to explore careers with positive results. Kiener (2006) drew upon Stumpf and Colarelli's study when he studied the effect of decision-making and motivation on career search behaviors in college students. In his study of over 200 students, Kiener (2006) found that individuals with an autonomous orientation and high decision-making competencies had a deeper sense of self-awareness and were more motivated to engage in career exploration activities. These individuals participated in self-exploration as well as practical exploration activities (Kiener, 2006). The results from Kiener's (2006) study suggested that individuals were predisposed to certain behaviors such as the amount of focus they put on self and environmental or practical career exploration. Although career advisors can teach career exploration behaviors to students, individuals learn and implement these behaviors differently (Kiener, 2006).

When students have participated in career exploration activities, they have decreased their tendency to foreclose on a specific career (Blustein, Ellis, & Devenis, 1989). Individuals who committed prematurely to a career without exploration and self-reflection showed characteristics of the foreclosure identity status where individuals make a decision without understanding why they are making that decision (Blustein, 1989; Marcia, 1966; Shaffer & Zalewski, 2011). Blustein and his colleagues have conducted extensive research on this topic and identified a relationship between career exploration and career decision making to identity and career development (Blustein, Devenis, & Kidney, 1989; Blustein, Ellis, & Devenis, 1989). Through their study, Blustein, Devenis, and Kidney (1989) found a positive relationship between students who were exploring careers and their position in the moratorium and identity achievement

status as described by Marcia (1966). In other words, these students had considered multiple career options or had solidified a career commitment based on their career exploration activities. Taylor (1988) determined that as a career exploration activity, internships helped students integrate their abilities, interests, and values into an occupational choice. In contrast, students who have chosen a career path prematurely were less likely to have participated in and reflected on career exploration activities (Blustein, 1989; Marcia, 1966; Shaffer & Zalewski, 2011).

When students participate in career exploration activities, researchers have tracked various outcomes. Students who participated in practical exploration experiences such as internships reported that they explored careers more often and gained more information (Stumpf & Lockhart, 1987). Students have also credited faculty members and other professionals in their field for increasing their occupational knowledge during the career exploration process (Taylor, 1985). However, in other studies, students reported dissatisfaction with the advice they received from faculty once they entered the professional world of work (Lunney, Gardner, & Williams, 1996). In addition, studies have shown that participating in career exploration behaviors increased job offers (Stumpf & Lockhart, 1987; Stumpf, Austin, & Hartman, 1984; Taylor, 1985). Career exploration has helped students improve their interview readiness but those who had explored careers through internships received more job offers than those who focused on gathering occupational information (Stumpf, Austin, & Hartman, 1984). When students had specific career interests, they became more engaged in the career exploration process throughout their senior year (Stumpf & Lockhart, 1987). Those students who completed

internships synthesized their occupational self-concept by identifying their abilities, interests and values (Taylor, 1988).

Internships

In addition to serving as a career exploration process for facilitating career decision making, the literature links internships to helping college students enhance employability and self-understanding. Through internships, students acquire the transferable skills needed for a variety of jobs. In addition to gaining the cognitive skills needed for the world of work, students who complete internships gain a greater self-understanding and can apply that understanding to making self-authored career decisions. In this section, I provided an overview of the studies that have examined the connection between internships and employability as well as internships and self-authored career decisions. In addition, I have included an summation of the scholarship describing internships as a high-impact practice that could help students develop the cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal skills that lead to self-authorship and are central to adult decision-making (Baxter Magolda, 2001).

Employability

In many of the studies concerning student internships, researchers have focused on the influence internships have on employability. In these studies, researchers have examined how completing an internship enhances one's preparation for full-time employment and acquiring skills for the workplace.

Preparation for full-time employment. When surveyed, employers have expressed a preference for hiring individuals who have had internship experiences (Chan & Gardner, 2013; Chegg.com, 2013; Hart Research Associates, 2013, 2015; NACE,

2014a). In studies about internships, students reported that employers reacted to them favorably during their job search because of their internship experience (Taylor, 1988). Students also expressed increased confidence in their ability to find a job because of their internship experience (Cook, Parker, & Pettijohn, 2004; Ng & Burke, 2006; Wood & Kacynski, 2007). Students who accepted full-time jobs with their internship employers reported shorter job search times, but students who chose to search for a job with a new employer took as much time to find a job as non-internship students (Wessels & Pumphrey, 1995). However, the students who changed employers reported that they received promotions quickly because of their internship experience (Wessels & Pumphrey, 1995).

Students who completed internship experiences also reported a more realistic view of work and their chosen career field (Barnett, 2012; Ng & Burke, 2006). In contrast, in studies where students have not completed internships, students have expressed an unrealistic view of the career field and proof that they had chosen their career without exploring multiple options (Lordly, 2013). For instance, students in Lordly's study expressed concern about the salary, prestige of the field, and number of jobs available but had chosen their field because of advice from others rather than personal exploration and reflection. Students who graduated without completing an internship reported that they were not prepared for working in an office environment and did not possess the skills that employers were expecting (Wood & Kacynski, 2007).

Acquiring skills for the workplace. Employers have stated that students who complete internships acquire the transferable skills necessary for the workplace (Chegg.com, 2013; Gardner, 2013; Hart Research Associates, 2013, 2015). Much of the

research supports this sentiment among employers. For instance, Wood and Kacynski (2007) compared the soft skills of students who had not completed an internship with those that had completed one. Students who entered the job market without an internship had increased difficulty explaining to employers that their academic skills translated to the job they wanted (Wood & Kacynski, 2007). In several other studies, students reported that they had increased their transferable skills because of their internship experience (Barnett, 2012; Cord, Bowery, & Clements, 2010; Dolinsky, Quay, & Serpa, 2011; Peterson, Wardwell, Will, & Campana, 2014; Tse, 2010; Sweitzer & King, 2013; Wood & Kacynski, 2007). Students from the aforementioned studies improved their skills in communication, customer services, teamwork, leadership, time management, intercultural relations, teamwork, networking, working independently, critical thinking, attention to detail, flexibility, perseverance, and technology. Students also reported increased skills for their particular field or industry (Cord, Bowery, & Clements, 2010; Diambra, Cole-Zakrzewski, & Zakrzewski, 2004; Peterson et al., 2014; Tse, 2010). In addition, students who completed internships grew in confidence and professionalism (Tse, 2010; Wood & Kacynski, 2007) and their ability to manage conflicts and enforce rules while maintaining positive relationships within the workplace (Peterson et al., 2014).

Establishing Self-Authored Career Commitments

As mentioned previously, researchers have suggested that internships could influence one's ability to develop as an independent thinker and make self-authored career commitments. However, few studies have explored the specific relationship between internships and self-authorship. Although Egart and Healy (2004) have

produced the only study published to date of student interns and their journey toward self-authorship, other internship studies support the idea that internships influence self-authorship. In addition to developing an internal belief system about their career interests, student interns in the research studies that I reviewed developed internally defined career decisions, a personal career value system, and increased professional readiness and maturity, all of which contributed to their sense of self-understanding.

Career decisions. Overall, the research studies provided evidence that internships help students clarify their predetermined career decisions. Even in the first year of college, internships can help students confirm academic and career interests as well as identify new ones (Dolinsky, Quay, & Serpa, 2011). Prior to the internship, students could have been unsure about career interests or had already committed to a career without exploring options (Shaffer & Zalewski, 2011). In an early study, Taylor (1988) examined internships because of the lack of empirical information about these experiences. She determined that as a career exploration activity, internships helped students identify a vocational self-concept and job opportunities after graduation as well as develop realistic perceptions of the world of work. In her study, students who had completed internships were more likely to integrate how their abilities, interests, and values related to their work (Taylor, 1987).

In Egart & Healy's (2004) study, once students experienced their profession, they began to view the work they were doing in their internship as their career and used the experience to consider multiple career options outside of what their academic experience had presented to them. When internships helped students build new skills for their field, students increased their confidence in succeeding within that field (Hoy, 2011; Zegwaard

& Coll, 2011). Students constructed their own meaning of the world of work from these experiences to begin making more informed career decisions (Barnett, 2012).

Students who have explored careers through internships have also identified how their major relates to their intended career goals. Studies have shown that internships can help students solidify their major and career choices (Cord, Bowery, & Clements, 2010; Diambra, Cole-Zakrzewski, & Zakrzewski; Dolinsky, Quay, & Serpa, 2011; Egart & Healy, 2004; Neapolitan, 1992; Tse, 2010; Wood & Kacynski, 2007). Neapolitan (1992) used the Career Decision Scale (CDS) to compare the career choice certainty of students who completed an internship with those that did not. In his study, most of the students who completed an internship showed increased certainty when they took the CDS a second time (Neapolitan, 1992). In cases where the internship did not increase career certainty, the students in his study indicated that the internship showed them new career options as well as what careers they did not want to do. Neapolitan (1992) interpreted these findings to mean that the “internship experience probably makes a valuable contribution to choosing an appropriate career, even though it does not increase certainty” (p. 227). Odio, Sagas, and Kerwin (2014) argued Neapolitan’s interpretation in a recent study. Like in Neapolitan’s study, some participants increased their certainty while others realized what they did not want to do in a career because of their internship experience (Odio, Sagas, & Kerwin, 2014). However, Odio, Sagas, and Kerwin interpreted these findings as negative because it meant that for some participants, their internship experience would deter them from entering their intended career field. These contrasting interpretations provide an example of how faculty as researchers can interpret the value of internships differently.

Career values. In several studies, students reported an enhanced sense of self and decreased reliance on external messages as they clarify their values and goals pertaining to work. For instance, students who completed internships learned that where one works is more than the beauty of the location (Diambra, Cole-Zakrzewski, & Zakrzewski, 2004) or prestige of the firm (Ng & Burke, 2004). Students who completed internships placed value on the people they worked with and the work they would get to do (Ng & Burke, 2004). Ng and Burke found that students without an internship experience most valued the prestige associated with top companies. Internships helped students gain a realistic view of work, which changed how they understood previously held beliefs about careers (Barnett, 2012). In Barnett's study (2012), the internship provided students with the opportunity to make new meaning of the world of work and their place within it.

Some studies, however, questioned how effective internships were for helping students establish career commitments (Brooks, Cornelius, Greenfield, & Joseph, 1995; Cook, Parker, & Pettijohn, 2004). Students in these studies rated their experiences as low for helping them make career decisions; however, Brooks et al. (1995) studied students who completed internships and part-time jobs and did not analyze the differences between the two experiences. Furthermore, Brooks et al. (1995) did not collect information to determine whether the work experience increased or decreased the career commitments of students prior to completing the experience.

Career and professional readiness. Students who completed internships also reported enhanced maturity and autonomy for adapting to the professional world. By choosing their own internship site, students had to determine their own goals for the

internship as well as how their interests, abilities, and skills matched the site (Diambra, Cole-Zakrzewski, & Zakrzewski, 2004; Egart & Healy, 2004). Although scholars have criticized the lack of academic structure to internships and their role as a high-impact practice (O'Neill, 2010), one could argue that allowing students to structure their experience is one way to teach students how to solve the complex problems they will encounter in their professional work and their personal lives. In their reflection, students in this study learned that they were responsible for constructing their own knowledge in the workplace and could not rely on prescribed answers (Egart & Healy, 2004). As students constructed more knowledge about careers through observations and practical work experiences, they crystallized their professional self-concept and developed an internal process for evaluating career choices (Taylor, 1988; Brooks et al, 1995).

Cook, Parker, & Pettijohn (2004) studied one internship site for 10 years and discovered that 76% to 82% of students reported each year that they had matured personally because of their internship. Other studies have shown that completing an internship motivates students to conduct more career exploration and self-reflection. Blustein, Devenis, and Kidney (1989) found that students who were actively exploring careers were also involved in other information seeking activities. Former interns were also motivated to improve their professional skills and qualifications. Zegwaard and her cooperative education research group found that students completing internships were motivated to attend graduate school when they discovered the skills and qualifications that they needed to enhance their ability to enter the field as a professional (Zegwaard & Coll, 2011).

Chapter Summary

Researchers such as Baxter Magolda, Bock, Laughlin and Creamer, Barber, and Kuh have suggested that internships provide the environment for moving students toward self-authorship. Egart and Healy (2004) used their study to show that a structured internship experience supported self-authorship and provided evidence that students arrived at self-authored career commitments because of their internship. Although Jones and Abes (2004) explored service-learning, the similarities between service-learning and internships as high-impact practices that facilitate experiential learning have supported the idea that high-impact practices help students develop self-authorship.

Although they did not explore self-authorship in their studies about internships, other researchers (eg. Barnett, 2012; Diambra, Cole-Zakrzewski, & Zakrzewski, 2004; Taylor, 1988; Wood & Kacynski, 2007) have provided further information on the connections between internships and the cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal development of students. Employers have shown concern about the skills gaps among recent college graduates (Hart Research Associates, 2015). Employers have reported that they value new hires who have had internship experiences because they can apply knowledge and skills to solve real-world problems in the workplace (Hart Research Associates, 2015). When students forgo the internship, they are less likely to have internalized their career commitments and have a difficult time convincing employers how their academic knowledge prepared them for the workplace (Wood & Kacynski, 2007).

Baxter Magolda (2001) has said that students need direct experience to understand that “self is central to career choice” (p. 311). Furthermore, Kuh et al.,

2005/2010, Kuh (2008), and O'Neill (2010) have described internships as a high-impact practice that helps students reflect on who they are becoming and how their values and beliefs translate into a career that matches their self-concept. More than just technical skills, students need skills that will help them navigate the complexities of modern life (Kegan, 1994). Additional research could enhance the scholarship that suggests that there is a connection between internships, career commitments, and self-authorship.

Through this study, I have explored how completing an internship contributed to the way traditional-aged colleges students arrived at self-authored career commitments during their senior year. In the following section, I outlined the methodology, which includes information on the research design, setting, participants, procedures, and data analysis process.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

In this qualitative study, I used phenomenology to explore how the lived experience (van Manen, 1990) of completing an internship influences how traditional-aged students establish self-authored career commitments. By using a qualitative methodology, I was able to go beyond the limits of quantifiable data to understand each participant's individual experience (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990). The phenomenological approach provides a framework for participants to recount and describe the entirety of their experiences so that the researcher can understand the essence or meaning of that experience (Moustakas, 1994). In addition, I shared the experiences of the participants in a descriptive and interpretative way to make meaning of the participants' descriptions rather than let the descriptions "speak for themselves" (van Manen, 1990, p. 180).

In choosing the focus of a phenomenological study, the researcher must choose a topic and research question that resonates with the researcher and addresses a social interest or concern (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990). The following research question guided the study: *How does participation in internships contribute to the development of self-authored career commitments of traditional-aged college seniors?* As the researcher, I was interested in this topic because it signified where my scholarly interest in self-authorship intersected with my professional work in career services. This study has meaning for educators, students, families, employers, and other entities concerned about the transition students make between college and career. Previous research has shown that employers often hire individuals who have transferable skills

from internships (Chegg.com, 2013; Hart Research Associates, 2015; Gardner, 2013). Through additional research, this study offers insight into the ways internships can help students arrive at self-authored or internally motivated career commitments before they graduate.

The phenomenological methodology provided the framework for a research design to describe and interpret the lived experiences of students (van Manen, 1990) who have completed internships and are in the process of making career commitments. In this chapter, I have described the setting and participants in addition to providing the procedures, data collection and analysis methods, and guidelines used to protect participants and establish trustworthiness as a researcher.

Research Design

Using phenomenology as the research design provides a framework for understanding how individuals perceive and interpret their lived experiences (Husserl, 1913; Merriam, 2009; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990). For this study, I examined the internship experience, a lived experience common among many traditional-aged college students in the United States. In fact, 61% of college seniors in the United States have reported that they completed an internship prior to graduation (NACE, 2014a). To make meaning of the lived experience of students completing internships, I used a qualitative phenomenological research design to examine the ways in which this experience influences how traditional-aged college students establish self-authored career commitments.

Phenomenology as a Methodology

Phenomenology as a research methodology grew out of philosophical and natural science traditions (Giorgi, 2005). Husserl developed phenomenology as a philosophy for understanding the science of what we see and experience with our conscious mind (Giorgi, 2005; Husserl, 1931/2012; Moustakas, 1994). His methodology of transcendental phenomenology provided a systematic way of using reflection to collect data from the consciousness of participants (Giorgi, 2005; Moustakas, 1994). Through this methodology, researchers can examine any human experience as a phenomenon in order to understand the essence of that experience (Moustakas, 1994).

Moustakas (1994) summarized the basic tenants of phenomenology or human science research. First, phenomenology focuses on a pure human experience shared by many and described through the descriptions of study participants. In developing the research questions, the researcher should use language that helps the participants vividly recount the experience of participants from multiple angles in order to capture the essence of each participant's experience. Moustakas (1994) recommended that the researcher should have a deep interest in the phenomenon but should identify preconceptions and related personal experiences through epoche. During the study, the researcher should bracket or set aside these preconceived ideas about the study.

Moustakas (1994) and van Manen (1990) have recommended that the researcher should reflect on, document, and analyze his or her own experience of the phenomenon.

Although I did not use this information as part of the research study findings (van Manen, 1990), this process helped me identify my assumptions about the internship experience and form connections with the participants. Van Manen (1990) encouraged researchers

to acknowledge assumptions and use their knowledge to question the phenomenon under investigation. In qualitative studies, the researcher is the data collection instrument (Merriam, 2009); therefore, bracketing assumptions about the phenomenon was critical when I joined with participants through the interview process to collect data.

Design of the Study

In a phenomenological study, the researcher should use data collection methods that encourage participants to generate descriptions that offer fresh insight into the phenomenon (Giorgi, 1985; Moustakas, 1994). To describe their experiences, participants completed a pre- and post-reflection journal entry and an interview. First, I asked participants to complete a written reflection journal entry about their internship experience prior to an initial one-on-one semi-structured interview. By using the reflection journal entry as a data collection method, I provided the participants with a way to describe and process their internship experience prior to the interview (van Manen, 1990). Written reflection offers the participants an opportunity to think about their experience, but talking allows the participants to become closer to their lived experience (van Manen, 1990). To achieve this result, I used interviews to get participants to relive their experiences through concrete descriptions (van Manen, 1990). As the participants told their stories, I probed with additional questions so that the participants would speak specifically about their experiences and increase my understanding of the phenomenon (van Manen, 1990). In addition, the interviews provided the interviewees with another opportunity to make meaning of their experiences (van Manen, 1990). Rather than conduct a follow-up interview, I asked participants to complete a final journal entry within a month after the interview.

Defense of the Methodology Chosen

In a phenomenological study, the researcher seeks to understand the essence and meaning of individual human behavior and experiences through qualitative rather than quantitative methods (Merriam, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). This methodology fit well with the purpose of this study. Rather than use quantitative methods to prove that participating in internships causes self-authorship, I used qualitative methods to identify relationships between the internship experience and self-authored career commitments (Moustakas, 1994). Researchers have used quantitative methods to assess self-authorship but these tools have been less effective than interviews for assessing development (Creamer, Baxter Magolda, & Yue, 2010). By using a phenomenological methodology, I used interviews to collect rich, detailed descriptions of the participants' experiences that I could not obtain through quantitative data collection methods (Moustakas, 1994). Through these narrative accounts, I gained a holistic perspective of how participants understood their internship experience (Moustakas, 1994) and identified themes related to their journey toward self-authored career commitments.

Although the study was not generalizable in the same way as a quantitative study, the phenomenological nature of this study captured the uniqueness (van Manen, 1990) of each student's internship experience and journey toward self-authored career commitments. Through the specific experiences of the traditional-aged college students in this study, practitioners can increase their understanding of what students experience in an internship as well as how they experience it (Creswell, 2013) as they moved toward self-authored career commitments.

Setting

I conducted this study at Liberal Arts University (LAU), a selective public institution in the southeastern United States. I accessed demographic data on the student population from the Office of Institutional Research. In fall 2014, LAU enrolled 5,927 undergraduate students, of which 1,358 were seniors. Primarily a residential campus, LAU is located in a rural area but draws over half of its students from a major metropolitan area. Students tend to come from families with a higher socioeconomic status, with only .63% receiving federal work-study assistance and 18% receiving the Pell Grant. Approximately 15% of students identify as non-White. Women and men make up 61.3% and 38.7% of the campus population, respectively.

Students at LAU have reported a strong interest in completing an internship prior to graduation. According to data from the campus MAP Works survey in 2012, 88.5% of freshmen and 91.3% of sophomores were moderately to extremely interested in completing an internship. During the 2014/2015 academic year, a report from the Registrar's office showed that 22% of the undergraduate student population completed an internship or semester long work education experience for academic credit. LAU last participated in the NSSE in 2011. At that time, 49% of seniors reported that they had completed an internship or some other type of practical work experience related to their field. Many complete internships without receiving academic credit, but the university does not have a centralized way to document that information. In addition, the Career Center coordinates and tracks over 200 internship placements per year in coordination with academic credit programs.

Participants

For the purpose of this study, I focused on traditional-aged college students who were in their final year of college and had completed an internship in the previous six months. Since my participants were traditional-aged college students in their senior year of college, they had time to develop rich, first-person accounts of their initial career commitments and experiences that have led them to their current ones (Merriam, 2009). I used purposive sampling to identify 11 participants who could provide information rich experiences for the purpose of understanding the problem and research question (Creswell 2014; Patton, 2002). This sampling exceeded the three to 10 participants that are typical among phenomenological studies (Creswell, 2014). In addition to having information rich experiences, participants represented various majors but the students who chose to participate in the study were homogeneous in gender and ethnicity identification. Nine of the participants were female and White, one was male and White, and the final participant was female and Latina. The demographic background of the participants reflected that of the student body.

To examine how completing an internship contributed to a student developing self-authored career commitments, participants could not have full-time, professional work experience. For this study, it was important to limit the study to those who have completed internships rather than including those who have completed other types of professional work experiences. In an older, similar study (Brooks, Cornelius, Greenfield, & Joseph, 1995) that scholars frequently reference, the researchers studied seniors who had completed a variety of work experiences and could not determine if the internship experience influenced their career commitments. To qualify as a participant with a rich

experience to share, each participant had to have completed at least a 10-week internship experience (Tse, 2010). The selected participants participated in their internship for 10 to 15 weeks and worked anywhere from 10 to 50 hours per week. Students who expressed interest as research participants, but had completed less than 10 weeks of work at their internships, had not gained enough experience (Hoy, 2011) to reflect on how their internships contributed to making self-authored career commitments.

After I received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, I used several entry points to recruit students for the study. First, I sent a recruitment email to faculty internship coordinators in the College of Business, College of Arts & Science, and the College of Health Sciences who would share the study opportunity with seniors who had completed academic credit internships with them during spring or summer 2015. I identified these Colleges because they have specific internship courses for students. In addition, I posted flyers in physical locations on campus as well as electronically through email and social media so that I could advertise the research study to all seniors, regardless of major. I sent the electronic flyer to faculty, academic advisors, and student affairs colleagues. In addition, I posted the flyer to the Career Center Facebook page as well as my personal page. As a final step, I emailed the invitation to all seniors who had used the Career Center in the 2014/2015 academic year. In all of the marketing materials, I directed potential participants to email me if they were interested in participating. As I screened and interviewed participants, I also asked participants to tell their friends about the study as a way to recruit participants through snowball sampling process (Patton, 2002). To entice potential participants, those who completed the entire

study received a \$10 gift card. See Appendix A for examples of the recruitment emails, flyers, social media postings, and Appendix B for the screening questions.

I used additional parameters as I screened potential candidates. In addition to experiencing an internship, participants had to indicate a strong interest in exploring the meaning of their internship experience and an eagerness to participate in the study (Moustakas, 1994). I also looked for participants who represented a variety of majors so that I could capture a diverse set of experiences. To ensure a successful study, I asked participants through the informed consent process to allow me to record the interview and use the information in future publications such as the dissertation and journal articles (Moustakas, 1994). In the following tables, I have provided the demographic (Table 3.1), family educational and occupational (Table 3.2), and internship site information (Table 3.3) for the 11 participants in my study.

Table 3.1 Participant Demographics

Participant	Major	Age	Race/Ethnicity	Gender
Chuck	Management Information Systems	21	White	Male
Ellie	Accounting	24	White	Female
Esmeralda	Spanish	21	Latina	Female
Jessica	Psychology	21	White	Female
Lynn	Nursing	22	White	Female
Marie	Marketing and Management	22	White	Female
Rebecca	Management Information Systems	21	White	Female
Rosie	Mass Communication	21	White	Female
Roxanne	Psychology	22	White	Female
Skye	Mass Communication	21	White	Female
Tate	Mass Communication	21	White	Female

Table 3.2 Family Educational and Occupational Background

Participant	Education		Occupation	
	Mother	Father	Mother	Father
Chuck	Bachelor	Master's	Homemaker	CFO
Ellie	Master's	Master's	School Librarian/Teacher	Police officer
Esmeralda	Some college	Bachelor's	Homemaker	Project Manager
Jessica	Ph.D.	M.D.	Psychologist	Physician
Lynn	Bachelor's	Some college	Dog groomer	Software Management
Marie	Bachelor's	Bachelor's	Sales	Sales
Rebecca	High school	Master's	Receptionist	Accountant
Rosie	Bachelor's	High School	Human Resources	Engineering Assistant
Roxanne	Bachelor's	Associate's	Teacher	CAD Designer
Skye	Some college	Bachelor's	Project Manager	Sales
Tate	Bachelor's	High School	Business Owner	Facilities

Table 3.3 Participant Internship Information

Participant	Internship Site	Functional Area	# of Weeks	Hrs per Week	Academic Credit
Chuck	Global Logistics Company	IT Support	12	40	Yes
Ellie	Large Public Accounting Firm	Tax Accounting	15	40 – 65	No
Esmeralda	Hispanic Community Association	Translations	12	12 – 15	No
Jessica	Autism Center	Feeding Clinic Assistant	12	15 – 20	Yes
Lynn	Metro Hospital	ICU Nursing	15	36	No
Marie	Outsource Sales Company	Sales	13	45	No
Rebecca	Big Computer Company	IT Security	11	40	No
Rosie	Local Publishing Company	News Reporter	11	20	No
Roxanne	Mental Health Hospital	Forensic Psychology	10	10 – 20	No
Skye	Digital Marketing Company	Account Management Assistant	11	40 – 50	No
Tate	State Government Agency	Communications	12	32	No

Procedures

Once I received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to collect data, I began to recruit, screen, and interview participants. In the section below, I have discussed the procedures for screening and selecting participants and then collecting data from the participants.

