APPLICATION OF FAITH DEVELOPMENT THEORY

FOR UNDERSTANDING STUDENTS' TRANSFORMATIONAL LEARNING

AS A RESULT OF BONFIRE AT TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

A Dissertation

by

BRENT RUSSELL PETERSEN

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2012

Major Subject: Educational Administration

Application of Faith Development Theory for Understanding Students'

Transformational Learning as a Result of Bonfire at Texas A&M University

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ABSTRACT

Application of Faith Development Theory for Understanding Students'

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(May 2012)

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Considerable attention by scholars for the last two decades has focused on issues of spirituality and higher education. Literature in the field of college student affairs suggest that, in order promote the development of the whole student, practitioners in the field should consider adopting theories of faith and spiritual development. This study considered the application of faith development theory, as developed by James W. Fowler, for contextualizing students' response to the 1999 Bonfire tragedy at Texas A&M University. The primary intent of this study was to (1) understand how a student's level of faith development relates to the transformational learning resulting from the Bonfire tragedy, (2) whether such a tragedy was a trigger for transformational learning, and (3) how student affairs professionals can utilize faith development theory for understanding students' narrative account of the tragedy and their commitment to the university.

This study utilized a comparative case study approach. Nine respondents were recruited and participated in a semi-structured and the classic Faith Development interviews. The accounts provided by three respondents were selected for in-depth analysis. The investigative tools used for this analysis were hermeneutical and included constant comparative methodology and narrative analysis.

Results from the study indicate that transformation of meaning schemes and meaning perspectives are key components of young-adult faith development. Evidence indicates that Bonfire was a student activity that was unique to Texas A&M University and had the potential to become a center of value and power for many students. Findings suggest that faith development theory can be an effective tool for exploring the structure of students' faith relationships and their commitment thereto. Based on an analysis of the narrative accounts, the Bonfire tragedy was a source of cognitive dissonance but not necessarily a disorienting dilemma. For some students the 1999 tragedy was part of a longer cumulative process that advanced the faith development process. Implications from the research findings and recommendations for future research are explored at length.

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my loving wife, Michelle, for her unfailing support and encouragement throughout these many years and to my children, Charles, Jesslin and David, who bring joy and continual excitement into my life. I am forever blessed by each and every one of you.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Beginning of the Story

The genesis of this dissertation occurred in the summer of 2003, during which time I

took a course in college student development. In that class I and three other classmates

presented a report on James Fowler's faith development theory (FDT). As I studied

Fowler's theory, I became fascinated by his contention that all human faith relationships

can be understood as having a triadic or covenantal structure. Fowler (1981) derived this

premise from the theologian and ethicist H. Richard Niebuhr. Niebuhr, having been

influenced by G. H. Mead's theory of symbolic-interaction and Josiah Royce's

philosophy of loyalty, conceived of faith as a universal human phenomenon that required

an *I* and a *Thou* in relation to an *It* (Niebuhr, 1989). This element of mutual concern –

this "it" – fosters the existence of genuine community and communication. As a result,

all faith relationships can be qualified as having various levels of fidelity or infidelity, of

trust or mistrust. As Niebuhr (1989) notes, "The self not only acknowledges the other as

another knower but in believing and disbelieving him [or her], it trusts or distrusts him

[or her] as another self that has the double freedom of being able to bind itself by

promises and yet break them also" (p. 47).

This dissertation follows the style of *Adult Education Quarterly*.

As an academic advisor working at Texas A&M, it occurred to me that it may be helpful for academic and student affairs professionals to consider relationships between college students and institutions of higher learning as having a triadic-covenantal structure. Questions that came to my mind included: Is it possible for students to develop faith relationships with peers and other student social groups that supersede their relationship to their particular college or university? How do students develop and express their loyalty to their college or university? How does a student react to an institution that she perceives as disloyal? How can previous faith relationships affect a student's interpretation of her college experiences? If Fowler is correct and a person's capacity of faith develops over several life stages, should his theory of faith development be embraced by student affairs professionals (for brevity, I include academic support professionals within the category of student affairs professions)? In particular, how does Fowler's theory correspond with theories of human development that comprise the theory base of the student affairs profession? And finally, what does the inclusion of FDT offer to the profession, which has as its goal the growth, development, and education of the whole student (Young, 2003)?

Introduction to the Research Problem

Issues of faith, spirituality, and religion are prominent concerns for many college students. Findings from a recent study by the Higher Education Research Institute (2004), *The Spiritual Life of College Students*, indicate that three-quarters of college students are concerned with issues of spirituality and life purpose. Nearly half of the study respondents believe it is very important to seek opportunities to grow spiritually.

For example, the willingness to discuss the meaning of life with friends was a strong indicator of students' spirituality, and the willingness to follow religious teaching was a marker for understanding a student's religiousness (Higher Education Research Institute, 2004). However, the cognitive and emotive processes needed to grow spiritually in life are being lived out by college students in an ever increasing globalized and "flattened" world (Friedman, 2007).

With the rise of globalization in the twentieth-century, spiritual issues and questions concerning the purpose of life are increasingly difficult for adolescents and young-adults to navigate. Globalization, contend Osmer and Schweitzer (2003), must be understood not simply as an interlocking of technological, economic, and cultural systems, but as a new form of consciousness. Global reflexivity, as they call it, is "a heightened awareness of and reflection on cultural 'others' and the construction of diverse images of the global whole" (p. 143). Today's college students are forced to navigate their spiritual quests in a world that, though connected, is increasingly diverse and fragmented.

Higher education student affairs professionals have historically recognized that for students to function in a complex and interdependent society requires the integrated development of their intellectual, personal, and social dimensions—i.e., the whole student (Baxter Magolda, 2001). Rendón (2006), in an invited response paper to NPEC 2006 National Symposium on Postsecondary Student Success, made these remarks concerning a theory of educating the whole person:

> What does it mean to be an educated person in the world today? The
> answer to this question should drive a new definition of student success.

>In my view, students should not be only critical thinkers and problem solvers; they should be able to lead, examine, and work with conflicting perspectives, learn to work with diverse cultures, have a sense of purpose in life, have compassion and appreciate the importance of giving back to communities in need, and be a life-long learner and a global citizen. Most of these "learning outcomes" are not considered by some policymakers who are focused only on checking to see if students stay in college, earn good grades, and graduate. A theory of educating the whole person would speak to education more broadly and not focus only on intellectual, but also social, emotional, and spiritual development. (p. 23)

In an era of increasing globalization, however, achieving this integrated development is a complex task (Osmer & Schweitzer, 2003). To promote holistic development of their students, student affairs specialists have historically turned to numerous psychosocial and developmental theories. Popular theories, among many others, include Chickering and Reisser's theory of psychosocial development, Kohlberg's and Gilligan's theories of cognitive-structural development, and the Myers-Briggs theory of personality type (Evans, 1996). However, traditionally, missing from such lists are theories of faith and spiritual development. Love and Talbot (1999) suggest that the absence of such theories is a result of the idea of spirituality being associated with religion. This is regrettable, for, as they point out, "By failing to address students' spiritual development in practice and research we are ignoring an important aspect of their development" (Love & Talbot, 1999, p. 362). In response to this failure, several scholars draw attention to the seminal research of James Fowler and his theory of faith development (Love, 2002; Love & Talbot, 1999; Parks, 2000).

Faith Development Theory

According to Fowler (1981), faith is a human universal whereby people make meaning of their lives. Typical of the structural-developmental tradition, Fowler (1981, 1986b,

2001) contends that a person's faith develops—or is transformed—through several stages that he characterizes as sequential, invariant, and hierarchical. These stages are: primal, intuitive-projective, mythic-literal, synthetic-conventional, individuative-reflective, conjunctive, and universalizing. Each faith stage is comprised of seven aspects, or what I like to think of as competencies: (1) form of logic (derived from Piaget), (2) role taking (derived from Selman), (3) forms of moral judgment (derived from Kohlberg), (4) bounds of social awareness, (5) locus of authority, (6) form of world coherence, and (7) the role of symbols (Fowler, 1986b).

These seven interlacing aspects of faith ultimately form structural wholes—or stages—that can be described as "relatively equilibrated integrations" of thought, valuing, and constitutive-knowing (Fowler, 1986b, p. 26). Between these stages are transitional phases brought about by the impact of new experiences, marker events, disorienting dilemmas, and exposure to new domain specific logics (Fowler, 1986b; Mezirow, 1991). A person's faith development is then intimately linked to his or her experiential learning (Mulqueen & Elias, 2000). But, as Kegan (2000) points out, not all experiences result in transformative learning (i.e. new meaning perspectives). Some of the learning that occurs in college simply adds to a person's fund of knowledge, but experiential learning that is transformative leads to changes in how a person knows.

Background of the Study

Since college student activities and programs are designed to promote personal development and transformative learning (Saunders & Cooper, 2001), then understanding students' faith as a mode of knowing and construing is of central

importance (Fowler, 1986b; Parks, 2000). Further, it goes without saying that all transformational learning takes place within particular contexts; in the case of this study, Texas A&M University and the Bonfire tradition.

As an academic advisor at Texas A&M University, I was daily confronted by the reality that it is a large, complex, chaotic institution. It is chaotic in the sense that, at any given point in time, it is possible to identify characteristics of order and stability on one hand, followed by disorder and irregularity on the other (Stacey, 1991). In an institution such as Texas A&M University, with over 50,000 students, 10 academic colleges, multiple cultures, and often conflicting goals, dysfunctional organizational practices commonly develop (Texas A&M University, 2001). Within this complex system, the Student Affairs division is charged with the task of facilitating learning through developmental opportunities and the creation of an inclusive campus community (Texas A&M University, Division of Student Affairs, n.d.). A key facet of the division's practice then is offering programmatic interventions (commonly referred to as student activities) designed to promote individual and community development (Saunders & Cooper, 2001).

At Texas A&M University, one of the most significant student-led activities was Bonfire: an annual burning of a mammoth-size stack of wood the night before the season's final football game against arch rival the University of Texas (Texas A&M University, 2001). To many students, Bonfire symbolized the very spirit of the A&M culture for over ninety years. Sadly, though, the tradition evolved over years into a risky event, for early on the morning of November 18, 1999, tragedy struck when the stack of

logs collapsed, killing twelve students and injuring many others. Bonfire was subsequently cancelled that year and—to the regret of many students and alumni—has not been formally reinstituted by the university. What was meant to be a festive and socially significant ritual may now be characterized as a disorienting dilemma for many students (cf., Jack Mezirow, 2000; Texas A&M University, 2001).

Statement of Problem

According to C. G. Wrenn, "the only justification for student personnel services is that they can be shown to meet the needs of students . . . these include both the basic psychological needs of all young people and the specific needs that are the direct result of the college experience" (as cited in Winston, 2003, p. 484). Student affairs professionals should, to use Winston's (2003) words, "possess carefully cultivated and practiced helping skills" in order to help students cope with various personal and environmental factors (p. 485). In order to accomplish such a task, student affairs professionals need to be familiar with many student development theories (McEwen, 2003). Love and Talbot (1999) point out, however, that student affairs professionals have routinely ignored spiritual development theories. Student affairs professionals need to understand how faith, along with values such as hope and love, contribute to the formation and persistence of campus communities and the developmental processes of students (Love and Talbot, 1999).

Purpose of Study

My purpose for doing this study was to address the above referenced void, by investigating Fowler's faith development theory and its potential contribution to the

student affairs theory base. Through this investigation I sought to understand how students made sense of the 1999 Bonfire tragedy and the subsequent cessation of the Bonfire ritual at Texas A&M University. Additionally, I explored the type and intensity of the students' transformational learning resulting from Bonfire and how this learning (or lack thereof) related to faith development theory and the developmental process of young-adult students (Mazirow, 1991).

Research Questions

My research was driven by three research questions:

1. How does a student's level of faith development relate to her type and intensity of transformational learning resulting from the Bonfire tragedy at Texas A&M University?

2. How can the loss of Bonfire, a significant communal ritual, be understood as a disorienting dilemma as delineated in Mezirow's transformational learning theory (TLT)?

3. How can Fowler's faith development theory be applied by student affairs professionals and other college administrators to contextualize the students' response to the Bonfire tragedy?

Methodology

The primary intent of my study was then to (1) understand how a student's level of faith development relates to the transformational learning (or lack thereof) resulting from the Bonfire tragedy, (2) whether such a tragedy was a trigger for transformational learning, and (3) how student affairs professionals can utilize FDT for understanding students'

narrative account and meaning-making of a tragic life event and their commitment to

centers of supra-ordinate values, as well as their commitment to Texas A&M University,

Bonfire, and other groups or individuals deemed important.

Since, as Fowler (2001) points out, the structural operations grounding faith

comprise only half of a person's faith development story, it is necessary to consider a

person's content of faith—the emotional and imaginal responses to life that shape a

person's habits, mind, and actions. In order to investigate the previously outlined

questions in sufficient depth, I decided an approach that included narrative, interpretive,

and the "classical" method of faith development research was warranted (Fowler, Streib,

& Keller, 2004; Streib, 2005). Through a three-step process of analysis, I was able to

compare and contrast the narrative accounts of several Aggies who were deeply

impacted by the 1999 Bonfire tragedy. These accounts were derived from two semi-

clinical interviews of each respondent along with the research of historical documents

and artifacts (Fowler, et al., 2004; Patton, 1990).

Participants

The selection of a purposive sample of participants for my study followed Patton's

(1990) notion of intensity sampling. The logic of this type of sample is that lessons may

be learned from people with expert knowledge, which can be understood as neither

extreme nor deviant, about a particular phenomenon. For this study, experts were Aggies

who were present when Bonfire collapsed. Study respondents included (1) students who

were friends or acquaintances with students who were either injured or died as a result of

the incident, and (2) students who worked on Bonfire but were not injured and did not

know personally anyone who was injured or died.

A total of nine respondents were recruited from these two groups resulting in the

establishment of multiple interactive and comparative narrative accounts. Individuals for

this study were identified and recruited through strategic organizational networking, i.e.,

"snowballing" technique (Streeton, Cooke, & Campbell, 2004). From the original pool

of nine respondents three were selected for addressing the research questions.

Procedures

Phase 1 of the inquiry, the orientation and overview phase, consisted of three subparts.

First, the inquiry began with the investigation of documents, commission reports,

manuscripts, media archives, etc. in order to construct a historical narrative of Bonfire

(Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Second, potential informants were contacted to set up initial

interviews. The protocol for these interviews was structured in accordance with

paradigmatic and narrative sense-making theories (see Appendix A). These interviews

included "grand tour" type questions dealing primarily with respondents' relationship to

and understanding of the Bonfire tradition as well as their relationships with other

students and TAMU. The protocol included sequenced open-ended questions designed to

elicit the respondents' narrative-account of the tragedy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985;

Spradley, 1979). Third, after the initial interview, respondents completed (by themselves

and on their own time) the biographically-oriented Life Tapestry Exercise and then took

part in the Faith Development Interview (Fowler, et al., 2004, see Appendices B & C).

The Life Tapestry Exercise is an integral part of the Faith Development Interview and

was administered for the purpose of enriching the interview process by helping respondents reflect upon questions and issues that frequently require a significant level of introspection (Fowler, et al., 2004).

Instrumentation & Data Analysis

Since this study is qualitative the primary instrument is the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In order to investigate how students may have been impacted by the 1999 Bonfire tragedy, I selected a comparative case study approach to bring the students' untold stories to light. The analytic strategy used to interpret these accounts is best described as a two-fold hermeneutic of restoration (or *faith*) and demystification (or *suspicion*) as outlined by Josselson (2004). This analytic strategy consisted of three subparts. First, a hermeneutic analysis of the respondents' accounts of the 1999 Bonfire was conducted. This initial analysis included a content analysis using pre-defined categories derived from Fowler and Niebuhr. Second, a structural analysis of the respondents' Faith Development Interview and completed Life Tapestry Exercise was conducted in order to determine a faith stage assignment (Fowler, et al., 2004). Once a respondent's level of faith development was determined, that information was used as a lens to conduct the second, hermeneutic of demystification, analysis. The trustworthiness of this study was established via prolonged engagement, triangulation, and referential adequacy (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Significance of the Study

According to Baxter Magolda (1999), student affairs professionals are faced with the challenge of helping "students develop ways of making meaning that enable them to

meet the expectations necessary to function as effective citizens in today's complex culture and society" (p.605). But any good programmatic intervention must be grounded by appropriate theories. As Saunders and Cooper (2001) point out, "Knowledge of the specific elements of student development theory is critical to designing programs that will be effective and appropriate for a targeted group" (p. 311). Arguably then, as Love and Talbot (1999) suggest, it is time to add faith and spiritual development theories to the student affairs professional's tool box.

