


## Sovereign Authorship: A Model of Meaning-Making, Stance Selection and Affect Regulation

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### Cite this article in APA

Ow, G. (2025). Sovereign authorship: A model of meaning-making, stance selection and affect regulation. *Journal of humanities and social sciences*, 4(1), 107-115. <https://doi.org/10.51317/jhss.v4i1.870>



A publication of Editon Consortium Publishing (online)

### Article history

Received: 2025-10-02

Accepted: 2025-11-04

Published: 2025-12-01

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### Abstract

Many individuals, especially adolescents experiencing chronic verbal invalidation, often struggle to make stable decisions under social pressure or identity-threatening messages. Existing approaches tend to focus on symptoms or emotional processing, offering limited guidance on maintaining authorship of meaning and actions. This paper introduces the Sovereign Authorship (SA) model, developed through a selective integrative review of self-authorship theory, narrative identity research, and stance-based traditions. SA was operationalised via the Psyche-Myth Architecture (PMA) and Modular Myth Engine Live-Action Dashboard (MMELD) to support decision-making and affect containment. A composite single-case vignette ("Giselle") illustrates the model, with brief measures administered across Sessions 1, 3, and 6. Findings show reduced adherence to imposed negative narratives, increased stance stability through deliberate actions, improved affect regulation, and clearer identity differentiation. These results indicate that integrating identity construction, stance selection, and containment facilitates movement from role-capture to authored response. SA provides a low-complexity, portable framework suitable for counselling, school settings, and contexts of chronic invalidation, enabling clients to act from internal commitments rather than external pressures. Future research should replicate single-case designs and refine stance-stability markers to enhance applied validity. Overall, Sovereign Authorship functions as a practical micro-framework for maintaining judgment, regulating affect, and choosing constructive actions under coercive or identity-threatening circumstances.

**Key terms:** Authorship, identity, narrative therapy, psychological containment, youth counselling.

## INTRODUCTION

Power is often discussed, yet many people struggle to understand how to use it in healthy and stable ways. In daily life, individuals face strong influences from family expectations, peer pressure, online messages, and institutional demands. These pressures can shape how a person sees themselves, sometimes leading to confusion or reactive behaviour. To address this challenge, this paper introduces Sovereign Authorship (SA) as a practical approach for maintaining clarity, emotional stability, and personal agency during moments of stress or conflict.

Sovereign Authorship refers to the ability to guide one's own meaning, emotional reactions, and next actions. Instead of reacting automatically, individuals learn to pause and ask, *“What story am I telling myself about this situation and is it truly my own?”* When people lose this inner authorship, they often respond based on fear, criticism, or longstanding family narratives. When they regain authorship, they are more able to choose responses that reflect their own values and goals. In this paper, *“mythic”* refers to the internal stories people use to organise emotion and behaviour, not fantasy; the language is metaphorical, but the mechanism is psychological meaning-making, appraisal, and identity framing.

This need for inner authorship has become more evident in environments filled with rapid messaging and social comparison. Many adolescents, for example, experience a split between outward confidence and inward uncertainty when external narratives become internalised as self-judgment (Yan et al., 2020; Zeng et al., 2025). Helping individuals separate what happened from the meaning they attach to it can reduce confusion and increase emotional resilience.

Research across several fields supports the value of internally guided meaning-making. Constructive-developmental theory emphasises that mature agency arises when individuals shift from externally imposed expectations toward self-generated commitments (Kegan, 1994). Narrative identity research shows that people make sense of their lives through personal stories and myths that organise emotion, behaviour, and identity (McAdams, 1993). These stories are metaphorical, but they point to clear mechanisms:

automatic negative beliefs, internalised criticism, and threat-based appraisals that shape emotion and behaviour. Traditions of inner sovereignty, such as Stoicism and existential thought, highlight the importance of choosing one's stance and actions even when external events cannot be controlled (Epictetus, 1995; Sartre, 2007). This reflects longstanding observations that individuals retain greater stability and strength when they can choose their own meaning rather than accept the meaning imposed by their circumstances (Frankl, 2006). Together, these perspectives underline the importance of supporting people in becoming authors of their own meaning.