Selecting Participants

After I posted the flyer electronically and at physical locations on campus, I began to receive emails from interested potential participants. I responded to each one via email in order to begin the screening process. I asked potential participants for their telephone number and scheduled a time to conduct the telephone screenings. In order to maximize time and resources, I also clarified that potential participants had completed internships and were planning to graduate in December or May before scheduling a telephone screening. In a few cases, clarifying information via email eliminated a potential participant without the need of a telephone screening. In order to select the best participants, I called and screened each one with a short list of questions (Appendix B). I used the screening questions to determine if potential participants fit the criteria for the study and if they were interested in exploring the connections between their internship and career commitments. In a phenomenological study, the best participants are those that are interested in exploring the meaning of their experiences (Moustakas, 1994). I used a telephone script so that I could review the purpose and details of the study with each potential participant. After each telephone screening, I entered the information I collected on each participant into an Excel spreadsheet saved as a password protected

computer file. See Appendix A for the screening questions and other recruitment materials.

When potential participants fit the criteria for the study and confirmed their interest in participating in the study, I sent them an email that contained the informed consent form, the pre-interview reflection journal, and a private online poll so that they could schedule an interview time. Occasionally, potential participants did not respond to the email and ignored reminder emails, and as a result, were not final participants in the study. Potential participants had to be able to make time to write a brief pre- and post-interview reflection journal entry and complete a 60-minute interview. I instructed participants to return the informed consent form and pre-interview reflection to me via email or in-person at my office either before or at the time of their interview. By signing the informed consent document, participants verified that I had informed them about their role within the study as well as the purpose of the study and the safeguards in place to protect them as participants (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014). See Appendix C for informed consent form, which includes the purpose of the study and researcher contact information. In case participants needed intensive career counseling services after the interview process, I also included contact information for University Counseling Services and the Career Center on the informed consent form.

Data Collection Methods

As a constructivist researcher using the phenomenological methodology, I used data collection methods that provided opportunities for participants to produce rich, biographical descriptions of their experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) referred to participants as co-researchers who join with the researcher to collect

meaningful data. As a researcher, I applied this concept to a constructivist paradigm that centers on co-constructing knowledge with participants. By listening, paraphrasing, and asking probing questions, I joined with participants and guided them toward constructing knowledge during the interview process. In addition to conducting one 60-minute interview with each participant, I also collected data through two written reflection journal entries from the participants. See Appendix D for the data collection materials.

Pre-interview reflection journal. When I emailed participants the informed consent form, I also attached an electronic copy of the pre-interview reflection journal. Participants could also come to my office to obtain a hard copy. Each pre-interview reflection journal handout included instructions for writing and submitting the exercise before the one-on-one interview. In the reflection exercise, I asked participants to describe their career commitments prior to the internship and an aspect of the internship that helped them solidify career commitments. I also asked participants to interpret the meaning of self-authorship in regards to career commitments. Participants submitted their reflection journal to me via email and in-person prior to their long interviews. Several participants brought the completed pre-interview reflection to the interview or completed it in my office prior to the interview. I read the reflection journal entries before each interview to prepare for the discussion and to determine additional questions for the one-on-one interviews.

Faculty members who supervise academic internship experiences often assign written reflection journals or papers to understand what the student has learned from the experience (Cord, Bowrey, & Clements, 2010; Egart & Healy, 2004.). Similarly, written reflection is also a common data collection method in phenomenological studies (Jones,

Torres, & Arminio, 2014). I chose this method so that participants could reflect on their internship experience and career commitments before the one-on-one interview. Using this method in addition to interviews also provided a way to triangulate and document the worthiness of information collected during the study (Creswell, 2013). Providing the participants an opportunity to reflect before the interview also built trust and rapport (Moustakas, 1994).

Interviews. After I completed telephone screening with the participants, I sent them an email that included a private online poll for scheduling their interview. To prepare for their interviews, I read the pre-interview reflection journals to gain an understanding of each participant and to determine additional questions. I also reviewed their pre-interview reflection journals with the participants during their interviews. By referring to the information in each participant's reflection journal, I showed that I valued his or her specific experience and contributions to the research study (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014).

Like in many phenomenological studies, I used the long interview as a primary data collection method (Moustakas, 1994). Interviews provide the best method for understanding the essence of how each participant experienced a particular phenomenon (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014; Merriam, 2009). The information that I collected through the interview process has provided rich description and insight into the experiences of interns as they explore and solidify career commitments.

To develop the interview protocol, I reviewed the protocol suggested by Moustakas (1994) for a phenomenological study and Baxter Magolda and King (2007) for interviews to assess self-authorship. I developed a brief list of specific questions to

refer to so that I could ensure that the participants provided a rich description of the phenomenon and addressed the research question (Moustakas, 1994). However, I used an informal, conversational style combined with probing questions to encourage participants to explore how they experienced the internship and how they constructed a sense of self during the experience (Baxter Magolda & King, 2007).

At the beginning of each interview, I developed rapport with the participants. I talked with them about the study to solidify my role as a researcher rather than the Director of the Career Center at their university. I also had each participant choose a pseudonym (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014). Although I had not planned it this way, getting the participants to choose a pseudonym at the beginning of the interview served as an icebreaker and opportunity to learn something personal about them since several revealed the meaning behind their pseudonym. I also reviewed their pre-interview reflection journal with them and asked questions of clarification before starting the interview. I referred back to the pre-interview reflection journal during the interview as well.

To begin each interview, I documented demographic information, academic major, internship credit information, graduation date, and family occupational and educational information. Gathering this background information helped me build additional rapport with each participant (Baxter Magolda & King, 2007). Although race, gender, and family background were not a focus of the study, I asked this information so that I could be aware of the diversity and similarity of the backgrounds within the participant group as I analyzed the data (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014; Patton, 2002). For the rest of the interview, I used a semi-structured interview guide to ensure that the

interview protocol addressed the research question (Moustakas, 1994). I wanted the interview to be conversational, but using a semi-structured interview provided a framework for guiding the interview and refocusing the participants as they reflected on their internship experience. To create a conversational environment, I used probing questions and pauses between questions. This technique provided the participants with the space to provide specific and detailed descriptions of their experience (van Manen, 1990).

In accordance with Moustakas' interview protocol, I asked them to describe their internship experience and include specific moments of "awareness and impact" (Moustakas, 1994, 2269). I described these moments to students as "aha moments" to help them reflect on the aspects of their experience that revealed the most to them about themselves and their career commitments. To help participants talk through their experience, Moustakas (1994) offered a list of probing questions. I used some of those questions to encourage participants to describe feelings and changes they experienced during the internship experience.

For the remaining questions, I asked questions that provided further insight into the participants' level of self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2001). To achieve this goal, I asked questions that mirror the phases of self-authorship. For instance, I first asked participants to discuss what has influenced their career interests and their desire to complete an internship. By asking this question, I was able to discern if participants had used external formulas to reach those decisions (Baxter Magolda, 2001). Next, I asked participants to talk about what they have learned during the internship and used probing questions to get them to discuss their cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal

development. These questions provided me with an opportunity to learn more about the internship as a crossroads experience and determine if they were moving toward self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2001). Finally, I asked participants to describe what they are doing now to transition to a career and how significant others in their lives have reacted to their plans. I also used this opportunity to review their pre-interview reflection journal and their personal definition of self-authorship and internal career commitments. The answers to these questions helped me understand how they were using what they have learned about themselves and their career interests to move toward establishing self-authored career commitments.

I followed a consistent procedure for preparing for each interview. Thirty minutes before each interview, I printed a question guide and used it to take notes, if needed. To ensure that I captured all answers to the interview questions for further analysis, I recorded each interview (Merriam, 2009). To record the interviews, I set up two recording devices each time in case one of the devices failed. After the interviews, I used transcription software to transcribe the audio recording from my laptop. I deleted the audio recordings from my iPhone, which was my secondary recording device, when I knew that the laptop audio application had recorded successfully. When I began the interview process, I planned to take notes during each interview so that I could record my reactions to information that the participants shared and use during the analysis process (Merriam, 2009). That process could work for other researchers, but I found that it was best for me to engage fully in the conversation and to focus intently on the experiences of the participants.

At the end of each interview, I reviewed the content of the interview with the participant to get additional insights (Baxter Magolda, 2007). I asked the participants to share additional observations or ask specific questions they had about the interview and research study. By debriefing with the participants, I could determine if they had experienced any discomfort from sharing their personal experiences and needed a referral to counseling services. Discomfort in my study was minimal to nonexistent. Before participants left the interview, I informed them that they would receive an email from me with the post-interview reflection journal. I told participants that in order to receive the incentive, I would have to receive their post-interview reflection. I also offered them the opportunity to read the analysis of their interview when I got to that part of the research process.

Post-interview reflection journal. As the participants reflect on their interview, they could experience new insights about the influence their internship had on their career commitments. To gather these insights from the participants, I emailed the post-interview reflection journal assignment to participants toward the end of the semester. I conducted two additional interviews at the beginning of the spring semester and emailed their post-interview reflection journal a few weeks later. This reflection opportunity provided me with additional insight into how the post-internship experience has influenced their career commitments during their senior year. I asked the participants to respond to the following questions:

- 1) Since the interview, what additional insights have you had about your career commitments (decision/choice/plans/goals/interests)?

- 2) Please describe at least one way your internship experience has influenced your career commitments (decision/choice/plans/goals/interests).

To gather this final information, I created an online form with the questions and a place for them to provide their preferred mailing address to receive their incentive. In some cases, I had to email the online form several times to ensure that all participants completed it. By the end of March, ten of the 11 participants had completed their post-interview reflection and have since received their incentive.

Data Analysis

To complete the data analysis process, I transcribed and reviewed the lived experiences described by the participants in their interviews and reflection journals to identify common themes and seek answers to my research question (Jones et al., 2014; Merriam, 2009; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990). To maximize time and prepare for future interviews, I transcribed interviews as they occurred. I did not change the interview guide, but by transcribing throughout the research process, I was able to identify probing questions for future interviews (Merriam, 2009). In a phenomenological study, the researcher must preserve the integrity of the participant's stories by transcribing and reading them in their entirety and assigning equal value to each statement (Moustakas, 1994). I used this method throughout the transcription and analysis process to ensure that I honored each participant's career journey and internship experience. To analyze the data, I used guidelines described by Moustakas (1994), van Manen (1990), and Merriam (2009).

When I analyzed the collected data, I used open and axial coding (Merriam, 2009) to identify themes to make meaning of the descriptive accounts that the participants

shared in their reflection journals and their interviews. To begin the analysis process, I chose two of my longer interviews to begin the open coding process. I started with a detailed, line-by-line approach to isolate the open codes (van Manen, 1990) but soon realized that most of the participants spoke in chunks or passages of information rather than through simple lines or statements. I read the passages within each transcript and identified common elements (van Manen, 1990) among the statements that were relevant to the purpose of the study (Moustakas, 1994). Using the first two coded transcripts, I made a list of the codes so that I had a framework for coding all of the transcripts (Merriam, 2009). This process helped me stay organized and focused by comparing the others sets of data to the initial ones I had reviewed (Merriam, 2009). Then I put the list of codes into a table and assigned a color to these broad codes. Within the table, I also included a column where I could explain the meaning and significance of each code.

To continue the open coding process, I read all of the transcripts and wrote the codes in the margins next to the passages that I underlined in corresponding color. I continued to look for codes line-by-line (Moustakas, 1994); however, the participants tended to speak in mini-monologues, which required me to assign codes to chunks of information. I also assigned multiple codes to some sections because the participants would alternate topics in one response.

When I finished coding the transcripts, I used axial coding to group the open codes into categories (Merriam, 2009). To organize the data, I created tables in Microsoft Word based on the new categories. The columns within the tables represented the open codes within the categories. Next, I copied and pasted the coded passages into the tables. I used this process to categorize, organize, and give meaning to each aspect of

the interview, which seemed important in a phenomenological study (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990).

However, by giving equal meaning to each statement through the coding process, I had to review the coded passages to determine which codes and categories answered the research question (Merriam, 2009). Next, I reviewed the codes within each category to determine an overarching theme that answered the research question. To complete this process, I saved each table to my computer with the name of its corresponding theme so that I would be able to review the original tables if needed. For instance, many of the participants spoke about exposure to a variety of professional experiences and its influence on their career commitments. I collapsed these multiple professional experiences into “establishing a professional identity.” The participants also shared information on how their internship had helped them prepare for the job and graduate school search. I collapsed these related codes into “influencing future job and graduate school searches.” In the interviews, the participants shared information related to how they were choosing careers since completing an internship. From the passages related to this category, I identified the themes “clarifying career interests” and “developing an internal belief system for forming career commitments.” As I completed the theme-based charts, I also wrote reflection memos about each participant’s responses and referred to them during the writing process (Merriam, 2009).

Finally, I reviewed the information from the open coding process that did not answer the research question. To honor the story of each participant and provide a more complete depiction of their journey toward self-authored career commitments, I also identified themes related to early career commitments and external influences such as the

educational and occupational backgrounds of their families. Since this information did not describe how the internship experience contributed to their development of self-authored career commitments, I set this information aside to provide background information on the participants. In addition, I looked for coded information that would inform educators, employers, and students about the value of internships. I have included this coded information about their motivation for completing internships and the value of internships as additional perspectives in Chapter 4 to provide more insight into the lived experiences of the interns as they journeyed toward making self-authored career decisions.

After coding and analyzing the interviews, I reviewed the pre- and post-interview reflection journals and coded this information based on the established central themes. I used the pre-interview reflection journal in several ways. First, the research participants had the opportunity to reflect before the interview, which prepared them to talk in detail about their internship experience during the interview. In addition, I believe the pre-interview reflection made them more comfortable with the interview topic so that they came into the interview understanding my purpose as a researcher. For instance, the participants reflected on their pre-internship career commitments and an aspect of the internship that helped them explore these commitments. I used that information from the pre-interview reflection information to start the conversation and triangulate what they said in the long interview (Creswell, 2013). For the final question, I collected information that showed their understanding of making self-authored career commitments. I coded this data and used it in the central theme, “Developing an internal belief system about career choice.” In analyzing the data for that theme, I included

statements from participants that showed how they had used their internship to describe their understanding of self-authored career commitments. In the post-interview reflection, the participants shared their career commitments since the interview as well as how the internship did or did not influence this commitment. I coded this information with the theme, “Clarifying career commitments” to determine if the participants shifted their career interests slightly, discovered a new career interest, or remained committed to their original career interest. In addition, I looked at the post-interview reflection journals to examine the depth of their statements and make a final assessment of their movement toward self-authorship.

With the interview passages clustered according to a theme within a chart, I had prepared the data for the analysis process so that I could synthesize statements into rich, verbatim descriptions (Moustakas, 1994). From the data, I used quotes and written descriptions that conveyed “what” the participants experienced and “how” the experience occurred (Creswell, 2013). To convey an accurate depiction of each participant’s internship experience, I provided rich, verbatim descriptions (Moustakas, 1994) and used the interpretative analysis of phenomenology as described by van Manen (1990) to connect the statements of the participants in a meaningful way. Through the written descriptions that I created from these charts, I captured the essence of the shared phenomenon of completing an internship and considering career commitments in the senior year of college (Moustakas, 1994).

Maintaining the rigor and trustworthiness of the study was another important aspect of data analysis. I conducted 11 interviews that included cases that supported and challenged the findings of the study (Merriam, 2009). Each participant shared different

perceptions on how their internship had contributed to self-authored career commitments. However, as I interviewed the participants, they also shared many of the same types of information through their stories. As the data revealed similar patterns during the interview process, I knew that I had collected enough data to answer the research question (Merriam, 2009). To communicate the experiences of the participants with accuracy, I have shared their experiences in Chapter 4 through detailed description and quotes from their interviews.

Protection of Subjects

As the researcher, I have an ethical obligation to *do good* in addition to protecting subjects from harm (Eisner & Peshkin, 1990; Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014). In qualitative research, the researcher obtains personal information from participants. To provide a safe environment for the participants, the researcher offers confidentiality, anonymity, trust, respect, and privacy (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014). As the researcher, I outlined these safeguards in the statement of informed consent (Appendix C). I discussed the purpose of the study and reviewed the statement of informed consent with each participant. To provide anonymity to participants, I asked each one to select his or her own pseudonym during the interview process. In addition, I created fake names to represent the companies for which they interned or from which they have accepted full-time jobs. When I wrote the descriptions of their internship experiences, I removed identifying information such as the names of campus organizations and specific leadership roles, hometowns, internship cities, and faculty advisors without altering the narrative (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). When participants shared personal details that could threaten their privacy, I removed that information from the study (Moustakas,

1994). I emailed the transcripts and the data analysis of each interview to the corresponding participant so that they could validate the accuracy of their narratives and provide additional feedback as co-researchers (Merriam, 2009; Moustakas, 1994).

As I collected data, I stored interview recordings and notes in password-protected computer files (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014). As I created electronic files for their information, I saved the files under their pseudonym, initials, and academic major. By signing the statement of informed consent, participants verified that I had explained and that they had understood their roles in the study as well as any potential risks (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014). The process of explaining and signing the statement of informed consent established trust between the participants and myself as a researcher.

Trustworthiness/Positionality

As the Director of the Career Center at Liberal Arts University, I had an interest in examining possible connections between internships and self-authored career commitments. Students often choose majors and careers based on external messages they receive from family, peers, faculty, and society (Baxter Magolda et al., 2012; Parks et al., 2012; Shaffer & Zalewski, 2011). Over the years, I have collected anecdotal evidence that internships provide students with a way to integrate those external messages with their own interests and values to make self-authored career commitments. Through purposeful, qualitative research, I sought out to discover and document how student interns incorporate external and internal messages about career once they complete an internship. Because I have worked in career services and with internships for most of my career, I had to examine my preconceived ideas about the topic before I began the study (Merriam, 2009). Then I had to put aside assumptions and prejudgments so that I could

approach the phenomenon with a new perspective (Moustakas, 1994). Known as the epoche, this phenomenological process requires the researcher to approach data collection with a fresh perspective and open mind that focuses on the very essence of the participant's description (Moustakas, 1994). Even though my experience in career services has led me to believe that students can use the internship experience to establish self-authored career commitments, I bracketed that assumption as participants shared their lived internship experiences (Jones et al., 2014; Merriam, 2009; Moustakas, 1994).

Because of my role within the Career Center, I was concerned that the study participants would hesitate to share all aspects of their internship experience and thoughts about their career commitments. To the contrary, the participants shared their experiences freely. It could be that because most of the participants had used the Career Center before, they were already comfortable with coming to the office to discuss their personal career issues with a career advisor. In addition, I established an open environment for each participant by addressing concerns of confidentiality during the participant screening and the informed consent process. During the interview, I told the participants that I would conceal any identifying details that they shared about their internship sites during the interview. When some of the participants hesitated to tell me what they thought of their internship site, I let them know that I had no bias toward their site and that they could speak freely with me. By encouraging the students to share their internal voice about their internship experience, I also supported the students gaining a self-authored understanding of their internship experience.

As in the advising relationship with students, the Learning Partnership Model provides a framework in this study for helping participants rely less on me as an authority

who has all of the answers and more on their internal belief system to describe their internship experience (Baxter Magolda, 2004). First, I validated the knowledge of participants by asking them to share their stories and opinions about internships in a judgment-free zone (Baxter Magolda, 2004). Sharing the story of their internship experience provided student participants with an opportunity to “bring their identity to learning” (Baxter Magolda, 2004, p. xix). Lastly, the participants were my co-researchers throughout the interview process (Moussakas, 1994) and together, we co-constructed knowledge about their internship experiences and the ways these experiences contributed to self-authored career commitments (Baxter Magolda, 2004). I developed the interview protocol so that participants would share their experience through their lens rather than my own (Baxter Magolda, 2004). I kept this concept in mind as I probed for additional information that would help them make meaning of their experience. Rather than dispense career advice or question decisions, I listened and joined with them to understand their lived experiences.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I provided an overview of phenomenology and its use as the qualitative research method for this study. By using phenomenology, I was able to use written reflection and interviews to help participants discover new insights and make meaning of their entire internship experience (Giorgi, 2005; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990). This phenomenology provided a framework for meaning making that fit well with the constructivist paradigm that guided my study. To collect the data, 11 participants completed a pre-interview reflection journal, a long interview, and a post-interview reflection journal. I used open and axial coding (Merriam, 2009) to determine

four overarching themes for how the internship experiences of each participant influenced self-authored career commitments. To honor these participants as co-researchers of a phenomenological study, I shared the respective interview transcript and data analysis with each one and solicited their feedback (Merriam, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). In the next chapter, I have presented the analysis of the research findings.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the relationship between the internship experience and the career commitments of traditional-aged college students during their senior year in college. I used Baxter Magolda's (2001) theory of self-authorship as well as the Self-Authorship Data Analysis Protocol (Baxter Magolda et al., 2012) as a framework for understanding how the internship, as a crossroads experience or developmental challenge, has the potential to help individuals move toward self-authored career decisions (Baxter Magolda, 2001, 2008). The 11 participants in the study completed pre- and post-interview reflection journals in addition to a long interview. I used questions in the reflection journals and interviews that would provide the participants an opportunity to discuss their internship experience and uncover their journey toward career decisions guided by an internally rather than externally defined belief system (Baxter Magolda, 2001, 2008). I interviewed each participant with the purpose of answering this research question: *How does participation in internships contribute to the development of self-authored career commitments of traditional-aged college seniors?*

In the data analysis process, I coded the entire transcript of each participant and discovered a variety of themes related to career decisions and internship experiences. I identified four central themes directly related to how the internship experience contributed to developing self-authored career decisions: 1) clarifying career interests, 2) developing a professional identity, 3) influencing professional career searches, and 4) developing an internal belief system for forming career commitments. These themes

provided insight into how the internship experience contributed to the self-authored career commitments of the participants. After coding the data and writing rich descriptions of their experiences, I used the Self-Authorship Data Analysis Protocol (Baxter Magolda et al., 2012) to determine how the research participants were progressing through the crossroads and internal phases of self-authorship. I have presented the analysis using that protocol in Chapter 5. In Chapter 4, I have provided rich, thick descriptions from each participant's experience (Moustakas, 1994) to present the findings while also making meaning of how these experiences contributed to self-authored career commitments (van Manen, 1990).

In addition to the central themes that answered the research question, I identified themes in the interviews and reflection journals that support the value of internships as a career exploration process. I have included data supporting these themes in the findings because practitioners could use that information in their practice. These themes included 1) motivation to complete an internship and the 2) value of experiential learning.

In this chapter, I have discussed the findings related to the central themes. In the additional findings section, I have provided additional perspectives from the participants on what motivated them to do an internship and how they benefited from completing an internship. To illustrate the journey of self-authored career commitments, I have arranged this chapter by first presenting the pre-internship career interests of the interns. Then I provided rich descriptions (Moustakas, 1994) of their internship experiences that uphold the central themes and additional perspectives.

Participants

Using purposive sampling, I interviewed 11 traditional-aged undergraduate students from Liberal Arts University who had completed internships in the spring or summer prior to graduation. The participants represented seven different majors and completed internships in a variety of non-profit, government, and corporate entities. The participants worked for 10 to 15 weeks at their internships and completed anywhere from 10 to 65 hours of work each week. Two of the 11 participants received academic credit for their internships. Five of the participants who did not receive credit referred to institutional barriers such as the cost of receiving course credit or limits on when they could do a for-credit internship in their curriculum.

Pre-Internship Career Commitments

Each participant shared his or her pre-internship career commitments in the pre-interview reflection and the interview. As a researcher, I gathered this information to build rapport and to understand the career journey of my participants. To provide context to the reader of how each participant began his or her journey toward self-authored career commitments, I have provided a brief introduction and overview of each participant's career interests prior to the internship.

Chuck. Chuck grew up wanting to go into business like his father, but he also had an interest in technology because of experiences he had inside and outside the classroom. He changed his major from marketing to management information systems (MIS) because he was not enjoying his marketing classes. Chuck shared,

So I was like, maybe I can take classes I like and still get to where I want to be after college...So that's where I looked into MIS. I actually like this stuff...So I

was thinking...I could get a degree in something I like, but in the end go into business, go into marketing, maybe just management, something like that.

Chuck completed an internship with information technology support for Global Logistics Company (GLC) to gain experience working in a professional environment.

Ellie. Ellie was heavily involved in music in high school and entered college as a music therapy major after completing an internship with a music therapist in high school. Although Ellie loved therapy, she was concerned that she would have to do freelance work like many of her peers. Ellie considered changing her major to education, but her mother who works in education, discouraged her. Ellie changed her major to accounting and “planned to pursue a Certified Public Accountant (CPA) and work in a public accounting firm doing either tax or audit.” Ellie’s parents did not want her to delay graduation by completing an internship. Despite her parents’ wishes, Ellie completed a tax internship at Large Public Accounting Firm during tax season.

Esmeralda. As a Spanish major and sociology minor, Esmeralda described her pre-internship career commitments as “aimed at further developing my language skills and service to others so my experiences would reflect my studies.” With her mother’s family being from Puerto Rico, Esmeralda’s first language was Spanish. Esmeralda took A.P. Spanish in high school and because of her family background, she shared, “Spanish has always been a big thing for me,” and “I wanted to pursue that at a higher level with my education.” Esmeralda networked with an alumnus in her major to obtain an internship in the translation department at the Hispanic Community Association. Esmeralda shared that her father, who has a college degree and works in project management, has been the main parent to encouraging her about school and making good

decisions about her future. However, neither of her parents has provided specific input into her career decisions.

Jessica. A psychology major since entering college, Jessica stated that her pre-internship “career goal was to be a cognitive behavioral psychologist and eventually have” her “own private practice.” In addition to taking A.P. Psychology in high school, Jessica spent time helping her mother with administrative work at her private cognitive behavioral psychology practice. Jessica reflected that hearing her mother talk about her job and seeing “just how good she felt and she was able to help people” made her interested in the field. Prior to applying to master and doctoral programs in clinical psychology, Jessica completed an internship at the Autism Center in order to get exposure to the field.

Lynn. Lynn entered college as an undecided major, but she shared with me that she “wanted to be an art major for the longest time.” Lynn’s father encouraged her to pursue art as a hobby and “pick something you can make a living off.” Lynn stated,

I was in like major turmoil because I didn't know what direction I was going to take, and I considered every degree out there...heavily. I was going to be mass communication...an art major...a lawyer...an English major...a teacher. I was going to be everything. So I just kind of settled into nursing. I don't really remember why, I just kind of like, that would be a good one. So I kind of went with it, and I never looked back. And I've really enjoyed it so far.

Looking back, Lynn believed that choosing nursing as her major made sense because she always loved biology and studying about the human body. Lynn completed

an internship in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) of Metro Hospital because she had not gained experience in an ICU during her clinical experiences.