Fowler's theory differs from other structural-development theories in that its focus is on the sequential development of faith by which persons shape their relatedness to a transcendent center or centers of value and power (Fowler, 1981). Following Niebuhr, Fowler contends that faith is relational and has a triadic or covenantal structure—self, other(s), and a shared center(s) of supraordinate value and power (SCVP). Along these lines, it is possible then to view A&M students as covenantly bound to other Aggies, who are in turn covenantly bound to the "Spirit of Aggieland"— the SCVP (see Figure 1). For some students this covenantal relationship was symbolically reaffirmed every year by the Bonfire ritual. By taking part in the building of the stack and its burning, students ritualized their shared commitment to the Aggie spirit and their commitment to one another. Therefore when Bonfire collapsed in 1999, not only did twelve students die, but a principal communal ritual that gave social significance and meaning was lost. Furthermore, coping with such a loss could ultimately lead students to reconstruct "a personal world of meaning that has been challenged by the loss" (Neimeyer, Prigerson, & Davies, 2002). In light of the foregoing,
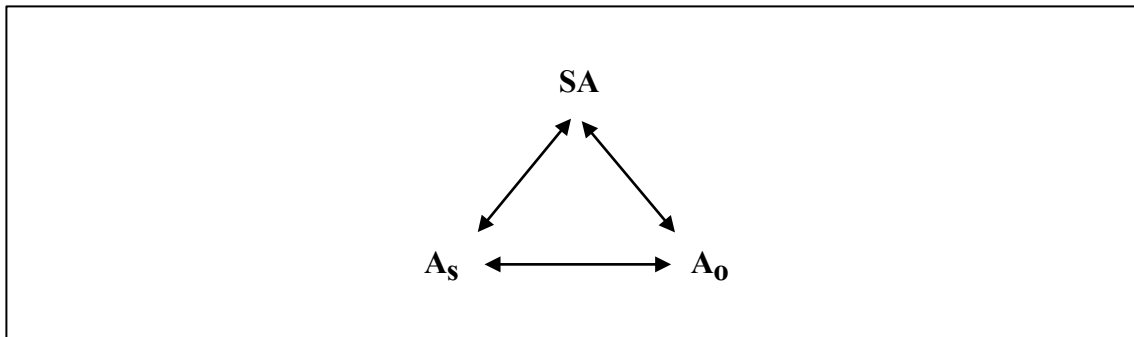
Figure 1. The triadic structure of Aggieland (SA = "Spirit of Aggieland"; A$_S$ = Aggie-self; and A$_O$ = Aggie-other)

FDT offers a unique lens for understanding how students construct meaning out of the narratives that include historic communal tragedies, such as Bonfire 1999.

This study is significant because, first, faith and spiritual development theory has by and large been ignored by the student affairs profession and consequently there is little information about how the theory can be used to develop quality programmatic interventions. Second, there has been very little research about how students' faith constructions (i.e., their faith stage) affect their relationships with institutions of higher education and other students, as well as the relationships throughout their lives. Third, this study will expand our understanding of communal or personal crises as potential triggering events for transformational learning. Fourth, this study will help us understand how students'—who are at a particular faith stage and who are coping with a tragedy—interpret that tragedy and how that interpretation affects their ongoing commitment to institutions of higher learning as well as the undergraduate experience.

Operational Definitions

Bonfire: A student run activity and annual fall ritual that includes the cutting of

trees for the creation of a mammoth-size wood stack that was burned the night before the university's football game against University of Texas.

Disorienting dilemma: Is defined as "an acute internal and personal crisis" and is the first step in perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1991).

Faith – "Faith is: 1) the process of constitutive-knowing 2) underlying a person's composition and maintenance of a comprehensive frame(s) of meaning; 3) generated from the person's attachments or commitments to centers of supraordinate value which have power to unify his or her experiences of the world; 4) thereby endowing the relationships, contexts, and patterns of everyday life, past and future, with significance" (Fowler, 1986b, pp. 25 & 26).

Faith development interview: An open-ended research interview originally designed by Moseley, Jarvis, and Fowler (1986).

Faith development theory: A structural-developmental theory of faith development as outlined by James Fowler and consisting of seven stages of faith by which persons shape their relatedness to a transcendent center or centers of value and power (Fowler, 1981).

Life tapestry exercise: A self-administered questionnaire/table completed by interviewees prior to the Faith Development Interview that asks respondents to consider, in chronological order, some of their life milestones and significant spiritual issues.

Texas A&M University: A doctoral/research university founded in 1876 as the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas. The university is a land-grant, sea-grant,

and space-grant institution situated in Texas with a student body enrollment of approximately 50,000.

Transformational learning: A reflective learning process by which people transform their taken-for-granted assumptions and paradigms (or meaning perspectives) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, and reflective (Mezirow, 2000).

Students (or Aggies): Current students, alumni, and past attendees of Texas A&M University.

CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In the next two chapters, I will draw attention to research, scholarly writing, and theories

most relevant to the topic of my study and research questions. My purpose in this

chapter is to contextualize this research historically and to set a foundation that will

legitimize the inclusion of FDT in the student affairs theory base.

The subjects to be reviewed have been compiled into four themes. First, in

Higher Education & Institutionalized Religion, I will set the stage for my research by

giving a brief review of the historical relationship between higher education and

religious institutions. Second, in Student Development Work and Its Theory Base, I will

provide a review of the emergence of the student affairs profession throughout the

twentieth century, the development of the student affairs theory base, and the dialog

amongst scholars concerning theories of student development and learning. Third, in

Spirituality & College Student Development, I will highlight the latest research and

scholarly dialog concerning college student development and spiritual development.

Forth, in Religion vs. Spirituality, I will focus on the contemporary struggle to define

religion and spirituality and discuss the implications this brings to the research project.

In the chapter to follow, Faith Development & Transformational Learning Theories, I

will describe and compare FDT, including its historical and theoretical roots, with TLT

as universal systems of meaning-making. In particular, I will focus attention on FDT and Niebuhr's theology concerning human responsibility, covenant, and fidelity.

Higher Education & Institutionalized Religion

In the United States, and much of the western world for that matter, higher education and religious institutions have been historically, culturally, and politically linked to one another (Lucas, 1994). Higher education was understood not only as a public service but also as a religious enterprise. According to Marsden (1992), even after formal disestablishment, the goals of the state and religion were often congruent and it was only natural for the two to work together.

During the seventeenth- and eighteenth-centuries, colleges and universities in the United States were primarily concerned with the preparation and education of men for service as either clerics or cultured civic or business leaders (Lucas, 1994). Not that college students didn't pursue other vocations, but, historically, clergymen were frequently the best-educated individuals in colonial towns and villages (Marsden, 1992). Marsden (1992) notes that "most educators were clergymen, and the profession of professor was not clearly differentiated from that of minister" (p. 10). As late as the mid-nineteenth-century, public Midwestern universities, although non-sectarian, continued to function as propagators of the Christian faith and ideals (Longfield, 1992). This commitment to the Christian faith was evidenced in the curriculum, the frequent requirement of mandatory chapel, and the continued policy to hire presidents who were either clergymen or trained theologians (Longfield, 1992). This bond between higher

education and Protestant (and to a lesser extent Catholic) religion ultimately proved quite durable, lasting through the Civil War and beyond (Marsden, 1992).

Nonetheless, while higher education and religion have a significant historical relationship, this association has sometimes been antagonistic (Lucas, 1994; Stark & Finke, 2000). Out of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment an atmosphere of distrust between the two entities began to grow. Lucas (1994) points out that, "the emergence of modern science and scientific method occurred during the midst of the confessional atmosphere of hatred, suspicion, and distrust, at a time when scientists' theories were assailed as heretical and their methods denounced as devilish art" (p. 91). Indeed, many would argue that religion was a hindrance to the progress of higher education. Institutions of higher learning in nineteenth-century America were, notes Marsden (1992), meager enterprises with few students and deficient academic standards. Many of these institutions needed to be disestablished, to distance or sever their ties with their supporting denominations (Marsden, 1992).

Not only did the post-Enlightenment bond between higher education and religion continue to disintegrate, much within the developing social sciences was increasingly hostile toward religion. According to Stark and Finke (2000), there was remarkable consensus among the early social scientists on key issues concerning religious phenomena. Included among these social scientists were David Hume, Auguste Comte, Karl Marx, Friedrich Engles, Herbert Spencer, Emile Durkheim, Carl Jung, Sigmund Freud, and others. These social scientists generally agreed that religion (1) was false and detrimental to individuals and society, i.e. the opiate thesis; (2) was destined to die out as

modernity continued to rise, i.e. the secularization thesis; (3) was an epiphenomenon, a mere reflection of a more fundamental phenomenon; and (4) was treated fundamentally in psychological terms rather than as a social phenomenon (Stark & Finke, 2000).

This sometime antagonistic stance of scientists toward religion was evidenced by two studies conducted by James Henry Leuba in 1914 and in 1933. In these studies Leuba (1950) asked physical and biological scientists, sociologists, and psychologists if they believed "in a God to whom one may pray in the expectation of receiving an answer" and if they believed in personal immortality (Leuba, 1950, p. 32; Wulff, 2000). Data from the first study showed that 44 percent of physical scientists, 30 percent of biologists, 25 percent of sociologists, and 24 percent of psychologists affirmed their belief in such a God. Leuba's 1933 replication of his original study showed a similar pattern among the four groups of scientists and within each group. Further, data from this second study indicated that, during the 19 years following the first study, the rate of belief had dropped for nearly all the groups (Wulff, 2000).

Not only has there been a historical anti-religious bias on the part of social scientists, but, contends Stark and Finke (2000), there remains an anti-religion bias among many contemporary scientists. This bias is evidenced by, first, the continued "emphasis on weird and obscure groups—that is, the space a religious group receives in journals is almost directly inverse to its size and conventionality" (Stark & Finke, 2000, p. 18-19). Second, there is proportionally greater antagonism toward conservative/fundamentalist denominations, or what D. M. Kelley (1986) would call

"strong," religious groups that have highly committed members and emphasize the supernatural (Stark & Finke, 2000).

In sum, by the time the mid-20th century arrived, many private colleges and universities had distanced themselves from their founding denominations. With the passage of the Morrill Acts in 1862 and 1890, private institutions increasingly had to compete with public land-grant universities springing up across the country (Lucas, 1994). During this time of increasing secularization and competition the traditional science professions were fragmenting into numerous specialties, including sociology and psychology. Within these two disciplines were many social scientists—skeptics—whose research and writings maintained that religion was archaic and harmful to individual and societies (Stark & Finke, 2000; Wulff, 1991). The stage was set for the secularization of the academy and it was out of this dramatic mix of institutional, religious, cultural, and ideological change that student affairs, as a profession and scholarly discipline, emerged.

Student Development Work and Its Theory Base

Research Universities

Although it has historical roots well into the Colonial college era, College student affairs, as an academic discipline and profession, is a product of the twentieth-century (Nuss, 2003). Before last century the interest in students' well-being was subdued by the rise of intellectualism and the German research university. Rentz (2004) notes that "With the primary focus on rational development, other aspects of students' social, psychological, physical, and spiritual development were devalued" (p. 36). Many of the "pioneer deans" of men and of women were recruited as disciplinarians (Nuss, 2003;

Rentz, 2004). University presidents and chancellors had more pressing concerns and few

wished to be saddled with the day-to-day affairs of controlling student conduct. These

pioneer deans were largely interested, not with the academic progress of students, but

with their moral and spiritual development (Rentz, 2004). This was a logical outcome of

in loco parentis, the foundational theory of student development that served institutions

of higher learning for over three centuries (Nuss, 2003; Upcraft & Moore, 1990). *In

loco parentis*, though a legal concept, had a developmental rationale. Students were to be

parented, their moral character protected and nurtured. When students got out of line,

they were to be punished (Upcraft & Moore, 1990). This situation reflected the close ties

that continued to exist between academic and ecclesial bodies through much of the early

twentieth-century (Marsden, 1992).

The Progressive Era

Appleton, Briggs and Rhatigan (1997) argued that student affairs work came from three

sources: personnel workers and, as previously discussed, deans of men and deans of

women. Along similar lines, Upcraft and Moore (1990), contend the secularization of the

student development theory base can be explained by emergence of the following: (1)

the rise and development of psychology as a field of research, (2) the emergence of

vocational guidance work and career development, and (3) the appearance of the student

personnel profession.

Personnel work is a product of the Progressive Era's vocational guidance

movement led by Frank Parsons and psychologist Walter Dill Scott. Scott was among

the first scientists to apply principles of psychology to employees in industry (Appleton,

et al., 1997; Hoff, Kroll, MacKinnon, & Rentz, 2004). When Scott was appointed as

president of Northwestern University in 1919, he assumed the role with the

understanding that he would develop a personnel program for the institution. Scott's

focus on the vocational guidance of students spread rapidly to other institutions of higher

learning. For some the notions of vocational guidance and personnel work became

almost synonymous (Appleton, et al., 1997). It should be noted, however, that the arrival

of student personnel workers on campus was not without controversy. Appleton, Briggs

and Rhatigan (1997) note that much of the efforts and concerns of newly hired personnel

administrators were already being performed by deans of men and women. "*On some*

campuses they coalesced immediately, but on others the groups worried about each

other, and instances of hostility resulted" (Appleton, et al., 1997, p. 46).

Era of Positivism

Following WWI, progressivism began losing ground to scientific naturalism or

"positivism" (Parkovnick, 2000). Within the positivistic paradigm metaphysical

speculations were meaningless. According to Kincaid (2000) proponents of positivism

believed

> that philosophy should be scientific, . . that there is a universal and a
> priori scientific method, that a main function of philosophy is to analyze
> that method, that this basic scientific method is the same in both the
> natural and social sciences, that the various sciences should be reducible
> to physics, and that the theoretical parts of good science must be
> translatable into statements about observations. In the social sciences and
> the philosophy of the social sciences, positivism has supported the
> emphasis on quantitative data and precisely formulated theories, the
> doctrines of behaviourism, operationalism and methodological
> individualism. (p. 696)

Under the mounting influence of positivism, social scientists frequently became dissatisfied with the qualitative or descriptive methods advocated by Wilhelm Wundt and William James (Appleton, et al., 1997). Behaviorism, built upon philosophic empiricism, turned away from subjective approaches and embraced objectivism (Wulff, 1991). As a learning theory, behaviorism sought to explain learning by focusing on observable stimulus and response patterns. Although classic behaviorism grew in disfavor by the middle of the century, "it is clear," writes Appleton et al (1997), "that the field of student personnel owes a debt to [it]" (p. 46).

Another model to emerge from positivism and useful for linking theory and practice in student personnel work was the interactionist model developed by Kurt Lewin (Evans, 1996). One of the founders of experimental social psychology and field theory, Lewin believed that neither nature nor nurture could wholly explain behavior. Lewin formulated the core idea of his field theory in his famous equation $B = f(P \times E)$, where behavior (B) is a function (f) of the interaction between a person (P) and her environment (E). Behavior, argued Lewin was a product of the interaction between a person and her environment (Berscheid, 2003; Lewin, 1951).

G.I. Bill & Civil Rights Era

Factors leading to the development and secularization of the student affairs profession emerged in a time of extreme change. With the establishment of The Serviceman's Readjustment Act in 1944, thousands of veterans began filling the academic halls (Rentz, 2004). The college population was diversifying. War veterans, older and more experienced than the previous generation of students, brought with them a willingness to

confront authority (Rentz, 2004). These students were adults and had little time for such notions as *in loco parentis*. As the halls of academia swelled in the last quarter of the twentieth century, the student population included greater proportions of women and minority students (Lucas, 1996). There was also a dramatic increase in the number of part-time and "non-traditional" older students (Lucas, 1996).

Two of the guiding principles of student affairs that emerged during this period of increasing heterogeneity were (1) "individual differences are anticipated and every student is recognized as unique" and (2) "each individual is to be treated as an individual whole" (Rentz, 2004, p. 45). To accomplish these tasks, research concerning the development of college students and their interactions with college environments began in earnest in 1950s and 60s (McEwen, 2003). Psychologists such as Nevitt Sanford, Roy Heath, Douglas Heath, Arthur Chickering and William Perry emerged during this time. These social scientists had a profound impact on the student affairs theory base (Evans, 2003; Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998).

Sanford, who conducted studies in the 1950s and early 60s, was among the first to study college students and their development (e.g., see Sanford, 1962). Evans (2003) notes that Sanford's study of Vassar students "had a profound impact on the student affairs field in that it provided evidence that change did indeed take place during college years and that the college environment significantly influenced development" (p. 182). Feldman and Newcomb's research on peer group influences was also noteworthy. Their finding suggest, among others, that peer groups help students achieve family independence, offer emotional support frequently unmet by faculty and administrative

staff, and may provide opportunities for interactions with others from different social and cultural backgrounds (Evans, 1996).