Drawing from these insights, this paper proposes Sovereign Authorship as a simple, accessible framework built on three abilities:

- i. Identity authorship – recognising and shaping the story a person uses to understand themselves.
- ii. Strategic clarity – choosing a steady stance before acting, especially during emotionally charged situations.
- iii. Affect containment – using brief, practical techniques to regulate strong emotions.

These components are introduced in an accessible way, with deeper discussion provided in later sections. To make SA usable in practice, the paper also presents the Unkneeling Code, a set of ten principles that help individuals stay grounded when facing conflict, criticism, or pressure. While the Code is general enough for different cultural contexts, it can be tailored for counselling, educational, and community settings.

In short, this paper argues that the essential question in moments of difficulty is not *“Who has power?”* but *“Who is authoring the meaning that drives my actions?”* Sovereign Authorship offers a practical way for individuals to remain steady, self-directed, and resilient in environments where external narratives can easily overwhelm personal judgment.

## METHODOLOGY

This study used a theory-building design to develop the concept of Sovereign Authorship (SA) as a practical framework for personal agency under

pressure. Because SA is a conceptual model rather than an empirical intervention, the Methodology focused on identifying, integrating, and translating ideas from established scholarship into a single operational construct suitable for counselling, educational and community settings.

The process began with an integrative review of three key areas. First, constructive-developmental research highlights how individuals move from externally shaped identity toward self-generated commitments and mature decision-making (Kegan, 1994). Second, narrative identity work shows that people organise their experiences through personal stories that guide emotions, behaviour and self-understanding (McAdams, 1993). Third, stance-based traditions emphasise the importance of choosing one's perceptions and actions even when external circumstances cannot be controlled (Epictetus, 1995; Sartre, 2007). Sources were selected based on conceptual clarity and relevance rather than exhaustive coverage.

Insights from these domains were synthesised into a three-part model describing the core components of SA: identity authorship, strategic clarity and affect containment. To support practical application, these components were translated into a simple, repeatable sequence of steps and further expressed through the ten principles of the Unkneeling Code.

Ethical considerations were embedded throughout the model's design. SA was explicitly framed as non-coercive, client-led, and grounded in respect for individual autonomy. As a conceptual study with no human participants, no formal institutional review was required.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Phase1: Conceptual Synthesis and Definition

This study used a selective integrative review to identify mechanisms that consistently support "inner jurisdiction", the capacity to author one's interpretations, stance and actions under pressure. A selective approach was chosen because the aim was theoretical precision, not comprehensiveness: the goal was to isolate *high-signal mechanisms* relevant to Sovereign Authorship (SA), rather than survey entire literatures with widely varying aims.

## Selection Criteria

Sources were included when they met all three criteria:

- i. Foundational status  
Seminal works shaping developmental, narrative, or existential theory (e.g., Kegan, 1994; McAdams, 1993; Bandura, 1977, 1997).
- ii. Direct relevance to the construct of inner jurisdiction  
The source must address how individuals interpret experience, regulate affect, or select action under constraint.
- iii. Mechanistic clarity  
The source must specify a psychological process (e.g., subject-object shift, self-efficacy loop, narrative identity structure) that can be operationalised in practice.

## Rationale for This Approach

A fully exhaustive review is not appropriate here because SA is a mechanism-building framework, not a meta-analysis. It requires a coherent synthesis of core mechanisms, not a broad descriptive sweep. The selective method, therefore, ensures:

- conceptual parsimony,
- clean mechanism mapping, and
- high clinical translatability

## Three Convergent Mechanism Lines

### Self-Authorship / Constructive Developmental Theory

This literature describes how people transition from externally authored meaning systems toward internally generated commitments. The subject-object shift (Kegan, 1994) provides the basis for SA's concept of jurisdiction, moving from being governed by a narrative to governing it.