Marie. When Marie entered college, she was a business undecided major. She tried accounting but eventually changed to marketing because she thought, “It was really cool how companies...market a product, and how it’s recognized all over the world.” Marie had also enjoyed completing marketing projects for DECA in high school and thought marketing would provide her more opportunities for working with people. She shared, “I really had no idea what I wanted to do before having an internship” and “never ever imagined myself taking a sales internship.” Although her mother, father, and grandfather have worked in sales, Marie had not considered that as a career for herself or has she experienced pressure from her family to do so.

Rebecca. Rebecca entered college as a business undecided major but unsure of which direction to take. She remembered, “I went through the list of business majors and crossed out the ones I didn’t want to do.” She briefly considered Criminal Justice because she enjoyed the television show *Law and Order: Special Victims Unit*, but her “parents were like, you’re not doing that, it’s dangerous, you won’t make any money.” She “decided on MIS” because her “brother-in law was an MIS graduate” and she “knew similar things of what he had done” and “just kind of grabbed it random.” Because she knew that the cybersecurity field was rapidly growing, Rebecca completed a security services specialist internship with Big Computer Company. Her father has encouraged her to open her own small business, but she plans to get experience with a big company and later work for a small corporation.

Rosie. Rosie has wanted to be a journalist since reading, *Humans of New York*, in high school. Since then, writing has been an escape for her. When Rosie considered writing careers, she “really wanted to write about stuff that mattered.” She elaborated, “To me, what first came to mind were the news and the news stories that effect people... So that’s why I originally wanted to go into news...to write about things like that...stories that really have an impact on community’s lives.” Rosie entered college as a mass communication major and has written for the campus newspaper all four years. While her parents support her career choices, Rosie described herself as a “very independent person” who makes those decisions on her own. Rosie completed her internship at Local Publishing Company, where she wrote for both their newspaper and magazine.

Roxanne. Roxanne first became interested in psychology during her A.P. psychology class in high school because of a specific class assignment. She found her internship in forensic psychology through a faculty member in the psychology department who had a personal and professional connection in the forensics unit at Mental Health Hospital. When she began her internship, she wanted to be a forensic psychologist because she enjoyed the show *Criminal Minds*. Roxanne’s father has supported her decision to pursue a doctorate in psychology.

Skye. When Skye first entered college, she was a psychology major because she “liked to study people, interact with people” and “wanted to know more on like a scientific and analytical level.” Skye changed her major to mass communication because it supported her interest in consumer behavior but involved less science. The journalism side to mass communication also appealed to Skye. She had always liked writing

because her father, who had once worked as a journalist, recommended journalism as a career because of her natural curiosity about people. Skye reflected, “We always had fun like doing my papers in high school like grading and checking and writing.” Skye has become more interested in the advertising and business side of mass communication and completed an internship working with account management at Digital Marketing Company to gain experience in those areas. Her parents and several other family members work in sales, which has also influenced her interest in business.

Tate. Tate had been interested in working in government since completing an internship with the Chamber of Commerce in her hometown. Although her mother’s interest in government had influenced her interest, Tate described her parents as being supportive of every career she had considered. Initially an English major, Tate transferred to LAU to become a mass communication major and political science minor. Tate applied to several government internships in the metropolitan area and accepted a communications internship with State Government Agency.

The research participants had pre-internship career commitments influenced by various external factors. In the next section, I presented the findings from the reflection journals and interviews that describe how the internship experiences of the research participants contributed to making self-authored career commitments.

Theme 1: Clarifying Career Interests

“Knowing what you don’t want to do is a lot more helpful sometimes than knowing what you do want to do.” (Tate)

In their interviews and reflection journals, all of the participants said that their internship experience helped them clarify career interests. Each participant experienced

this clarification differently. For some participants, the internship confirmed their original career interests, but the realities of the field led the participants to consider new possibilities and slightly shift their original plans. Other participants used the internship to discover a career path they might not have considered prior to the internship.

Conversely, another participant explored a new area within her field only to discover that she preferred her original plan. By completing an internship, the participants experienced a developmental crossroads that led closer to making self-authored career commitments (Baxter Magolda, 2001, 2008; Baxter Magolda et al., 2012). In this section, I have provided descriptions of how their internships helped the participants clarify career commitments on their own.

Shifting Career Commitments

The internship experience exposed the research participants to the type of work and the environment related to the professional roles they had imagined for themselves. Most of the participants were experiencing their career choice for the first time. For instance, Ellie planned to become a CPA and work for a public accounting firm, but her internship experience challenged this original plan. Ellie said, “I’m still sure I want to do accounting. I *love* accounting. I *hate* public accounting.” Ellie explained why she hated public accounting.

I think the busy season is the most disgusting thing ever. Like there is a difference...I think a lot of people don't absorb this. There is a difference between busy and working hard and working efficiently and just working your life away. There's no reason at 25 you need to be working that amount of ridiculous hours for that pay.

From this experience, Ellie determined that she would fit best within the corporate accounting environment. Other participants also used their experience to identify preferred work environments within their field. Chuck and Rosie specifically referred to the value of using their internships to help them find out what they did not want to do in their careers. Although Rosie remained committed to a career in journalism, her internship showed her that writing for a local newspaper was not the right fit for her.

My internship has taught me more about what I don't want to do than what I do want to do...and I think that's really valuable too. So going into my internship, I thought this was going to be great because I thought that this would solidify that I want to work for a newspaper. But it solidified that I don't really want to work for a local newspaper.

Like Ellie, Rosie's experience provided substantial work in the field but led her to shift from one focus to another because she disliked the work environment. Rosie shifted from community journalism to magazine or alternative news journalism. She said, "It was helpful in the fact that I really have kind of decided what I want to do hopefully....I really like the idea of alterative newspapers....Just anything that allows me to be more opinionated than reporting just straight news..."

Chuck also said that the internship helped him learn more about what he did not want to do in his career. Through hands on experiences at his internship, Chuck learned that he preferred the business side to the technical support side of IT. Furthermore, similar to Ellie, Chuck realized that work-life balance was an important career value for him. Chuck shared, "My internship helped me realize what I didn't want to do, which I think is very valuable. I don't want to work somewhere that will force me to miss

holidays and work on weekends.” In addition to disliking the 24/7 schedule in technical support, Chuck enjoyed the business related work in his role. Chuck honed his public speaking skills when he had to “run a daily meeting with QAR specialists” and confirmed that he can be assertive in the workplace when consulting other departments on IT needs.

Similar to Chuck, Tate used her internship experience to clarify her work environment preferences and to identify new skills and interests within her field. In fact, at the end of her interview, she also said, “Knowing what you don’t want to do is a lot more helpful sometimes than knowing what you do want to do.” Tate described the internship with State Government Agency as “exactly what I’ve wanted to do,” but the experience showed her that she would prefer a more fast-paced environment than what a government agency provides. Tate explained, “I’ve only worked in government...affiliated internships so I really was questioning whether I wanted to stay in that...and also like not being in an office all the time.” Although she questioned working in a government agency, Tate confirmed her “passion for communications” and expanded her interests to include journalism because of the writing assignments she had for the internship. Journalism also offered Tate the opportunity to use her communication skills in a fast-paced, non-office work environment. She said, “Journalism gives you a lot more freedom to not be in an office 24/7, and...a lot of opportunities...to travel and to...humanize people, like in newspapers, writing feature stories...I became more interested in that aspect of journalism after my internship.”

Like the other participants, Esmeralda had an idea of what her career should be like, but her internship experience challenged this preconceived idea. In her internship experience, Esmeralda realized that career satisfaction for her might not include using her

Spanish major. She said, “I kind of had like a... moment when I realized...I don't love translating and this is what I've been saying I'm going to do.” However, Esmeralda did enjoy helping her clients. She explained, “I was able to do it because I met my clients, and I knew like why they needed it, and how it was going to make a difference to them, and I think that really motivated me to do it.” Because of this experience, Esmeralda focused her full-time job search on opportunities that aligned with her desire to “keep doing something that allows” her “to help people in the future.”

By experiencing work in a professional environment, the research participants had the opportunity to evaluate their work preferences. Through their internship experience, they identified their career interests and values as well as the type of work environments that best suited them. Although the internship experience challenged them to evaluate these preferences, the experience also introduced them to new career options by helping them eliminate those that do not fit them.

Discovering a Professional Focus

While other participants were using the internship to discover what they did not want to do, others were deepening their commitment to their profession. The internship helped these participants identify a professional specialty that aligned with their career interests and values. For instance, Lynn and Roxanne discovered specialties within their fields after experiencing the physical and mental realities of their professions. Despite the challenges, both participants increased their commitments and began to plan for additional educational training in their fields.

Lynn completed an internship in intensive care nursing, which strengthened her commitment to nursing and introduced her to a specialty that aligned with her need to

build connections with her patients. In her post-reflection journal, Lynn discussed how her internship led her to the specialty she chose for her first job.

My internship completely changed my career path as far as specializing in the nursing field. I don't know that I would have chosen cardiac ICU if I hadn't been exposed to it during an internship. I'm very thankful for my experiences with my internship, for what I learned about the job and about myself.

Roxanne, on the other hand, used her internship to eliminate a previous interest and discover a new one. Initially, Roxanne had pursued a forensic psychology internship because she loved the show *Criminal Minds*. By interning in the forensic unit of a mental health hospital, Roxanne learned about forensic psychology beyond what she saw on television. Roxanne said, "I found out it's so different from watching it on TV to like seeing it in real life..." Roxanne knew that she would be working with the mentally ill population at Mental Health Hospital, but she said,

I didn't know that it was going to be these people who had...done like just...awful things...until I like got there and realized...I have to like take off all of my jewelry and step through this security thing. They have to pat you down every day and you have to go...through eight doors to just get into the place...

Similarly, Lynn became more aware of the physical and mental realities of being a staff nurse at a hospital and began to consider her future in nursing. Rather than change her commitment to the field, this experience encouraged Lynn to plan for her long-term nursing career by exploring education for advanced nursing roles. Lynn shared,

There have been moments where I have thought I cannot do this for very long because nursing breaks your back. It's so physical....I'm realizing I'm not going

to do this for a very long time, I'm going to get my master's, something in like, I would love to work as a nurse practitioner in an office somewhere...

Lynn also observed the mental toll of nursing on her colleagues. In the future, she saw herself changing nursing specialties and work environments “to keep it interesting. People get stuck on the same floor and the same job for 20 years” because “exhausting, caregiver fatigue is a real thing. I have to get out of this as soon as I can and do something different, I don't want to be like that.”

Similarly, Roxanne experienced the realities of forensic psychology but discovered other ways to work with the mentally ill population that she wished to serve. Roxanne experienced an internal conflict when she realized that as a forensic psychologist, she would be required to provide testimonies that could be what allowed someone “to be let out into the community.” Roxanne said,

If there's a possibility that this person could hurt someone else again at some point, I couldn't see myself getting up in front of a jury, in front of...the parents of this child who was murdered and say...this person should be let out....I couldn't justify that as a professional.

By encountering this challenge, Roxanne realized that by focusing in mental health assessments, she could work with children and adolescents to screen for “the likelihood of someone committing these things because of their environment.” In her graduate school applications, Roxanne listed child psychology as her proposed specialty. Rather than leave the psychology field, Roxanne used the internship experience to explore a career path and identify a specialization within psychology that would best fit her professional values. Roxanne said,

And I think that internship...even though it ended up being something I didn't want to do, it just made me feel so accomplished like as a psychology student and as a potential, future clinician...I have to do something like this. There's like no other way, it's the only way I just have to....that's where I'm going to be the biggest benefit to the world. I wouldn't have as much passion for it. I wouldn't do as good a job as I would with this.

Lynn and Roxanne used their internships to experience the realities of their fields, which led them to develop a more internally defined understanding of their fields. Although their experiences challenged them, they increased their commitment to their fields by experiencing them on their own and independently identifying a specialty that aligned with their professional values.

Identifying Career Interests through Exploration

Several participants entered their internship without a specific career commitment and used their experiences to explore fields related to their majors. These participants explored fields where they had minimal classroom knowledge and hands-on experience. In this section, I discussed how exploration opportunities influenced how the participants viewed the new career areas they had explored.

Rebecca intentionally pursued an internship in cybersecurity, but Marie did not realize she had a sales internship until she started her position. Marie stated, "I just didn't realize what I'd be doing until I actually started. I didn't know it was sales until I started I guess." Marie approached her internship as an opportunity to explore a career in sales. She said,

I'll find out if I hate it or if I love it and then might narrow something else down.

When I graduate, I won't look for that because I know I hate it or I'll only look at that because I love it.

In her internship, Marie explored all aspects of a sales position because she had the same work responsibilities, training, and promotion opportunities as the full-time sales employees. Marie excelled quickly in her internship and was “promoted all at the same level” as the full-time employees that were trained with her. Marie also trained some of the full-time employees because of her success. Marie said, “In my internship I grew a lot as a person more than in just marketing or just business. I think I found something I was really good at, and I could show other people how to do it too.”

Rebecca, on the other hand, had chosen a cybersecurity internship because she had conducted research on it and learned it was a growing field. However, the internship did not provide her the opportunity to explore the field of as she had expected. Rebecca shared,

There was a graduate student in the same internship program that I was, and he was in a securities concentration...anytime they had security work, they would give it to him. They didn't really pass it along. I think that that made me decide I didn't want to do securities...because I didn't get any exposure to it...

Unlike Rebecca, Marie received hands on experience in the field she was exploring. Marie's success at her internship seemed to contribute to her new interest in sales and perhaps motivated her to explore other interests as well. Since her sales internship, Marie has explored advertising through another internship and shared in her post-reflection journal that she would like to pursue full-time opportunities in that field as

well. However, Marie credited her internship for providing her with direction she did not have before the experience. She said, “I feel like it’s [the internship] helped me know because now I feel like I really know what I want, like I have a direction of where I want to go...” Like other participants, the internship also helped Marie discover what she does not want in a career. She said,

I loved my internship and I learned a lot, but there were a lot of parts that I didn’t like because it was an agency....I know now, I think like I’d do corporate sales with a publically traded company. .

While Marie has interviewed for a sales position, Rebecca did not apply for cybersecurity positions when she conducted her full-time job search because of the lack of exposure in the internship. Although Rebecca did not gain skills in cybersecurity, she also identified what she did and did not want to do in a career. She said,

It gave me the opportunity to know that I don’t want to do something that I don’t like because sitting there being bored was something I didn’t like and it was miserable.

Marie and Rebecca’s internship experiences provided examples of how the level of exposure the intern has to their desired careers could influence future career choices.

Confirming Original Career Commitments

The remaining two participants did not change their career commitments after completing their internships. Both Skye and Jessica pursued internships related to original career interests influenced by family members and maintained those interests at the end of the internship. However, each one gained a new perspective on their careers and internalized their commitments differently.

Prior to the internship, Skye said she had “been studying the digital side...of marketing and advertising.” Through the internship, Skye experienced strategy sessions and the implementation of digital campaigns. Skye described how the internship helped her explore her career interests outside the classroom.

It was really fun to see the strategy behind it from the business side and from the psychology side with the consumers....Just from being in that process, I got to learn so much about the ad industry, about how they perform campaigns and all the background work that goes beyond when you see an ad pop up. All these terms, theories, and concepts. I think that was a really good part because I'm not getting that necessarily in my [mass communication] classes. So it was a really good like kind of crash course on what the sales people know, account managers know in order to do their jobs.

Unlike Skye, the internship introduced Jessica to a setting different from her original interests. Before completing the internship, Jessica had based her knowledge of the field of clinical psychology on what she had observed in her mother's career. The internship experience confirmed rather than challenged Jessica's desire to work in her own private practice. Jessica stated,

I knew that I didn't want to be a psychologist in that setting though. If I was going to be in that setting, I don't think I'd want to be the psychologist....Watching the psychologists, they mainly observed like I did. They make the plans and they interact with the parents some, but they are not really the ones in the room feeding the clients....I want more interaction with the client than

they had....They would just make the rounds instead of really spending a lot of time with the client.

Jessica remained committed to having a private psychology practice, but she did expand her ideas about the type of population she might work with as well as the experience she needs prior to having her own practice. Jessica said, “Watching patients get better every day because of their treatment and personal care they were given inspired me to want to treat others and improve their lives.” Jessica said that working in a clinic like the Autism Center “might be something...to do one day before” having her “own private practice....” Jessica explained,

I never really thought too much about working with autistic children or anything like that, but after being there, I started maybe wanting to incorporate that in some way someday. And then...that got me thinking about other job possibilities other than just doing therapy....every day I could see how much the kids improved and they would go from eating nothing or being afraid of having food in their mouth to being able to eat solid foods and watching that is pretty cool and watching the relationship the therapist gets with the patient is really cool....I just liked the setting, and it was a setting I never thought about working in before....It became another option for me. I still think I'd prefer to do what my mom does, but since I never thought about doing that before and seeing it, I did like it.

Similar to Jessica, Skye’s family had influenced her interest in the business side of advertising. Her family connections had also helped her get her internship. However, through her internship experience, Skye confirmed on her own that she is best suited for the marketing side of advertising. In fact, Skye said that her family had been a positive

external influence on her because they expected her to do the work to obtain career opportunities. She said, “We were brought up that you make your own decisions...you pave your way...your own path. It’s more you seeking...and using that help verses it just being throw to you or pushing you with...no choice to go outside of it.”

Unlike Jessica, Skye also received more hands on experience during the internship, which exposed her to the career she was considering. She discovered that she had the communication skills for being an account manager. She shared,

I think I fit that role well by being in a job where I might have to be the contact point, the middleman....so I think yeah, I fit well into what account managers do. Any sort of role where...you’re essentially communicating and getting stuff done.

In addition, the internship helped Skye identify what is important to her in a company culture. Skye has since decided that she would like to work full-time for the company. She said,

I didn’t realize how important that was to me when I go to work somewhere...It’s one thing to love what you do for the most part...I didn’t really realize how important it was to have that environment that fits you well.

After their internships, Skye and Jessica remained committed to the careers they were considering when they started their internships. Skye had a key role within the agency and had the opportunity to experience various aspects of the account manager role. In addition to finding a role within the company that suited her, Skye learned what was important to her in terms of company culture. Jessica’s internship involved more observation than interaction with clients. From her observations, Jessica determined that

she would be interested in working with autistic children, but she still preferred the idea of working in a private practice.

Through their internship experiences, the research participants explored career fields and identified preferred career values and interests as well as work environments. These varied exploration experiences allowed them to evaluate and clarify career commitments before they entered the professional world. As the research participants clarified their commitment to their field, several of the participants also began to establish a professional identity.

Theme 2: Establishing a Professional Identity

“Well, I definitely feel like I’m part of something now. I’m part of the nursing community, which is something I didn’t have before.” (Lynn)

The participants also shared that as they moved closer to committing to a career, they were experiencing opportunities at their internships to develop a professional identity. The participants reported that their experience adapting to the professional world during the internship contributed to the way they were evaluating their career decisions. In their interviews, the participants most frequently gave examples of how professional relationships and opportunities to develop expertise in their field had influenced their commitments to their particular career field. In this section, I have provided descriptions of how the internship provided the participants a space for developing a professional identity, which provided another opportunity to make self-authored career commitments.

Developing a Professional Identity through Workplace Connections

As the participants described their internship experiences, they revealed that relationships with supervisors, mentors, colleagues, and clients influenced how they connected to their profession. In several instances, participants had positive relationships in the workplace that gave them the confidence that they would be successful as a professional in that field. The participants benefited from positive role modeling and mentoring from leaders and colleagues as well as friendships and positive professional relationships in the workplace. Nine of the 11 participants (Jessica, Lynn, Tate, Skye, Roxanne, Marie, Esmeralda, Chuck, Ellie, Rosie) described how workplace relationships influenced their career commitments. In this section, I have included examples that show the positive and negative influence of these relationships in the workplace.

Interactions with supervisors, mentors, and colleagues. Through direct interactions and observations, participants reported that mentors and supervisors in the workplace provided career advice that influenced their career commitments. For instance, Roxanne received advice from several of the psychologists at Mental Health Hospital who served as mentors to her during the experience. Roxanne “idolized” one psychologist in particular because “she had a Psy.D. and a Ph.D...” and introduced Roxanne to the concept of doing mental health assessments. Interacting with this professional helped Roxanne learn about a career option that aligned with the way she was thinking about her career commitments during the internship. Roxanne explained,

From working with her and seeing that side of it, it made me want to stick, because I think that this population of people in particular needs attention, and I think it needs attention from individuals who are good at what they do, and I

would like to believe that with enough education that I could be a really good candidate to do that.

Roxanne also talked to the psychologists about what motivated them to remain in the field. The psychologists provided a variety of reasons related to helping people and using their intellect to develop treatment plans, but Roxanne said that she mainly learned “not to do a career in psych because of the money.”

I never once heard them say it was because of the money. They make a decent amount of money. I was honestly expecting at least one of them to say that....It made me feel good you have to have more than just a desire for a good income.

By incorporating what she had learned on her own through the internship with new advice from professionals in the field, Roxanne was able to evaluate and make informed, self-authored career decisions.

In contrast, other participants encountered negative behavior from supervisors and colleagues that also influenced how they were considering their career commitments. For instance, Ellie received contrasting advice from the two supervisors she had during her internship. When her first supervisor told her that she was asking too many questions, Ellie applied this feedback to her work and continued to do so when she changed departments. Ellie said, “So I didn’t ask questions. So when I got my second evaluation [from a new supervisor], they were like, you don’t ask questions. How are you supposed to learn if you don’t ask any questions?” Unlike Roxanne, Ellie did not get the opportunity to ask questions and expand her knowledge about her field.

Although Chuck had a positive relationship with his mentor and colleagues, his observations of their workplace behavior influenced how he was considering his career

commitments. After working in his particular department at GLC, Chuck determined that his work ethic and approach to professionalism did not match that of his mentor and colleagues.

I think I learned, I enjoyed being in an office...but I still like to get work done....I had a mentor and supervisor and a manager. My mentor that I interacted with every day....he actually left for a week for vacation, and I literally did his job for him for a week, and I kind of realized he had been slacking off for a while...

In the interview, Chuck also talked about how watching his father's corporate career had influenced how he thought about work environments. Because he had observed his father working in a "cutthroat" corporate environment, Chuck questioned the relaxed atmosphere in his department. Chuck also described how his departmental colleagues presented themselves in the workplace and how it did not match his expectation of professionalism.

So...it was a professional environment, but it wasn't suits and ties...These guys were fun. I liked, I loved their humor and they were really nice guys, but...they'd have "Suspenders Friday," and then there was one day they dressed like the guys in Men in Black. And they thought it was funny, and I thought it was funny too, and it's just not something I would do when I'm out of college because I don't think it's professional.

Chuck allowed the external messages he had received about the corporate world and the behavior of his mentor and colleagues to influence his career commitments. While Chuck made the decision to change his focus from technical support to the business side of IT, Rosie realized that she should not change her career path because of

the behavior she witnessed from colleagues at her internship. Rosie's journalistic values differed from the journalists at the local newspaper where she interned. For instance, other reporters had misquoted community members in the past, which created challenges for Rosie when she interviewed sources. Although Rosie experienced frustration when this past behavior affected her ability to get interviews from sources, she realized that she had an obligation to remain in the field and represent people accurately in the news. She said,

It...let me be aware that this is happening and that people do care about newspapers...about their publications that they're quoted in. So it almost kind of gave me, this is kind of what I need to be doing. Like these people have been misquoted before, I need to be the person who writes a story where they're not misquoted so it gives them more faith in this publication or give them more faith in the news, that we're not just publishing what we feel like publishing.

For the interns in this research study, workplace connections with supervisors, mentors, and colleagues influenced how they approached commitments to their career field.

Value of workplace friendships. Some participants also discussed how the presence or lack of workplace friendships at their internship influenced their career commitments. When Marie discussed her internship and her commitment to sales as a possible career, she often referred to the friendship and positive connections with her colleagues. For instance, Marie chose her internship because she liked the people, and as she reflected on her experience, she continued to talk about the people as an important part of why she enjoyed the work environment. Marie said,

And I loved the way the company was set up. Every morning we had a meeting and you'd play a game to get ready for the day. That was like something different. Like it gets you excited for the day, it's not just like a Monday. You're hanging out with your friends, it takes your mind off the fact that you're getting ready to work all day.

Ellie, on the other hand, never made connections with her peers at the internship and believed that the lack of connection negatively affected her experience. Ellie transitioned to her actual work assignment at her internship after the other interns did. When Ellie made the transition, she felt disconnected from the other interns, which made her feel more disconnected from public accounting. Ellie said,

I honestly didn't fit in. I didn't fit in with the people around me. I didn't fit in with the other interns. They all loved working, and they all loved doing what they were doing, and they all worked 12-hour days, and they'd go out together....I just constantly felt like people didn't like me and that I didn't fit in and they didn't make anything like welcoming or like enjoyable....It was just such a strange experience and I felt like everyone else loved it and I hated it and I didn't want to be there anymore. And the more I hated it the more everyone else loved it and were like, "Oh my gosh, I can't wait to do this full-time!" And just like wasn't fun at all.

Although Ellie became more disconnected from the other interns and the public accounting field, Marie's positive experience with her colleagues increased her interest in sales. When I asked Marie about the most meaningful aspect of her internship, she said,

It sounds so cliché, the friendships that I made. I still talk to the people I worked with. They were older than me. Like I'm still in college; they're not, but they still treated me with respect, I don't know. It was a really good experience. Like the friendships and just like figuring out what I wanted to do with my life post-graduation. That I do like sales.

For Marie, having positive relationships at work influenced her commitment to sales at the end of her first internship. Although weak connections with peers negatively influenced Ellie's career commitment to public accounting, she did use the internship to learn about what she values in a work environment. The internship experience made Ellie reflect on what attracted her to her original major, music therapy. When I talked with Ellie about the differences between accounting and music therapy, she confirmed that the internship aligned with her interest in accounting but not the developmental environment that she enjoyed in music therapy. Ellie said,

Yes. That's exactly it. Therapy you talk about it, and if you don't know what you want in the beginning, you know what you want in the end because you discussed things. And in the busy seasons they were just too busy to talk to you. They didn't have time to answer your questions. Sometimes they didn't want to answer your questions. There was no relationship. And just really, at least for me, maybe I didn't find a happy medium on how to build those relationships. And I was put off that other interns were making those relationships and for someone reason I wasn't. It just wasn't working. I think like at the end of the day I felt so uncomfortable because I didn't feel like I fit in. And they made me feel like I didn't know what I was talking about...

For Marie, workplace friendships strengthened her interest in sales as a possible career. Ellie, on the other hand, left her internship committed to accounting but determined to avoid applying for public accounting firms because of her experience. Although they had different experiences with workplace friendships, their internship experienced helped them determine that they both valued working in a supportive environment where they could connect with people and grow as a professional.