Development and Learning in College Student Affairs

As the protest movement of 60s quieted, student affairs professional associations sought opportunity to clarify their identity and foundational principles (Evans, 1996). In an article originally published in 1974, C.A. Parker (1999) argued that the field of student affairs "has never had a clear identity, and the student protest movement of the 60s intensified the feelings of identity diffusion amongst those on campus responsible for student welfare" (p. 494). One solution offered to remedy this "identity diffusion" was the increasingly popular idea of student development. Proponents for student development generally fell into three camps: humanistic, cognitive complexity, and stage theories. C. A. Parker (1999) claimed that stage theories, such as those developed by Piaget, Erikson, and Kohlberg are worthy of consideration "because they deal with direction, level, and content of change, [and] seem to offer greater possibilities for psychologists and others in higher education who are looking for ways to set directions for the process of higher education" (p. 496).

As theories of student development proliferated in the 70s and 80s it became increasingly difficult to distinguish student development from student learning and the role that student affairs was to play in that matrix. In 1996, the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) released "The Student Learning Imperative: Implications for Student Affairs." In this report the authors note,

> The concepts of "learning," "personal development," and "student development" are inextricably intertwined and inseparable. Higher

education traditionally has organized its activities into "academic affairs" (learning, curriculum, classrooms, cognitive development) and "student affairs" (co-curriculum, student activities, residential life, affective or personal development). However, this dichotomy has little relevance to post-college life, where the quality of one's job performance, family life, and community activities are all highly dependent on cognitive and affective skills. . . And, recent research shows that the impact of an institution's "academic" program is mediated by what happens outside the classroom. Peer group relations, for example, appear to influence both affective and cognitive development. For these reasons, the terms learning, student development, and personal development are used interchangeably. (ACPA, 1996)

Spirituality & College Student Development

As the twentieth century came to a close, many social scientists argued that the spiritual development of college students ought to be a legitimate concern of student affairs professionals and adult education specialists (see Bolen, 1994; Bryant, Choi, & Yasuno, 2003; Chickering, Dalton, & Auerbach, 2006; Higher Education Research Institute, 2004; Love, 2002; Love & Talbot, 1999; Parks, 2000; Rogers & Dantley, 2001; Tisdell, 2003). In scholarly literature, attention on higher education and spirituality has focused on numerous topics, including, (1) understanding the college experience as a time when religious assumptions and spiritual values may be challenged (Hindman, 2002; Love & Talbot, 1999); (2) exploring theoretical connections between spirituality and student development (Love, 2001; Parks, 2000); (3) identifying educational practices—both inside and outside of the classroom—that engage the spiritual dimension (Capeheart-Meningall, 2005; Parker, 2003; Strange, 2001); (4) the relationship between students' spiritual experiences and spiritual change and development (Tolliver & Tisdell, 2006); (5) charting the different types of spiritual journeys practiced by traditional and adult students (Dalton, Eberhardt, Bracken, & Echols, 2006); and (6) theorizing how students'

spirituality and religiosity can be operationalized and measured (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011).

The college experience is often a critical time when students reevaluate their spiritual beliefs and values and actively search for meaning in life and their place within the broader social narrative. The undergraduate years can be understood as a liminal experience—a period characterized by the transition between the familiar and unfamiliar, between the safety of home and the risks associated with hostile territories (Hindman, 2002). Hindman notes that during such times the spiritual development of college students can be assisted by college faculty and staff and that the spiritual lives of students can be enriched or hindered by their many relationships. The journey from splintered lives to wholeness, he notes, "is a spiritual quest" (Hindman, 2002, pp. 172-173).

Such a quest is, contends Dalton, Eberhardt, Bracken, and Echols (2006), often described as an inward spiritual journey and is one of many spiritual practices commonly taken by undergraduates. In their research of student spirituality practices, Dalton et al (2006) identified two primary forms of spiritual searches: (1) spiritual searches oriented *inside* the context of religion, i.e., a specific or multi-faith religious tradition or context; and (2) spiritual searches oriented *outside* "a direct connection to any particular religion or religions and utilized a non-religious or secular approach in the search for spiritual meaning and purpose" (p.6). From these primary forms of spiritual search activities the researchers identified four types of student spiritual seekers: (1) *faith centered* seekers, students engage in spirituality solely within the confines of their particular religious tradition; (2) *multi-religious* seekers, students driven to deepen their spirituality through interfaith exploration; (3) *mindfulness* seekers,

students who focus their inner search on ways to heighten self-awareness and understanding; and (4) *wellness* seekers, students engaged in spiritual activities as a means of achieving a more holistic, healthy and integrated way of life (Dalton, et al., 2006, p. 7).

According to Capeheart-Meningall (2005), the process of spiritual development as outlined by Love and Talbot (1999, see p. 31) can be used by student affairs professionals to establish a "bridge between the life currently being lived and the life students are developing through the integration of new knowledge with old" (p. 33). Capeheart-Meningall (2005) argues that the support of "spiritual development" is best a collaborative effort between student and academic affairs and "is critical both to the integrated development of the student and to the fulfillment of our responsibilities to educate the whole student" (p. 33). Among her many propositions, Capheart-Meningall suggests that incorporating student values clarification and goal setting into college orientation programs can support student spiritual development by promoting personal authenticity and wholeness. Also, student programs and services that promote and affirm diversity, social responsibility, and community support spiritual growth by helping students develop a greater connectedness to self and others.

In their efforts to understand students' spiritual and religious qualities, Astin, Astin, and Lindholm (2011) developed the Students' Beliefs and Values survey, which offered a new comprehensive set of measures of spirituality and religiousness. Survey content areas included, among others, spiritual/religious worldview, spiritual well-being, compassionate behavior, spiritual/mystical experiences, theological/metaphysical beliefs, and religious affiliation/identity (p. 42).

Religion vs. Spirituality

Love and Talbot (1999) assert that spirituality has been largely ignored because the concept of spirituality is frequently associated with religion—a taboo subject in higher education (Collins, Hurst, & Jacobson, 1987). Much of higher education's disinterest or inattention to issues of spirituality and religion is attributable, in part, to the idea of separation of church and state (Collins, et al., 1987). Collins et al. (1987) argue, however, that "the intention of society's founding fathers to curtail state religion has been transposed into something entirely different so that religion, spirituality, and the 'divine' are mentioned publicly only with reservation" (p. 275). Within the secularized ivory towers, argues Dallas Willard (1995), professor of philosophy at the University of Southern California, "the cognitive content of religion is not regarded as in the domain of 'knowledge'" (p.1).

At this point it may be helpful to ask the question: How is spirituality to be distinguished from religiosity? Is there any difference when you describe someone as spiritual versus religious? Historically, the terms were not distinguished from one another (Turner, Lukoff, Barnhouse, & Francis, 1996). According to Hill et al. (2000), religion and spirituality are complex, multidimensional phenomenon that defy any single definition. William James (1902), considered by many as the father of psychology, distinguished between a personal experiential religion and a formal institutional religion that is part of an individual's early and on-going socialization. Hill and Pargament (2003) point out, "both elements fell under the purview of religion." Over the last few

decades, however, the relationship between the two constructs has widened and reified (Wulff, 1991).

Zinnbauer et al. (1997) seeking to clarify these two terms, found evidence which suggests that the terms describe, in some measure, different concepts. First, their study of how individuals define *religiousness* and *spirituality*, revealed the former to be associated with such concepts as religious orthodoxy, higher levels of authoritarianism, parental church attendance, and self-righteousness. The later term was associated with such variables as mystical experience and New Age beliefs. Second, although the two terms tend to describe different constructs, they are not independent of each other. A clear majority (74%) of the study respondents considered themselves to be both spiritual and religious; however, there was a sizable minority (19%) of respondents who identified themselves as solely spiritual and not religious. The latter group was less likely to evaluate religiousness in positive terms and less likely to participate in traditional forms of worship. Zinnbauer et al. (1997) concluded that researchers need "to recognize the many meanings attributed to religiousness and spirituality by different religious and cultural groups, and the different ways in which these groups consider themselves religious and/or spiritual" (p. 562).

In light of the foregoing, it stands to reason that social scientists researching the applicability of spiritual development in student affairs frequently find it difficult to define spirituality (Chickering, et al., 2006). This difficulty stems from three "points of tension," contends Speck (2005). First, confusion surrounding the notion of separation of church and state commonly inhibits any conversation which seeks to include religion

and spirituality. Second, rational empiricism and positivism promote an epistemology that honors objectivity and disallows personal values and beliefs. Third, members of the faculty commonly have little or no education in addressing spirituality (Speck, 2005).

Although they acknowledge there is no common definition for spirituality, Love and Talbot (1999) moved beyond these points of tension to initiate a new conversation calling for the inclusion of spiritual development into the student affairs theory base. In their 1999 article they offered five propositions in the conceptualization of spiritual development:

1. Spiritual development involves an internal process of seeking personal authenticity, genuineness, and wholeness as an aspect of identity development.

2. Spiritual development involves the process of continually transcending one's current locus of centricity.

3. Spiritual development involves developing a greater connectedness to self and others through relationships and union with community.

4. Spiritual development involves deriving meaning, purpose, and direction in one's life.

5. Spiritual development involves an increasing openness to exploring a relationship with an intangible and pervasive power or essence that exists beyond human existence and rational human knowing. (pp. 366-367)

Together these five propositions suggest that spiritual development is the process whereby individuals seek personal authenticity, transcendence, genuine community, meaning, and greater openness to a divine power that exists beyond our thoughts and world (Love & Talbot, 1999).

CHAPTER III

FAITH DEVELOPMENT &

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEARNING THEORIES

Introduction

This chapter is divided into three primary sections: (1) Faith Development and Its

Theoretical Antecedents (2) Transformational Learning & Disorienting Dilemma, and

(3) Meaning Making: Linking FDT and TLT. In Faith Development and Its Theoretical

Antecedents, I will present an extensive description of FDT and its historical and

theoretical roots. In the two following subsections I will describe the seven interpersonal

aspects that comprise a faith stage and the stages of FDT. Next, I will discuss FDT and

student development research, where I will offer a brief review of relevant research

exploring the application of FDT in higher education contexts.

In Transformational Learning & Disorienting Dilemma, I will review Mezirow's

transformational learning theory and highlight the types of transformational learning

identified by him. I will also consider the concept of disorienting dilemma and how it

relates to cognitive dissonance theory. In the last subsection, I will draw attention to

Segal's (1999) essay considering disorientating dilemma and critical incidents from the

perspective of the hermeneutic phenomenology of Martin Heidegger.

In the third section I will consider the association of FDT and TLT in the context

of praxis. I will examine FDT and TLT as theories of meaning making from an

epistemological level. I will also consider the similarities and differences between the

two theories and how these theories differ from a pedagogic perspective.

Faith Development and Its Theoretical Antecedents

Distinguishing Faith from Belief and Religion

Although it is reasonable to include FDT within the province of spiritual development

theories, such a move may do injustice to Fowler's conceptualization of faith as

informed by H. Richard Niebuhr, Winfred Cantwell Smith and others (Fowler, 1981;

Niebuhr, 1960; Smith, 1979). For Fowler, faith must be distinguished from belief and

religion. Following Smith (1979), Fowler notes that *religion* can be understood as

"cumulative tradition." Cumulative tradition includes such things as sacred texts, laws,

rituals, symbols, and myths, as well as cultural norms and values (Fowler, 1981). Faith,

on the other hand, is as expression of a person's deepest values and commitments.

Quoting Smith (1979),

> Faith is deeper, richer, more personal. It is engendered by a religious
> tradition, in some cases and to some degree by it doctrines, but it is a
> quality of the person not of the system. It is an orientation of the
> personality, to oneself, to one's neighbor, to the universe; a total
> response, a way of seeing whatever one sees and of handling whatever
> one handles; a capacity to live at more than a mundane level; to see, to
> feel, to act in terms of a transcendent dimension. (p. 11)

Faith must also be distinguished from *belief*. From his extensive research as a

comparative religionist, Smith contends that the modern identification of faith with

belief is erroneous (Smith, 1979). Belief is commonly understood in propositional terms.

The verb "believe" is defined as the cognitive assent or holding of a particular idea or

proposition. Statements such as "I believe that God exists," or "I believe in the theory of

evolution," are just two examples. From an etymological perspective "to believe," means to "to hold dear," "to love." This can be evidenced by the German word *belieben*, which means "to treat as *lieb*, to consider lovely, to like, to wish for, to choose" (Smith, 1979, p. 105). The word "credo," frequently translated as "I believe," in classical Latin meant "to entrust" or "to commit." Quoting Smith (1979) again:

> There would seem little question but that as a crucial term used at a crucial moment in a crucial liturgical act of personal engagement— namely Christian baptism—*credo* came close to its root meaning of "I set my heart on", "I gave my heart to" ("I hereby give my heart to Christ"; I herein give my heart to God the Father"; …); or more generally: "I hereby commit myself ("to …"), "I pledge allegiance". (p. 76)

Faith, rather than belief or religion, "is the most fundamental category in the human quest for relation to transcendence," notes Fowler (1981, p. 14). Faith is the universal aspect of the human psyche whereby people commit to—place their heart upon—that which is of ultimate concern and value. In this sense then, faith should be understood as a verb and not a noun. "'I trust, I commit myself, I rest my heart on, I pledge allegiance.' All of these paraphrases show us that faith is a *verb;* it is an active mood of being and committing" (Fowler, 1981, p. 16).

Dimensions of Faith

According to Fowler (Fowler, 1981), the central activity of human beings is meaning-making through faith. Distinguished from religion or belief, faith is conceived by Fowler (Fowler, 1981, 1986b) as a human universal whereby people make sense of reality. It is the mechanism that bridges the subjective and objective realms of human experience. Faith is a multidimensional construct that is foundational to our social relations, personal identity, and the making of personal and cultural meaning (Fowler, 1996). Such a notion

has direct implications for student affairs professionals concerned with the growth and education of students (Baxter Magolda, 2001). But what exactly is "faith?"

Faith, contends Fowler (1986b), has two dimensions: a relational dimension and a knowing dimension. As previously indicated, faith is fundamentally relational; it always involves more than one party. Fowler, following Niebuhr, contends that faith has a triadic structure, which includes the self, significant others, and the "ultimate Other," or the relationship to a shared center(s) of value and power (or SCVP, see Figure 2). All meaningful relationships exhibit something similar to this covenantal form. The passive expression of this faith is understood as trust; the active expression is that of commitment (Niebuhr, 1960).
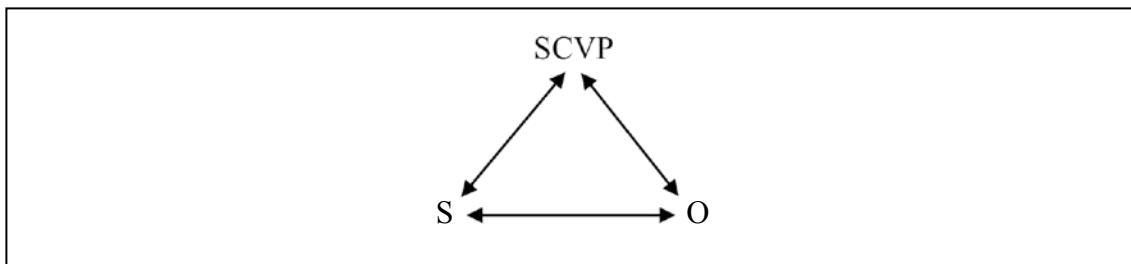
Figure 2. The triadic structure of faith (S = self; O = other; SCVP = shared center(s) of value and power, see Fowler, 1981, p. 17)

Faith is not only relational, it is also a "way of being, arising out of a way of seeing and knowing" (Fowler, 1986b, p. 19). This approach of "faith as knowing" is rooted in the cognitive- and structural-development tradition of Piaget, Kohlberg, and Selman. "In this tradition knowing means an acting upon and 'composing' of the known" (Fowler, 1986b, p. 19). From the structural-development standpoint, the mind is

understood as having structures (or schemata) that are formed as individuals seek to organize and give meaning to their sense experiences (Fowler, 1986b). All of our relationships, whether to individuals, groups, or to an Ultimate Other, involves constitutive-knowing—"the knowing that composes or establishes both the known and the knower in relation to the known" (Fowler, 1986b, p. 21).

Covenant Relationships

The "committing" that Fowler writes about is the committing that takes place—is required—of all covenantal relationships. As mentioned, Fowler contends that all meaningful relationships have a triadic structure (see Figure 2). A covenant relationship is a bond that exhibits some level of faith, commitment, trust, loyalty, and/or love. Typically an individual will have many such relationships. A husband and wife, a mom and her child, best friends, an advisor and her student, professional colleagues, employer and employee, are just few of the many covenant relationships commonly experienced. Further, the number and quality of such relationships are not static. These relationships take place over time and in many contexts, as new relationship are born, and some relationships die. The process by which people negotiate their relationships takes place in time and space. Since faith is a verb it frequently exhibits a narrative quality.