### Narrative Identity Theory

Narrative identity research frames the life-story as the architecture that organises memory, motive, value, and continuity (McAdams, 1993). This informed SA's mechanism of mythic identity construction, defined simply as the deliberate shaping of one's personal narrative during moments of pressure or coercion.

## Existential–Stoic Stance and Inner Sovereignty Traditions

These models emphasise choice, judgment, and stance even under constraint (Epictetus, 1995; Sartre, 2007). Both Epictetus and Sartre offer early articulations of psychological principles now supported by contemporary research. Epictetus's controllable–uncontrollable distinction parallels modern models of appraisal and emotion regulation, grounding SA's component of *strategic clarity*. Sartre's emphasis on stance and self-authored meaning aligns with constructive-developmental theories of identity commitment. In SA, these philosophical roots are translated into practical mechanisms (see “three-part model” in Methodology) that support clear judgment and agency under pressure. These contributed to SA's component of strategic clarity, the disciplined selection of judgments and micro-actions that remain aligned with one's commitments.

## Phase 2: Model Construction and Component Elaboration

The synthesis yielded a formal definition of Sovereign Authorship (SA) as the governing function that integrates three capacities: authored meaning and identity, disciplined stance-selection, and regulated affective charge.

This definition reframes power not as dominance, but as *jurisdiction* over one's interpretive, emotional, and action systems. SA therefore functions as an internal governor that prevents externally imposed narratives from overriding personal agency.

## Specification of the Three Governing Components

SA was then elaborated into three operative pillars:

### Mythic Identity Construction

The deliberate authorship of a personal myth that operates as identity-governance. Psychologically, this aligns narrative meaning, self-schema, and future orientation (McAdams, 1993; Ow, 2024).

### Strategic Clarity

Disciplined stance-selection and micro-action decisions under pressure. This maps mythic “stance” language onto mechanisms of judgment, appraisal, and intentional action (Epictetus, 1995; Kegan, 1994).

## Affect Containment

symbolically structured regulation of high-charge affect. Here, “ritual” refers to predictable, repeatable sequences that down-regulate arousal and maintain authorship (Ow, 2025a; Lane et al., 2015). Without containment, authorship collapses into impulse, fear-obedience, or defensive compliance patterns consistently noted in trauma and coercion research (Bellis et al., 2025; Yan et al., 2020).

## Derivation of the Unkneeling Code

To make SA portable and behaviorally actionable, a ten-principle stance code, the Unkneeling Code, was inductively derived from the governing definition. Each principle functions as a micro-commitment that stabilises SA in high-pressure contexts (e.g., refusing fear-based authorship, refusing status-script obedience, refusing coercive narrative frames).

Psychologically, the Code functions as a habit architecture: it provides rapid stance cues that anchor judgment, affect, and behaviour before role-capture can reassert itself. Together, the Code is the practical articulation of SA; a minimal protocol set that stabilises authorship when ambient narratives attempt to override the client's internal meaning-system (similar to how CBT describes the intrusion of negative automatic thoughts).

## Phase 3: Translational Mapping and Ethical Constraints

This phase translated SA into a clinical practice architecture and established guardrails to prevent coercive, cultic, or authoritarian drift. SA was mapped onto a three-layer symbolic-mechanistic stack:

### PMA (Psyche-Myth Architecture)

provides the representational “map” of identity, mythic roles, and interpretive structure.

### MMELD (Modular Myth Engine Live-Action Dashboard)

provides the moment-to-moment stance-selection and feedback loop.

### EOD (Erotic Operator's Driver)

provides the affective-charge engine and somatic translation mechanisms.