Client interactions. In addition to interactions with workplace colleagues, some participants (Esmeralda, Lynn, Roxanne, Rosie) discussed how interactions with their clients influenced their career commitments. For Esmeralda, she was able to solidify her career commitment because of the people she served in her internship. Although Esmeralda did not enjoy translating, she discovered that working with clients at the Hispanic Community Association did give her career satisfaction. Helping others was more important to her than having a career where she used her language skills. Esmeralda explained,

I think that some of my most gratifying moments during it was working with the clients. I think that probably had the biggest impact on me. And there are some people who were really, really humble who had some really difficult circumstances and talking to them and seeing their struggles and knowing that in some small way I can make a difference, that really resonated with me. That was like an aha moment. I want to keep doing something that allows me to help people in the future.

Because Esmeralda worked directly with the people seeking assistance from the Hispanic Community Association, she was able to explore her interest in serving others as a career.

Similarly, Lynn described how interacting with the patients at the hospital influenced and solidified her career commitments. In addition to finding the right specialty area within nursing, the internship helped Lynn clarify why she is certain about choosing the nursing profession. She said,

I think those moments kind of happen all the time. When I do something small for someone like get them a cup of water or you know help them use the bathroom, the small things, people are like...some people aren't very thankful and then you get those people who are super thankful for everything you do....I am doing something important...

For individuals considering careers where public interaction or service would be a part of their responsibilities, the internship experience provided them a way to determine if that type of interaction was important to them in their careers.

Developing a Professional Identity through Completing Substantial Work

Participants shared that supervisors and colleagues influenced career commitments by how much they entrusted the participants to complete substantial work related to their field of interest. This trust influenced how confident the participants were to enter the particular field. Nine out of the 11 participants had supervisors and colleagues who entrusted them to either complete substantial work or observe activities directly related to their career interests. In those instances, the participants developed new skills they wanted to use in their careers and a deeper understanding of what it means to be part of a particular profession.

Gaining skills and expertise. Six of the participants (Esmeralda, Skye, Tate, Chuck, Marie, Lynn) had the opportunity from their supervisors to explore and expand

their career options through their internship, and as a result, gained new skills they want to use in their profession. In this section, I have provided examples of how supervisors trusting interns to complete substantial work helped them gain new skills and begin to identify with a profession.

When Skye, Tate, and Marie reflected on their internships, they all commented on how good it made them feel to work alongside their supervisors doing the same work as full-time employees. Both Skye and Tate said that the most meaningful part of their internships was the way that they were treated by their supervisors and colleagues. In her internship, Skye managed all incoming digital advertisement requests from clients, which was a major function of their business. Skye said,

I was given a lot to do, but then in return I was expected to do that and to do it well. I was very much treated as if I was working there full-time...was a little bit older. I wasn't looked down upon. I didn't...go get coffee, that's not their thing, we don't hire interns to do that, that's a waste of our money, that's a waste of your time.

Similarly, Tate thrived in her work environment and discovered a new career path because of the trust her supervisors had in her work. Like Skye, she found herself doing substantial work rather than mundane tasks that some associate with internships. In fact, she was “doing the exact same thing” as her supervisors. Tate said,

The most meaningful part is the trust that my bosses instilled in me....They sent me on assignments with no supervisor and they trusted me to get the job done and do it how they wanted me to do it....They threw me right into it...within the first month, I was drafting press releases, I was writing blogs to be posted on the state

website....They threw me in there with full confidence, and so that made me realize that I have to live up to their expectations, and I have to do my best, and that was really, an eye opening moment because a lot of internships, you feel like you're just going to copy papers, get coffee.

Marie also earned the trust and respect of her supervisors, full-time colleagues, and the company president. When Marie started her internship, she completed training with full-time entry-level employees and received a promotion for closing eight accounts in two days, faster than any other salesperson. Marie shared, “Within the first two to three weeks, people there were asking me for advice. People actually think I’m good at this, that’s really cool!”

Trust and recognition from supervisors and colleagues helped the research participants gain confidence in their skills. By the end of the internship, Marie received the opportunity to train the full-time salespeople as well as recognition from the company president.

Toward the end of my internship I was getting asked to train people so that just makes you feel good because I mean, you obviously know what you're doing or someone wouldn't be asking you. It really made me feel like I learned a lot. If I can teach someone else and they are going to be doing what I'm doing, that means I really did learn something and made an impact....

This increased confidence influenced the interns to consider professional work similar to their internship. Marie said, “I guess it made me realize I am good at this. I like doing it.” Tate recalled that after her bosses told her, “Great job, Tate” for the first time, she “felt really accomplished in her abilities” and it “definitely helped build” her

“confidence.” Because of the writing experience Tate gained in her internship, she realized that she wanted a communications career that focused more on writing and newsgathering. Skye reported that she was “definitely considering going back to the company” to complete another internship and possibly work full-time.

When Marie had the opportunity to train other employees, the experience also introduced her to the possibility of using her initial interest in teaching but in a training capacity within a corporate environment. However, the additional recognition from the company president deepened her interest in sales.

The president called my boss, and I guess the companies that I had worked with told him that I was like the best sales representative like they had ever had. That at the end of my internship just wrapped it all up and it was like, “Oh, you’re doing a good job. This is something you’re really good at,” and it was someone recognizing me that’s really high up. It wasn’t just my boss saying you did a good job or people I was working with saying you’re so nice and helpful. It came from the president of the company I was working for who I’ve never met in my life so that like meant a lot to me.

When Marie’s colleagues and supervisors recognized her for her accomplishments in sales, they validated for her that she could commit to a career in sales in the future. Skye reiterated the value of supervisors and colleagues providing encouragement. Skye said,

I think just kind of like that acceptance and you know, encouragement to do well, that openness, if you have questions, don’t be afraid to ask. I think that environment just overall was just the best part. I think it gives a lot of us interns

the ability and confidence to do our work, and in return, we gave them like really productive and useful work.

In contrast, Rebecca, did not get the opportunity to do substantial work related to the purpose of her internship. Without the experience in cybersecurity she had hoped for, Rebecca did not have the confidence to apply for those positions when she conducted her full-time job search. After three weeks, Rebecca realized that her supervisor was not going to give her any work.

I probably did zero with security throughout the whole summer. I did a couple web applications....They had the other interns train me which was kind of disappointing....I think that mostly I was just disappointed. Probably around the third week, I'm just going to sit around here for 10 weeks, and I'm going to do the work that the other interns decided that they don't want to do.

Because Rebecca did not get experience in cybersecurity, she did not have the confidence to apply for full-time positions in that area. However, the internship experience did influence her to look for companies that offered good training programs. Rebecca said, "I went and looked on my own. Let's see who had good entry-level position with training. I think that's what mainly effected, I wanted training and Big Computer Company didn't give me the training that I thought I needed."

When the interns had the opportunity to work in an environment, where they were trusted to do the professional work associated with their internships, they gained the confidence to approach their jobs as professionals and begin preparing for opportunities in those respective fields.

Joining a professional community. For participants like Lynn and Rosie, the internship was their opportunity to experience a career in which they had already committed. Although they each related to their work environments differently, each of them remained committed to their professions and moved closer to establishing their own professional identity because of their internships. For instance, Lynn gained experience working alongside nursing professionals in a positive team environment and identified a nursing specialty that resonated with her. When she reflected on her internship, Lynn said, “Well, I definitely feel like I’m part of something now. I’m part of the nursing community which is something I didn’t have before.” Lynn described how being part of this professional community was the most meaningful part of her internship.

I’ve worked with different nurses every time I’ve worked....So you kind of get to work with a bunch of different people. You know, that was meaningful to me because people started trusting me to do things. Like, “Hey, can you go draw this blood for me?” I felt like an actual member of the team you know, because I was actually being helpful so that ...was meaningful to me.

While Lynn easily found herself in a community of nurses that reflected her professional values, Rosie had a more difficult time feeling connected to her profession. Rosie had the responsibilities of a full-time employee, but she described an environment where she did not feel trusted as a journalist.

It was kind of like I wasn’t trusted. And even out in the community, people didn’t want to talk to me because I wasn’t a long time reporter for the newspaper. So it was just one of those things where I feel like my talents weren’t put to use as how

they could be, and I was writing stuff that didn't matter to me, that I didn't want to write about.

Rosie briefly considered changing her career path because of these obstacles, but through her experience, she developed a strong professional identity as a journalist. Rosie said,

I really learned how to go out into the community and be a professional. And I think that more than anything has been a good take away from the internship is that I learned what kind of community standards are as far as being interviewed, as far as dealing with journalists.

However, by focusing on her duty to represent community members accurately, Rosie established an identity for herself as a journalist and displayed an increased commitment to that career.

When the research participants had the opportunity to do significant work in their field, they gained skills and expertise and identified with a professional community.

However, the trust of supervisors and colleagues strengthened their confidence in their work and their place within their profession.

Integrating Professional Identity into Daily Life

Lastly, the participants who were most committed to a particular career field also described how they were integrating their professional expertise into their lives. Four of the participants (Jessica, Lynn, Roxanne, Esmeralda) described this phenomenon. When I asked Jessica how the internship had changed her, she discussed new interests and then recalled a significant change that had occurred. She said,

But that reminded me of something that did make a change in me....When I would go babysit after that experience, I would think of how I interacted with children

differently. They teach you there [The Autism Center] how to reward them for their behavior but not punish for bad behaviors and how to praise them and I would just start using that without realizing it when babysitting

Lynn and Roxanne have also integrated their professional expertise into their daily lives. Roxanne shared that her friends have noticed that she “speaks[s] very differently,” and that she is critical when someone uses a mental health diagnosis such as OCD, depression, or anxiety to describe personal challenges when they do not have a diagnosis for that disorder. Roxanne described how she advocates for the mentally ill population by educating others about the proper use of those terms.

It's almost given me like this advocate drive. Because it's just not, it's just not right....When people throw out phrases like that, it really now, before it was no big deal, I used them myself as well. One that I would always use is “Don't talk about that, it gives me anxiety.” No, no, no. Not anymore. Just because I don't, like you said, kind of like minimizes the battle that people are facing every single day. It just really bothers me. That's one way that it's changed how I interact with people. And not that I'm mean about it, I'm not mean about it. I am just gently like, “don't use that phrase.”

Similarly, Lynn saw herself as a professional in the field who is trusted because of her training in nursing and has become someone that her friends and family come to for assistance with medical issues. After the internship, Lynn found herself noticing health issues that people may have because of her training. Lynn said,

I definitely notice things more now. I notice certain features about a person, and I'm like, they are probably dealing with this right now. It's kind of cool to be able

to pick up on certain things like...if someone has clubbed fingernails, they are not getting enough oxygen or they have sleep apnea, notching, little things like that...

Lynn had internalized what she learned in the internship and applied it to her understanding of people she meets in daily life. Esmeralda took a similar approach when she realized that larger, national issues were at the heart of the challenges her clients were facing. However, while Lynn's training taught her how to look at people and better understand their health issues; Esmeralda learned that she must look beyond appearance to understand someone's societal challenges. This realization during her internship influenced Esmeralda to access more news sources so that she could "at least become more aware of current events as far as like politics and kind of like why people had certain opinions and things like that..." Because of the internship, Esmeralda gained an increased understanding of how to relate to the people she served.

I think I was kind of naive and ignorant to it before but I think that ties back into that bigger picture stuff that is important to me as far as why I keep up with it still....I feel like it was definitely an experience that made me more empathetic and sensitive to people. Just learning that there are people going through certain things that you wouldn't necessarily be able to recognize by just looking at them.

And that had a lot to do with my client consultations and things like that....

Through her client interactions, Esmeralda began to examine the world through "just more of a critical thinking lens" and increased her understanding of how she can affect change within the bureaucratic structures that exist.

And also kind of understanding what goes on in just the bureaucratic end as far as like what change are you able to make, based on resources and kind of, just

kind of give and take and I have learned, that's not necessarily someone's fault. It's sometimes a good thing, sometimes it's a bad thing....So I guess it's made me a little more mature in that way because I'd be able to understand those things where I didn't necessarily have those kinds of understandings before.

The research participants revealed that their internship had influenced the development of their professional identities. Workplace connections, significant work experiences, and trust from supervisors and colleagues provided interns with the opportunity to see how they fit into a profession. For others, the internship influenced them to integrate aspects of their profession into their daily life. By establishing a professional identity during their internships, the research participants could then transition into the professional career search process.

Theme 3: Influencing the Professional Career Search Process

“I didn't have any idea what accounting in the workforce was....I don't think I would be able to present myself in any...desirable way in an interview because I had no idea...what accounting was at all before I did the internship.” (Ellie)

For the participants, the end of the internship signaled the beginning of their professional career search. Two of the participants had plans to attend graduate school. The remaining participants had plans to find a full-time job although three of them first had to complete a final required internship as part of their academic program. Several of the participants shared how the internship experience influenced their career search and preparation for interviews.

Considering Multiple Opportunities

The internship experience expanded what the research participants knew about the type of professional career opportunities available to them. Even participants, such as Skye and Chuck, who were interested in working full-time at their internship site, discussed the multiple opportunities they were considering. Even though she is “definitely considering going back to the company,” Skye has taken the initiative to make sure she is making the right decision about her future. She said,

I don't know so much about either of these industries. It's like should I be looking somewhere else too and should I be getting a different perspective? Even if this company is so great and I had a great experience, it's that kind of like, you still have that feeling when you're young and in school, what should I be doing?

Similarly, when discussing how the internship had influenced his career commitments, Chuck said, “It definitely opened my eyes to different things” and if he went to work for GLC full-time, he would like to talk with human resources about opportunities beyond the technical support role he was in as an intern. In addition, Chuck has networked with family friends and has used LinkedIn to make connections at other large corporations. His supervisor also told Chuck that he could see him “being a good project manager in the future.” Chuck said, “I've just been looking at something maybe similar to that job title to work my way over there” as well as other business related IT positions. Chuck has even thought about his previous career interest in video production and has considered applying to jobs at a new film studio near his home so that he “won't regret it.”

Although she is primarily interested in working for the company where she interned, Skye has also expanded her efforts to research opportunities on her own. When Skye first applied to internships, she relied on family recommendations. Skye is considering “different opportunities” beyond “marketing and ad” that she “could do with” her “degree.” Sky added,

But I think I'm doing definitely more research because now I know what that business does and that side, then I can find out stuff on my own. I know what to look for, what to not. So definitely I have more clarity going in this time around, which is nice.

Like Skye, other research participants relied on others to lead them toward their internships, which is different from what they have experienced during their professional career search. Large Public Accounting Firm pursued Ellie after a career fair, but she did not pursue other opportunities on her own. Marie and Esmeralda foreclosed on their searches early in the process when Marie connected with a Career Center employer and Esmeralda connected with an alumnus. Rosie had a previous relationship with the local newspaper. Since completing the internships, their experience has empowered the participants to take ownership of their search.

Although Marie did not want to work at her internship site as a full-time professional, she did continue to have an interest in the field. However, like Skye, she wanted to make sure she had explored all of her options within the marketing field. When Marie conducted her internship search, she realized that she should have started before her junior year because finding an internship was “so hard...really time consuming...really competitive.” Since the internship, Marie networked at a conference

and found another internship in creative marketing for the spring. Marie said, “Unless I really fall in love with something again, I could see myself graduating and doing sales.” In her post-reflection journal, Marie added, “I really enjoyed my internship over the summer. I loved sales and could definitely see it as a career path. I just want to see what working at an advertising firm is like until I make a final decision.”

The internship experience also expanded what careers the participants thought were available to them in relation to their major. When Esmeralda and Ellie completed their internships, they learned that their career options went beyond what they had perceived. Prior to her internship, Esmeralda had chosen translations as a possible career through research on her own while Ellie had chosen corporate accounting because of faculty influence.

As a Spanish major, Esmeralda did not feel pressure from her department when it came to choosing a career. Instead, she “experienced some disappointment and frustration” with her department because they did not require internships, and she felt like she had to figure out her career plans on her own. Through her own research, Esmeralda chose to pursue a career in translations. She said, “It just seems like that’s a secure career path that I could do with language,” and it fit the notion that she had “to do something with language.” However, since the internship, Esmeralda has realized that her career options go beyond translation and that she would get more career satisfaction from a career focused on services than one focused on language only. Although she has wrestled with the decision to choose service over language, she described how the internship experience and her job offer from Urban Teachers have helped her expand her view of career options.

I think even reflecting back on my internship experience, I've learned kind of to accept that that's ok, that I can still kind of get transferable skills out of it, that if I did want to go and pursue something with language, it doesn't mean that this won't complement that...I've learned that to be, I think more flexible, that things kind of have a way of working themselves out that way. Because I always tend to be like think worst-case scenario, like this isn't a job in language and that's what my background is and I'll be unemployed after this, but my experiences have taught me that that's not the case.

Unlike Esmeralda, Ellie experienced pressure from her academic department to consider certain types of jobs related to her major. However, since her internship, Ellie has considered multiple types of jobs outside of public accounting. Ellie has been hesitant to tell her faculty that she has accepted a job in corporate accounting. Ellie stated, “Our accounting department just really gives us the impression that we really want CPA, and um, like public accounting is pretty much the only way to go.” When Ellie realized that public accounting was not the right fit for her, she said, “I had this idea that I wouldn’t have any job openings anymore and that’s just not the case – they were all there.”

At the time of the interview, Ellie had not told her faculty that she had accepted a job with The Electric Company since she was not going to work in public accounting. Esmeralda, on the other hand, has found that talking to faculty in her department has helped her reconcile the conflict she had about choosing a non-language career. Although her academic department and other people significant in her life had expected Esmeralda to go into a language field, she reported, “I feel like talking to others has

helped me....I'll still get valuable skills out of this that I can use later, but this will be more of a stepping-stone and not as much as a detour as I thought.” The internship experience for both Esmeralda and Ellie helped them focus their job searches on opportunities that fit their career values and interests rather than one focused on jobs that seem to fit their majors.

In addition to helping research participants consider multiple job opportunities, the internship experience also helped participants expand their view on pursuing graduate school after graduation. Jessica and Roxanne both used their internships to gain different perspectives on what they could do before and after graduate school. For instance, prior to the internship, Jessica was unaware of career options available to her before completing a doctorate. Jessica said,

I learned that the people who were the therapists were just like a year or two older than me, and I didn't realize I could do what they do after graduation....That's always an option for me for next year if I wanted to do that...It made me realize that I don't have to completely wait until I have my Ph.D. to be able to work in my field of study.

In contrasting their experiences, Jessica expanded her knowledge of pre-doctoral work while Roxanne increased her knowledge of professional career options in clinical psychology after graduate school. Through her internship, Roxanne determined that she would like to do psychological assessments so that she can provide early interventions to individuals with mental illness. Roxanne incorporated her new interest in her graduate school applications.

The internship was such a good experience that I never would have given that up, but it never made me want to stop working with clinical. It almost kind of switched my gears to wanting to do assessment in particular. I did some grad school applications, and...you list specializations and I did child psychology. I just thought if there was someone doing these screenings in the school system and caught this like outlier, caught like this child and looked at their background...

The internship introduced Jessica and Roxanne to new options, but they incorporated them into their plans in different ways. Jessica remained committed to having her own private practice but thought she might want to work with autistic children. Roxanne, on the other hand, used the internship to identify her place within psychology to work proactively with children and adolescents who have mental illness. For Roxanne and the other research participants, the internship increased what they knew about themselves in regards to personal career preferences and related career options.

Seeking More Information

In addition to exposing the research participants to new career options, the internship also empowered them to research additional opportunities. Nine of the 11 participants had conducted limited research on internship opportunities and had accepted the first internship offer they received. Marie, Rebecca, Skye, Roxanne, Esmeralda, Ellie, and Rosie shared that they had conducted a limited search and had relied on connections through the Career Center, family, faculty, and community involvement. In this section, I have provided examples of how the internship experience led the research participants to take ownership of their search for full-time opportunities. For example, when Rebecca looked for an internship, she relied on information from faculty and

family. Rebecca said, “I think in our program, they push you to do an internship....our program head, she emailed me [opportunities]....I didn’t get this internship until actually May.” She had also applied to internships based on recommendations from her brother-in-law. She said, “My brother-in-law....did the same thing I did, so he sent me a list of all the companies so I went through the list and applied to all of them.” Similarly, Skye applied to only three internships the first time and found an internship only because her cousin got her a position with her company.

Since their internships, Rebecca and Skye have taken more ownership of their professional job searches. During her first search, Rebecca said, “I just, I didn’t care. It wasn’t a big deal,” but since completing her internship, she has a vested interest in her search. Rebecca said that she “could have gone right back to that list and applied to jobs from there,” but instead, she looked online to “see who had good entry-level positions with training...” She said, “I wanted training and Big Computer Company didn’t give me the training that I thought I needed.” Skye also reported doing more research in her current career search, Skye said,

I think I’m doing definitely more research because now I know what that business does and that side, then I can find out stuff on my own. I know what to look for, what to not. So definitely I have more clarity going in this time around, which is nice.

However, Skye said that she continues to value the advice she gets from the people who matter to her.

I think I’m still getting advice from others just because I love having just different opinions, different ideas. I think how, like when people evaluate you and think of

opportunities, that's just like such a unique perspective. I wouldn't see myself doing that, but I wonder why they did. Maybe that's something you know, I don't see, because you can't always see things for yourself that maybe other people can.

When Rebecca did look to others for recommendations during her job search, she relied on those who had experience with the companies she was considering. When she reflected on her brother-in-law's list, she admitted, "He didn't have any experience with most of them." Because of her internship experience, Rebecca had the confidence to research opportunities on her own and integrate rather than rely on information from others as she made decisions about where to apply for jobs.

Preparing for Interviews

Most of the participants reported that the internship increased their confidence as well as their knowledge of self and career interests when preparing for job and graduate school interviews. Research participants said that the internship experience provided them with examples to talk about during the interview as well as a better idea of what to expect in a professional interview. Participants also used the interview as a way to evaluate and make decisions about professional career opportunities.

Highlighting real work experience. Four of the research participants discussed how the internship experience increased their confidence about interviews because they had real work experience to use as examples. For instance, both Lynn and Marie have used their internship experiences to interview for jobs in their fields. Lynn said that having an internship between spring and fall helped her remember nursing concepts she had learned from previous practicum sites. Lynn said,

It helped me so much when finding a job because I knew what they wanted. I knew what they expect out of a new nurse. I knew kind of things I need to highlight. I also had so many more stories to pull from when I was being interviewed. There were like tell me about a clinical experience where this happened, and I'd be like, "I got that," because I had so much experience by that point. By the time I was interviewing, I hadn't dove into my [fall] practicum yet. So you know I had all this stuff fresh in my mind whereas if I hadn't had an externship, I would have had a full summer between clinicals and you don't remember stuff.

Just as Lynn had relevant stories to pull from when interviewing for nursing positions, Marie has used her sales experience from her internship to speak confidently and intelligently about sales. Marie said,

I've done like a sales interview and I felt totally confident. It was supposed to last 15 minutes. I talked to him like 45 minutes. I felt like I had an intelligent conversation with him. Like the things he was talking about, I knew what he was talking about, and I didn't really think I was on an interview. I felt like I was totally being myself, like I wasn't trying to impress someone so bad or like worried about what I was going to say next, like it was very natural just because I had done it.

Although Roxanne had not started her graduate school interviews, she believed that the internship had provided her with an experience that would help her connect with professionals in her field, similar to what Marie described. Roxanne said,

It was an environment that's just real world, and I had never been in anything like that....I feel like I have something now that I can really talk about to, especially people who are interviewing for these grad programs. I can actually...connect with people.

For Marie, having something to talk about in an interview was one motivating factor for pursuing an internship. Marie said, "I realized going into interviews I would have nothing to talk about besides things I had done in college." Roxanne also discussed how she thought her internship experience would help her stand out among candidates who could only talk about classroom experience. Roxanne said,

If I were to go up to like a grad school interview or something, going against someone who hasn't had any kind of exposure to the real world, I just kind of feel like...It gives me something...when they ask you questions. Well, I have like an actual example, more than just this is all the stuff I have learned about in classes. Because that only gets you so far.

By experiencing a professional work environment, the research participants had real world examples to talk about in their professional interviews. In addition, Ellie, discussed how participating in a formal interview for her internship prepared her for the professional interview process. Ellie reflected,

I think pursuing and learning about the accounting field and recruitment within the accounting field is a very valuable experience....It just teaches you so much and then once you've done the internship recruitment experience, like doing the job recruitment experience it's no big deal, you've done it all before.

In addition, Ellie realized after the internship she had learned more than she thought and could more accurately describe what she was looking for in a job. Ellie stated,

I don't think I realized how much I learned until I came back and started looking for real jobs and being able to explain what I had learned in the internship and like why I wasn't looking for that in a job, or what I was looking for in a job.

Although the internship presented challenges, Ellie shared thoughts similar to Marie and Roxanne about the internship exposing her to her profession outside the classroom. Ellie said, "I didn't have any idea what accounting in the workforce was....I don't think I would be able to present myself in any...desirable way in an interview because I had no idea...what accounting was at all before I did the internship." When it was time to interview for full-time jobs, Ellie described her feelings of confidence to me as, "Like here's my resume, ask me whatever questions you want. I'm ready. It's not scary at all."

Marie also provided an example of how the transferable skills from her internship had helped her in non-sales interviews. Despite feeling less confident about non-sales interviews, Marie reported that she had been successful explaining how her sales experience translated to other careers.

And it's helped me on like actual job interviews. And like even when I go to interviews that are not sales, it still shows that clearly she can have a goal and reach it. She knows how to work hard. Door-to-door sales is not easy. People generally know that. So it just helps.

After reflecting on their internship experiences, the research participants increased their ability to identify and connect transferable as well as field specific skills with full-time job opportunities during interviews.

Using the interview to make informed career commitments. The participants gained practical work experience at their internships, which increased their confidence when they went through the formal interview process. Because of this increased confidence, research participants such as Ellie, Lynn, Rebecca, and Marie also used the interview to ask questions and share information in order to evaluate the opportunity before they made a commitment to the company.

Because of her experience at the internship, Ellie learned that it was important to ask the right questions during the interview so that she would know if The Electric Company was the right fit for her. Ellie said that she went into the interview with the confidence to get that information although people would say, “Oh, you shouldn’t say that in an interview.” Ellie, who has started to move away from external formulas, responded to this type of advice.

No, you need to say that because if you don’t see their reaction now you will see it when you’re working and you won’t like it if it’s not what you wanted. And I think when you’re looking for a job you should be able to ask those question and be completely comfortable ...If you’re not comfortable asking those questions, it’s not the right job.