As we move through life our faith story is played out. The patterns of triadic relationships that we have at any point along our timelines were classified by Niebuhr (1960) in three primary types: henotheistic, polytheistic, and radical monotheistic. Henotheistic faith has a strong communal pattern (Niebuhr, 1960). *Heno,* meaning in Greek "one," suggests faith in the one god through which a family, tribe, or nation forms

its identity. Such a faith, however, does not assert that there is only one god worthy of devotion. The family "god" is only one of many. Polytheistic faith describes a pattern of relationships that is pluralistic. This form of faith has many minor objects (gods) of loyalty and devotion. This is a diffuse pattern of faith that "lacks any one center of value and power of sufficient transcendence to focus and order one's life" (Fowler, 1981, p. 19).

Richard Niebuhr's model of covenantal faith is of central importance to this study, especially as articulated in *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture* (Niebuhr, 1960). In the West, the primary challengers to monotheistic faith are henotheism and polytheism. The structure of a person's faith flows out of the triadic relationships to which she is committed. Nazism is an extreme type of henotheistic- or social-faith generally known as nationalism (Niebuhr, 1960). Nationalism suggests a devotion to one nation—one god—among many nations—many gods. Such sentiments can be articulated in rather mundane ways, e.g. the phrase "Truth, Justice, and the American way." Such a statement raises American ideology to the level of truth and justice—to the level of absolutes. As Niebuhr (1960) points out,

> It is characteristic also of modern secular nations which, without benefit
> or mythology, theology, or metaphysics, so identify themselves with the
> cause they claim to serve that devotion to the nation [the United States]
> and devotion to the cause [truth and justice] are blurred into each other;
> so that reliance on the society is equated with trust in Nature, in Nature's
> God, or in the determination of destiny by some iron law of history. (pp.
> 68-69)

Like nations, cultural institutions—such as Texas A&M University—may engender the type of loyalty best described as henotheistic. A report from the Interim

Cultural Taskforce to the Bonfire 2002 Steering Committee determined that Bonfire was a symbol and ritual activity that was at the heart of Aggie identity. Bonfire "came to serve as an illustration and confirmation of the Aggie belief that they are fundamentally unlike the student bodies of other universities" (Texas A&M University, 2001, p. 5). Bonfire served to symbolized the difference between Aggie culture and what they "perceived to be 'liberal' values of an increasingly alien national culture" (p.6) However, Texas A&M University, like other cultural institutions, could not provide the value structure whereby an individual or group can establish ultimate meaning.

Fowler (1986b) states "we have not come to terms with faith as relational until we have examined it as an activity of knowing and being in which the self makes a bid for relationship to a center of value and power adequate to ground, unify, and order the whole force-field of life" (p. 18). Niebuhr coined this third form of faith "radical monotheism." This faith is characterized by a bond of loyalty and devotion to the One that is beyond the many. This One is not merely the conscious and unconscious extension of the communal god (Fowler, 1981). Monotheistic faith is evident by an individual's or group's loyalty to a transcendent center of value and power. "This is the faith triangle that includes—when it is intact—all the others of which we are part. This is the most inclusive triangle in which the self relates to the canvas of meaning itself" (Fowler, 1986b).

In his heart, James Fowler is foremost a practical theologian (Fowler, 2003; Osmer & Schweitzer, 2004). In order to understand his theory of faith development it is important to recognize that Fowler (2001) fashioned the theory within a context of

praxis. The methodology of FDT was developed by Fowler in 1968-69, when he was the

Associate Director of Interpreters' House, a spiritual renewal center for clergy and laity

(Fowler, 1986a, 2001). It was in his role at the Interpreters' House that Fowler had the

opportunity to listen to individuals share in-depth narratives of their lives and work.

During this period, he spent extensive time studying the work of Erikson and continued

his study of Niebuhr and his theology (Fowler, 2001). It was in this context, writes

Fowler, that "linkages between Niebuhr's dynamic conception of faith, understood as a

human universal, and the psychological conception of the self offered in Erikson's ego

psychology began to come clearly into fruitful relationship" (Fowler, 2001, p. 159).

Commenting on this association, Fowler writes:

> Part of the linkage that made this pairing seem natural results from
> Niebuhr's having been deeply influenced by his early study with
> philosopher-sociologist George Herbert Mead. It is important to indicate
> at this juncture how central in Niebuhr's account of human faith and
> selfhood the social and relational understanding of the self, which he
> found in the work of Mead, became. (Fowler, 2001, p. 159-60)

After a year and a half at the Interpreter's house, Fowler returned to Harvard Divinity

and was eventually introduced to the structural-developmental theories of Kohlberg,

Piaget, and Selman (Fowler, 1986b, 2001). The influence of Erickson's theory of

psychosocial development on Fowler, however, remained broader and deeper then

Kohlberg's theory.

Aspects of Faith Development

Each stage of faith development is a dynamic schema of seven intrapersonal aspects, or

capacities. These aspects (see Table 1) form a "structural whole"—a stage that

potentially develops greater complexity over the course of one's life. Aspects are "in

Table 1. Aspects of Faith Development Theory

Stage Aspect	Source	Form of Knowledge
Form of Logic	Piaget	Logic of Rational Certainty
Social Perspective Taking	Selman	
Form of Moral Judgment	Kohlberg	
Bounds of Social Awareness	Fowler	Logic of Conviction
Locus of Authority		
Form of World Coherence		
Symbolic Function		

themselves complex clusters of cognitive skills that are structurally related" (Moseley, Jarvis, Fowler, & DeNicola, 1993, p. 21). Fowler derives Aspect A, *form of logic*, from Piaget's theory of cognitive development. This aspect focuses on patterns of mental operation or reasoning that individuals utilize when thinking about the object world (Moseley, et al., 1993). Aspect B, *social perspective taking* (or *role-taking*), is derived from Roberts Selman's developmental theory of interpersonal relations (Fowler, 1986b). It "describes the way in which the person constructs the self, the other, and the relationship between them" (Moseley, et al., 1993, p. 22). Closely related to aspects of logic and perspective taking, is Aspect C, *form of moral judgment*. Though not without modification, Fowler (1986b) derives this aspect from Kohlberg's stages of moral reasoning. This aspect seeks to answer the question, "What is the nature of the claim that others have on me, and how are these claims to be weighted?" (Moseley, et al., 1993, p. 23). Together, Aspects A, B, and C, form what Fowler (1981, 1986b) refers to as the "logic of rational certainty" (See Table 1). As a form of knowing, the logic of rational certainty seeks to be objective, impersonal, demonstrable, and replicable (Fowler, 1981).

Aspects D, E, F, and G, as developed by Fowler, comprise the "logic of conviction." Aspect D, *bounds of social awareness*, is concerned with the "extent of inclusiveness and accuracy of construal of the reference groups in relation to which persons ground their identity and define their moral responsibility" (Fowler, 1981, p. 36). This aspect helps to identify the valuing and knowing whereby individuals are able to determine who belongs within their social world and who remains alien (Moseley, et al., 1993). Aspect E, *locus of authority*, considers three factors, (1) the selection process of authorities, (2) how authorities are held in relationship to the individual, and (3) whether the person responds to primarily internal or external authorities (Moseley, et al., 1993). This aspect asks the question of whom or what group an individual looks to for justification and validation of decisions that affect her sense of worth and personal meaning. Aspect F, *form of world coherence*, "represents a focus on each stage's particular way of composing and holding a comprehensive sense of unified meaning" (Fowler, 1986b, p. 37). This aspect focuses on how people make sense of their environment and all it contains. It is concerned about how someone fits the object world together (Moseley, et al., 1993). Aspect G, *symbolic function*, attends to how someone "understands, appropriates, and utilizes symbols and other aspects of language in the process of meaning-making and locating his or her centers of value and images of power" (Moseley, et al., 1993, p. 34).

How these seven aspects interrelate to each other forms a structural whole—a way of knowing and valuing others and objects of ultimate concern (1981, 1986b). As mentioned, Fowler has found it beneficial to think of the seven aspects as belonging to

two types of logics: the logic of rational certainly and the logic of conviction. The logic

of rational certainty embraces the positivistic ideals of objectivity, verifiability, and

disinterestedness. But, as Fowler (1981) notes, "the model of disinterestedness

represented by scientific inquiry does not fit with the kind of knowing involved in moral

reasoning or in faith's compositions" (p. 102). The logic of conviction, on the other

hand, is broader and subsumes the latter. Both Piaget and Kohlberg separate cognition

from affection. Such a "bifurcation" is problematic when seeking to understand the

constitutive-knowing that is faith, contends Fowler (Fowler, 1986b). Following Kegan,

Fowler notes that there is no thought without feeling, no feeling without thought. Within

the logic of conviction it is understood that the risk of the "constitution or modification

of the self is always an issue" (Fowler, 1986b, p. 23). Fowler (1986b) is asking us to

> focus on the logic of conviction as a more comprehensive mode of
> knowing. It transcends while including the logic of rational certainty. To
> do so brings the recognition of another layer of problems. Faith, as
> generative knowing, "reasons" holistically—it composes "wholes." In
> faith, the self "knows" itself and the neighbor in relation to an ultimate
> environment. A spread of meaning, a canopy of significance is composed
> to backdrop or fund more immediate, everyday action (p. 23).

Beyond the kinds of reasoning employed when understanding the aspects of

faith, it is also possible to view the aspects from a content perspective. Form of logic,

form of world coherence, and symbolic function form an interrelated cluster of content

areas that are primarily cognitive in nature (Moseley, et al., 1993). Social perspective

taking, bounds of social awareness, and form of moral judgment include both

psychosocial and cognitive content and, together, form another content cluster (Moseley,

et al., 1993). As individuals move through time they confront persons, groups,

ideologies, and institutions that challenge their faith logic. In order to maintain a sense of equilibration at a particular faith stage, new experiences and knowledge must be, in Piagetian terms, assimilated or accommodated. Both are considered to be learning, but it's accommodation that encourages growth and transformation from a faith development perspective (Fowler, 1981, 1996).

Stages of Faith Development

Primal Faith, Stage 0 (infancy)

As a person grows in faith they evolve through seven stages of development (See Table 2; Fowler, 1981; 2000). The first stage arises during infancy and is understood as primal or undifferentiated faith (Fowler, 1981). During this stage a

> prelinguistic disposition of trust forms in the mutuality of one's relationships with parents and other caregivers to offset the inevitable anxiety and mistrust that results from the succession of cognitive and emotional experiences of separation and self-differentiation that occur during infant development. (Fowler, 1996, p. 57)

While acknowledging that this stage is largely inaccessible to empirical research, Fowler (1981) believes that when an infant receives the requisite love and care from his primary care provider(s), a bank of fundamental trust is established. Building off of the work of Erikson, Fowler notes that if this bank of trust generally offsets experiences of mistrust, then the basic virtue (or strength) of *hope* emerges (Fowler, 1986b).

Intuitive-projective Faith, Stage 1 (early childhood)

At about age two, infants begin to move toward the second stage—intuitive-projective faith—with the "convergence of thought and language, opening up the use of symbols in speech and ritual play" (Fowler, 1981 , p. 121). Intuitive-projective faith is described by

Table 2. Stages of Faith Development

Stage	Descriptive	Age of Development
0	Primal	Infancy
1	Intuitive-projective	Early childhood
2	Mythic-literal	Middle childhood and beyond
3	Synthetic-conventional	Adolescence and beyond
4	Individuative-reflective	Young adulthood and beyond
5	Conjunctive	Early mid-life and beyond
6	Universalizing	Midlife and beyond

Fowler (1981) as "the fantasy-filled, imitative phase in which the child can be powerfully and permanently influenced by examples, moods, actions and stories of the visible faith of primally related adults" (p. 133). Since a child at this stage lacks stable logical operations and is limited in her ability to differentiate and coordinate her perspective from another, her imagination is uninhibited and perceptions tend to be egocentric. It is at this stage that children begin to construct their first representation of God, patterned largely after their parents or other primary care givers. This representation can be either benevolent or malevolent depending on the socialization which took place during prior development (1996).

The strength that emerges during this stage, "is the birth of imagination, the ability to unify and grasp the experience-world in powerful images and as presented in stories that register the child's intuitive understandings and feelings toward the ultimate conditions of existence" (Fowler, 1981 , p. 134). This stage correlates with Piaget's preoperational stage and with Kohlberg's punishment and obedience stage (Fowler, 1986b , p. 28).

Mythic-literal Faith, Stage 2 (middle childhood and beyond)

The development of what Piaget called "concrete operational thinking" (typically around a child's sixth or seventh birthday) is the main factor precipitating the emergence of the mythic-literal faith stage (Fowler, 1981, 1996, 2000). Although this stage typically develops during the elementary school years, some adolescents and a few adults operating at this level have been identified by Fowler. At this stage of faith development, an individual takes on stories, beliefs, and observances that symbolize membership to a community. Beliefs and moral rules are appropriated with literal interpretation (Fowler, 1981).

With the emergence of concrete operational thinking, an individual's "operations of thought can now be reversed, which means that cause and effects relations are now more clearly understood" (Fowler, 1996, p. 60). With this new cognitive ability, the faith constructions of the intuitive-projective stage become inadequate and more linear and narrative-like constructions emerge. "Story becomes the major way of giving unity and value to experience" (Fowler, 1981, p. 149). This capacity to narrate their conscious interpretations is the emergent strength of mythic-literal individuals. However, at this point, these individuals do not reflect extensively on their stories. As Fowler notes,

> They offer narratives from the middle of the flowing streams of their lives. They do not step out upon the banks to reflect upon where the streams have come from, where they are going, or what larger meanings might give connection and integrated intelligibility to their collection of experience and stories. (Fowler, 1996, p. 60)

During this stage, individuals have a greater capacity for taking the perspective of others on matters of mutual interest. They have not, however, developed the ability to

"construct the interiority—the feelings, attitudes, and internal guiding processes—of the self and others" (Fowler, 1996, p. 60). Accordingly, mythic-literal individuals tend to compose their worlds (i.e., ultimate environments) based on principles of moral reciprocity and fairness (Fowler, 1981, 1996). "God is constructed on the model of a consistent, caring, but just ruler or parent. Goodness is rewarded; badness is punished" (Fowler, 1996, p. 60).

Synthetic-conventional Faith, Stage 3 (adolescence and beyond)

The emergence of synthetic-conventional faith typically occurs during adolescent years. Critical to this stage is the early emergence of formal operational thinking and mutual interpersonal perspective thinking (Fowler, 1981).

With the arrival of formal operational thinking, individuals can now appreciate abstract concepts, reflect upon their thinking, offer hypothetical solutions to problems, and think in systems (Fowler, 1981, 1996). With this new capacity an individual can mentally "step outside the flow of life's stream" and, once on the river bank, he or she can see "the flow of stream as a whole" (Fowler, 1981, p. 152).

This arrival of formal operational thinking is linked to the emergence of mutual interpersonal perspective, which Fowler (1981) derives from Robert Selman. This is the capacity to compose the perspective of others upon ourselves and can be summed up with the couplet: "I see you seeing me; I see the me I think you see;" and its reciprocal: "You see you according to me; you see the you you think I see" (Fowler, 1981, 2000, p. 46). It is the emergence of this capacity that accounts for the typical adolescent self-consciousness, contends Fowler (1981, 2000).

Fowler considers this faith stage to be synthetic, that is, in the sense of drawing together. With the capacity for interpersonal perspective taking, an adolescent is the recipient of numerous reflections or "mirrorings" of the self (Fowler, 2000). "Like distorting mirrors in an amusement park fun house, the images of self that one discerns that others have constructed do not necessarily fit nicely together. Nor are they necessarily congruent with one's own felt images of self" (Fowler, 2000, p. 47). Further, this stage of faith is characterized by "the drawing together of one's stories, values, and beliefs into a supportive and orienting unity" (Fowler, 2000, p. 47). Fowler (1981) sees this synthesis as the composition of a new self myth.

> A myth or myths of the personal past can be composed; this represents a new level of story, a level we might call the *story of our stories*. And with this comes the possibility and burden of composing myths of possible futures. The youth begins to project the forming myth of self into future roles and relationships. (Fowler, 1981, p. 152)

Fowler sees synthetic-conventional faith as conventional in two senses. First, at this level of faith development, an individual's belief and value system is largely derived from significant others. This system has largely chosen them, rather than vice-versa (Fowler, 1981). Second, their values and belief system is conventional because it is tacitly held. Although the synthetic-conventional individual has new cognitive capacities, much of their value system remains tacit. This person is "aware of having values and normative images. He or she articulates them, defends them and feels deep emotional investments in them, but typically has not made the value system, *as a system*, the object of reflection" (Fowler, 1981, p. 162). "In this stage" contends Fowler (2000), "one is embedded in one's faith outlook, and one's identity is derived primarily from

membership in a circle of face-to-face relations" (p. 47). This deep concern for the opinions of others points to a limitation of the synthetic-conventional faith stage: the lack of third-person perspective taking. "This means that in its dependence upon significant others for confirmation and clarity about its identity and meaning to them, the self does not yet have a transcendental perspective from which it can see and evaluate self-other relations" (Fowler, 1996, p. 62).