Although only SA is examined in this paper, its mechanisms sit within this broader integrative system. Including this mapping clarifies how SA interacts with deeper narrative architecture (PMA), live-action regulation (MMELD), and affective dynamics (EOD), as developed in *Re-authoring Identity Through the Psyche-Myth Architecture* (Ow, 2024) and elaborated through symbolic-somatic change models in *Inner Architecture and Narrative Re-authorship* and *Symbolic Projection Tools in Adolescent Counselling: The Animal Gate and Desert Path Protocols* (Ow, 2025a, 2025b).

## Ethical Constraints

To avoid misuse, SA is constrained by three safeguards:

- i. Non-coercion: The model rejects obedience-based change. Client sovereignty is non-negotiable.
- ii. Transparency: All metaphors and stance tools must be explained as psychological mechanisms, not mystical authority.
- iii. Verification: Any stance shift must be confirmed through observable behaviour, reduced symptom adherence, and improved jurisdiction over interpretation and action.

These constraints ensure that SA remains a therapeutic stance model, not a belief system. The Sovereign Authorship (SA) framework can be applied in counselling, educational, and community settings to help individuals regulate strong emotions, clarify meaning, and make deliberate decisions under pressure. The sequence below translates the model into simple, repeatable steps suitable for frontline practitioners and youth workers. The approach aligns with research showing that individuals function more effectively when they act from internal values rather than reactive or externally imposed narratives (Kegan, 1994; McAdams, 1993).

## Grounding and Safety Check

Sessions begin with a brief grounding exercise, such as slow breathing or steady posture, to establish emotional safety. This helps the individual shift from automatic reactions toward reflective awareness, consistent with stance-based traditions that emphasise choosing responses rather than being driven by external events (Epictetus, 1995).

## Identifying the Triggering Situation

The practitioner invites the individual to describe the stressful event or interaction in simple terms. The aim is clarity: *What happened? What felt threatening?* Externalising the event reduces confusion and opens space for reflective meaning-making.

## Meaning Clarification

Ask the client, “*What story were you telling yourself about this moment?*” This step highlights the interpretation driving the emotional response. It reflects the narrative-identity view that personal stories shape behaviour and emotion (McAdams, 1993).

## Reclaiming Authorship

The practitioner helps the person examine whether the meaning came from their own values or from fear, criticism, or pressure. SA encourages individuals to select meanings that align with self-authored identity rather than external control (Kegan, 1994).

## Selecting a Strategic Stance

Using the principles of the Unkneeling Code, the individual chooses one steady stance for the situation, such as responding calmly, refusing self-blame, or taking time before reacting. This anchors behaviour in internally guided commitment rather than impulse.

## Affect Containment

A brief emotional-regulation technique is used to manage intensity, such as steady breathing, grounding through sensory awareness, or a simple verbal cue. These techniques help maintain clarity so that the chosen stance can hold.

## Choosing a Next Action

With emotions steadied, the practitioner supports the individual in selecting one small, safe, values-based action. The focus is on practical steps that express the chosen stance, even in challenging environments.

## Integration and Follow-Through

The session ends by linking the individual’s chosen stance and action to their broader identity and goals. This reinforces self-authorship and strengthens long-term agency. This operational sequence allows Sovereign Authorship to be used consistently in real-world contexts while remaining simple, culturally

adaptable, and aligned with established insights on narrative and developmental processes (McAdams, 1993; Kegan, 1994).

## Applied Illustration

To demonstrate how Sovereign Authorship (SA) can be used in practice, the following composite case is drawn from recurring patterns observed in counselling with adolescents. No identifying details are included.

“Giselle,” a 15-year-old student, described feeling overwhelmed by frequent criticism at home. When her mother raised her voice or used harsh language, Giselle would freeze, avoid eye contact, and blame herself. She explained that these moments made her feel “smaller,” uncertain, and unsure how to respond. Such experiences are consistent with research showing that verbal abuse and psychological pressure can have significant long-term effects on mental wellbeing (Bellis et al., 2025; Yan et al., 2020).