When Ellie interviewed, she said that she asked the right questions and determined that The Electric Company matched the career values she had established for herself since the internship. She also connected with the accounting professionals at The

Electric Company who had worked in public accounting firms and left for similar reasons. Both Ellie and Rebecca learned that talking honestly about their experience benefited them during their interviews. Rebecca said,

I went in and they asked me about it, and I told them what I did, the same way I told you. I really wish they would have given me more work. I talked about it honestly. I don't think that they used us to their full potential. I think just saying things like that made them realize I wanted to work more. At Big Computer Company, I wanted to do more for them. I wasn't there to get paid, I was there to learn things.

Lynn also went into her full-time job interview with specific requirements that she had identified during her internship. When Lynn reflected about her first job interview, she said, "I was also interviewing the director, definitely."

Lynn explained that the internship showed her that she had a choice about where she would work after graduation. Lynn said, "I got a better idea of what really is important...as far as looking for jobs because you do have a choice, you know. You want to go with your gut as far as a good place to work." In the interview, Lynn asked specific questions of her future manager.

So when I was in the interview with the director at the place that I'm working, I asked her, "What kind of manager are you? How do your employees feel about their job?" I was asking the questions...I had never been to her unit before, so trying to get a sense of what kind of unit she ran. And I liked her, and I liked what she had to say. She's not a micromanager, I can't stand micromanaging, and she said, "I'm not a micromanager."

After her internship, Marie also realized that if she were to pursue sales opportunities, she would have to ask the right questions to evaluate the opportunity. When she interviewed for her internship, Marie said, “I didn’t know what questions to ask...I didn’t know what pay structure you were supposed to do. Or what sounded good. I wasn’t doing it for money, I was doing it for the experience. But now I know.” In preparing for future interviews, Marie planned to ask about commission, travel expenses, and work hours. Marie learned about the sales profession as well as how her career values would need to align if she were to accept another sales position.

By completing an internship, the research participants gained confidence in their ability to conduct an effective professional career search. They used the internship experience to learn about new career opportunities, and when it was time to apply to and interview for jobs, they took ownership of their job search. Rather than rely on external sources, the research participants implemented various means to conduct a self-authored search for positions that best fit their career interests, values, and work preferences.

Theme 4: Developing an Internal Belief System about Career Choice

“In spite of all the temptations, the voices that tell [you], “Oh, maybe, you can do this or maybe you can’t do that,” just silencing those and...having confidence in yourself and your goals. And I think that internship...just made me feel so accomplished....I have to do something like this. There’s like no other way, it’s the only way.” (Roxanne)

The research participants described their internship experience and reflected on how that experience has influenced their career commitments. All of the participants have indicated signs that the internship experience helped them move away from external formulas. However, as the participants made meaning of their experience through the

interviews, they represented different points along the spectrum of externally and internally defined career decisions. In this section, I discussed how the internship has helped participants move closer to developing an internal belief system in regards to making career decisions. The participants used varying levels of self-authorship to integrate external formulas and internal beliefs as they made meaning of their internship experience in order to make career decisions. Several of the participants also expressed an increased value on career exploration and experiential learning during their internship. First, I discussed how the participants described how they viewed internally defined career commitments

Developing a Definition of Internally Defined Career Commitments

In the pre- and post-reflection journals as well as the interviews, participants described their definition of internally defined career commitments. The participants had varied responses that provided some insight into how their internship was influencing how they were making self-authored career commitments.

Several of the participants described an internally defined career commitment as a career choice based on personal values, interests, and goals. In her pre-reflection journal, Esmeralda described it as a “personal commitment based on individual values and morals.” She explained that she had followed these principles and chose her internship and first job based on her “personal value for language and moral to serve others.” In the interview, Esmeralda discussed career choice as a value and related internally defined choices to “head and heart....like very specific to an individual....what’s internally defined for me is not what’s going to be internally defined for my peers.”

Like Esmeralda, Tate described it in the pre-reflection journal as a set core of values that you want to take with you to whatever career choice you choose.” Through her internship, Tate discovered that being able to use communications in her job was an important value for her. Similarly, Roxanne interpreted it in the pre-reflection journal as having a goal and then “find[ing] a career that accomplishes that.” She added, “Mine was doing work with people who may not otherwise receive adequate medical treatment.” In the interview, Roxanne explained that she could “help people with doing pretty much anything,” however, through her internship, she discovered that there was a specific way she had to help others. Roxanne realized it was about making a specific commitment to helping the mentally ill. For her to change her mind, Roxanne said that “some magical thing” would have to present itself as her “calling” instead.

I just think it's important once you kind of make a decision, it's not that it can't change, if it's going to change it needs to change for the right reasons. Like if I decided at some point not to do clinical psychology it would have to be for a really good reason. And not just it's hard or...you might not make money. I would have to be like, I can't even think of a reason....

Participants also discussed in their interviews how experiences such as the internship helped them establish an internally defined career commitment. Rebecca stated that establishing an internally defined career commitment “means to make a decision about...your career based on a position that you have previously been exposed to....” Although Rebecca did not experience cybersecurity in her internship, she said, “I was able to narrow my search to positions that I was exposed to that peaked my interest.” For Esmeralda, experiencing the work in her internship and past experiences helped her

make an internally defined career commitment. She explained, “This is why I want to do this career path. This is why I want to do Urban Teachers and not go back to where I interned over the summer as a translation intern or a translator.” Although Lynn was committed to nursing, she said that the internship experience internalized that decision for her. Lynn said, “It just solidified that even more and reminded me what a cool job it is. What an awesome, neat career path it is. And it solidified what I think I already knew that I want to do this.”

Other participants provided definitions of internally defined career commitments but did not relate it directly to their internship experience. However, similar to the participants who related it to their internship, participants discussed committing to a career decision even when it is challenging (Marie) and choosing what is best for you and following through on that commitment (Skye). Chuck related career commitment to specific values. He said, “I think it means...are you just doing your job to receive a pay check at the end of the week, or you have defined a role and you are going to strive to try and make a difference when at work?”

The internship experience provided the research participants with a framework for making meaning of self-authorship and internally defined career commitments. For those who defined it in terms of their internships, they were able to use their experience even more to understand how they were making career decisions on their own terms.

Integrating External and Internal Messages to Commit to Careers

Participants discussed how they were evaluating and integrating outside information and advice to make their own decisions since completing the internship. In the interviews, the participants described how the internship experience helped them

evaluate the quality and usefulness of the advice they had received about their internship experiences and career choices. Participants also discussed how their internships provided them the opportunity to choose a career and decide for themselves how peers, family, and faculty would influence that commitment.

Relying on supportive advisors. The internship experience helped some participants determine whom they should listen to for career advice. Rebecca determined that listening to people in her career field has helped her clarify her thoughts about her career decisions. For instance, talking to her friend who had a marketing internship at Big Computer Company provided less clarity for her than talking to her brother-in-law who works in the information technology field. Rebecca talked to her friend and her brother-in-law about the lack of work she was getting in her internship.

I think talking to my friend who actually worked for Big Computer Company was kind of the wrong way to go because she was having such a positive experience, that it was making me think like...this must be really bad....I definitely talked to my family....I lived with my sister....Her husband...who works in IT kind of gave me a little bit more assurance because he had a similar situation....He said, "This can happen but...it doesn't matter, you're still going to be ok, I didn't have that much experience in my internship, you're going to be fine in the IT field, you need to calm down." It kind of made me realize that I wasn't disliking the work, remember I said it wasn't that....I wasn't enjoying the boredom. He kind of made me realize it. You're not doing anything, that's why you don't like it.

Rebecca determined that advice from loved ones was best when that person was also in her field. Skye had a similar perspective on how to interpret advice from

significant others in her life. Skye acknowledged that her family “had a little bit” of influence on her internship and career choice, but she explained that her career decisions were her own. Skye said,

I take it very seriously because they know me well. And if we have similar interests and they've done stuff, I take it very seriously because that's firsthand knowledge and experience you're not going to get anywhere else....It has a big impact on me but at the same time, you know, I don't let people make decisions for me....it has a big influence, but it's not a decision maker...but it helps me make decisions.

Rosie had also doubted her career choice until her friends who are also aspiring journalists validated the challenges she experienced at her internship and helped her recognize her talent for journalism. Rosie said,

My boyfriend...he's a journalist too, so he kind of understood what I was going through, and I think that has really...helped to have people that understand. My parents are great and they support me. They don't really get the behind the scenes of journalism and writing. They're just like this article is great. I'm like, you don't understand what I had to go through to get this source. But having people, even the campus newspaper staff, they all know what I'm going through too, so having people who know what I'm going through or who know the struggles of talking to sources on deadline or struggles of writing deadline stories has been really helpful.

Rosie integrated the advice from friends in her field with her own internal monologue to choose to stay in journalism. Rosie said,

He [her boyfriend] ...kind of helped me realize that this is what I'm supposed to be doing I'm good at my job, I'm good at what I do, to not change my major. And then I kind of had this internal monologue of I don't want to work outside of journalism. I don't really have any interest in other fields, I'm not really good at anything else....This is what I want to do so why would I change my field just because of one internship experience?

Rosie and Tate also discussed how friends provided support for them as they evaluated their internship experience and considered career options. Rosie's friends helped her realize that she has the talent to be a journalist and that the challenges she experienced with sources was not a reason to change career fields. As Tate looks for her next internship, she said that the support of her peers who were going through a similar experience motivated her. She said,

I think that being surrounded by people who are doing the same thing is really motivating, you know, to keep on track and just their encouragement...really helps me to believe in my abilities and to reach for something completely off the wall that I wanted to do....Surrounding yourself with people who share similar interests with you...really help[s] because I have a lot friends in mass communication but I also have lot of friends in exercise science and economics and they're all completely different fields of study but my one remaining factor is having a friend group that supports you in whatever you do... and encouraging you to take advantage of all the resource that are offered, especially at the college.

Jessica has relied on her mother for career advice because they are in the same field. Although the internship introduced her to possibilities if she decided to take a year off from school, Jessica remained committed to having a private practice like her mother. Jessica said that her mother “hasn’t been pushy about it at all.” She added,

It's more me asking her questions and her telling me what she thinks. She's been helping me pick out schools. She's been helping me pick out what direction I want to go in, if I want to do clinical or whatever, she'll help me decide that. She's definitely not pushy. She's not trying to make me do what she does. She thinks it's a great field, and she thinks that I will enjoy it. But there's not pressure.

Jessica spoke less about internally defined career decisions. When I asked Jessica if the internship had made her career decision more personal, she discussed what she had learned in her internship but did not discuss how it had helped her internalize career decisions. She also shared that because some of her peers were taking a year off to work on their applications, she had wondered if she should do the same.

Marie, on the other hand, also completed an internship in the same field as family members, but did not go to them for advice. For Marie, the internship experience, rather than her family’s involvement in the field, influenced her to consider sales as a career.

I think if I had been like forced into it I probably wouldn't have liked it as much because it wouldn't have been my decision. So like now it's my decision that I like it and that's what I'm choosing to do, it means more. It's on me. And probably to them too, I would assume.

Through her internship, Marie discovered that she did enjoy sales and would be interested in it as a career. Although Marie said that her “family is all for” her working in sales since they are in that profession, they have not pushed her toward that career.

Other participants were pursuing careers that were different from their families and had received strong support from them. For instance, Roxanne’s father has supported her plan to pursue more education to receive her doctorate. She said,

My dad has just always been really supportive in the sense that, he’s never said, “Oh, no you can’t do like a doctorate degree. Oh, you can’t do this because it’s expensive.” He’s said, “We’ll find a way to make it work.” ...And my dad has always been...like I want you to do better than what I was able to do, so I think that is why he’s been so supportive. Like I know you want to do this so let’s make sure that you have basically all possibilities...or opportunities so you are able to do it.”

One research participant wished she had more influence from the significant people in her life. Although Esmeralda’s family has supported her education and career interests, she said that her internal motivation more than family expectations had pushed her toward completing an internship. She said,

It's not like they were like, you need an internship, you should really do that, like that's important...I kind of knew it was important... And I don't know if they ever did internships when they were in college. They've always been supportive of me, but they've never pushed me one way or another. I think kind of like a double-edged sword. It's nice that there's not pressure and that they're supportive, but sometimes I kind of have to guide myself a little bit more.

Through their experiences, Esmeralda and the other participants suggest that to develop an internal voice, students should integrate positive external messages with the internal belief system they are forming to make self-authored career commitments. Research participants benefited from external influences who encouraged them to do an internship (Rebecca), helped them obtain a networking contact for an internship (Marie, Skye, Ellie, Roxanne), or simply encouraged their career goals (Esmeralda, Tate, Rosie, Jessica). Internal motivation combined with positive external messages propelled several of the participants to complete internships and experience the professional world before making a career commitment.

Making independent career decisions. Several of the participants also discussed how the internship helped them make career decisions independent from the information they received from others. In some instances, the participants described how the internship experience had led them to make career decisions that were different from their peers and what faculty had expected from them. Esmeralda, for instance, said that her peers also majoring in Spanish who have not completed internships are unsure of what they want to do after graduation so they are considering graduate school. Esmeralda said,

I feel like grad school is one of the big external things that I've heard. Oh, like you need to get your masters or Ph.D. now. I can, but I feel personally that's not something I have to do right now. If I decide to do that later, fine. But I feel like my peers and faculty very much like assume that's the next step.

Ellie has a similar experience when her internship experience helped her realize

she did not want to pursue a master's degree to qualify to be a CPA. Prior to her internship experience, the faculty in her department had emphasized public accounting as their main career option. Ellie said,

I think our accounting professors are knowledgeable, they know what they are talking about, they are good professors, they are invested....I just, they don't know what they are talking about when it comes to options outside of the CPA. Like they don't acknowledge it as an option at all.

Ellie remained committed to accounting as a profession but pursued new options on her own. Ellie added,

It's infuriating after what I've experienced because...if it wasn't like for my own...personal motivation to find something different, there is no concept to them that there's anything else....It's frustrating that if you even...allude to the concept that you might not want a CPA they assume you are going to work at McDonald's for the rest of your life.

Ellie said that she did not feel conflicted about her decision to do something else but that she was concerned about her peers following the CPA path without exploring it on their own. Ellie said, "If you don't like listen to everyone else around you, that's not really a conflict. I am not really about that, at the end of the day. I think that my only concern is that everyone around me is completely dumb about it."

Esmeralda and Roxanne also provided evidence that external messages from faculty could be a positive influence when they were considering career options during and after their internship. For instance, Esmeralda's internship led her to pursue a career

focused on service rather than language. Initially, external messages that she had perceived about choosing a career that matches her major influenced her.

But just like doing the internship experience and now having a job offer that isn't necessarily like a straight path as far as like degree background....I don't know if should accept this teaching offer because it's not teaching Spanish....I thought they'd do something more specific to my training or background....I never really had that concern with my internship because this is very obviously related to language.

However, once Esmeralda talked with her faculty and parents, they helped her move past those external messages and focus on how the opportunity with Urban Teachers matched her transferable skills and interest in service.

So I feel like talking to others [parents and faculty] has helped me kind of reach that mindset of...it's going to be like ok. I'll still get valuable skills out of this that I can use later, but this will be more of a stepping-stone and not as much as a detour as I thought. My conversations with others have helped me notice that because I didn't necessarily feel that way initially

By integrating the advice of others with the experience at her internship, Roxanne determined on her own that she would find more career satisfaction if she chose a career for intrinsic rather than financial reasons. Mentors at her internship as well as faculty had told her that “you don’t have to worry about a paycheck,” but Roxanne still worried about the reality of needing a good income. However, Roxanne said,

But to see these people who were able to balance the two it was kind of like, ok, I can do this...nothing bad is going to happen. It didn't make me afraid to pursue

this career full force. I was kind of like, I want to do clinical, I want to do clinical, but there was also that voice in the back of my head kind of saying, don't you want to do something that's a little more safe? But it kind of made that voice go away.

Esmeralda provided insight into how the career perceptions of others can become stereotypes about career choice. Esmeralda said,

I feel like there are always external things. I think about things like, what's the job market like? Should I really be majoring in Spanish or should I pick something more secure like nursing or accounting....So when I think of external things, those are things I feel like are...almost like stereotypes as far as like this is what you should do. But also learning that like what is internally defined varies so much between people and is also, those external factors become so generalized almost to the point where they're not really helpful because they don't really apply to people on an individual basis. So I feel like my personal career commitments or decisions haven't been based on a ton of external factors so I feel like they don't apply, but I've definitely heard those things.

Similar to what Esmeralda had observed, some participants still looked to external formulas during their internship to help them to determine a path for themselves. For instance, Chuck observed the work of a peer at his internship and used that information to make decisions about his career. Without directly experiencing the business side of IT, Chuck made a decision about his future career commitments. Chuck reflected,

I interned with another LAU student, and she did like the business analyst...role, and that seems like more of something I'd want to do because you're actually

interacting with clients. I felt that was something I'd be good at, so that kind of led me to kind of pursue a route kind of like a business analyst or project manager or something like that.

While several of the participants formed career commitments based on their own experiences and values, participants such as Chuck continued to lean toward external formulas without integrating them fully into what he had already evaluated for himself. The research participants who were able to evaluate and integrate or disagree with information from outside sources showed signs of making self-authored career decision.

Developing a Value for Career Exploration

After their internship experiences, several participants continued to express a personal value for exploring career opportunities to make an internal career decision. For instance, Esmeralda discussed how the internship experience validated her decision to take the initiative to plan for her career. For her, the internship was just the beginning.

I think after going through the experience, it kind of validated...the mindset I went in with. This is something that I need to do, and this is something going forward I need to keep doing as far as networking and being proactive and exploring my opportunities. It's not something like ok, I did my internship. Done. I don't have to network anymore.

For the participants in this study, the internship was their first professional opportunity to explore their career field. Several of the participants planned to continue exploring careers through another internship or their first job, which could provide them another opportunity to develop an internal belief system about career. For instance, as mass communication majors, Skye, Tate, and Rosie must complete another internship to

meet graduation requirements. When they discussed their internship experience, they also described the value they had now for exploring career opportunities before making a career commitment. Skye said,

Well, I guess with the internship, what it taught me, if you really want to figure out what you want to do, what you like, what you don't, you have to take those opportunities and do them, whether you think that it's going to be great or just mediocre.

Tate placed a similar value on what she experienced in her internship. She said, "I gained a lot more experience being thrown into it firsthand than what I learned in a lot of my classes...a lot of that stuff they can't teach in class." By exploring careers through her internship, Tate realized she had limited experience with other types of work environments and said, "I don't know if I want to work in a government agency just because that's all I've experienced so far, so I really don't know what else is out there."

At the time of the interview, Rebecca had accepted a full-time job with company that had a strong training program. Rebecca acknowledged that the external messages still influence her and that she would probably integrate the two more once she begins working full-time.

Yeah, I would say my internally defined career commitments are probably very similar to the external ones that I've experienced just because I'm not in the working field yet, not in the industry yet. So yeah, I would say, I do let a lot of people externally influence me. Internally probably resembles a lot of that...I think once I start working full-time and seeing other positions in the company and see the flexibility, I will probably move around a little bit.

From the internship, Rebecca did learn that she needs satisfying work and professional development in the form of training in her career. These realizations influenced the type of full-time job she chose. Rebecca said, “I kind of think that career satisfaction will be more important to me later on in life. Not even later on. Probably in the next couple of years. Being that bored with my job was horrible.”

Marie discussed her plan to explore careers and clarify her interests through another internship. At the time of the interview, Marie had accepted an internship with a creative agency so that she could explore that area before committing to sales. Since completing her internship, Marie said she has been evaluating what she has learned and realized the importance of seeking more opportunities. She said, “Especially coming into my senior year I’ve been like, really...I need to get everything together and start taking opportunities that are presented to me. Because the school has a lot but you have to be willing to do it...”

From their internship experiences, the participants learned that exploring new opportunities as they continue their career search could deepen their personal commitments to their career choices. The research participants have integrated external messages with what they experienced at their internships to move toward developing an internal voice that guides them toward self-authored career decisions.

Additional Findings

The central themes of the study provided insight into the ways the internship contributed to how research participants were establishing self-authored career commitments. Throughout the interview process, I identified additional perspectives from the participants that provided additional insight into what motivated them to do an

internship and what they learned from the experience. These additional perspectives do not speak to how the internship contributed to self-authored career decisions; however, educators could use this information when motivating students to complete an internship. During their interviews, the interns shared information about their experiences that spoke to what motivated them to complete an internship and how the internship experience benefited them.

Motivation to Complete an Internship

The research participants shared several motivating factors that led them to complete an internship. All of the research participants except for Ellie intentionally completed an internship so that they would have more experience to put on their resumes. These participants cited specific reasons such as standing out on graduate school applications, gaining experience to talk about in interviews, being more competitive in their field, and preparing to do the work college has prepared them for once hired full-time.

One of the participants (Ellie) had not planned to do an internship and accepted it after the firm had pursued her. Rather than do an internship to gain experience, this participant knew that she had to accept the internship because of the prestige associated with it among her peers. Another participant (Rebecca) completed an internship for experience, but she credited her department chair's influence as the main motivating factor for why she completed an internship. Rebecca said, "I think in our program, they push you to do internship....They push you because they tell you how much better it looks on your resume." Only one participant, Marie, pursued the internship with the

purpose of figuring out what she wanted to do after graduation. However, Marie shared additional motivating factors that spoke to what the other participants said as well.

I had no idea what I wanted to do post-graduation. Also, I realized going into interviews, I would have nothing to talk about besides things I had done in college. A lot of people do the same things in college, not the same things but it's pretty comparable. So I wanted to have something when I was going to interviews, to have real work experience because I don't work during school. I worked at the daycare in high school but that doesn't really count. I wanted something I can go in and say, this is what I've done. And to find out what I like and didn't like.

The research participants shared similar motivations for completing an internship experience. In analyzing the experience of the interns in more detail, their motivation to complete an internship could provide insight into their level of self-authorship at the beginning of the internship and their potential to rely less on external formulas as they make career commitments.

Value of Experiential Learning

In addition, the research participants shared experiences that provided additional insight into the value of an internship. Although the interns shared various benefits of the completing an internship, they shared significant details on how the internship exposed them to being a professional in the workplace. In addition, several of the interns completed their internship and expressed the importance of students completing internships and participating in other experiential opportunities.

Professionalism in the workplace. The research participants in this study consistently referenced how the internship experience exposed them to professionalism in the workplace. In the central theme of establishing a professional identity, I discovered how the professional behavior of superiors at the internship was influencing their career commitments. However, the interns also said that the internship experience taught them what it was like to be a professional in the workplace. I thought this information could be useful for understanding the transitions students experience as they go from intern to full-time professional.

Participants such as Ellie, Rosie, and Rebecca reported the biggest challenges in their internships but still said that the experience increased their knowledge of professionalism in the workplace. Ellie and Rebecca both pointed out that they now knew what it was like to wake up and be at work at 8 a.m. In addition, Rebecca said that she did not learn what she intended to about cybersecurity but she did learn “in terms of being...a working professional...” She continued,

I think that I know what to expect when I go into the workforce this time. I mean last time, the night before, I had no idea what they were going to throw at me. Do I bring a computer tomorrow? What do I do? So this time, it will be a lot easier to enter and I mean, I know that everyone is like going to be in the same position as me. I think last time, I didn't know that everyone else was doing the exact same thing as I was doing. That they are going to be friendly and try to work with me too.

Although Rosie had a difficult time working with sources for Local Publishing Company, she used that experience to improve how she presents herself to sources during

interviews. Rosie said, “I don’t like to dress professional...to be like proper all the time. I really hate it...And so...I know going into the real world, I’m going to have to be professional...to be put together for interviews and all that stuff.” During her internship, Rosie learned how to present herself as a professional so that she could take herself more seriously and as a result, gain that trust of her sources too. She said,

Learning how to go to interviews and just being, carrying myself as a professional and as an adult and not a college student. Because that was one of the hard things too was that people didn’t take me seriously because I was still in college. And just learning how to present myself because I am a serious person, I am an adult working in a career field that I want to be working in right now, so please take me seriously verses, I’m a college student, I’m doing this as an internship...I just need you to interview...I just need an interview of you and that’s it. I really learned how to keep that connection going between my sources and like how to be an adult instead of just a student going out and interviewing people.

Similar to Rosie, Ellie learned more about workplace behavior in a corporate setting. Coming from a more casual setting as a student assistant on campus, the internship helped Ellie evaluate her behavior. She said,

Even professionally, I think my internship definitely taught me, maybe some bad habits I had picked up in student worker jobs where things were so casual in the student worker setting that you don’t realize that you are even forming bad habits, but those are definitely like pointed out really quickly in the real important setting.

In addition, the interns who had positive experiences also reported gaining more

insight into professional expectations in the workplace. Like Rosie, Roxanne also had to change the way she dressed because of her work environment. She said, “Professionally, I had never been in an environment to dress like a person every single day verses going to class with jeans and a t-shirt.” Most of all, Roxanne had to dress in a specific way because of the population she served. She added,

I had to dress conservatively especially being a young female...I had to make sure I was...dressed...head to toe...not that I was walking out in risqué clothing every day, but you can't show your arms, you're not really supposed to have any shirt that comes down at all.

Other participants such as Skye, Tate, Lynn, and Jessica discussed how the internship experience exposed them to office culture, personalities in the workplace, and the importance of teamwork. With a greater understanding of the workplace, the research participants could enter their first professional roles with more confidence. This increased confidence could help them adapt more quickly to the work environment by following their own formulas for success.

Importance of internships. In their interviews, several of the interns discussed the importance of future students completing internships and experiential learning opportunities. This information provides evidence that the internship experience caused the research participants to reflect on the value of their experience and its ability to influence career preparation and decision making.

Marie and Ellie emphasized the importance of internships as well as students taking advantage of other opportunities around them. While the internship helped Marie

see that she should have started her internship search earlier, Ellie realized that she almost missed participating in a valuable exploration opportunity. Ellie said,

I would have entered a job where, where I would have not known that I didn't like public accounting....I honestly think all accounting students should be required to do an internship just because they talk so much about how like a CPA is your only route....None of these students are getting any idea that like you can do something other than work at a firm and like you all are giving the impression that like that's not ok.