It is important to know that many persons at this level of faith can remain— equilibrate—at this stage well into their adult years. "The worldview and sense of self synthesized in this stage and the authorities who confirm one's values and beliefs are internalized, and the person moves on through the life cycle with a set of tacitly held, strongly felt, but largely unexamined beliefs and values" (Fowler, 2000, p. 49).

Individuative-reflective Faith, Stage 4 (young adulthood and beyond)

In order to move beyond the synthetic-conventional faith, two fundamental movements must take place. First, at some point the individual must critically examine her tacit and unexamined system of beliefs, values and commitments. The symbols and stories through which her life is oriented must be critically reappraised and reinterpreted (Fowler, 1981, 1996, 2000). Second, to make the transition to individuative-reflective faith, an individual must struggle to re-ground her sense of identity and worth constituted and sustained by prior roles and responsibilities to one that is freely and explicitly chosen. Fowler calls this move the emergence of the "executive ego—a differentiation of the self behind the personae (masks) one wears and the roles one bears,

from the composite roles and relationships through which the self is expressed" (Fowler, 2000, p. 49).

Fowler contends that the heart of this dual movement is the emergence of third-person perspective taking. No longer limited by intra- and interpersonal perspective taking, the individuative-reflective person can formulate a view that transcends self-other relations. Fowler states that "the third-person perspective allows one a standpoint from which conflicting expectations can be adjudicated and one's own inner authorization can be strengthened" (Fowler, 1996, p, 63).

In order to maintain their newly created reflective identities, the individuative-reflective person "composes meaning frames that are conscious of their own boundaries and inner connections and aware of themselves as worldviews" (Fowler, 1996, p. 63). Their sense of self and worldview are differentiated from those others and become explicit factors by which they interpret and react to the actions of self and others (Fowler, 1981). Armed with a new power for critical reflection, the individuative-reflective person relates to and uses symbols in a manner that markedly differs from persons with less developed faith. Persons at this higher level of faith routinely "demythologize" symbols, rituals and myths by translating them into concepts or propositions. When a religious symbol is recognized as merely a symbol it becomes detached from it transcendent reference point, it becomes in Paul Tillich's (1957) word, a "broken symbol" (Fowler, 1981). Finally, at this faith stage, persons often become overconfident in their conscious awareness and give little attention to the assumptions influencing their judgments (Fowler, 1981, 1996). "This excessive confidence in the

conscious mind and in critical thought can lead to a kind of 'cognitive narcissism' in which the now clearly bounded, reflective self over-assimilates 'reality' and the perspective of others into its worldview" (Fowler, 1996, p. 63).

Conjunctive Faith, Stage 5 (early midlife and beyond)

Somewhere around the mid-thirties (or later) the individuative-reflective individual may become restless with the self-images, outlook, and dichotomizing logic maintained in this faith stage. This restlessness is experienced when the executive-ego begins to acknowledge that its confidence is based partially on illusion and poor self-knowledge. As Fowler (1981) notes,

> The person ready for transition finds him- or herself attending to what may feel like anarchic and disturbing inner voices. Elements from a childish past, images and energies from a deeper self, a gnawing sense of the sterility and flatness of the meanings one serves—any or all of these may signal readiness for something new. (p. 183)

This "something new" is the emergence of conjunctive faith, the name of which implies the rejoining of things previously separated. This stage of faith, notes Fowler (2000) "involves the integration of elements in ourselves, in society, and in our experience of ultimate reality that have the character of being apparent contradictions, polarities, or, at least, paradoxical elements" (p. 51). Truth claims, for the conjunctive faith person, moves beyond simple and/or propositions to "dialogical knowing" (Fowler, 1981).

In dialogical knowing a person can express her- or himself, but at the same time, the structure of the world in all its diversity is free to disclose itself as well. "The knower seeks to accommodate her or his knowing to the structure of that which is being known

before imposing her or his own categories upon it" (Fowler, 1981, p. 185). Accordingly, this stage is distinguished by a movement beyond the demythologizing that characterized the Individuative-reflective stage. "Acknowledging the multidimensionality and density of symbols and myths, persons in the Conjunctive stage learns to enter into symbolic realties, allowing them to exert their illuminating and mediating power" (Fowler, 1996, p. 65). This willingness to enter into symbolic realities is not a repudiation of critical thinking, but is evidence of a willingness *not* to reduce symbols and myths to mere propositions. It is evidence of a *second naïveté*—"a post critical receptivity and readiness for participation in the reality brought to expression in symbol and myth" (Fowler, 2000, p. 53).

This second naïveté stems from an epistemological humility that is open to the truths of traditions and communities of other groups. Fowler cautions, though, that this openness should not be mistaken for relativism. A woman at the conjunctive faith stage, although she exhibits a commitment to the truth claims of her particular tradition, has the humility to acknowledge that her grasp on ultimate truth is tentative and always open to correction and challenge (Fowler, 2000). The rigid boundaries of self and outlook of the previous stage become porous and permeable in conjunctive faith, open to other ideas, alive to paradox and apparent contradiction (Fowler, 1981). During this stage there is a reclaiming and reworking of one's past and a willingness to listen to the voices of the *deeper self*. As Fowler notes, "this involves a critical recognition of one's social unconscious—the myths, ideal images and prejudices built deeply into the self-system

by virtue of one's nurture within a particular social class, religious tradition, ethnic group or the like" (Fowler, 1981, p. 198)

Universalizing Faith, Stage 6 (midlife and beyond)

The emergence of the last faith stage—universalizing faith—is the normative endpoint to Fowler's theory and is marked by the completion of two radical tendencies that have developed through the earlier faith stages (Fowler, 1981). The first tendency, which is epistemological, is the decentration of the self (Fowler, 2000). As a person progresses from one faith stage to the next he or she grows in their perspective taking ability. The circle of "those who count" in our lives began with the immediate family (or caregivers), widened to include extended family and friends, then included others who shared our religious or political identities, and then finally—hopefully—expands to include all humankind (Fowler, 1981, 1996, 2000). As Fowler (1996) notes, "Gradually the circle of 'those who count' in faith, meaning making, and justice has expanded until, at the Conjunctive stage, it extends well beyond the bounds of social class, nation, race, gender, ideological affinity, and religious tradition. In Universalizing faith this process comes to a kind of completion" (p. 66). In the conjunctive stage, an individual is caught in polar tension between her commitments and loyalties to the present order and her vision of a new and more inclusive ultimate order (Fowler, 1996, 2000). This existential tension may become the means for some conjunctive faith persons "by which they are called and lured into a transformed and transforming relation with the ultimate conditions of life—and with themselves and everyday existence with their neighbor"

(Fowler, 1996, p. 55). Transitioning into Universalizing faith, an individual begins to "know" the world from the perspectives of those different from the self (Fowler, 2000).

The second tendency, which is closely related to the first, has to do with a person's valuing and valuation (Fowler, 2000). As people progress in the decentration of perspective taking, their devotion to value centers enlarges. As people grow, they "rest their hearts" on centers of value and commitment that confirms their sense of identity and provides them with a sense of meaning and purpose. As the "circle of those who count" expands, the universalizing person takes on the concerns and valuing of others. At the universalizing stage, "a person decenters in the valuing process to such an extent that he or she participates in the valuing of the Creator and values other beings—and being—from a standpoint more nearly identified with the love of the Creator for creatures than from the standpoint of a vulnerable, defensive, anxious creature" (Fowler, 2000, p. 55-56).

Fowler (2000) sums up the completion of these two radical tendencies:

From the paradoxical attachments and polar tensions of conjunctive faith, the person best describes as exhibiting universalizing faith has assented to a radical decentration from the self as an epistemological and valuational reference point for construing the world and has begun to manifest the fruits of a powerful kind of kenosis, or emptying of self. Often described as "detachment" or "disinterestedness," the kenosis—literally, the "pouring out," or emptying, of self—described here is actually the result of having one's affections powerfully drawn beyond the finite centers of value and power in one's life that promise meaning and security. "Perfect love casts out fear," as it says in 1 John 4:18. The transvaluation of value and the relinquishing of perishable sources of power that are part of the movement toward universalizing faith are the fruit of a person's total and pervasive response in love and trust to the radical love of God. (p. 56)

FDT and Student Development Research

Although there is a considerable body of literature concerning spirituality and higher education, research on the applicability of FDT within the context of college student affairs is limited. The following review will focus on two bodies of research: (1) correlation studies that compare FDT to other theories of human development, and (2) studies that seek to explore the value of FDT for understanding student development and identity formation within the context of higher education.

Several researchers have conducted correlation studies between FDT and other developmental theories. Ivy (1985) developed a model for pastoral assessment that integrated FDT and Kegan's theory of ego-development. Journals from six pastoral education students were analyzed with the assessment model, which was judged to be "applicable and credible" when used to explore the inner perspective of others. Thomas (1990) compared the concepts of meaning-making as articulated in FDT and Perry's theory of ethical development. In particular, Thomas focused on the potential insight these theories offer student affairs professionals concerned with the holistic development of college students. Initial support for the inclusion of FDT was offered. Bolen (1994) did a comparative analysis of FDT with the theories of five other developmentalists: Jean Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg, Erik Erikson, A. W. Chickering, and William Perry. From his study of five first-year college students at a Christian College, Bolen concluded that "faith," as articulated in FDT, is highly compatible with the purpose of higher education and that FDT "can shed some light" on other developmental theories and on the struggles of first-year college students.

A number of scholars have explored the application of FDT within the context of higher education. Anderson (1995) studied the role of spirituality and faith in the lives of three college women involved with an ecumenical campus ministry. Anderson criticized FDT as limited; this contributed to her decision to adopt a narrative research methodology. Her findings strengthen the argument for including religious identity as a factor for understanding the lives of female college students and the importance of community and mentor relationships. Creel (2000) considered FDT along with Loevinger's ego and Helminiak's spiritual development theories in order to investigate if spirituality, gender, and/or student classification could be categorized as predictor-variables of coping resources of female college students. Though Creel's findings were mixed, her research supports the inclusion of spiritual development as necessary to foster the holistic development of college students. From a sociological approach, Hiebert (1993) studied the effects of liberal arts, professional, and sectarian institutions on faith development. In a sample of 796 freshmen and senior students, 64% of all respondents scored at stage 4 on the faith development scale. Variation between groups was only mildly significant with "liberal arts colleges showing slightly more developmental affects" (Hiebert, 1993).

Stewart (2001, 2002), investigated the awareness and integration of social-cultural identities of five Black college students at a predominantly white college. Stewart's theoretical perspective was informed, in part, from Fowler's and Park's faith and identity typology. Findings from the study revealed the impact of the students' relationships to a transcendent source of value and meaning. Additional findings suggest

that students' organizational commitments provided clues about their socio-cultural identities. Stewart's study is particularly relevant because of her findings which suggest *that social commitments play a role in identity formation*.

The largest investigation of college students' faith development is the on-going Faithful Change project (Holcomb & Nonneman, 2004). A longitudinal study, the Faithful Change project seeks to determine spiritual growth patterns in college students. Preliminary findings indicate that students entered college at either mythic-literal or synthetic-conventional stages. By the time of graduation, however, approximately half of the seniors scored between synthetic-conventional and individuative-reflexive stages. Findings also suggest that crises, as understood by Erikson, were key drivers of development. The researchers determined that a crisis was not necessarily a short term event, but rather can be characterized as a "prolonged period of active engagement with, and exploration of, competing rules and ideologies" (Holcomb & Nonneman, 200).

Sharon Parks (1982, 1986, 2000), developed and applied FDT in the contexts of undergraduate and graduate education. Like Fowler, Parks conceived of faith as a verb. "Faith," notes Parks (1982) "composes our conviction of value and trustworthiness. Faith is the patterning activity that orders our sense of the ultimate nature of the cosmos of being" (p. 658). In her extension of FDT, Parks focused attention on the transition between stage 3 (conventional) and stage 4 (individuating) faith development. When considering the transition between and conventional and post-conventional faith, special attention should focus on a person's "locus of authority." During the stage 3-4 transition a person's locus of authority shifts from outside to inside. It is a movement from

"dependence" on trusted others to "inner-dependence" (Parks, 1982). From her personal

experience as a college chaplain and teacher, Parks found that most "mature" students

(i.e., junior, seniors, and new graduate students) continued to exhibit a mixture of

dependent and inner-dependent behavior. Influenced by the research of Keniston (1973)

and Perry (1970), Parks hypothesized the existence of a distinct developmental stage

between conventional (adolescent) and post-conventional (adult) stages. Labeled "young

adulthood" by Parks (1982), this stage of faith development is post-adolescence and is

characterized by the emergence of a "self-aware self" that evidences a locus of authority

described as a "fragile inner-dependence"—an affective component that "is ambivalent

in relation to self and society" (p. 666). The transition between adolescence and

adulthood is a two-step process where "the locus of authority shifts first from those

assumed sources of authority 'out there' that one had appropriated unself-consciously, to

an authority out there one *choses*, and then in a second movement to an authority located

within" (p. 666). As Parks continued her refinement of Fowler's work, she eventually

outlined a three-component model of faith development. The three interactive

components included in her model are (1) forms of knowing, grounded in Perry's (1970)

work in cognitive and ethical development; (2) forms of dependence, an affective aspect

of faith development; and (3) forms of community, which corresponds with Fowler's

bounds of social awareness (Love, 2001; Parks, 1986, 2000).

FDT - Conclusion

In sum, the inclusion of FDT in the student affairs theory tool box is legitimate on

several grounds. Historically, there has been a significant relationship between

institutions of higher education and ecclesiastical bodies. The schism between science and faith, from a student affairs point of view, is a relatively new phenomenon. The history of student affairs is much longer than the history of the profession. The profession, in many ways, is a product of an increasingly secularized, positivistic and fragmented culture. It is therefore reasonable to view the current interest in spirituality by student affairs scholars as a renewed acknowledgment of the profession's historical and theological heritage.

From the perspective of history of science, the inclusion of FDT is also legitimated. Many of the leading contributors in the field of psychology considered the nature of spirituality and its relationship to physical and emotional well-being as important areas of study, social scientists including William James, Carl Jung, and Erik Erickson to name just a few. Further, as part of the Cambridge circle, Fowler outlined FDT in collaboration with such notable social scientists as Lawrence Kohlberg, Carol Gilligan, Robert Kegan, and William Perry. The works of these scholars are fundamental to student affairs theory base (Evans, 1996). Finally, Fowler's argument that faith is a universal human phenomenon also clears the way for the inclusion of FDT. By focusing on the cognitive structures that comprise a person's faith stage, Fowler has essentially side-stepped the problem of separation of church and state. His focus is not on the religious content of faith, but rather on its formal cognitive structures and how they are evidenced through an individual's covenantal relationships as composed within her or his field of ultimate concern (Fowler, 1981, 1996).

Although there is a considerable body of literature concerning higher education and spirituality, such is not the case with FDT. Research on the application of FDT in the context of public colleges and universities, though thin, strongly supports the inclusion of spiritual and faith development in the student affairs theory base. Yet, other than Stewart's (2001, 2002) research concerning identity integration of Black students on a predominantly white campus, I am aware of no studies that have used FDT for researching the dynamics of loyalty and commitment of college students as they seek for wholeness, transcendence, and meaning in a culture that is increasingly fragmented.

Transformational Learning Theory

Mezirow's theory of Transformational Learning, like Fowler's theory of Faith Development, views meaning making as universal to all humans. According to Mezirow (1991, 1997, 2000), TL is a mode of meaning making whereby individuals, first, become critically aware of their tacit assumptions and expectations and those of others and, second, assess the relevance of these assumptions and expectations for making an interpretation. Much of our tacit, or taken-for-granted, assumptions are acquired in childhood during the socialization process. The form of our assumptions and expectations is our frame of reference through which we filter our experiences (Mezirow, 1991, 1997, 2000).

A frame of reference is a *meaning perspective* composed of two dimensions: *habits of mind* and the resulting *points of view* (Mezirow, 1991, 1997, 2000). A habit of mind is a set of generalized assumptions. These assumptions include such things as conventional wisdom, religious worldview, cultural canon, political ideology, and the

like. Habits of mind can be expressed as liberal or conservative orientations; whether we think like a lawyer, soldier, artist, or educator; whether we approach problem solving analytically or intuitively; whether we are an introvert or extrovert; our learning styles; and other orientations and worldviews (Mezirow, 2000). Points of view are *meaning schemes* and are expressions of our habits of mind. A point of view is "constituted by the cluster of specific beliefs, feelings, attitudes, and values judgments that accompany and shape an interpretation" (Mezirow, 1997, p. 7). Meaning perspectives, which usually operate outside of our awareness, determine what we see and how we see it.