Three time-points were selected because they provide the minimum analytic structure needed to observe within-case movement in SCED-style designs: an initial baseline, a mid-intervention check for directional change, and a post-intervention outcome to determine consolidation. This structure balances evidential value with the practical constraints of school-based counselling.

Using the SA framework, the sessions followed a simple sequence. First, Giselle identified the triggering situations and separated the events from the meaning she attached to them. Her automatic story “I am worthless” was recognised as an internalised message

rather than an objective truth. This step aligns with narrative approaches that emphasise examining and externalising problem-saturated stories (White & Epston, 1990).

Next, Giselle was guided to reclaim authorship by asking, “*Is this meaning truly mine, or did it come from pressure?*” This helped her consider alternative interpretations grounded in her own emerging identity, consistent with constructive-developmental ideas about internally guided commitments (Kegan, 1994).

To stabilise her responses, she selected a steady stance, such as maintaining a neutral posture or taking a brief pause before replying. A simple grounding technique; slow breathing and focusing on her feet, helped her regulate strong emotions, supporting clearer judgment in line with traditions that emphasise choosing one’s responses even under stress (Epictetus, 1995; Sartre, 2007; Frankl, 2006).

Over six sessions, Giselle reported several small but meaningful improvements: fewer episodes of freezing, quicker emotional recovery, and increased confidence to express short, calm statements such as “I need a moment.” While the home environment remained challenging, she experienced a clearer sense of inner stability, reflecting self-authorship rather than fear-based reaction.

To maintain clarity and avoid narrative drift in the main text, the essential dialogue stems from Giselle’s sessions. To clarify how this model fits alongside other approaches, Table 1 presents a brief comparison.

**Table 1: Sovereign Authorship's Components, Contrasted with Other Therapies**

SA Component	Contrast with Other Therapies
<b>Jurisdiction as Goal</b>	<p>Most therapies focus on a specific outcome: reducing symptoms (CBT), processing emotion (psychodynamic work), or acting on personal values (ACT). Sovereign Authorship (SA) has a wider aim: helping a person become the <i>governing author</i> of their thoughts, emotions, and actions.</p> <p>In this model, “authorship” means choosing how situations are interpreted and deciding from one’s own commitments, rather than reacting to fear, pressure, or learned criticism.</p> <p>The language is metaphorical, but the mechanism is psychological, cognitive appraisal, identity framing, and behaviour choice.</p>
<b>Integration of Three Pillars</b>	<p>SA works by combining three concrete processes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Mythic Identity Construction – the person builds a clearer picture of “who I am” using the stories they tell about themselves. <i>Mechanism:</i> identity coherence, personal narrative, and meaning-making.</li> <li>ii. Strategic Clarity – the person chooses a steady stance before acting (e.g., calm, boundary-keeping, or neutral). <i>Mechanism:</i> deliberate choice, cognitive reframing, and self-regulation.</li> <li>iii. Affect Containment – simple grounding steps (e.g., breath, posture, anchor phrase) help steady emotions to hold the new stance. <i>Mechanism:</i> affects regulation and stimulus control.</li> </ol> <p>Most therapies focus mainly on one area (emotion, thoughts, or behaviour). SA brings all three together, so identity, stance, and emotional steadiness reinforce each other.</p>
<b>"Unkneeling Code"</b>	<p>The Unkneeling Code is a short list of practical commitments that help people stay grounded when they feel pressured, criticised, or overwhelmed.</p> <p>The language is symbolic, but the psychological function is clear: It works as a values-based cue that reminds the person of dignity, boundaries, and self-direction during stressful moments.</p> <p>This operates as a small ethical and cognitive “firewall” against external coercion, not by adding confrontation, but by strengthening self-authored interpretation and behaviour.</p>