Because of her experience, Ellie has talked openly to underclassman about internships and provided feedback to her accounting department in her exit survey for graduation. She said that the internship had introduced her to the reality of what the professional world would expect from her. Ellie said that students should

Think(ing) about future professionalism like in a very serious way and prepare(ing)...by being involved in everything...college had to offer. I think a lot of them...talk about...GPAs...Sorry. No one cares. Were you actually involved....Were you really experiencing college and were you really growing up and do you really know what you are talking about? If you're just doing the bare minimum, going to classes, doing homework, you're not going to be fully prepared. It's just like you're going to be behind

Ellie almost missed completing an internship, and Marie regretted delaying her search until the spring of her junior year. Like Ellie, Marie had specific advice for students preparing for their careers. Once she began to search for internships the first time, she realized how hard it was and that preparation is required. Going forward, she

has used that preparation to her advantage and recommended to me that other students should do the same. She said,

Like the internship I'm doing in the spring, I found out about it...at a conference I went to last spring. There's like taking all the opportunities, I wish I had done that early. If I could tell someone to do it, I'd tell them to do it. The social stuff is great, like still do that, like definitely. Just take the opportunities. Like I started using the Career Center like this year, I should have been using it all along. Take the opportunities that you have and don't think I'll do that my junior year, I'll do that my senior year. Don't put it off until your junior year....And not thinking that something is too little to put on your resume...like keeping a list of things you're doing and really getting involved in the business school [so] it's not just like, I've been in a sorority like all four years, so just not doing that, and don't wait until your junior year to start doing it.

Ellie and Marie expressed themselves passionately about the importance of experiential learning and preparing for careers while in college. Esmeralda used her internship to discover that a career focused on service rather than the Spanish language would provide her more career satisfaction. Without an internship, Esmeralda said that she would have planned to be a translator and would not have realized that “it wasn't fun just staring at a screen all day.”

Similar to what other research participants said about their own experience, Esmeralda summarized the value of an internship as helping people know what they do and do not want to do in a career. She said, “*I think...reflecting back it would be a mistake for anyone who is in undergrad not to do an internship before they graduate or*

not to do it before they're a senior. I think it's important to be proactive about it because I think it helps you learn what you do or don't like and being more intentional about that.

In addition to examining how the internship experience contributed to self-authored career choices, I gleaned other information about the internship experience that could be useful in understanding how students approach career exploration and decision making. The research participants discussed their motivations for completing an internship, their introduction to professionalism in the workplace, and the value they put on completing internships. These additional findings also provided a deeper understanding of each participant's journey to self-authorship.

Chapter Summary

In their interviews and pre-and post-reflection journals, the research participants shared their experiences from their internships. The internship experience provided the research participants with a crossroads or developmental challenge that moved them closer to making self-authored career commitments (Baxter Magolda, 2001). Prior to the internship, several participants had committed to career fields but changed their paths slightly once they started the internship.

In analyzing the data, four central themes emerged that linked completing an internship to making self-authored career decisions: clarify career interests, establish a professional identity, influence professional career search, and develop an internal belief system about career choice. In addition, participant perspectives emerged that provided added knowledge of what motivates students to complete internships and what they value about experiential learning. To clarify career interests, most participants used the internship experience to find out what they did not want to do. As the research

participants worked alongside supervisors and mentors, they established a professional identity, which gave them the confidence in their skills and expertise to conduct a substantial career search. The internship experience provided several of the participants with the confidence to evaluate potential job opportunities by asking meaningful questions during the interview. Lastly, individuals shared how they integrate external and internal messages to solidify their own internal belief system concerning career choice.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The internship experience has become a pivotal moment for many college students as they prepare for their future careers. They have the academic knowledge from their major, but until they complete an internship, they do not get the opportunity to test and apply this knowledge in a professional setting. For many students, this experience introduces them to the realities of a professional work environment, and for most, it provides them an opportunity to explore and gain experience in a specific career. When students explore and gain experience through an internship, they experience a developmental crossroads where realities of the work environment challenge the external formulas for success that they had associated with their major and career choice (Barber, King, & Baxter Magolda, 2013; Baxter Magolda, 2001, 2008).

In this phenomenological study, I conducted 11 interviews to capture the lived experiences of traditional-aged college students who have completed internships and were beginning to make career decisions during their senior year of college. Through pre- and post-interview reflection journals and interviews, the participants and I made meaning of their internship experiences and explored how those experiences served as a crossroads for making self-authored career commitments. The following research question guided my study: *How does participation in internships contribute to the development of self-authored career commitments of traditional-aged college seniors?*

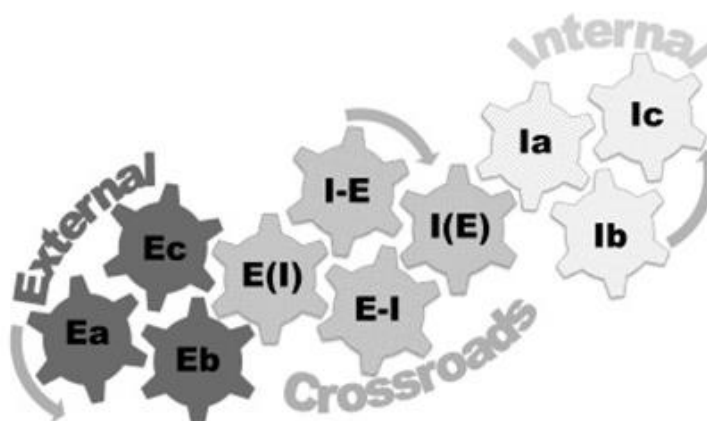
At the center of my study was Baxter Magolda's (2001) theory of self-authorship, a constructivist-oriented paradigm that provided the framework for my relationship with my participants. I paired the constructivist-oriented theoretical framework of self-

authorship with a constructivist paradigm to guide how I developed interview questions, collected data from my research participants, and analyzed the experiences of the participants. I situated myself in the study as a constructivist researcher who joined with my research participants to make meaning of their experiences.

On the journey to self-authorship, individuals move through four phases: following external formulas, experiencing a developmental crossroads, becoming self-authored, and establishing an internal foundation (Baxter Magolda, 2001). Many students enter college in the following formulas stage and make initial decisions related to major and career based on external messages (Baxter Magolda et al., 2012; Parks et al., 2012; Shaffer & Zalewski, 2011). In order for students to move from following external formulas to using an internal belief system indicative of self-authorship, they must experience a developmental crossroads that challenges them to question the external messages that helped them form their initial career interests (Baxter Magolda, 2001). The students who participated in this research study experienced a developmental crossroads when they tested the external messages they had received about their career choice by completing an internship (Baxter Magolda, 2001). Because of their internship experiences, they began to form more self-authored career commitments.

To determine where students were within the following external formulas, crossroads, and becoming self-authored or internal phases, I used the Self-Authorship Data Analysis Protocol (Baxter Magolda et al., 2012). This model provided a streamlined framework for evaluating, understanding, and visualizing where students are within these phases and when they have moved to the next one. Figure 5.1 shows the graphic that Baxter Magolda et al. (2012) developed to illustrate this model.

Self-Authorship Data Analysis Protocol



EXTERNAL	CROSSROADS	INTERNAL
<p>Ea: Consistently and unquestioningly rely on external sources without recognizing possible shortcomings of this approach.</p> <p>Eb: Consistently rely on external sources, but experience tensions in doing so, particularly if external sources conflict.</p> <p>Ec: Continue to rely on external sources but recognize shortcomings of this approach.</p>	<p>Predominantly External</p> <p>E(I): Continue to rely on external sources despite awareness of the need for an internal voice. Realize the dilemma of external meaning making, yet are unsure how to proceed.</p> <p>E-I: Begin to actively work on constructing a new way of making meaning yet "lean back" to earlier external positions.</p> <p>Predominantly Internal</p> <p>I-E: Begin to listen carefully to internal voice, which now edges out external sources. External sources still strong, making it hard to maintain the internal voice consistently.</p> <p>I(E): Actively work to cultivate the internal voice, which mediates most external sources. Consciously work to not slip back into former tendency to allow others' points of view to subsume own point of view.</p>	<p>Ia: Trust the internal voice sufficiently to refine beliefs, values, identities and relationships. Use internal voice to shape reactions and manage external sources.</p> <p>Ib: Trust internal voice sufficiently to craft commitments into a philosophy of life to guide how to react to external sources.</p> <p>Ic: Solidify philosophy of life as the core of one's being; living it becomes second nature.</p>

Figure 5.1: Self-Authorship Data Analysis Protocol Model created by Baxter Magolda et al. (2012).

Initially, individuals are in the external phase when they do not question information from external sources until they experience conflict from this over-reliance. As individuals move to the end of the external phase and closer to the crossroads phase, they rely on external messages but realize they should consider other options. Within the crossroads phase, the individual moves from predominantly external to predominantly internal as they make meaning of their experiences (Baxter Magolda et al., 2012). In the crossroads phase, students first rely on external messages but are aware of the need to follow an internal voice. As students move toward the internal or self-authored phase, they begin to develop an internal voice to counter the external messages they are still considering. Students enter the internal phase when they consistently trust the internal voice and use it to guide their decisions and reactions to external messages.

In this chapter, I discussed the findings from the study in the context of Baxter Magolda's theory of self-authorship as well as the Self-Authorship Data Analysis Protocol (Baxter Magolda et al., 2012). In addition, I connected the findings to other literature that speaks to the significance of internships and the relationship between career exploration and self-authorship. Next, I introduced limitations of the study and discussed implications for educators and employers who either support students who participate in internships or work directly with internship programs. Lastly, I provided recommendations for future research that I identified during the data collection and analysis process.

Discussion of the Findings

In analyzing the data, I identified four main themes that provided insight into how the internship experience contributed to the research participants moving toward making

self-authored career commitments. These themes were 1) clarifying career commitments, 2) developing a professional identity, 3) influencing the professional career search process, and 4) developing an internal belief system about career choice. In addition, I have identified participant perspectives that offer additional insight into what led them to their internship journey and what they gained from it: 1) motivation to complete an internship and the 2) value of experiential learning. These perspectives from participants support the literature on what motivates students to complete internships and the value these experiences provide, therefore, offering further information to help educators and employers encourage more students to complete these opportunities.

Understanding the Path to Self-Authorship

The internship experience served as a developmental crossroads that challenged how the research participants integrated external messages they had received about careers with the practical experience from their internship (Baxter Magolda, 2001, 2008). The internship experience pushed all of the 11 participants closer to self-authorship, but each one internalized this experience in a different way. To begin the discussion and position the data within the theoretical framework, I discussed the research findings using Self-Authorship Data Analysis Protocol.

External. In the external phase, individuals rely on external formulas at various levels when making decisions (Baxter Magolda et al., 2012). As students move out of this phase, they experience a conflict that forces them to question their over-reliance on external messages and realize they should consider other options (Baxter Magolda et al., 2012). First-year college students typically fall in the external phase because they rely on authorities for advice on majors and careers (Baxter Magolda, 2001). Because the

research participants were college seniors who had recently completed internships, they had moved out of the external and into the crossroads phase. An individual's first professional work experience is often the catalyst for questioning external career formulas on the journey toward self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2001).

Crossroads. By completing an internship, the research participants had the opportunity to experience the professional world and to move away from external formulas and make self-authored academic and career decisions (Baxter Magolda & King, 2008; Baxter Magolda et al., 2012). Researchers have suggested that practical experiences such as internships provide the challenge that students need to move toward self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Laughlin & Creamer, 2005). The experiences of the research participants provide evidence that completing an internship does lead to an increase in self-authored behaviors. Within the crossroads phase, students can range from predominantly external to predominantly internal (Baxter Magolda et al., 2012).

Predominantly external. Most of the research participants were in the crossroads phase, with three (Jessica, Chuck, and Rebecca) presenting as predominantly external. Jessica, for instance, said that the internship showed her that she could pursue other options such as taking a year off from school or working in a facility like the Autism Center, but she remained foreclosed on her original desire to have a private practice like her mother. In fact, Jessica's response in her post-interview reflection journal was identical to her pre-interview reflection and her long interview. While Jessica did not vary from her original commitment, Rebecca described how external formulas had influenced her career commitments but showed signs that she was beginning to use a more internally focused process for making career decisions. For instance, when she

conducted her full-time job search, she researched companies on her own and focused on opportunities that offered strong training programs rather than a well-known company brand. However, in her post-interview reflection, Rebecca credited the brand name of her internship rather than what she had learned about herself as the reason why she got a full-time job. Chuck used his internship experience to evaluate his work interests and discover different roles within his field, but he still relied on the messages he had received from watching his father's career when he evaluated the type of work environment that best matched him. However, in his post-interview reflection, Chuck showed that he had used his internship experience to identify a personal value for work-life balance and that he had prioritized that value in his job search. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that the interviews for these three participants were the shortest among the 11 participants.

Predominantly internal. Six of the participants (Ellie, Rosie, Tate, Roxanne, Skye, and Esmeralda) presented as predominantly internal. Skye seemed to be on the low end of the internal spectrum among these group members but because she did not complete the post-interview reflection, I could not make a definite assessment of her level of self-authorship. Skye had a positive internship experience and although she said she was researching other options in digital marketing, she wanted to work for the same firm to complete her for-credit internship and hoped to get a full-time offer as well. Unlike the other two mass communication majors who had to complete a for-credit internship before graduation, Skye had not applied to other internships at the time of the interview but had not received an offer from her previous internship site either. However, unlike Jessica who also maintained an original career interest and was predominantly external,

Skye could see herself in various professions in the future. The other interns had developed an internal voice but the external messages that had led them to previous career interests continued to emerge. Ellie, Rosie, Roxanne, and Esmeralda presented signs of moving toward the internal phase, but they seemed to be waging internal battles about moving away from their previous career plans. In her post-interview reflection, Ellie described her decision to accept a job in corporate accounting in relation to the negative experiences at her internship. Until Ellie experiences corporate accounting firsthand, it is difficult to determine if her motivation to pursue accounting as a career is internal. Similarly, Rosie remained focused on her dislike for local newspapers and mentioned her interest in alternative newspapers in her post-interview reflection, but she will need to experience work in that field to ensure that she is making that decision because of an internal motivation and not because of the negative experience at her internship.

In their internships, Roxanne and Esmeralda have both identified a passion for helping others, but they also showed signs of fighting an external voice about what they should do in order to be successful. With more experience in the professions they have chosen, Roxanne and Esmeralda will be able to internalize their decisions and move away from external voices. For instance, Roxanne had chosen clinical psychology over psychiatry. Throughout her internship, she sought validation from other professionals that she was making the right decision to choose a career that combined her interests with a respectable income rather than choosing one mostly for the financial security. In her post-interview reflection, Roxanne remained committed to clinical psychology and working with children, but direct experience in that environment will help her internalize

that decision even more. In the interview, Esmeralda continued to discuss concerns about not using her major in her first full-time job although she had realized during her internship that she had more interest in serving others than using language. In her post-interview reflection, Esmeralda showed signs that she is following her internal voice by taking a full-time position that will allow her to serve others. In her post-interview reflection, Esmeralda said, “My internship also helped me learn that career plans tend to change over time as I grow in my skills and my preferences change.” I believe this statement shows that Esmeralda will use her first job to determine if she can find career fulfillment through service only rather than through a career combining both service and language.

Internal. In this phase, individuals begin trusting an internal voice to “refine beliefs, values, identities, and relationships” (Baxter Magolda et al., 2012, p. 422) and move toward developing and then solidifying their commitments into a guiding philosophy. Two participants, Marie and Lynn, seemed to be in the internal phase of establishing self-authored career commitments because they used their internal voices to manage how they received external messages. Although Marie has continued to explore careers and has not committed fully to a career in sales, she has used her internal voice to manage how she approaches her professional job search. Marie had a positive internship experience because of the relationships with the people and the success she experienced, but rather than foreclose on sales as a career choice, she allowed her internal voice to guide her toward exploring other options. In her post-interview reflection, Marie said that she could not commit completely to sales until she experienced working at an

advertising agency. In addition, Marie has contacted alumni on LinkedIn to get career advice and has continued to evaluate her resume for areas of improvement.

Lynn was committed to nursing before her internship but experienced the physical and mental challenges of the work that could have discouraged her from the field. However, she used her internal voice to manage the challenge (Baxter Magolda et al., 2012). By researching other nursing careers and graduate school options, she has decided to pursue her Family Nurse Practitioner degree so that she can increase her professional options within nursing. Furthermore, Lynn used her internship experience to learn about a new nursing specialty as well as herself. In her post-interview reflection, Lynn said, “My internship completely changed my career path as far as specializing in the nursing field....I'm very thankful for my experiences with my internship for what I learned about the job and about myself.”

Moving closer to self-authored career commitments. When students experience professional work through an internship, they have the potential to move away from the external messages they have received about careers and begin to form self-authored career commitments (Barber, 2014a, 2014b; Barber & King, 2014; Barber et al., 2013; Baxter Magolda, 1992; Baxter Magolda, 2001; Baxter Magolda & King, 2008; Baxter Magolda et al., 2012; Creamer & Laughlin, 2005). Although the participants in this research study varied in how they were managing external messages and their internal voice in regards to career choice, all of the participants showed signs of forming self-authored career commitments because of their internship experience. In the next section, I interpreted how the internship experiences helped the research participants

clarify career commitments, establish a professional identity, influence their professional career search, and develop an internal belief system about career choice.

Clarifying Career Commitments

All of the 11 research participants used their internship experiences to explore and clarify their professional career commitments. Through their internships, the research participants experienced the reality of the careers they were considering and often identified personal career values, work interests, and preferred work environments that differed from the career they had believed they wanted. By experiencing an internship, the research participants encountered a developmental challenge or crossroads that caused them to question and evaluate the externally defined concepts they had about careers before the internship (Baxter Magolda, 2001). When the research participants began to integrate their new experiences with the external ideas that influenced their original career interests, they began to move toward self-authored career commitments based on an internally defined understanding of the career (Baxter Magolda, 2001).

Savickas (2011a), whose career construction theory incorporates the idea of self-authorship, has also said that by exploring a career before entering professional life, students can evaluate and define their career choices. Ten of the research participants expressed a common theme of realizing what they did not want to do in a career because of the internship experience. A similar phenomenon occurred in Neapolitan's (1992) study in which students said that the internship increased their knowledge of career options in addition to helping them identify what they did not want to do.

Some researchers have questioned the value of internships because the experience can lead students to move away from careers related to their academic program based on

one experience (Odio, Sagas, & Kerwin, 2014). By experiencing the realities of the work that they thought they wanted to do (Barnett, 2012), the research participants identified career values, interests, and preferences that caused them to shift their career commitments. However, most of the participants in this study made slight adjustments that kept them in similar careers where they would continue to use their academic knowledge or transferable skills from other key experiences. Esmeralda, for instance, chose to focus on her sociology minor rather than her Spanish major when she decided to pursue a career focused on service rather than language. Esmeralda said that if she had not completed an internship, she would have pursued jobs in translations and would have realized too late that she did not enjoy the work. The study conducted by Odio, Sagas, and Kerwin provides an example of the challenges that Baxter Magolda and King (2008) have said that students face when faculty and advisors prescribe formulas for success as they relate to their specific academic program. Ellie experienced a similar challenge and perceived that her faculty would consider her a failure because she had a job offer in corporate rather than public accounting.

Prior to their internships, several of the research participants had relied on external messages to make career choices. Whether it was a television show (Roxanne), a book (Rosie), family (Jessica, Skye, Chuck), or impressions from faculty or classes (Ellie, Esmeralda, Lynn), the research participants entered their internship with preconceived ideas about what the professional world would be like. By experiencing their chosen professions through an internship, they experienced the realities of the field and had a defining crossroads moment (Baxter Magolda, 2001). Rather than change their career path, the internship experience introduced the research participants to options

beyond what they perceived through external messages. In most cases, these options were in the research participant's field, but he or she would not have known about them without completing an internship. For instance, Roxanne realized that she did not want to use her degree to work directly with criminals, but her internship introduced her to the idea of working with children in order to prevent criminal behavior. Similar to another study conducted by Barnett (2012), the research participants gained a more realistic view of work, which changed what they knew about career options as well as how they saw themselves within a career. By discovering their work interests, values, and preferences before graduation, the research participants have had the opportunity to apply what they have learned about themselves to their senior year job or graduate school search.

Conversely, when the research participants had fewer opportunities to experience realistic work, they seemed less likely to question their previous career commitments. Two of the participants remained committed to their original career choice after their internships; however, only one expanded her view of her field and her place within it. Skye, for instance, remained interested in the digital advertising and marketing field but she had significant responsibilities that exposed her to the sales, account management, and advertising functions. Jessica, on the other hand, only observed and had minimal contact with clients. While Skye has the opportunity to evaluate possible roles through experience, Jessica evaluated them through observations. At the end of her experience, Jessica remained committed to being a cognitive behavioral psychologist like her mother. If Jessica had more opportunities to interact with clients or assist the psychologists at her internship site, she may have finished her internship with additional ideas of what she could do as a clinical psychologist. Furthermore, because her internship focused on

observation, Jessica experienced minimal challenges in her internship. Researchers have suggested that when students completed internships that expose them to multiple challenges and perspectives, they could be more likely to make self-authored career decisions (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Creamer & Laughlin, 2005).

Through their internships, the research participants experienced their choices before committing to it after graduation. In her longitudinal study, Baxter Magolda (2001) found that her participants did not reach self-authorship until they started their first full-time job and realized that they had made their career decisions on external influences rather than their own values and interests. By experiencing a developmental crossroads related to career interests prior to graduation, the participants in this research study could enter their first full-time jobs closer to self-authorship. In this next section, I discussed how students used what they were learning about their internal career commitments to establish a professional identity.

Establishing a Professional Identity

As a high-impact practice within higher education, internships provide students with a meaningful professional work experience that facilitates intellectual, social, and personal development (NSSE, 2013). Kuh et al. (2005/2010) stated that through high-impact practices such as internships, students internalize their experience so that what they learn becomes part of their identity. The research participants in this study showed evidence of integrating what they learned at their internship site into a professional identity, which also reflected an increase in how personally committed they were to their career choices. Similarly, Barber (2012) had found that when students integrate knowledge successfully, they have the ability to connect ideas to multiple aspects of their

lives. For instance, Roxanne developed a professional philosophy about the seriousness of mental health issues during her internship, which led her to integrate advocacy for this population into her personal life. Similarly, Esmeralda increased her awareness of the current issues affecting the people she plans to serve in her career and has continued that interest since completing her internship. When individuals use their internal voice to develop a life philosophy, they are likely to use that philosophy to guide how they react to external messages (Baxter Magolda et al., 2012). By integrating these professional habits into their personal lives, Roxanne and Esmeralda provided evidence that they had internalized a commitment to their career choices.

The research participants also revealed how professional relationships with mentors, supervisors, colleagues, and clients influenced their career commitments. For some participants, these relationships led them to make more self-authored decisions. Roxanne learned how to use advice from professionals at her internship by integrating it into what she knew about her work interests and career values. In fact, she experienced crossroads moments where she would question the economic security of clinical psychology, but her professional mentors provided advice that helped her ignore those external voices and trust her internal one (Baxter Magolda et al., 2012). Ellie evaluated the behavior of supervisors and colleagues at her internship site to determine that her professional values did not match the environment of public accounting. Rather than leave the accounting profession, she used this information to give her the confidence to go against the formulas for success prescribed by her accounting faculty and instead pursue opportunities in corporate accounting. Similarly, Rosie did not let the unethical behavior of colleagues keep her from a career in journalism. Instead, she internalized this

challenge to decide that she “needs(s) to be the person who writes a story where [sources are] not misquoted...” Through experiences that expose students to professional life, students have the opportunity to gain the ability to move away from prescribed formulas for success and toward making self-authored career decisions (Baxter Magolda & King, 2008; Baxter Magolda et al., 2012).

While Roxanne, Ellie, and Rosie showed signs of moving toward making internal career commitments, Chuck remained at a crossroads when faced with the challenge of integrating prescribed formulas into what he wanted in a career (Baxter Magolda & King, 2008). At his internship, Chuck used his previous notions about the corporate world to evaluate the behavior he observed and determine the level of professionalism he values and expects in the workplace. Chuck said that he wished his internship had been in a “cutthroat” environment because he associated that with his image of the corporate world. In her study, Baxter Magolda (2001) found that her research participants did not reach self-authorship until their first full-time job. Chuck could find himself in a similar situation in his first professional position. Rather than rely on the external formulas for the corporate world that he learned from watching his father’s career, Chuck will need to experience a “cutthroat” environment on his own to determine if it matches his values.

The research participants reported that receiving substantial work assignments and building professional relationships increased how confident they were to work in the professional world. Prior to completing an internship, students often rely on the external formulas from faculty, family, and advisors who have told them what skills and experiences they will need to be successful in their profession (Baxter Magolda & King, 2008). However, external support systems such as advisors can help facilitate

development. For example, career advisors could help students move toward self-authored career decisions by suggesting career exploration activities so that students can discover their own formulas for what makes a successful career (Baxter Magolda & King, 2008). When students complete internship experiences, they often expand their support systems by building new relationships with mentors, supervisors, and colleagues. The findings from this research study provide evidence that when internship supervisors offer a supportive environment for gaining skills needed for their profession, the students have the tools necessary for arriving at self-authored career commitments.

Tate, Marie, Skye, and Lynn completed internships where their supervisors and colleagues trusted them to do substantial work. As a result, they developed skills, which contributed to their development as a professional in their field. Research has shown that when students complete internships before graduation, they are more likely to have the skills employers need (Wood & Kacynski, 2007). Supervisors and professional colleagues at their internship sites could further validate their acquisition of these skills. For instance, Marie increased her confidence and commitment in being a sales professional because her colleagues asked her for advice and additional training. Tate, Skye, and Lynn felt like a part of a team or professional community because their supervisors and colleagues treated them like permanent employees and worked alongside them to accomplish the goals of the organization. Rosie, on the other hand, doubted her skills when she sensed that supervisors, colleagues, and clients did not trust her as a journalist. By trusting and validating the contributions that their interns made to their organizations, the internship supervisors helped the research participants gain confidence

in themselves as a knowledgeable professional who has come to identify more closely with a professional field.

Past research has shown that students gravitated toward career paths where they saw their parents be successful (Creamer & Laughlin, 2005; Feldt & Woelfel, 2009). The same could be true when interns have a positive connection with supervisors and colleagues, and as a result, they begin to feel a connection to that profession. For instance, Marie experienced great success in sales as well as recognition from colleagues and company leaders, which contributed to her interest in sales as a possible career. Similarly, Tate and Skye's supervisors trusted them with significant projects and praised their abilities. However, unlike students who have foreclosed on a career choice because of parental influences (Blustein, 1989; Marcia, 1966; Shaffer & Zalewski, 2011), Marie, Skye, and Tate had the opportunity to integrate the feedback from supervisors and colleagues with the experience they gained at the internship. Marie remained committed to sales but used her experience to make decisions about the types of sales positions she would consider. Tate decided to pursue the journalism aspect of her internship rather than the government aspect she had committed to since high school. Although Skye remained committed to working at the same digital marketing firm, she had the confidence and knowledge to evaluate other similar opportunities.