Meaning perspectives, according to Mezirow (1991), can be categorized into three primary types: epistemic perspectives, sociolinguistic perspectives, and psychological perspectives. Epistemic perspectives are those that relate to the way we know and how we make use of that knowledge. Cranton (1994) notes that sociolinguistic meaning perspectives are founded upon social customs, cultural expectations, socialization, and language codes. Psychological meaning perspectives are shaped by such things as people's self-concept, inhibitions, locus of control, or needs and tolerance for ambiguity (Cranton, 1994; Mezirow, 1991). It is important to note that distortions in meaning perspectives can occur in any of the three types of meaning perspectives (Mezirow, 1991).

TL can take place in four different ways: "by elaborating existing frames of reference, by learning new frames of reference, by transforming points of view, or by transforming habits of mind" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 19). What *transforms* in transformational learning is our frames of reference (a meaning perspective), which are

the source and nature of our tacit beliefs and values (Mezirow, 2000). Transformational learning is the process by which we transform problematic frames of references to make them more dependable in our lives by generating opinions and interpretations that are more justified. When our beliefs are deemed to be problematic we are motivated to become critically reflective and thereby arrive at a transformative insight. Such insight must then be evaluated, or validated, through rational discourse. Also, Mezirow (1991, 1997, 2000) contends that transformation in our habit of mind may be sudden or incremental. It may involve a dramatic reorienting insight or a slow progression of transformations in related points of view.

Perspective Transformation

From his study of women returning to college, Mezirow (1978, 2000) was able to identify ten phases of transformative learning:

1. a disorienting dilemma

2. self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt, or shame

3. a critical assessment of assumptions

4. recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared

5. exploration of options for new roles, relationships and actions

6. planning a course of action

7. acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans

8. provisional trying of new roles

9. building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships

      10. a reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new

          perspective (p. 22)

While Mezirow originally saw this learning process as linear (though not always

invariant like stage theories), more recent studies suggest that the process is akin to a

recursive journey (Taylor, 2000).

      The experience of a disorienting dilemma—the first stage of transformational

learning—can include such phenomena as the death of a friend, broken relationships,

emotional disturbance, failed academic performance, or, as in this study, the collapse of

Bonfire. To more fully illuminate the notion of disorienting dilemma, attention will be

drawn to Festinger's (1957) theory of Cognitive Dissonance and Segal's (1999) analysis

of disorientating dilemmas and critical incidents in light of the hermeneutic

phenomenology of Martin Heidegger.

Cognitive Dissonance

According to Festinger (1957), cognitive dissonance is the experience of psychological

discomfort that has motivational characteristics. Festinger (1957) hypothesized in his

theory of cognitive dissonance that pairs of cognition can be either relevant or irrelevant

to one another (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 1999). At any given point in time people are

processing multiple thoughts or cognitions that are in relation to one another (e.g., A

implies B, B implies C, and so on). Cognitions include facts, opinions, and beliefs about

others, the environment, or one's behavior (Festinger, 1957). For example, Natalie, a

respondent and student advisor, described the first time she visited the Bonfire stack:

      I'm not one of these people who had been to Bonfire all their lives. I
      knew it existed; didn't know anything about it; never seen it; didn't even

really know what it looked like except I'd seen pictures on shirts, so I had no previous anything. I kind of knew the tradition around it, but as far as what it was, I had no idea, and [a new friend] took me and Wow! I really wish students would work as hard in the classroom as they do on Bonfire, but you know out there; these students; me; my bonfire buddy; these people that I know out there building this [thing]; giving their heart and soul to this structure that to them encompassed the spirit to beat the University of Texas in a football game! This was to show our spirit and our desire to beat them. And students—friends of mine that I'm sure had never seen an ax or a log or a piece of baling wire in their life—were out there with blisters on their hands and grease on their face and were building this structure and it was amazing! [R5-BI:90-101] [*]

By examining Natalie's account of seeing Bonfire for the first time, the flow of cognitive elements may be structured as follows: (a) I didn't know anything about Bonfire. (b) I knew a little about the tradition. (c) But, wow, I had no idea how big it was. (d) I had no idea how hard the students worked. (e) I wished students would work that hard on their studies. (f) These students, my friends, were giving their heart and soul to build this structure. (g) It was amazing.

These cognitive elements are relevant to each other; they are logically related. When any two elements of cognition are relevant to each other, they are either consonant or dissonant. "Two cognitions are consonant if one follows from the other, and they are dissonant if the obverse (opposite) of one cognitions follows from the other" (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 1999, p. 3). For example, suppose I am out with my wife for a walk. Suddenly, I am aware that we are under a thunder cloud that is about to burst (thought, A). I am suddenly fearful that we are going to get wet (thought, B). The downpour starts, but I notice that I am not wet (opposite of B). I, therefore, experience a small level of dissonance. To address the dissonance—the illogic of not being wet—I quickly look

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[*] R5-BI:90-101 refers to respondent #5, Bonfire interview, line 90-101.

around and find that my wife is holding an umbrella over me. The illogic of the situation

is explained and the level of cognitive dissonance that I experienced is reduced (for a

similar example see, Festinger, 1957).

Since individuals are most comfortable when in a state of cognitive consistency,

they are motivated to keep dissonance to a minimum. High levels of cognitive

dissonance lead to high levels of psychological discomfort. The greater the discomfort

the more an individual is motivated to reduce dissonance.

> Dissonance can be reduced by removing dissonant cognition, adding new
> consonant cognitions, reducing the importance of dissonance cognitions,
> or increasing the importance of consonant cognition. The likelihood that a
> particular cognition will change to reduce dissonance is determined by
> the resistance to change of the cognition. . . . Resistance to change of a
> behavioral cognitive element depends on the extent of pain and loss that
> must be endured and the satisfaction obtained from the behavior.
> (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 1999, p. 4)

The magnitude of dissonance between any two cognitions is a product of (1) the

strength or importance of one cognition in relation to another and (2) the ratio of

dissonance to consonant cognitions. "As the number and/or importance of dissonant

cognitions increases, relative to the number and/or importance of consonant cognitions,

the magnitude or dissonance increases" (Brehm & Cohen, 1962, p. 4). For example,

Natalie, as a college student advisor, experienced a certain level of dissonance between

two thoughts: (1) "I saw students giving their heart and soul to building Bonfire," and

(2) "I wish these students would work as hard at studying as they did working on

Bonfire." As an academic advisor committed to helping her students succeed

academically, Natalie, to a certain extent, lamented the influence of Bonfire. The idea

that students were more committed to building Bonfire than doing well academically

increased dissonance. However, Natalie was able to reduce her level of dissonance by reinforcing the significance of awe she felt when she watched students sacrificing themselves to build the mammoth bonfire.

Since 1957, the advancement of research in cognitive dissonance theory has focused around many common paradigms. According to Harmon-Jones and Mills (1999), these paradigms include, among others, (1) the free-choice paradigm, where it is postulated that once a decision has been made, dissonance will be aroused; (2) the belief-disconfirmation paradigm, which argues that dissonance will increase when people receive information that is inconsistent with their beliefs; and (3) the effect-justification paradigm, where dissonance is sparked when an individual engages in an unpleasant activity to obtain a desirable outcome.

Making Assumptions Explicit

Steven Segal (1999) examined the concept of disorientating dilemmas and critical incidents in light of the hermeneutic phenomenology of Martin Heidegger. According to Segal (1999), neither disorienting dilemmas nor critical incidents necessarily lead to critical reflection. Rather, in response to either of these phenomena, a person may react with defensiveness or dogmatism. Defensive responses come in many forms including racism, nationalism, and fundamentalism. From these defensive positions people seek to avoid reflecting upon their tacit assumptions and, instead, blame others for their psychological discomfort, i.e. cognitive dissonance (Segal, 1999).

From a Heideggerian perspective, disorienting dilemmas are the generative conditions of existential explicitness. Before people can reflect upon or defend their

practices, their practices must be made explicit. "Explicitness," notes Segal (1999), "is not itself a moment of critical reflection but the condition of both reflection and defensiveness" (p. 74). The question is, under what conditions can we learn about our practices by observing and reflecting on them (Segal, 1999).

To address this question, Segal draws on Heidegger's logic in *Being and Time* (1962). From Heidegger's perspective, a distinction can be drawn between thinking about something and thinking about the context in which this thing is situated. The change from being embedded in our day-to-day activities to thinking about them requires an existential break or "rupture." For example, when an exchange student travels to a foreign country, he will be exposed to a different culture. In the process of dealing with this "strangeness," the student is wrenched free from their day-to-day know-how. The student's own way of doing things is made explicit because of the rupture brought on by experiencing a new culture. In order for the student to grow from this experience he must be willing to reflect upon and, to use Segal's words, deconstruct the assumptions that have been made explicit (Segal 1999). In situations like these, the student becomes "reflexive not out of a conscious desire to be reflexive but *through a rupture in his everyday world* in which he become existentially withdrawn from the everyday world" (Segal, 1999, p. 85, italics added). The shift from being involved in our taken-for-granted practices to thinking about them and the contexts in which they are situated may present certain challenges. "Rupture, critical incidents and disorienting dilemmas do not lead necessarily to critical reflection. They may lead to defensiveness"

notes Segal (1999, p. 87). Ultimately, however, both reflection and defensives are forms of explicitness.

Meaning Making: Linking FDT and TLT

As we have learned, both FDT and TLT focus on the proclivity for human beings to make meaning. Furthermore, attention was focused on how the concept of disorienting dilemma can be framed in light of cognitive dissonance theory and how assumptions must be made explicit before they can be reflected upon. In this section, attention will focus on the juxtaposition of FDT and TLT and how they can be used by student affairs professionals to promote the growth and transformational learning of college students.

Theories of Meaning Making

Overton (1994) suggests that all theories of meaning making—social or otherwise—can be categorized by two alternative strategies: the isolationist or system strategies. From the isolationist strategy, there is a split between subjective ("I mean") and objective ("it means") poles, a split between a thing or person objectively encountered and the subjective meaning formed within the mind of a comprehending agent. Overton points out that, from this perspective, there must be some logical or causal network that acts as glue to hold the two poles together (Overton, 1994, p. 2). In the system strategy, the "I mean/it means" relation forms a "unified whole or self-organizing system" (p.3). Ontological priority is not granted to either the subject or object, but rather "each feature of the matrix defines and is defined by the other" (p. 3).

At an epistemic level, FDT and TLT are best understood as isolationist strategies where reality and its meaning are viewed as subject and a construction of the individual

mind (Baumgartner, 2001; Fowler, 1994; Mezirow, 1991). FDT may be seen as representative of the "Piagetian or schema-driven brand of constructivism" (Prawat, 1996, p. 215). This type of constructivism, notes Prawat (1996), is highly rationalistic and places great emphasis on the mind's capacity for self-organization—the construction of mental structures. This process of self-organization is an on-going response to the sensual world in which we operate. New information is received, evaluated and either assimilated into our current schema or, in the case of accommodation, our schema is altered in a way that receives the new knowledge.

Since TLT is also concerned with changes in an individual's meaning perspective, it appears in line with the isolationist strategy. Mezirow (1991), on the other hand, argues that TLT shares a closer alignment with contextual theories of adult learning, noting, "in contextual theories, learning and memory are by-products of the transaction between individual and context" (p. 9). Mezirow's contention notwithstanding, because a system strategy for meaning making is paradoxically cultural and individualistic it advances a monistic worldview. This is why, Overton (1994) suggests, "The major danger for the systems strategy is that if there were no way at all of resolving the circularity and paradox, then thinking about a domain of interest—here, meaning—would become confused and muddled" (p. 4). Even if system strategies reject the "I mean/it means" duality, for practical purposes social scientists inevitably favor one side or other of the "I mean/it means" matrix. Apparently, Mezirow (1991) favors the system over the isolationist strategy, but his inclusion of social constructivism as a

foundational principle within TLT suggest that greater weight be placed on the "I mean"

side of the matrix (Baumgartner, 2001; Clark, 1993a).

Points of Connections

Although TLT is not a theory of cognitive development, Mezirow (1991) contends TL

and adult development are closely related:

> Transformation can lead developmentally toward a more inclusive, differentiated, permeable, and integrated perspective and that, insofar as it is possible, we all naturally move toward such an orientation. *This is what development means in adulthood*. It should be clear that a strong case can be made for calling perspective transformation the central process of adult development. (Mezirow, 1991, p. 155)

Transformational learning and religious conversion. Not surprisingly, within FD and TL

theories, there are several points of connections. Wollert's (2003) review of FDT and

TLT juxtaposed the two theories in a way that contrasted Mezirow's ideas concerning

transformation of meaning schemes and the transformation of meaning perspectives with

Fowler's thoughts concerning religious conversion and structural stage change.

Regarding the latter two, Fowler (1981) notes,

> after several years' reflection, I am finding it most useful to reserve the term conversion for the sudden or gradual processes that leads to significant changes in the *contents* of faith. Structural stage change separate from or as a part of a conversion process should be identified in terms of stage change. (p. 285).

Fowler (1981) contends there are six possible relationships between formal

structural stage change and conversional change in faith.

1. Stage change without conversional change

2. Conversional change without faith stage change

3. Conversional change that precipitates a faith stage change

4. Faith stage change that precipitates conversional change

5. Conversional change that is correlated with, and goes hand in hand with, a structural stage change

6. Conversional change that blocks or helps one avoid the pain of faith stage changes

Wollert (2003) points out that Fowler (1986b) considers faith as a powerful expression of constructive knowing. As such faith involves "constructions of self and others, in perspective taking, in moral analysis and judgment, and in the constitutions of self as related to others which we call ego" (Fowler, 1986b, p.21). "Fowler goes on to state that in faith-knowing, the modification of constitution of one's self is always a possibility" (Wollert, 2003, p. 22). Wollert recognizes the similarities between Fowler's thoughts on constructive knowing and its potential impact on the self with the distinction that Mezirow (1991) draws between the transformation of meaning perspectives and the transformation of meaning schemes. Both the transformation of meaning perspectives and the constitutive knowing that is faith involve one's sense of self. "One might say that faith, as Fowler defines it, is more closely related to the transformation of meaning perspectives than to the transformation of meaning schemes" (Wollert, 2003, p. 23). Both involve the possibility that one's sense of identity can be changed. Wollert (2003) goes on to say that Fowler's perception of conversion may be more aligned with the transformation of meaning schemes. As noted, when speaking about religious conversion Fowler (1991) is primarily talking about the *content* rather than *form* of a person's faith.

The alignment between FDT and TLT is most pronounced when the particulars associated with Stage 3 to Stage 4 faith transition is compared to perspective transformation.

> This stage requires breaking the balance of the last stage's dance. Its tacit system of beliefs, values, and commitments must be critically examined, and be replaced or reorganized into a more explicit meaning system. The sense of self, derived from one's important roles and relationships, must be grounded in choices (and exclusions), and in a qualitatively new authority and responsibility for oneself. Roles and relations, once *constitutive* of identity, now being chosen, become expressions of identity. (Fowler, 1986b)

Relationships – The importance of "others." It has already been established that Fowler formulated his theory of faith development around Niebuhr's relational anthropology (Mikoski, 2003). Central to FDT—and to this study—is the notion that all faith relationships are covenantal in nature. Similarly, for Mezirow, transformational learning is a social process. Transformational learning occurs in adults when tacit assumptions are made explicit and transformed through critical reflection and discourse. Mezirow (1997) notes, "To resolve these questions of assumption, we rely on a tentative best judgment among those whom we believe to be informed, rational, and objective. We engage in discourse to validate what is being communicated" (p. 6). This relational way of viewing the world, contends Clark (1993b), is evidence of the connection between theology (faith) and adult education (learning).

Locus of control. Mezirow (1997, 2000) contends that, outside of discourse, our only option when validating revised frames of reference is to turn to an external authority or tradition. This brings us to the question of whether our locus of control is internal or external. To speak of "locus of control" is to ask the question, "Do I ultimately answer to

myself or to some outside authority, i.e., religious texts, spiritual beliefs, parents, or tradition?" Within post-modernity, contends Mezirow, individuals must make their own interpretations rather than act upon the interpretations of others. In *Faithful Change*, Fowler expands FDT as a way of explaining the differences between modern and postmodern social consciousness. A postmodern faith consciousness—a progressive temper—is akin to Individuative-Reflective faith. Fowler (1996) writes, "In [a postmodern] faith consciousness, progressives tend to be resistant to appeals to authority based upon unexamined traditional doctrine or to claims dependent primarily upon ecclesial authority for their validity. Progressives locate authority *within* the self" (p. 169). It is clear then that both FDT and TLT are built on the assumption that the self is understood as rational and autonomous.