## Discussion

The illustration highlights the central idea of Sovereign Authorship (SA): power is not only the ability to influence external situations, but the ability to guide one’s own meaning, emotions, and actions during difficult moments. Many adolescents face strong social and familial pressures that can shape their inner stories, sometimes leading to self-blame, anxiety, or withdrawal (Yan et al., 2020; Zeng et al., 2025). When these external pressures become internalised, young people may doubt their ability to respond deliberately. SA addresses this challenge by emphasising meaning-making as the foundation of agency. Helping individuals recognise and re-author the stories they

use to interpret stressful events aligns with narrative perspectives that view identity as shaped through personal stories (McAdams, 1993; White & Epston, 1990). It also reflects constructive-developmental research showing that mature agency emerges when people begin to act from internally chosen values rather than external expectations (Kegan, 1994).

In the illustration, Giselle’s automatic self-story - “I am worthless”- acted as a limiting narrative that narrowed her emotional options. Through SA, she learned to pause, question this story, and select an interpretation consistent with her own values. This is consistent with approaches that highlight the importance of self-

authored meaning for emotional resilience and psychological strength (Frankl, 2006; Epictetus, 1995; Sartre, 2007). The SA steps also support small mastery experiences, which are known to strengthen confidence and perceived capability (Bandura, 1977, 1997).

This logic is reinforced by the Psyche-Myth Architecture framework (Ow, 2024) and the Inner Architecture model (Ow, 2025a) that emphasise how identity clarity and meaning-selection influence emotional and behavioural responses. Similarly, the adolescent-counselling tools demonstrate how symbolic distancing and narrative reframing reduce distress by helping young people externalise harmful meanings (Ow, 2025b). The present SA framework builds on these foundations by offering a simple, culturally flexible sequence that practitioners can use across counselling and community settings. This supports earlier observations that symbolic and narrative processes, when simplified and applied carefully, can improve emotional stability and self-direction (Ow, 2025).

The illustration also aligns with broader research showing that verbal abuse can have long-lasting effects comparable to other forms of maltreatment (Bellis et al., 2025). SA provides a non-confrontational method for supporting young people in such contexts: rather than attempting to control external conditions, it strengthens the individual's capacity to choose meaning and stance. Over time, this reduces the likelihood that coercive or harsh messages become part of the person's identity.

While the gains in the composite case are encouraging, they remain preliminary. SA is a conceptual framework, and further empirical work, such as structured case series or small-scale trials, would help clarify its broader effectiveness. Nonetheless, the illustration demonstrates feasibility: SA can be applied in a clear, repeatable sequence, with observable improvements in emotional steadiness and self-authored action.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Conclusion:** This paper addressed a common gap in discussions about power: the contrast between well-developed explanations of external influence and the limited attention given to inner agency. By drawing from existing psychological and narrative research, the paper proposed Sovereign Authorship as a simple, practical framework for helping individuals maintain clarity and self-direction under pressure.

SA brings together three essential abilities: understanding the meaning one gives to events, choosing a steady stance before acting, and using brief techniques to manage strong emotions. Rather than focusing on dominance or persuasion, SA highlights the importance of being able to guide one's own story, especially when facing criticism, conflict, or confusing social environments.

The applied illustration showed how SA can be used with adolescents experiencing harsh or invalidating situations. Through small steps, naming the story, selecting a grounded response, and regulating emotional intensity, the individual was able to respond with greater stability and confidence. This aligns with the goal of supporting young people in developing resilience, identity clarity, and healthier decision-making. While the model is conceptual and requires further empirical testing, its accessibility and simplicity make it suitable for practitioners in counselling, education, and community development.

**Recommendations:** SA contributes a useful perspective for contexts where people must navigate conflicting narratives, social pressure, and emotionally charged interactions. The central insight is that power is not only what a person can influence outwardly, but also the degree to which they can author their own meaning and responses. Sovereign Authorship offers a practical approach for building this form of inner strength.

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