Through their interactions in the workplace, the research participants established a professional identity, which created a deeper association with their career field. Although their supervisors, colleagues, and clients influenced their career decisions in some way, the research participants integrated that influence with the experience from the internship to arrive at self-authored career decisions. These findings provide evidence that external

messages influence career commitments, but as long as the interns integrate that information into what they are experiencing, they are likely to move toward making self-authored career commitments. Next, I discussed how the research participants showed evidence of self-authorship through the way they approached their professional career search.

Influence on the Professional Career Search Process

Stumpf and Lockhart (1987) found that when students clarified their specific career interests, they became more engaged in the career exploration process throughout their senior year. Although the research participants had different short-term and long-term career goals, their experience provided evidence that the opportunity to clarify interests and a professional identity increased how involved seniors will be in their career search. The internship experience introduced them to conducting more career research and motivated all of them to apply and interview for opportunities before graduation.

After completing their internships, ten of the 11 research participants increased their self-awareness and used their experience to conduct their own career search. Taylor (1987) also found that internships helped students identify a vocational self-concept, develop a realistic view of work, and conduct a full-time job search. When they started their professional search, they were intentional and looked for specific types of experiences because they had internalized what was important to them in a career. The research participants in my study also discussed how their internship experience prepared them for interviews.

Because the research participants integrated their career commitments into a professional identity during their internship, they took a self-authored approach to their

professional career search. In contrast, most of the research participants relied on others to obtain their internship. In fact, many found an internship by chance rather than through an intentional search, and several accepted the first position they were offered. When students have the opportunity to increase their confidence in their skills through experiential learning (Blustein, 1989; Delorenzo, 2000), they have confidence in their ability to research opportunities and accept the right position rather than just the one offered to them (Saks, 2005). Prior to their internship, the research participants had minimal skills and experiences in their field. Similar to the research findings in a study by Delorenzo (2000), this study provided evidence that by completing experiential learning opportunities, students increase their confidence in making career decisions and controlling the outcome of their careers. The internship experience helped the research participants see that they have control over their career decisions and do not have to rely on chance. This realization helped lead them to taking a self-authored approach to their job search

For instance, Rebecca relied on her department chair and her brother-in-law to give her suggestions for where to apply for an internship but authored her own full-time job search. Since completing the internship, Rebecca conducted research on her own and applied for several jobs before interviewing and accepting a job at Major Communication Company. She accepted that position because they offered a strong training program, which she did not have during her internship but has since identified as a priority for her. Even Chuck, who had an interest in working for the company where he interned, has taken an active role in his job search by using LinkedIn and personal contacts. The internship experience itself increased their knowledge of career options and gave them

the confidence to use multiple methods for locating new opportunities. Similar to research conducted by Blustein, Devenis, and Kidney (1989), the research participants participated in an internship as an exploration activity but then continued to seek information through various research methods.

Research has also shown that by completing internships, students identify the skills and qualifications they need to enhance their career preparation and become motivated to attend graduate school (Zegwaard & Coll, 2011). Roxanne, who was developing an internal voice, had used her internship to integrate what she had learned from authorities in the field with what she had experienced firsthand. She used this self-knowledge to identify specialties she wanted to pursue and the institutions where she could apply that would provide her that opportunity. She received some advice from faculty but realized they did not have all of the answers. Jessica, on the other hand, relied on her mother as well as faculty as she conducted her graduate school search.

The research participants also enhanced their preparation for interviews because they had reflected on and internalized how the internship had helped them develop transferable and field-specific skills. Furthermore, students at this stage are more likely to be contextual knowers who have confidence in their abilities and are able to connect their life and work to multiple career options and situations (Bock, 1992; Baxter Magolda, 1992). Conversely, another research study found that students who entered the job market without an internship had a more difficult time connecting their academic skills and experience to the jobs they wanted (Wood & Kacynski, 2007). When Ellie and Lynn reflected about their job interviews, they discussed how they were confident to answer any question with examples from their internship experiences. Marie's

confidence soared when at 15-minute sales interview became a 45-minute one because she and the hiring manager were able to connect on her experiences in sales. Marie and Esmeralda also used their transferable skills from the internship to interview successfully for positions less directly related to their internships. The research participants seemed to have reflected on their own about their internship experiences to prepare for interviews, but research studies have shown that guided reflection with advisors could increase how students make meaning from their experiences (Baxter Magolda & King, 2004, 2008; Pizzolato, 2008).

In addition to having specific work examples to use in their interviews, the research participants said that the experience helped them identify the right questions to ask in an interview. By getting exposure to the professional world and learning firsthand what was important to them in a work setting, the research participants had the confidence to use the interview as an evaluation process. Ellie, Lynn, and Rebecca used these techniques and received job offers after their first professional interviews. Ellie offered a significant example of how one can internalize the internship experience to move toward self-authored career decisions. In her internship, Ellie's supervisors and colleagues made her feel like she could not ask questions. However, in the interview process with The Electric Company, she had the confidence to ask questions. Ellie said, "I think when you're looking for a job you should be able to ask those question and be completely comfortable ...If you're not comfortable asking those questions, it's not the right job." When Ellie used the interview process to ask questions of her potential supervisors and colleagues, she showed that she was on her way to transitioning from the predominantly internal end of the crossroads phase to the internal phase. By moving

away from the external voices telling her not to ask questions in the workplace, Ellie followed her internal voice to guide her through the interview process and make a decision that fits her career values.

Although the research (Saks, 2005) would indicate that Ellie, Lynn, and Rebecca were not as confident after their internships because they accepted the first job offers they received, the way they conducted their job search shows progression toward self-authored career decisions. For instance, all three researched and evaluated multiple full-time opportunities based on criteria they established after exploring and reflecting on careers through their internship experience. In contrast, Lordly (2013) found that students who had not completed internships conducted themselves much like the students in this research study before their internships. The students in that study who had not completed internships had unrealistic views about careers and relied on advice from others rather than their own career exploration and reflection.

The internship experience helped the research participants develop a self-authored approach to their professional career search. Once they had the confidence that they could be successful in the profession, they were able to take a self-authored approach to searching for and applying for opportunities. The internship experience also helped the research participants internalize their experiences so that they could connect their transferable and technical skills to the job they wanted. However, they also became adept at using the interview to evaluate how well opportunities matched their career values, interests, and work preferences. In the next section, I discussed how the research participants showed evidence of developing an internal belief system about making career choices.

Developing an Internal Belief System about Career Choice

With self-authored career decisions at the heart of this study, I spent a significant portion of the long interview constructing meaning with the research participants to understand how they are developing an internal belief system about career choice. Baxter Magolda (2001) has said that students need direct experience to understand that “self is central to career choice” (p. 311). The information that the participants shared in their interviews and reflection journals provided evidence that ten of the 11 participants seemed to gain this understanding because of their internship experience. Additional research (Brooks et al., 1995; Taylor, 1988) has shown that when students constructed more knowledge about careers through observations and practical work experiences, they crystallized their professional self-concept and developed an internal process for evaluating career choices.

All but one of the 11 research participants showed signs that they were integrating external messages with what they were finding out for themselves at their internship site. One participant, Jessica, continued to follow formulas prescribed by her mother and seemed susceptible to adopting career advice without evaluating it critically. For instance, Jessica remained steadfast in her decision to become a clinical psychologist but seemed to waiver on this commitment when she talked during the interview about working with autistic children or following the example of peers who were taking the year off before getting their graduate degree. However, the internship experience provided Jessica an opportunity to explore a career before graduation. Since many individuals do not reach self-authorship until they begin their first professional positions (Baxter Magolda, 2001), she could progress toward self-authorship in her first year of

graduate school if she continues to integrate external messages that have influenced her career commitments with new experiences she has in the field (Baxter Magolda, 2004; Laughlin & Creamer, 2005).

The other research participants used their internship experience to develop an internal mechanism for evaluating advice and implementing steps that moved them further along the journey toward self-authored career commitments. In the pre-reflection journals, I asked each participant to define self-authorship in the context of people making internally rather than externally defined career decisions. In evaluating the findings for developing an internal belief system, it is important to note that prior to the research study, none of the participants were familiar with the terms “self-authorship” or “externally and internally defined career commitments.” The research participants and I co-constructed definitions for these concepts that resonated with their individual experiences. This process provided them with an opportunity to have a reflective conversation (Baxter Magolda & King, 2008) with a learning partner who validated them as knowers and helped them learn from their experience (Baxter Magolda, 2004; Baxter Magolda & King, 2008).

The research participants also revealed that since the internship, they developed the capacity to integrate positive external messages with what they knew about their career values, interests, and work preferences to move closer to self-authored career commitments. In past studies, researchers also found that students who make self-authored career decisions have the ability to consider multiple viewpoints of others without losing their personal identity (Baxter Magolda, 1999; Creamer & Laughlin, 2005). Several of the participants used their internship experience to evaluate and

determine when external messages can benefit them when making decisions. For instance, Rebecca, Rosie, and Tate learned that when friends and family had experienced something similar and offered advice, they were able to integrate that insight with their experience to make a self-authored choice and remain committed to it. Rosie decided that she would not let negative external voices make her question her ability to pursue a career that she referred to as her “passion.” This decision showed that Rosie was learning to trust her internal voice and had realized that she could control how she thought about and reacted to external events (Baxter Magolda et al., 2012; Evans et al., 2010). At the end of her internship, Rosie was determined to exemplify ethical journalistic standards and pursue a journalism career with an organization that matches her values.

Other participants also used the internship experience to dispel what they thought they knew about their career choices so that they could move toward making independent, self-authored career commitments. When her internship experience showed her that a career in public accounting did not match her career values, Ellie became determined to chart her own path. By integrating this new internal foundation with the external messages that she had received from faculty about public accounting, Ellie could plan her accounting career according to her terms (Baxter Magolda, 2008; Evans et al., 2010). Similarly, Esmeralda continued to wrestle with the message from other Spanish majors and faculty that graduate school was the logical next step. Although Esmeralda’s department offered less direct advice, both she and Ellie left their internships frustrated with the quality of advice they had received from their faculty. This outcome mirrors other studies where after entering the professional world of work, graduates reported

dissatisfaction with the advice they received from faculty during college (Lunney, Gardner, & Williams, 1996).

However, other research participants looked to the examples of others to have the confidence and reassurance that their self-authored decisions were the right ones. Research has shown that the students who completed internships valued the people they worked with and the work they did (Ng & Burke, 2004). However, Roxanne could have continued to question the importance of these values to her in a career if she had not listened to the mentors at her internship site who convinced her that she would have both career fulfillment and income security if she chooses clinical psychology. Although his actions may seem less self-authored, Chuck continued to get ideas about career options by observing other interns. Although he got the idea by comparing himself to a peer, it still provides another piece of evidence that the internship experience can serve as the catalyst for introducing individuals to career information from a source other than their families and faculty (Barber, King, & Baxter Magolda, 2013; Baxter Magolda et al., 2012; Parks et al., 2012; Pizzolato, 2008; Simmons, 2008). Even in their senior year, research has shown that college students used external meaning making structures, placing them in the beginning stages of the journey toward self-authorship (King et al., 2009; Pizzolato and Ozaki, 2007). Before they experienced a crossroads that forced them to consider more than just externally defined options, students used advice and feedback from family, peers, and other external entities to make meaning of career decisions (Laughlin & Creamer, 2005)

Even as some research participants showed more externally defined career commitments, all of them showed signs that they were beginning to integrate external

messages with what they had experienced at their internships to form self-authored career commitments. The research participants appeared to have increased their capacity for making self-authored career choices after completing their internships; however, they could experience additional crossroad moments during their next professional position that cause them to reevaluate and become more certain of the internal career commitments they are making. However, unlike work colleagues who have not completed internships, the research participants will start their first jobs knowing what to expect from the workplace and the field that they have chosen for themselves.

Additional findings

The research participants also provided additional insight into what motivates students to complete internships and the value of completing these experiences. By examining their motivations to complete an internship, one could assess if those motivations were external or internal. Marie, for instance, showed internal motivation because she pursued an internship to determine what she wanted to do after graduation and then pursued another internship during her senior year. However, Marie and the other 10 participants also showed external motivation because they pursued internships so that they would have more experience for their resumes or graduate school applications. Ellie had not pursued an internship and said that she accepted her internship only because of the prestige of the firm. However, Ellie's parents were against the idea of an internship because it would delay graduation. Even though Ellie and other participants seemed to have found their internships by happenstance, they took an action that led them to the internship (Krumboltz, 2009). By taking action and actively engaging in a particular career exploration activity, the participants showed the

motivation that leads to beneficial experiences (Krumboltz, 2009). Furthermore, it is likely that the participants in this research study had dispositions and behaviors that made them more likely to participate in career exploration activities that contribute to the career decision-making process (Stumpf & Colarelli, 1981). Educators and employers may assume that academic credit motivates students to complete internships, but this research study dispels that idea because only two students received academic credit.

In addition, the participants validated the research that discusses the value of internships. Students clarified career commitments through exploration (Savickas, 2011a), improved their job search behaviors (Stumpf & Lockhart, 1987), increased their confidence in controlling their career outcomes (Delorenzo, 2000), and received job offers (Chegg.com, 2013; Gardner, 2013; Hart Research Associates, 2015). In addition, research participants said that their internship prepared them for professional expectations in the workplace (Barnett, 2012; Taylor, 1987). Even Rebecca, who did not get the substantial work in her field that she had expected, believed that the internship had prepared her for the transition to full-time professional employment. Lastly, the research participants developed their own opinions about the importance of internships. Compared to their initial motivations to do an internship, these comments provided further evidence that they are beginning to make internally defined value judgments about multiple areas of their lives. The internship experience provided the participants an opportunity to integrate external and internal knowledge in order to develop their own guiding principles for career choices (Barber, 2012; Baxter Magolda, et al., 2012).

Discussion Summary

By using Baxter Magolda's theory of self-authorship, I analyzed the internship experiences of 11 traditional-aged college students and discovered each research participant was moving closer to self-authored career commitments because of this experience. The participants experienced a developmental challenge or crossroads experience when they realized that they had rely on external formulas for success or move toward authoring a career path based on their internal values (Baxter Magolda, 2001). The internship experience provided the research participants a crossroads experience that clarified career commitments, established a professional identity, influenced a professional career search, and developed an internal belief system about career choice. As the research participants experienced dissonance between what they though they knew about their career choice and the reality of the work involved (Barnett, 2012), they began to form an internal voice to guide their career decisions. Even participants who leaned on external formulas in the crossroads phase (Baxter Magolda et al., 2012) showed signs that they were making efforts to become more self-authored. However, the students in the study who developed a strong connection to their profession or increased their confidence in finding the right career (Kiener, 2006), provided evidence that the internship experience could be the catalyst for making self-authored career decisions. In addition, the research participants who were strengthening their career commitments because of how they had internalized their internship experience also expressed a philosophy for using an internal belief system to guide their career choices throughout their lives.

Limitations of the Study

The scope of this study was limited to undergraduate, traditional-aged students at one institution in the southeastern United States, Liberal Arts University (LAU). This study had a limited sample size and because of the demographic make-up of LAU, the diversity among the research participants was minimal. In Table 3.1, I have provided the demographic background of the participants. Of the 11 participants, only one identified as male. In addition, ten of the participants were White with only one student identifying as non-white. I have also provided the family educational and occupational background in Table 3.2. All of the participants had at least one parent with a bachelor's degree who worked in a professional rather than blue-collar job.

True to the nature of a qualitative study, the results are not generalizable to a larger audience (van Manen, 1990). Furthermore, a phenomenological study should be small in nature. However, other researchers could implement this study at other institutions with different demographics to identify similarities and differences between the research findings. For instance, with only one participant who identified as male, I wondered how the research findings could have differed if I had an equal distribution of males and females. The research participants represent seven different majors, and if duplicated, researchers could expand the study to other majors to compare findings.

I promoted the research study using flyers and purposive sampling techniques, but it could be that the type of student who chooses to participate in a research study about internships influences the results of the study. The participants who chose to participate had heard about the opportunity from a faculty or staff member on campus, friend, or because they had used the Career Center. For instance, faculty internship coordinators

who recommended the study to their students could have had more influence on students who are externally motivated by faculty approval. Similarly, when I sent an email to students who had used the Career Center, some of the students could have responded because of their relationship with me or other staff in my department. However, the students who chose to participate in this study also showed a tendency to act independently from their peers to learn about themselves and reflect on a significant experience. From that perspective, it seems that the same drive that motivated these students to complete internships could be what motivated them to participate in the study. From that standpoint, the findings of this study could be limited to how a professionally oriented student would arrive at self-authored career commitments.

Although I offered an incentive, most of the research participants did not realize that when they volunteered. It seems that the type of student who would volunteer to participate in a study about internships could be less likely to follow external formulas and could value the concept of experiential learning; therefore, already showing signs of self-authorship. If future researchers want to examine the experiences of students with various motivation levels, they could collaborate with a faculty member and study a group of students within a particular major who have to complete an internship to meet graduation requirements.

Implications for Practice

The purpose of this study was to capture the lived experience of students who have completed internships and are considering career decisions during their senior year of college. As a constructivist, qualitative researcher, I used this phenomenological study to collect data through pre- and post-interview reflection journals as well as interviews

where they could reflect on their internship experience. Through the data collection, I identified implications for practice that educators and employers could use to help college students make meaning of their internship experiences and move toward self-authored career commitments.

All Students Should Complete Internships

Each of the 11 participants provided evidence that students should complete internships so that they can clarify their career interests before entering their first professional position. Employers have said that they prefer hiring new graduates who have had internship experiences because they gain the soft skills and industry knowledge needed for the workplace (Chegg.com, 2013; Gardner, 2013; Hart Research Associates, 2015). Of the 11 participants, six had accepted full-time jobs or internships by the post-interview reflection. In addition to making themselves more attractive to employers by increasing their skills and knowledge, the research participants completed their internships with more clarity about the type of career that aligns with their career values, interests, and work environment preferences. While the term “self-authorship” may not have meaning to employers, employers do want to hire new graduates who are committed to their profession and the employer they choose. Educators can use the results of this study to show employers why offering internship programs will improve their employee retention (Levine & Dean, 2012). New hires without internship experience are a risk because they are using a full-time professional job rather than a temporary internship to try out a career. By offering internships, employers can increase the retention of new hires because they are hiring individuals who have already experienced the job as an intern and know what to expect from the workplace and the profession they have chosen

(Levine & Dean, 2012). However, to increase the number of students who complete internships, institutional officials must put resources toward supporting the internship process as well.

Although the research participants in this study had external influences who encouraged them to do an internship, none of them were required to complete the experience. Of the 11 students in this research study, only two received academic credit. The other research participants listed various reasons for not pursuing academic credit. For students such as Tate, Rosie, and Skye, the curriculum in their particular major requires an internship, but they were not far along enough in their program to receive credit for the internships they discussed in this study. Instead, all three students will complete their for-credit internships as their final course requirement. Others explained that they did not pursue credit because of the cost and that they did not need the additional credit hours (Ellie, Roxanne). Lynn did not have an academic credit option in her department beyond what she could earn for her academic clinical experiences. Students who want credit for their internship at LAU must go through their academic department, but some miss that opportunity because their particular major does not have an internship course or a faculty member willing to offer an independent study course. Furthermore, students at LAU must show that their internship relates to their academic major, a potential obstacle for a student exploring a career field that seems to be unrelated to their major. When institutions will not offer credit for an internship, they are sending perhaps an unintended message to students and employers that internships are not a priority. If employers say that critical thinking, communication, and problem solving skills are more important than the academic major is, then institutions should offer

multiple ways for students to receive academic credit for an internship. To provide this additional support, institutions could charge a nominal fee so that students could register for a zero-credit internship program managed by the career services office. The institution could use the generated funds to provide staffing support in career services so that the institution can provide the needed assistance for students and employers. In addition to helping students prepare for the internship application and search process, the institution can use funds to support employer site visits that facilitate stronger relationships between the institution and companies that hire interns. By providing a centralized and adequately funded internship program through career services, all students have the opportunity to complete an internship, regardless of major.

Internships as a High-Impact Practice

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) considers internships to be among one of the high-impact practices that facilitates intellectual, social, and personal development through frequent feedback (Keller, 2012; Kuh, 2008; NSSE, 2013). In this research study, only two students earned academic credit for their internship and received structured feedback from faculty and supervisors during the process (Keller, 2012). The remaining research participants had experiences that lacked faculty mentorship as well as a structured evaluation and reflection process (Keller, 2012). As I analyzed the data, I realized that I had not asked the research participants if they had reflected with an advisor or faculty member about their internship experience prior to the research interview. This information could have provided additional insight into how the participants were making meaning of their experience.

Feedback. When students receive credit for an internship, the supervising faculty member has the authority to create a structured system where employer supervisors must adhere to specific guidelines for evaluating student intern performance (Keller, 2012). For non-academic credit internships, institutions lack the authority to set these guidelines, making it likely that supervisor feedback in non-academic credit internships would vary in quality. With the faculty mentorship piece missing from non-academic internships as well, a student intern could complete an internship without an evaluation process (Keller, 2012). To ensure that internships are a high-impact practice, students should receive meaningful feedback, which facilitates their intellectual, social, and personal development, (NSSE, 2013). In this research study, the participants referred to institutional barriers such as cost of the course and limits placed on when the internship course could occur in the student's curriculum. Institutions such as LAU and others should examine their academic internship process and determine what barriers could be limiting students from benefiting fully from the high-impact aspect of internships. Academic partnerships between career services offices could provide structure through zero-credit hour transcript notations (e.g. University of Iowa, Northwestern University).

Guided Reflection. When students experience cognitive dissonance and reflect on how they had used external formulas to construct meaning, they begin to integrate external and internal beliefs to move toward self-authorship (Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004; Torres & Hernandez, 2007). Career advisors could help students through this process. Baxter Magolda and King (2008) developed a conversation guide to help advisors conduct reflective conversations with students. Although they developed their guide for first-year students in an academic advising setting, career services practitioners

could design and use a similar guide for providing guided reflection with students after they have completed an internship.

With more students using career services (NACE, 2014b), career advisors may not have time or resources to schedule appointments or plan programs for this single activity. However, career advisors could use this guided reflection when helping seniors develop and review their resumes, complete mock interviews, or plan career search strategies. For instance, career advisors could ask one question during a mock interview to get the student to discuss how their internship has helped them prepare for their professional career. To assist with their resume and career search plan, career advisors could ask students to describe the transferable skills they gained and the way the internship has influenced their current career interests. To maximize resources even more, career services offices could share the conversation guide with academic advisors and faculty internship supervisors to encourage more educators on campus to talk with students about the outcomes of their internship experience.

Following the learning partnership model, a guided conversation that requires students to bring their career values and experiences to the discussion provides another opportunity to facilitate self-authored career decisions (Baxter Magolda & King, 2008). However, Baxter Magolda and King also warned against placing value judgments on where students are in their journey toward self-authorship. When using this resource, career and academic advisors should remember that even students who have completed internships are at different developmental levels. For instance, comparing the two psychology students in this research study would offer two contrasting levels of internal meaning making that advisors should value equally.

Institutional Patterns of External Formulas

The findings from the research study provided insight into positive and negative external formulas that influence how students make self-authored career decisions. Ellie, Esmeralda, and Rebecca spoke the most about external formulas presented by the university. For instance, Rebecca, who was in the same major as Chuck, said that the MIS department chair made them believe that they had to do an internship. Although Rebecca relied on her professor for internship site suggestions, this external message pushed her toward a developmental experience that has influenced her to make more self-authored career commitments. Rebecca spoke positively about her faculty member's influence on her decision to do an internship. Ellie and Esmeralda, on the other hand, offered a critical view of external messages from faculty. With more academic departments competing for students in order to receive adequate budget allotments (Shaffer & Zalewski, 2011), it would seem that departments use various messages about career success to entice students into their major. For instance, Ellie complained about the emphasis on public accounting as the only career choice, but the accounting faculty could be using the prestige of public accounting firms to attract students to their program. Esmeralda, however, thought her faculty could have been more involved in suggesting career options.

Institutional leaders should be aware of these challenges and find ways to embed career planning into the curriculum or the campus culture so that all students have the opportunity to explore a variety of career options. By making internships part of the campus culture, institutional leaders would send a strong message that internships are crucial for all majors. In that type of educational environment, a Spanish major like

Esmeralda would hear the same message as Management Information Systems majors like Chuck and Rebecca about the importance of completing an internship. To make internships even more accessible, institutional leaders should add multiple credit options so that students can explore internships that may seem in contrast to their majors. If students see that they have multiple career options related to their major, then they may also see how completing a degree at that institution will benefit them. By challenging assumptions about internships, institutional leaders have opportunities both to prepare more students for the workforce and to meet the needs of employers.

To prepare students for meeting the expectations of employers, advisors and faculty should facilitate self-authorship in students by challenging the assumptions that students have about the professional world. By challenging students during the advising process, faculty and advisors could prepare students for handling how they manage their reaction to internal conflicts they experience about career choice during their internships (Baxter Magolda & King, 2008; Pizzolato, 2008; Pizzolato & Ozaki, 2007). To make career exploration a part of the culture, institutional leaders should ensure that faculty and advisors deliver similar messages. Institutional leaders should provide professional development opportunities for advisors and faculty so that they have the knowledge and confidence to expose students to multiple resources rather than prescribe limited career options. Furthermore, faculty could collaborate with career services staff to bring their resources and expertise into the classroom.

With the support of institutional officials, career services offices could institutionalize career planning by implementing the four-step career exploration model outlined by Savickas (2011a) and begin with career assessments in first-year academic

seminar. To implement the four-step model, institutional leaders should work with career services to assess resource needs and align new funding requests with a specific plan for expanding how the career services office reaches students across campus and in multiple disciplines. Many institutions (e.g. University of Georgia, University of Tennessee) use a centralized career services model with Career Consultants assigned to major clusters. In these models, Career Consultants work with specific academic departments to manage career resources for students in their majors and to provide individualized advising to help those students evaluate, research, and experience career options that match their self-concept. At smaller institutions, career services offices could instead assign advisors to specific majors or colleges to manage faculty relationships but have the flexibility to serve students in various majors. When institutional leaders in academic and student affairs develop a campus culture where career services offices are encouraged to partner with academic departments, then students receive more guidance and experiences that move them from an externally to an internally defined belief system about career decisions (Baxter Magolda, 2001, 2007). Rather than view their academic department as the authority on major-related career options, students can begin to integrate multiple resources to discover numerous connections between majors and careers. As they integrate multiple ideas, students could move closer to self-authored career decisions.