Differing Perspectives – Differing Praxis

TLT differs from FDT in that TL is concerned with the generation of knowledge whereas FD is focused on the internal structuring of an individual's meaning-making (or faith) capacity (Fowler, 1994; Mezirow, 1991). Faith, as argued by Fowler (2001) and others, is understood better when it is perceived as a cube. Since a cube is three dimensional, an observer can see only half of its form at any one time. Fowler (2001) acknowledges that "the structuring operations underlying faith are at best only half of the story of a person's development in faith" (p. 164). This is to say he is concerned about the life-long structuring—i.e. *form*—of an individual's faith capacity through which meaning is created. Faith, for Fowler (1981, 1986b, 1996), is a *way* of knowing. Mezirow (1991, 1996, 1997), on the other hand, is concerned with the on-going process

of communicative learning through which we make meaning, e.g., when the *content* of problematic frames of reference are transformed as a result of the critical reflection on the assumptions that comprise the foundation of our interpretations, beliefs, habits of mind, and points of view.

The difference between the theoretical approaches of FDT and TLT is significant, especially from a perspective of educational praxis. The formal aspects that comprise a stage of faith are cognitive, affective, and imaginal ways of knowing that shape a person's way of valuing and committing to others and to objects of ultimate concern. Since FDT is purposefully content neutral, Fowler contends it is not appropriate for educators, counselors, and/or clergy to develop curriculum specifically designed to promote stage development. Fowler (2004) argues strongly that "***it should never be the primary goal of religious education simply to precipitate and encourage stage development***" (p. 417). Rather, as educators, it is our responsibility to pay attention to stage and stage advancement when teaching, advising, or designing educational programs. "Movement in stage development, properly understood is a ***byproduct*** of teaching the substance and the practices of faith development" (Fowler, 2004, p. 417). This sentiment stems from the notion that stage development is a life-long process; there may be times in a person's life when the push for development is erroneous. Sometimes, people need to experience what Kegan (1982) calls a culture of embeddedness. As Strieb (2003b) notes, "From the life-span perspective, but also from a religious styles perspective, we have no reason to reinforce developmental pressure; the variety and

complexity [of religious experiences] contradicts any simple and unidimensional effort"

(p. 133).

CHAPTER IV

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In the preceding chapters I addressed four key issues: (1) theories concerning

psychology of religion and college student affairs practice, (2) the history of the student

affairs as a profession, (3) Fowler's theory of faith development and its affinity with

Mezirow's theory of transformational learning, and (4) disorienting dilemmas and

cognitive dissonance theory. In this chapter, consideration will be given to the steps

taken for collecting data and the subsequent construction of respondent narrative

accounts. Details concerning the research paradigm and methodologies employed will be

made clear in the following subsections: (1) Theoretical Paradigms and Rationale, (2)

Research Strategies, (3) Trustworthiness, (4) Conclusion.

Theoretical Paradigms and Rationale

The method by which respondents' accounts were constructed, and then later analyzed,

interpreted and reconstructed is the heart of this chapter. Understanding the process is

essential for establishing the trustworthiness of my interpretations and my

representations of the accounts provided. In this section, I will briefly highlight three

theoretical perspectives that established the horizon from which I engaged in the

research process, namely, (1) field theory, (2) life-span development, and (3) personal

narratives and hermeneutics.

Field Theory: Interactionist Model

To lay the groundwork for analysis, I decided to draw on Kurt Lewin's interactionist formula, $B = f(P$ x $E)$, as a simple heuristic device (Lewin, 1951). Although a product of the positivist paradigm, Lewin's development of field theory was an effort on his part to liberate psychology from the grips of scientific naturalism. Lewin's model reveals behavior as a product of the interaction of the person and his or her environment. An environment includes both the physical and social environments in which a person is imbedded (Berscheid, 2003). In this study, respondents' social environment included the many covenant relationships to which they were committed, i.e., relationships with their Bonfire family, other college students, significant others, the university and, *most importantly*, their relationship to transcendent center(s) of value and power. The behaviors that form the core objects of research included the narrative accounts of past actions, intentions, and experiences, answers to interview questions, and other reflexive practices. In this study I was employing FDT not as a means of predicting students' behavior but as a means to help explain the behavior of students trying to make sense of the Bonfire tragedy. From a field theory perspective, I theorize that respondents' constructions of narrative accounts regarding the 1999 Bonfire tragedy can be explained, *in part*, as an interaction of the respondent—who is at a particular stage of faith development—and their many covenant relationships.

It was not my intention to make a rigorous application of Lewin's theory. I believe such a stance was unnecessary. I simply utilized the theory as a device to focus my analysis in a way that equal attention was given to the respondent and his or her

environment. I believe the model offers a starting place for understanding how students' level of faith development affected their meaning-making process and how the structure and strength of their many covenant relationships impacted the making of narrative accounts.

Life-span Development

While Lewin's field theory provides a good basis for contextualizing behavior, it is limited because it does not adequately account for time. The model primarily explains behavior that takes place in the present. In its rudimentary form, the interactionist model does not consider an individual's past or future as part of the equation. However, the narrative accounts offered by study respondents did not begin with the actual interviews. Rather, each respondent brought a backstory to his or her interview. Backstories are essential because they help establish a personal history from which meaning can emerge. They aid in answering several questions: Who is this person offering a narrative account of Bonfire? Who were the key authority figures in his life? How does a female graduate student's historically and relationally-bound faith configure her assumptions and interpretation of Bonfire?

As previously mentioned, when fashioning his theory of faith development, Fowler was deeply influenced by Eric Erickson and his theory of psychosocial, or life-span, development (Fowler, 1981). According to Fowler, when we speak about the adult life-cycle, we are usually referring to ways of looking at the course or process of adult human life (Fowler, 1983, p. 181). Levinson (1978) suggests there are two key metaphors that infuse theories of life-span development: the life journey and seasons of

life. When we speak of life's journey we comprehend the human life cycle as a passage

from new life to old age. The metaphor of *journey* suggests that there is a beginning,

middle, and end to the life process. However, from personal experience, we know the

trajectories of our lives are not simple and unchanging. Our individual journeys are

marked by twists and turns, fluctuating degrees of difficulty, and a multitude of positive

and negative disturbances. Yet when we step back to consider the common progression

of our journeys it is possible to discern predictable patterns or *seasons*. Regarding this

second metaphor, Levinson (1978) observes that "a season is a relatively stable segment

of the total [life] cycle. . . . To say that a season is relatively stable, however, does not

mean that it is stationary or static" (p. 7, as cited in Fowler, 1983). Every season of a

person's life is marked by physiological and social change and the on-going process of

transition to the next stage of life.

At a symposium exploring the intersection of adult life cycle and faith

development, Fowler presented a model (see Figure 3) that showcased the temporal and

psychosocial dimensions of faith development (Fowler, 1983; see also Streib, 1991). In

this model, Fowler identified six "interpenetrating variables in the faith movement of

adults through time" (pp. 199-200). In the figure shown, the letter A indicates the

dimension of time. Fowler (1983) claimed that "it is of critical importance [in an adult's

life] to know what time it is in his or her life and to have reliable knowledge of what

existential issues and challenges predictably come with the time-fullness of this period

of his or her life" (p.201). Within the moving ellipse are three components of the

structuring activity that is faith. First, the letter B represents the operational structures of
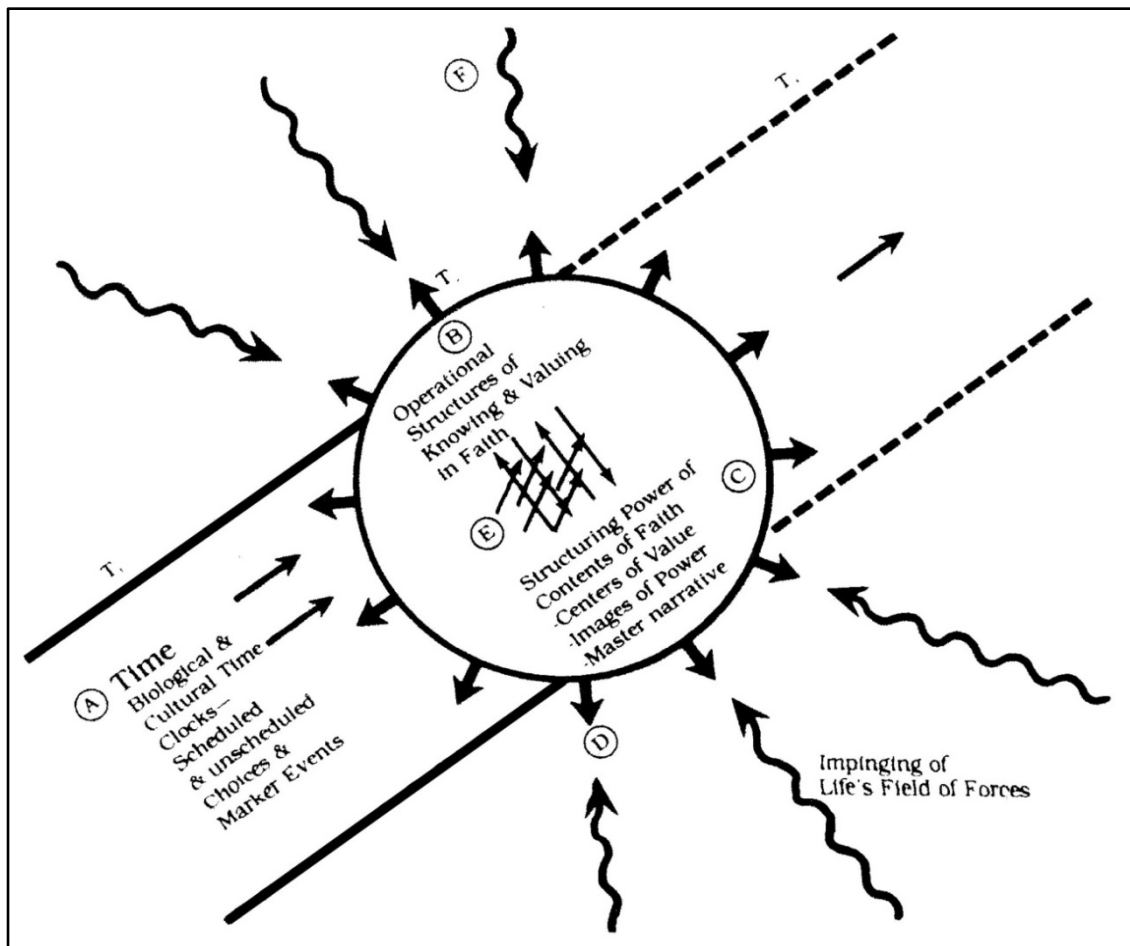
Figure 3. A model of the dynamics of adult faith (Fowler, 1983, p. 200)

knowing and valuing in faith "which underlie a person's appropriation and organization

of the contents of his or her faith" (p. 201). The letter C denotes the structuring power of

the contents of faith which include centers of supraordinate value and power as well as

master narratives. The letter E represents a depth dimension and is representative of "the

powerful role of the dynamic unconscious in the shaping of faith and in faith's

contribution to building and sustaining a life structure" (p. 202). The letter D represents

the shape of the life structure at a given time (T_1). As time passes (T_2 and T_3), "the life

structure will have had, or will take on, a new shape and pattern of relationships, involvements, and investments of the self" (p. 201). The letter F signifies the field of forces that impinge on an adult's life and includes the integration of "the economic, political, ideological, environmental, and relational influences, as well as the influence of religious communities and their symbolic representation" (Streib, 1991, p. 43).

Fowler's model of the dynamics of faith is helpful because it places faith, with its multiple dimensions, within the broader life journey. By comparing FDT with Erikson's theory of psychosocial stages and Levinson's adult eras, Fowler (1983) outlined several "optimal parallels" (see Erikson, 1963; Levinson, 1978). Fowler notes, "the period from seventeen to twenty-two, the time Levinson sees as marking the transition to the early adult era [or young-adult stage as outlined by Parks], corresponds with what appears to be the optimal time for beginning a transition from Synthetic-Conventional toward Individuative-Reflective stage of faith" (p. 196).

Personal Narrative and Hermeneutics

Among many social scientists it is now recognized that people bring order or meaning to their lives through narrative. A narrative is a sequence of events that are bound within a temporal structure. How people make sense of their life experiences is made explicit through stories. The process of making stories is constructive and is a type of "world making" (Bruner, 1987, p. 11). Autobiography and narrative accounts of specific events are not objective reconstructions but are perceptions bound within a particular context (Wiklund, Lindholm, & Lindstom, 2002). The narrative accounts collected in this study are co-constructed and culturally bound. Wiklund, et al. (2002) note that "most research

interviews are, in one way or another, narratives about a particular phenomenon of interest and a hermeneutic approach is used to interpret and understand these narratives and the phenomenon the narrative is about" (p. 114). According to Schwandt (2003), "To find meaning in action, or to say one understands what a particular action means, requires that one interpret in a particular way what the actors are doing" (p. 296).

The narrative turn within the field of psychology is aimed at rejoining psychology with other interpretive disciplines in the humanities and social sciences (Bruner, 1990). If psychology is to be an interpretive discipline then the issue of hermeneutics becomes a central point of concern. Originally used in the interpretation of ancient texts, hermeneutics is "conceived of as the philosophy of understanding and the science of textual interpretation" (Wiklund, et al., 2002, p. 115). Through the art of hermeneutics a body of text becomes meaningful to the reader(s). Josselson (2004) notes that "while the person storying his or her life is interpreting experience in constructing the account, the researches' task is hermeneutic and reconstructive . . in offering a telling at some different level" (Josselson, 2004, p. 3)

Research Strategies

Case Studies

"Research design," notes Lincoln & Guba (2003), "situates researchers in the empirical world and connects them to specific sites, persons, groups, institutions, and bodies of relevant interpretive material, including documents and archives" (p.36). In order to investigate how students may have been impacted by the 1999 Bonfire tragedy, a comparative case study approach was selected to bring their untold stories to light.

Merriam (1988) defines a case study as an "intensive, holistic, description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit" (p. 21). The heart of the case studies presented in this particular research project is the students' response to the 1999 Bonfire tragedy from FDT and TLT perspectives. The boundaries of each case study are established by the network of triadic-covenant relationships to which the respondent is committed. Although each respondent brought their particular story to the interview sessions, the opportunity to analyze and compare several cases from multiple perspectives will strengthen the trustworthiness of this study.

Multi-modal Secondary Data

Concurrent to recruiting and interviewing study respondents, I sought to establish the context of the 1999 Bonfire tragedy and Texas A&M University. The historical, cultural, and political contexts were established through the collection and analysis of multi-modal secondary data. The data drawn from the field represented "distinct *modes* of representation and communication" (Fincham, Scoufield, & Langer, 2007, p. 2) and included eye-witness accounts, official commission reports, published web-pages, media archives, and published books. I selected these documents because they were produced by diverse stakeholders who offered contrasting narratives of Bonfire history and culture. For that reason, these documents were selected purposefully and in a "nonsampling manner" (Miller & Alvardo, 2005).

Once collected, I studied the documents from a context analytic approach. Documents, analyzed from such an approach, are understood as social constructs generated from a larger field of social activity. How and why documents are produced

and used is historically and culturally relevant (Miller & Alvardo, 2005). Researchers applying a context analytic approach to multiple documents, "use documents as commentary to provide insight into individual and collective actions, intentions, meanings, organizational dynamics, and institutional structures, in short, to interpret the social reality indicated in the documents" (Miller & Alvardo, 2005, p. 351). Data from the multi-modal documents were analyzed as a means of constructing cultural and historical narratives of Bonfire (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The narratives generated contrasting accounts of Bonfire and provided a rich source of data for triangulation.

Respondent Selection

The recruiting of study participants began with two questions: *Who* should participate in this study? And, *how* should these individuals be identified and approached? The answer to the "Who should participate?" question, was derived from the focal point of the study, i.e. individuals who had a disorienting dilemma resulting from the collapse of Bonfire. In particular, people who experienced a "disorienting dilemma" were defined as individuals who were (1) involved with Bonfire and (2) knew someone who died in the tragedy.

The identification of such people was done in a manner consistent with Patton's (1990) strategy of intensity sampling. The rationale for this approach is founded on the premise that lessons may be learned from people with expert knowledge. The recruiting of "experts" willing to share their personal accounts of the Bonfire incident, nevertheless, proved difficult. Though initial contact with Bonfire leadership showed promise, ongoing litigation compelled early contacts to withdraw support. In response to

this, I added a secondary recruiting strategy known as "snowballing." The snowballing

technique is a networking strategy found to be effective for recruiting hidden or hard-to-

reach populations (Platzer & James, 1997; Streeton, Cooke, & Campbell, 2004).