Understanding the Motivation to Complete an Internship

More students should be completing internships in order to meet the needs of employers who have said that they prefer to hire graduates who have completed internships (Chegg.com, 2013; Gardner, 2013; Hart Research Associates, 2015). In order to increase the number of students completing internships, institutions and the employers

who are recruiting interns need to understand what motivates a student to complete an internship outside of the opportunity to earn academic credit. Many individuals associate internships with an academic credit experience, often required for graduation. However, in this research study, only two students received academic credit for their internships, and for those two students, the internship was not a graduation requirement. In fact, the mass communication students were completing their internships before their curriculum would allow them to complete their required for-credit internship. If institutions such as LAU are not requiring all students to complete internships and if some students see cost as a barrier to completing an internship for credit, then institutions should examine other avenues for motivating students to complete internships.

Kiener (2006) found that students with an autonomous orientation and high decision-making competencies had a deeper sense of self-awareness and were motivated to engage in career exploration activities. His study implies that if the institutional leaders could implement opportunities to help students increase their self-awareness early in their college experience, then students could also increase their motivation to complete an internship. However, institutional leaders should be aware that career advisors can teach students career exploration behaviors, but individuals will learn and implement these behaviors differently (Kiener, 2006). Furthermore, several studies have shown that students are more likely to seek advice from parents and other family members than their campus advisors (Creamer & Laughlin, 2005; Gardner, 2012; Simmons, 2008). To challenge students who are relying on external formulas to understand their career options, institutional leaders should find ways for students to conduct research and expand their understanding of the careers they are considering. Exploration activities can

include one-day shadowing visits, informational interviews, or semester break externships with alumni. When students have participated in career exploration activities, they have decreased their tendency to foreclose on a specific career prematurely without using exploration to understand why they are making that decision (Blustein, Ellis, & Devenis, 1989; Marcia, 1966; Shaffer & Zalewski, 2011). If institutional leaders can identify more ways to embed career planning into the curriculum and campus culture, then career advisors and faculty member have more opportunities to motivate students to research, evaluate, and experience career options that match their interests.

Explaining the value of internships. To motivate students to complete internships, institutional leaders should also be aware of the value of internships beyond placement or career outcomes statistics. For instance, national surveys (NACE, 2014a) often provide data showing the percentage of seniors who had completed internships and had job offers at graduation. These surveys often compare how quickly students with paid internships verses unpaid internships find full-time jobs. NACE also presents annual information on the percentage of students whose internships converted to full-time employment with their company. While career outcomes data is valuable, it does not capture the developmental influence internships have on students. Moreover, simply completing internships does not lead to high placement numbers. However, the developmental benefits of completing an internship could in fact lead to behaviors that result in positive career outcomes. For instance, research participants such as Ellie and Lynn showed that in addition to helping them build technical and soft skills for the workplace, they gained confidence in their ability to articulate their skills in an interview

but also used the interview to evaluate the opportunity. Through experience, the research participants recognized for themselves that they could contribute to their professional fields, which increased their confidence to explore multiple options and conduct a self-authored professional career search. Furthermore, the internship introduced the millennial students in this study to the expectations of the professional world, placing them ahead of students who have not learned about those expectations.

Preparing millennials for the workplace. For most of the research participants in this study, their internship provided them the opportunity to experience a professional work setting for the first time. The research participants learned about professional work relationships and expectations within a professional environment in the context of a temporary work experience rather than at their first full-time professional job. The experience also introduced students to the realities of the workplace. Ellie, Chuck, and Marie spoke specifically about their value of work-life balance and the dissonance they experienced because their internship environments did not support that value. Similarly, Levine and Dean (2012) found this value to be common among millennial students they surveyed. As career services professionals work with students, they should be aware of the dissonance students may experience between their understanding of the professional world and personal career values along with the realities they will encounter when they enter that world. However, career services professionals could also use the information in this study to understand why students could feel uncomfortable in professional environments. By identifying ways to ease that discomfort and make the transition to the professional world less intimidating, career services professionals could motivate more students to complete internships.

Implementing a self-authored professional career search. In past research studies, students have expressed increased confidence in their ability to find a job because of their internship experience (Cook, Parker, & Pettijohn, 2004; Ng & Burke, 2006; Wood & Kacynski, 2007). In this research study, most of the research participants reported the same sense of self-confidence and applied a self-authored approach to their professional career search. Rather than rely on others, the participants had the confidence to research and apply for multiple opportunities based on what they had discovered about themselves during the internship. When institutional leaders and career services professionals talk to families about the importance of internships and career outcomes, this information could be beneficial. For instance, five of the eleven research participants (Ellie, Esmeralda, Rebecca, Chuck, Lynn) had solidified their after-graduation plans at the time of this study. Two others (Roxanne, Jessica) were finalizing their applications to graduate school and another (Marie) had accepted an internship in order to explore another career option. The remaining three (Rosie, Skye, and Tate) had started their search for their required mass communication internship.

The research participants were more motivated to begin their professional career searches than they had been to conduct their initial internship searches. Once the research participants had the opportunity to clarify their career interests and identify with a profession because of their internship experience, they could visualize themselves in a professional career. The research participants became more engaged in the career exploration process throughout their senior year because they had identified specific career interests (Stumpf & Lockhart, 1987). With specific career interests, they could be

more successful at job interviews and improve their chances of receiving job offers (Stumpf, Austin, & Hartman, 1984; Stumpf & Lockhart, 1987; Taylor, 1985).

Without an internship experience, it is likely that the research participants would have entered their professional career search with the minimal effort they used for their internship search. If students do not experience a developmental crossroads that helps them clarify their career interests, values, and work preferences, then the transition from their senior year to the professional workplace could look much like what the research participants experienced in their internships. If students are further along on the journey to self-authorship during the senior year, then they could have a successful transition to their first professional roles after graduation.

Recommendations for Future Research

This research study provides evidence that internship experiences can help facilitate self-authored career commitments and offers a starting point for additional research to understand this phenomenon. I have identified several potential research studies that could expand on this study and the current knowledge on internships as a high-impact practice for facilitating the intellectual, social, and personal development necessary for the professional world (Kuh, 2008; NSSE, 2013).

Because this phenomenological study focused on one institution with limited diversity, researchers could duplicate or modify this study to examine how other factors influence self-authored career choices when students have completed internships. For instance, another researcher could look specifically at the self-authored career commitments of students who complete internships and identify with a specific gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or a certain socioeconomic status. Researchers could use a

constructivist or critical lens to understand these experiences. Researchers who examine the internship experience and the journey to self-authorship through a critical lens could increase understanding of how career development experiences and identity development intersect to facilitate self-authorship.

This study showed that internships move students toward self-authorship but additional research could provide insight into why some students do not pursue these high-impact opportunities. If internships helps students arrive at self-authored career commitments before they graduate, then higher education professionals could benefit from additional research on what motivates career exploration behavior. Researchers could examine whether early participation in short-term career exploration activities such as job shadowing and semester-break externships leads to self-authored career behaviors such as pursuing internships. However, in this research study, Jessica's experience suggests that observations or job shadowing alone may not be enough for developing self-authored career commitments. If researchers could study the difference between the students who observe and those who actively engage in substantial work, educators could use that information to justify why students should complete multiple career exploration activities. Researchers could also examine students who participate in service learning or leadership experiences early on in their college career to determine if they also were more likely to pursue internship experiences before graduation.

In career services, we often help the students prepare for their internship searches, but faculty and internship supervisors are most likely to be involved in reflection after the experience. As I reflected on the experience of interviewing the research participants, I recognized the value to both the student and the career services professional for using

guided reflection to help them process their experience. In the implications, I suggested that career services and academic advising professionals could use a conversation guide to help students reflect on their internship experiences. By using a pre- and post-survey instrument to assess growth from the reflection, researchers could measure how guided reflection contributes to self-authorship after a student completes an internship.

Similarly, faculty and internship supervisors have traditionally been involved in the feedback process with career services sometimes serving as an intermediary with minimal involvement. With only two students in this research study receiving academic credit for their internships, one could assume that feedback from faculty was minimal during and after the internship. However, because of the purpose of this study, I did not ask questions to uncover this information in the interviews. In a future study, researchers could examine how faculty and internship supervisors provide feedback to students participating in for-credit and non-credit internships. Career services professionals could use that information to determine how they could enhance the feedback process for students participating in non-credit internships. As employers continue to emphasize the importance of internship experience (Hart Research Associates, 2015), the number of students completing non-credit internships could increase, making this information even more relevant to career services offices concerned about student learning and the quality of experiences offered by employers.

In addition, researchers could examine the career values of millennial graduates and their transition to their first professional positions. Using a larger sample than I used, researchers could compare research participants who completed internships with those who did not to evaluate the dissonance new professionals could experience when their

values such as work-life balance do not match those of the organization where they work. From a self-authorship standpoint, this study could expand the research that I conducted since three of my participants (Ellie, Chuck, Marie) spoke specifically about work-life balance.

Lastly, as the researcher who conducted this study, I am particularly interested in how the participants in my study will continue along their journey to self-authored career commitments as they begin their first professional job or enter graduate school. Qualitative or quantitative research on their entry into a professional position could provide further evidence that the internship experience helped them arrive at a self-authored career commitment. Additional research could also provide insight into crossroads experiences during the first job that could help practitioners prepare students for the transition to the professional world.

Conclusion

In this research study, I interviewed 11 traditional-aged college students to understand how internship experiences contribute to making self-authored career commitments. Grounded in Baxter Magolda's (2001) theory of self-authorship, this research study has provided a starting point for looking more closely at how an internship experience could be the developmental challenge that moves college students toward self-authorship before graduation. In her longitudinal study, Baxter Magolda found that many of her participants did not reach self-authorship until they experienced this crossroads in their first professional job after graduation (Baxter Magolda, 2001, 2008). She suggested that if her participants had completed internships prior to graduation, then perhaps they would have experienced the crossroads moment and realized sooner that

they were considering careers based on external formulas rather internally defined beliefs and values about careers (Baxter Magolda, 2001). For the students in my research study, the internship served as their developmental crossroads, and all of them used this experience differently to begin authoring their own career commitments. Their experiences provided evidence that completing an internship is a useful mechanism for moving college students toward self-authored career decisions.

This study was important to me as a career services practitioner because I believe that internships, more than any other co-curricular experience, prepare students for what they will experience in the professional world by helping them clarify their career interests as well as develop field-specific and transferable skills. I have had the opportunity to see many students make a successful transition from their internship to their professional careers. Although I have always believed that their internship experiences had influenced those outcomes, I wanted evidence beyond internship placement or conversation to full-time job numbers to substantiate that belief. To obtain that evidence, I wanted to conduct a qualitative study so that I could capture how students make meaning of their internship experiences and translate that meaning into career interest clarification, professional expertise, and career search preparation.

As I read more of Baxter Magolda's research, I found her work to resonate strongly with career development. By connecting the student internship experience with Baxter Magolda's (2001) theory of self-authorship, I have produced evidence through this research study that students benefit when they take ownership of their career paths by completing an internship. However, this powerful step requires confidence and a strong external support system that has encouraged the student to develop an internal voice

throughout their lives. If students come to college without those qualities, higher education professionals will have to find ways to help students build them.

In my work with students completing internship experiences, I have witnessed the divide between the students who believe in their ability to control their career outcomes (Delorenzo, 2000) and those that believe that outside forces rather than their own efforts determine their career success. Rather than capitalizing on opportunities that could lead to an internship (Krumboltz, 2009; 2013), some students believed that family and institutional connections controlled their destiny rather than their own actions. When students begin to trust their internal voice, then they start to believe that they, rather than external events, have the power to influence their career trajectory (Baxter Magolda et al., 2012; Evans et al., 2010). Several of the students in this research study showed both characteristics, with some taking independent action to implement a successful internship search and others relying on good connections and good fortune. However, individuals who stumble upon opportunities must have the internal drive to then pursue and benefit from the opportunity. In his Happenstance Learning Theory, Krumboltz (2009) provides an explanation for how the actions of participants created the happenstance moments that led them to their internships. First, they took actions in their lives that put them in a position to find an internship. For instance, Ellie took action by attending a career fair. Next, she actively engaged in the event or opportunity, which led her to the opportunity to interview with a firm. As a final step, Ellie took the opportunity to interview because she could see how the internship would benefit her. Although Ellie and the other research participants seemed to have stumbled upon their internships, they had in fact taken some action that led them to internship opportunities and because of their particular

drive and determination, they knew that taking these opportunities would benefit them (Hirschi, 2014; Krumboltz, 2009, 2013). Other happenstance moments that led to an internship included Roxanne, Chuck, and Rebecca talking with their faculty; Esmeralda and Skye networking with family and alumni, respectively; Rosie making a professional connection with the newspaper; and Marie using the Career Center's online job board. After completing the internship, all of the participants except for Jessica took actions in their professional career search that showed they now understood the control they have over their career outcomes. For instance, one participant succinctly summarized this collective realization by saying, "I got a better idea of what really is important...as far as looking for jobs because you do have a choice" (Lynn).

Seeing family members succeed in their fields also helps students envision themselves as someone who can succeed in the professional world (Laughlin & Creamer, 2005), which offers another positive external influence for completing an internship. Several of the participants spoke positively about watching and learning from the careers of their family members (Chuck, Skye, Jessica, Rebecca, Tate), which could have contributed to their confidence in completing a professional internship experience. The research participants in this study provided good examples of what can happen when an external influence pushes students toward an internship in direct and indirect ways. Because of the positive external influences in their lives, the research participants had the ability to recognize the possible benefits and opportunities that an internship could provide (Krumboltz, 2009).

Students who choose to participate in career exploration activities that lead to career decision making have certain dispositions and behaviors (Hirschi, 2012; Stumpf &

Colarelli, 1981). If a student must have certain dispositions and behaviors in order to be likely to engage in career exploration, then positive external influences could be the impetus that pushes other students toward career exploration. By requiring that a student attend a career fair or setting an expectation that students should complete internships, faculty can create more opportunities for exposing students to the possibility that they have control over their career path. Furthermore, if faculty work with career services to introduce these opportunities to students, then career advisors can provide career coaching so that students recognize how participating in these various opportunities gives them the ability to control their career destiny (Krumboltz, 2009).

Although the students in this research exhibited the motivation to complete an internship, just over half of college students complete internships (NACE, 2014a; NSSE, 2014). If employers are more likely to hire individuals who have completed internships (Chegg.com, 2013; Hart Research Associates, 2015; Gardner, 2013) and research shows that completing an internship facilitates self-authorship, then early career interventions could be the answer. When they enter college, many students have neither explored nor committed to a career (Shaffer & Zalewski, 2011). However, current data show that today's college students want career planning assistance. For instance, 47% of first-year students have reported that they want career counseling (Noel Levitz, 2014), making early career interventions even more possible. If students often expect career and academic advisors to point them toward specific majors or career options, then they could react positively if advisors facilitated early career interventions (Baxter Magolda & King, 2008; Pizzolato, 2008; Shaffer & Zalewski, 2011). However, when possible, faculty should work with career and academic advisors to place these activities into the

curriculum as much as possible so that all students benefit from this experience. Many students reject help from advisors because they have selected a particular career; however, those that have foreclosed on that choice without exploring or researching it on their own could benefit from guided exploration (Shaffer & Zalewski, 2011).

Higher education professionals have an obligation to prepare students for managing the challenges of a 21st century world (Baxter Magolda, 2001). Although students and parents assume that employers focus on majors more than experience, employers have reported that many new college graduates that apply and interview for jobs with their organizations have a skills gap that completing an internship could improve (Hart Research Associates, 2015). By following the four-step career exploration model (Savickas, 2011a), advisors could intervene during the first and second year of college to help students assess their career interests and then internalize a sense of self when they explore careers through information gathering. Early interventions could include assigning students to network with alumni through LinkedIn. A more complex idea could include career services and alumni relations collaborating to arrange a semester-break externship program with alumni. By completing early career exploration activities, students could begin to identify their own interests and values, and as a result, gain confidence in their ability to chart their own career path (Delorenzo, 2000). When students obtain that confidence, then they could be more likely to have those dispositions and behaviors that would motivate them to complete an internship and make self-authored career choices before they graduate (Barber, King, & Baxter Magolda, 2013; Barnett, 2013; Baxter Magolda, 2001). In addition to helping new graduates integrate external and internal formulas to make career decisions, completing an internship could

also help new graduates continue to make self-authored decisions in the workplace that could positively affect their careers.

Lastly, completing an internship provides students an opportunity to try a career before they have to make a commitment. By discovering what they did *not* want to do, the students in this study discerned what they *did* want to do, and did so by using their own internal meaning making system. Classroom experience alone cannot prepare students for the realities of the professional world. Esmeralda, for instance, said that she realized her major could not stand on its own and that she had to do an internship to develop other marketable skills. For students to make a successful transition to professional life, internships are no longer optional. I close this discussion with final statements from Marie and Skye who speak to the necessity of the internship experience and the importance of reflection and self-discovery in order to author one's own life. By connecting and implementing these viewpoints, today's college student can meet the demands of 21st century life.

"I honestly I wish I had done an internship my sophomore year too. I could tell someone ...don't wait...When you graduate...you want a job. You don't want to be an intern. If I could tell someone, get one your sophomore year...your junior year." (Marie)

"It's really important to do stuff...on your own terms and for yourself...you shouldn't be...doing it for someone else and their sake, their happiness, their fulfillment....because then you really know. Is this what I want to be doing? Am I enjoying this? Is this how I want to spend my time? Or is it good for me? Am I growing?" (Skye)

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APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT MATERIALS

Email to Faculty Internship Coordinators

I am conducting a dissertation study on the experiences of student interns to fulfill requirements for the Student Affairs Leadership, Ed.D. program at the University of Georgia. I am seeking traditional-aged, undergraduate participants in their senior year of college who have completed an internship in the last six months. The purpose of the study is to examine the experience students have when they complete internships prior to their senior year in college and the influences that the experience has on their previous and current career commitments (decisions/goals/plans/interests).

I am asking faculty internship coordinators to share this email with current seniors who have completed internships. Please have students contact me at internshipstudy@gmail.com. I appreciate your assistance with this project!

Email to Seniors Using the Career Center

Did you complete an internship in the past six months? If so, you are invited to participate in a research study about your experience. You are receiving this email because you visited the LAU Career Center in the past year and appear to be in your final year of college.

The purpose of the study is to examine the experience students have when they complete internships prior to their senior year in college and the influences that the experience has on their previous and current career commitments (decisions/goals/plans/interests).

If you are interested in participating in the study, please email me at internshipstudy@gmail.com so that I can ask you a brief set of screening questions. Students who are chosen and participate in the study will receive a \$10 gift card. If you have questions about the study, you may also contact me at XXX-XXX-XXXX.

I appreciate your assistance with this project!

Disclaimer: Choosing to participate or not participate in this study is not related to your ability to use the Career Center. All study participants and non-participants are encouraged to use the Career Center for their career planning needs.

APPENDIX B

TELEPHONE ELIGIBILITY SCREENING SCRIPT

Thank you for contacting me to find out more about this research study. My name is Mary Roberts, and I am conducting research for my dissertation at the University of Georgia in the College of Education.

The purpose of the research study is to look at how students think about their career commitments after completing an internship. I hope that this study contributes to the research on the value of internships. Do you think you might be interested in participating in the study?

[If No]: Thank you very much for your time.

[If Yes]: Before enrolling people in the study, I have to ask you some questions to determine your eligibility. At this time I would like to ask you a series of questions about your internship and background. This should only take about 15 minutes of your time.

I do not foresee any discomfort from the questions I will ask, but if any of the questions make you uncomfortable or distressed; please let me know. You don't have to answer those questions if you do not want to.

All information that I receive from you during this phone interview, including your name and other information that can possibly identify you will be strictly confidential and will be kept in a password protected file on my computer. Remember, your participation is voluntary; you can refuse to answer any questions or stop this phone interview at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Do I have permission to ask you these questions?

Thank you. If you have any questions about the research study, please feel free to call me at 478-445-2780. Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant should be directed to Institutional Review Board, 629 Boyd GSRC, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; telephone (706) 542 – 3199; email address irb@uga.edu.

Screening Questions

1. When did you complete your internship? Start Date _____ End Date _____
2. How many hours per week did you work?
3. How old are you?
4. Have you worked professionally in a full-time job?
5. When do you graduate?
6. What is your academic major?

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA CONSENT FORM

<http://research.uga.edu/documents/#hso>

The Lived Experience of Interns and the Journey toward Self-Authored Career Commitments

Researcher's Statement

I am asking you to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you the information about the study so you can decide whether to be in the study or not. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." A copy of this form will be given to you.

Principal Investigator: Mary Roberts
College of Education, University of Georgia
478-445-2780

I am conducting this study as part of the requirements for my Ed.D. in Student Affairs Leadership at the University of Georgia. I am conducting the research under the direction of Dr. Laura Dean, Associate Professor, Counseling and Human Development Services.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to examine the experience students have when they complete internships prior to their senior year in college and the influences that the experience has on their previous and current career commitments (decisions/goals/plans/interests). You have been asked to participate in this study because you fit the following criteria: age 18 – 24; completed an internship in the past six months, no professional full-time work experience, and represented one of several academic majors at the university.

Study Procedures

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to ...

- Complete a brief pre- and post-interview reflection journal entry as well as a 60-minute interview about your internship experience and career commitments (decision/choice/plans/goals/interests)
- Participation in this study should take less than three hours for each participant. Participants will take less than 15 minutes to answer screening questions, a total of 30 minutes to complete each reflection journal entry, and approximately 60 minutes to complete the interview.

- I will use two written reflection journal entries and an interview to collect data. For this study, the most personal and sensitive questions include parental occupations, the details of your internship experiences, and what has influenced their previous and current career commitments.
- I will audio record the interviews.

Risks and discomforts

- ❖ *Psychological risks (e.g., feelings of stress/discomfort, sadness guilt or anxiety, loss of self-esteem, etc.).* If you did not have a good internship experience, or it led you to reconsider previously firm career decisions, participating in this study could create feelings of stress/comfort, sadness, guilt, anxiety, or loss of self-esteem.
- ❖ I do not anticipate any social, economic, legal, or physical risks to participants in this study.
- ❖ It is normal to experience decreased or uncertain career commitments after an internship. I encourage you to be honest about your experience, and if you feel uncomfortable during the interview, we can stop at any time. I will also provide contact information for the Counseling Services Office (478-445-5331) and the Career Center (478-445-5384) in case you would like to talk to someone in depth about the career decision-making process.

Benefits

- By participating in this research study, you will have the opportunity to reflect on your internship experience and career commitments. This reflection process could provide you with increased clarity on next steps in your career decision and implementation process prior to graduation.
- By participating in this study, you will help institutions of higher education, advisors, and faculty members who work with student interns understand how the internship experience influences career commitments. Advisors and faculty can use this information when talking to students about the benefits and risks to completing an internship. Your participation will also help advisors and faculty provide career guidance to students when they complete the internship.

Incentives for participation

Participants who complete the entire study will receive a \$10 gift card.

Audio/Video Recording

I will audio record the interviews so that I can listen to the participants during the interview and actively engage as a constructivist researcher as they tell their stories. In addition, using an audio recording will capture direct quotes, emotion, and tone as the participants tell their stories. I will destroy the recordings after I transcribe and analyze the data for each interview. I will keep the transcription files for five years to reference in case I publish findings from the dissertation.

Privacy/Confidentiality

You will choose a pseudonym at the beginning of the study. In my data collection and analysis files, your information will be categorized by your pseudonym. For information

that you email to me, I will remove your name and replace it with your pseudonym when I file it. However, I will keep participant contact information with pseudonyms in a separate, password protected file so that I can follow-up with participants during the study. I will keep the password protected file with pseudonyms and matching contact information for five years in case I decide to conduct additional research.

To protect you as a participant, I will store all audio recordings, transcriptions, and notes in a password protected computer file. Researchers will not release identifiable results of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent unless required by law.

Taking part is voluntary

Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

If you decide to stop or withdraw from the study, the information/data collected from or about you up to the point of your withdrawal will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless you make a written request to remove, return, or destroy the information.

If you have questions

The main researcher conducting this study is Mary Roberts, a graduate student, at the University of Georgia. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Mary Roberts at internshipstudy@gmail.com or at 478-445-2780. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706.542.3199 or irb@uga.edu.

Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:

To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. Your signature below indicates that you have read or had read to you this entire consent form, and have had all of your questions answered.

_____	_____	_____
Name of Researcher	Signature	Date
_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Signature	Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

APPENDIX D

DATA COLLECTION MATERIALS

Pre-Interview Journal Reflection. Please respond to the following questions. Submit to me at internshipstudy@gmail.com or in the Career Center prior to your interview.

1. Describe your career commitments (career choice/decision/plan/goal/interest) prior to your internship experience.
2. Describe an aspect of your internship that helped you explore those career commitments.
3. Self-authorship is a term used by Kegan (1994) and Baxter Magolda (2001) to describe when people arrive at their own decisions based on an internal rather than external belief system. Now, think about your recent internship and your career commitments (career choice/decision/plan/goal/interest). What does that definition of self-authorship mean to you?

Post-Interview Journal Reflection. Please respond to the following questions. Submit to me at internshipstudy@gmail.com or in the Career Center.

1. What is your current career commitment (career choice/decision/plan/goal/interest)?
2. Please describe how your internships did or did not influence your current career commitment (decision/choice/plans/goals/interests).

Long Interview Protocol

a. Demographic and informational questions

1. How many hours per week did you work?
2. Did you receive academic credit for the internship?
3. Type of organization where you interned: non-profit for-profit government
4. What are the occupations of your parents(s)?
5. What is the educational level of your parent(s)?
6. How do you describe your race/ethnicity?
7. How do you describe your gender?

b. Interviews Questions

1. Tell me about the career interests you mentioned in your reflection journal. How did you arrive at those?
2. Why did you decide to complete an internship? This particular internship?
3. When you began the internship, what did you hope to accomplish? Learn? Improve about yourself professionally and personally?
4. Think about your internship experience and “particular moments of awareness and impact” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 2269). Describe your experience.
5. At your internships, what did you accomplish? Learn? Improve about yourself professionally and personally?
6. What changes about yourself did you experience?
7. Did the internship experience ever make you question previous career interests/commitments? Tell me about that experience.
8. How has the internship experience influenced how you think about your career commitments?
9. How do you think your internship influenced your internal belief system in regards to your career decisions?
10. Since the internship, how would you describe the way you relate to the world and people around you?
11. You have completed an internship. You are a senior in college. What are some ideas you have about your future?
12. When you talk to friends, family, faculty...what do you tell them about your plans for the future?
13. Have you experienced any challenges or conflicts between what you want to do and what others think you should do? Tell me about those.
14. What are you doing now to transition to a career after graduation?
15. In the reflection journal, I ask you to talk about what self-authorship or an internal belief system mean to you in relation to your internship and career interests. Do you have any additional thoughts you would like to add?