Respondents were recruited through students who championed my cause. Through these

efforts I eventually recruited nine individuals willing to share their faith biographies and

their narrative accounts of Bonfire. Out of these nine respondents, three were selected

for further analysis. These study participants were selected because their completion of

the Life Tapestry Exercise and the narrative accounts constructed through the interview

process evidenced deeper levels of personal reflections and "thicker" descriptions.

After analysis on secondary documents commenced, I contacted potential

informants to set up initial interviews. Interview protocols included sequenced open-

ended questions designed to elicit the respondents' narrative-account of the tragedy

(Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Spradley, 1979). Following the initial interview, respondents

completed (by themselves and on their own time) the biographically oriented Life

Tapestry Exercise and then took part in the Faith Development Interview (Fowler, et al.,

2004, see Appendices B & C). The Life Tapestry Exercise in an integral part of the Faith

Development Interview and was administered for the purpose of enriching the interview

process by helping respondents reflect upon questions and issues that frequently require

a significant level of introspection (see also Moseley, et al., 1993).

Personal faith biographies and narratives accounts of the Bonfire tragedy were

solicited from respondents as a means of answering the first two research questions (see

Introduction, p. 10). My analytic approach, best described as a two-fold hermeneutic of

restoration (or *faith*) and demystification (or *suspicion*), was applied to the biographies

and accounts provided. Josselson (2004) notes that from a hermeneutic of restoration

stance, we "believe that the participants are telling us, as best they are able, their sense of

their subjective experience and meaning making" (p. 5). From this stance there is the

assumption that respondents are experts concerning their lived experiences and that

meaning of the text is essentially transparent. Contrarily, from a hermeneutic of

demystification stance the researcher assumes that experience is not "transparent to

itself: surface appearances mask depth realities; a told story conceals an untold one"

(Josselson, 2004, p. 13). These methods included, as previously mentioned, the reading

of cultural documents, reviewing visual media, and analyzing respondent interviews.

The investigative tools used to identify themes in the narrative texts are hermeneutical

and include constant comparative methodology and narrative analyses. Specifically, I

reflectively explored the application of FDT to interpret narrative accounts offered by

study respondents in light of findings.

Interview Protocols

In the original study design, study respondents were to (1) take part in an semi-structured

interview that allowed them to articulate a narrative account of Bonfire and reflect on

what they may have learned from the experience and (2) complete the Stages of Faith

Scale. The protocol for the semi-structured interview included approximately 16

questions clustered under six major themes: (a) Becoming an Aggie and the Aggie spirit,

(b) Understanding Bonfire and the 1999 tragedy, (c) Responding to others, and (d) What

has changed and what have you learned? The logic and sequencing of the questions

presumed a basic narrative timeline of the accounts that were provided by study

respondents (see Appendix A). Specifically, the first four questions focused on

information and events preceding Bonfire '99. The next set of five questions focused on

the Bonfire tradition and the '99 tragedy. Here respondents were invited to offer their

personal account of what happened. The last seven questions were designed to elicit

information relating to the participants response to other Aggies and how they might

have changed or what they learned from a TLT perspective.

The "Stages of Faith Scale" constructed by Swensen, Fuller, and Clements

(1993) consisted of five questions redacted from the *Manual for Faith Development*

Research (Moseley, et al., 1986). Four early participants completed and returned this

instrument. However, following an analysis of submitted responses, it became apparent

there was insufficient data to assign respondents to a particular stage of faith

development. Through subsequent research, this concern was corroborated by Heinz

Streib (2003a) and his review of FDT research. Concerning the Stages of Faith Scale,

Streib wrote:

> In my judgment, this series of questions leaves out important dimensions
> of the *Manual* entirely, such as the section on relationships (significant
> others, parents), the openness of values commitment beyond the
> individual, specific dimensions of religion (prayer, death, sin), and,
> finally, crises and peak experiences beyond the, nevertheless important,
> question of hope and faith. (p. 28)

In light of the foregoing, I decided to replace the Stages of Faith Scale with the

classic Faith Development Interview (Fowler, et al., 2004). The protocol for the Faith

Development Interview (see Appendices B & C) contained two elements: (1) a self-

paced exercise entitled "The Unfolding Tapestry of my Life" and (2) a "semi-clinical"

interview, which consisted of 25 open-ended questions grouped under the following headings: Life Tapestry/Life Review, Relationships, Present Values & Commitments, and Religion (Fowler, et al., 2004).

Trustworthiness

Credibility

As a qualitative researcher, it is not my intent to be objective. The narratives presented in the following chapter are co-constructions in the most basic sense. The faith biographies and narrative accounts are offered as credible evidence in support of the findings and provisionary conclusions that I present in the final chapter. The narratives are deemed as credible due to the following criteria: (1) prolonged engagement, (2) triangulation, and (3) referential adequacy.

One avenue by which I attempt to build truth value in this study is through prolonged engagement. "Prolonged engagement provides a foundation for credibility by enabling the researcher to learn the culture or an organization or other social setting over an extended time periods that tempers distortions introduced by particular events or by the newness of researchers and respondents to each other's presence" (Erlandson, et al., 1993, pp. 132-133). My engagement, or rather my relationship, with TAMU is substantial and multivariate. During the time I have conducted this study I have been a graduate student and professional academic advisor in the College of Education and Human Resource Development. As a student and as an employee of TAMU I brought substantial understanding of the history and culture of the institution. As a student affairs professional, my firsthand experience advising and counseling hundreds of students gave

me substantial understanding of the problems and issues associated with college student development. Further, at a certain level, my study respondents treated me as a fellow Aggie. My credibility as a researcher was established in part by a fellow Aggie who championed my research endeavors.

The second technique employed to build credibility for this study was triangulation, the strategic use of different and multiple sources, methods, and theory (Erlandson, et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Specifically, triangulation was established through the following strategies: (1) the selection of multiple comparative case studies; (2) the historical and thematic analysis of multi-modal secondary data to construct a political and cultural narrative of Bonfire; (3) the two-fold analysis of personal faith biographies and narratives accounts of the Bonfire tragedy from the hermeneutic of restoration and demystification; and (4) respondents' participation in the FD interview in combination with their completion of the Life Tapestry Exercise.

The third avenue by which I build truth value in my study was through referential adequacy. "Referential adequacy materials," notes Erlandson, et al. (1993) "support credibility by providing context-rich, holistic materials that provide background meaning to support data analysis, interpretation, and audits" (p. 139). More specifically, referential adequacy involves setting aside a portion of data to be archived and analyzed at a later date. After the initial analysis is completed the researcher then returns to the archived data and analyzes it as a way to test the trustworthiness of her preliminary findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Materials and records obtained to establish the historical context of Bonfire include official eye-witness testimonies of the Bonfire

tragedy, historical photographs, web pages, newspaper articles, official university reports, videos, and other secondary sources. Although I did not specifically set aside a portion of the data for later analysis, a purposive sample of documents, official records, and other sources were selected as a means to construct a preliminary Bonfire narrative. Throughout the analysis and interpretive phases of this study, I identified and evaluated additional historical documents and secondary sources to strengthen the trustworthiness of the historical Bonfire narrative used to contextualize respondent interviews.

Conclusion

Although this chapter was primarily concerned with how respondents' narrative accounts were constructed, analyzed, interpreted, and reconstructed, a consistent theme running throughout this chapter is evident, namely, that our many covenant relationships shape, in large part, the context of our lives, and that these relationships form the primary avenue through which life becomes meaningful. As Fowler (1981) notes, when someone enters into a relationship with the Creator—as *the* transcendent center of value and power—that person is making a bid to participate in a relationship that can subsume all other relations. That said, not all centers of value(s) and power are worthy of commitment. The intensity (high *to* low) and level of commitment (loyal *to* disloyal) to lesser gods—nations, institutions, ideologies, or causes—will impact how a person makes meaning in his or her life. The intensity and level of commitment that a student may have had toward Bonfire and their Bonfire family is a primal concern in this study.

CHAPTER V

INTERPRETING NARRATIVE ACCOUNTS OF THE

1999 BONFIRE TRAGEDY

Introduction

The framework for the historical and cultural narrative presented in this chapter was

derived in part from two secondary sources: The *Texas Aggie Bonfire* by Irwin Tang

(2000) and the *Interim Report of the Institutional Culture Taskforce to the Bonfire*

Steering Committee or ICT (Texas A&M University, 2001). These Bonfire narratives

were pooled with respondents' narratives to establish a context from which to explore

answers to the research questions. These narratives were also supplemented with

information culled from multi-modal secondary documents that included eye-witness

accounts, official web sites, and media archives. The purpose of this chapter is to

construct a multi-layered narrative that offers a historical and cultural context for

understanding Bonfire and establishes a horizon from which to explore answers to the

three research questions. First, how does a student's level of faith development relate to

her type and intensity of transformational learning resulting from the Bonfire tragedy at

Texas A&M University? Second, how can the loss of Bonfire, a significant communal

ritual, be understood as a disorienting dilemma as delineated in Mezirow's

transformational learning theory? And, third, how can Fowler's faith development

theory be applied by student affairs professionals and other college administrators to

contextualize the students' response to the Bonfire tragedy?

Brief History of Bonfire

> And the drum major so hearing
> Slowly raised his hand
> And said, "Boys let's play "the Spirit
> for the last time in Aggieland."
>
> And the band poured forth the Anthem
> In notes both bright and clear
> And ten thousand Aggie voices
> Sang the song they hold so dear.
>
> And when the band had finished
> St. Peter wiped his eyes
> And said, "It's not so hard to see
> They're meant for Paradise."
>
> The Last Corps Trip [*]

For an outsider to understand the tradition of Bonfire, she or he must first attempt to comprehend the *spirit* that infuses the tradition. The language commonly used to describe Bonfire (and Texas A&M in general) is metaphorically spiritual. In some ways the Bonfire tradition is best compared to an immense religious-style ceremony. The size and spectacle of Bonfire throughout the last quarter of the last century makes it is easy to forget its humble origin.

Bonfire was started as an A&M tradition early in the 20th century. During Bonfire's formative years (1909-1963), the then Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas (A&MC) was an all-male, military-style college. All students enrolling in A&MC were required to join the Corps of Cadets. In addition to core academics, all students

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[*] Excerpts from *The Last Corps Trip*, written by P.H. DuVal, Jr., TAMU class of 1951, can be seen engraved on the granite wall of the Traditions Plaza, which marks the entrance to the Bonfire Memorial. The poem was traditionally recited before the lighting of Bonfire.

received extensive training in the military sciences. Understandably, the lives of corps members were tightly regimented. The uniform they wore, when they ate, studied, or slept were spelled out in the Rules and Regulations book (Tang, 2000). As time passed, the Corps of Cadets came to be known as the "Keepers of the Spirit" because it was through them Bonfire and most of the University's cherished traditions were established (Keepers of the spirit, 2011).

There is evidence suggesting the first on-campus Bonfire was held in 1909. It was little more than a pile of scrap wood measuring around 12 feet high. The materials used to build Bonfire, including community trash, boxes, and scrap lumber, were scavenged by students (see Figure 4). Securing fuel for the yearly project was not always easy. As scavenging became more difficult, overzealous students "confiscated" railroad ties and lumber slated for university construction projects. The morning after the

Figure 4. Early Bonfire, cir. 1933 (TAMU, 2011)

1935 Bonfire, an irate farmer showed up at the Commandant's office complaining that students had "carried off his log barn, lock, stock, and barrel" (Tang, 2000, p. 102). In response to this incident the Commandant's office took control of Bonfire the following year.

With control of Bonfire now in the hands of the Commandant's office, the building, protecting, and burning of Bonfire became militarized. A chain of command was established, with the Assistant Commandant officially overseeing the annual project. Because pranksters from the University of Texas would frequently attempt to ignite Bonfire early, the Commandant's office had guards posted 24-hours-a-day. Eventually, 18 guard posts would be stationed around three concentric circles surrounding Bonfire (Tang, 2000). Guards assigned to these posts took their duties seriously and, over the years, dedicated guards sometimes used force to protect Bonfire (see "Criticism of Bonfire" below).

Bonfire, as a symbol of TAMU culture, was never static. The first bonfires were built as a "practical means to furnish heat, light, and excitement to outdoor prep rallies" (Texas A&M University, 2001, p. 3). The direct link between Bonfire and the football game against the University of Texas was not established until 1919. As noted by Tang (2000), the first time living trees were cut and used to build Bonfire was in 1942, when the Paramount film "We've Never Been Licked" (1943) was filmed on the A&M campus (see Figure 5).

The cutting of live trees undoubtedly inspired the already established need to build larger and larger bonfires. As Bonfire grew in recognition it became a matter of competitive pride for the freshmen class to build a bonfire that was larger than the one

Figure 5. Bonfire 1943 – "We've Never Been Licked" (TAMU, 2011)

built by the previous class. With the advent of the first "tall center poll" in 1946 the height of Bonfire doubled from 25 to 50 feet (Tang, 2000). Students from a 1949 engineering class calculated that it took over 35,000 man hours and 1.2 million pounds of timber to build Bonfire that year. By 1969, Bonfire reached a height of nearly 110 feet and required in excess of 100,000 hours of work to build (see Figure 6). According to the ICT (2001),

> These gigantic Bonfires of the post-war period began to take on meanings in addition to the football rivalry with the University of Texas. . . . As it outgrew the labor capacity of the freshmen class and absorbed an ever-increasing quantity of student labor, Bonfire also began to provide students with a memorable experience of camaraderie. Thus after 1945, Bonfire increasingly became a symbol and an event that was at the heart of the Aggie experience. (p.5)

It is somewhat ironic to note that the period when there was the most growth in the size

of Bonfire the A&MC football team was routinely dominated by the University of Texas

Figure 6. Bonfire 1969 (TAMU, 2011)

(or UT) football team. Between 1940 and 1975, the Aggie football team won only three

of its thirty-five matches against UT. "As pride in the accomplishments of the football

team became harder to sustain, it is understandable that students began to take more

pride in their Bonfire construction skills." (Texas A&M University, 2001, p. 5)

In the 1960s dramatic changes came to A&MC. For the first time women and minorities were allowed to enroll as students. The college changed its name to Texas A&M University and membership in the Corps of Cadets became voluntary. These university-wide changes affected the organizational structure and culture of Bonfire. In 1968, because membership in the Corps of Cadets was no longer mandatory the first civilian joined Bonfire's leadership ranks. This student leader was referred to as the "Redpot," because he wore an army-style helmet that was painted red. "Pots" in Bonfire parlance refers to the helmets worn by all Bonfire workers. The Bonfire chain of command eventually included 8 senior redpots, who directed and supervised the construction process, 8 junior redpots, who were responsible for the physical management of student workers, and 5 brownpots, who assisted the junior redpots and were responsible for chainsaws and other equipment (Godinez, Tamez, & Benton, 1990).[*]

As Bonfire grew in size and in recognition, the culture of tradition that assured the continuation of Bonfire became more entrenched. Every significant aspect of the Bonfire culture was steeped in tradition. One facet of the Bonfire culture could be termed "offensive for offensiveness's sake." These were traditions and practices that students partook in purely for the sake of being offensive. For example, one tradition called for Bonfire workers to label their pots with vulgar words and other idioms. There was also the practice, as one respondent described, of including "road kill" in the stack to ward off vandals. Students who worked on Bonfire would traditionally not wash their

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[*] According to Tang (2000) there were 9 senior redpots and 9 junior redpots.

work clothes (called "groads") for the entire Bonfire season. Secondly, there was also a cultural aspect of secrecy. According to one study respondent, the acronym "SSBS," which stood for "super-secret Bonfire sh*t," was a commonly accepted attribute of the Bonfire culture.

As membership is the Corps of Cadets declined, it became increasingly difficult to recruit enough men to build Bonfire in the time that was allowed. In response to this shortfall, women for the first time were recruited to work on cut in the early 80s. Ultimately, though, the role women were to play on Bonfire and their access to the stack was a point of contention. In particular, women were not allowed to enter the Bonfire perimeter (Tang, 2000). Any women found within the perimeter were immediately expelled and, if necessary, with force.

Criticism of Bonfire

Although Bonfire has routinely been described as a student activity that promoted leadership, camaraderie, and institutional loyalty, there is strong evidence suggesting the annual event also promoted sexism and racism, as well as inappropriate, unsafe, and even violent behavior. Many considered Bonfire to be simply a colossal waste of human and natural resources. Historically, the aberrant behavior most often associated with Bonfire was alcohol abuse and hazing. A case in point, in 1998, university police caught about 30 students (including 20 minors) inside a storage shed with a 15.5-gallon beer keg. University police called for an ambulance to attend to an 18-year-old student found passed out in the shed. One study respondent who was deeply involved in Bonfire during

his freshman year confessed that he got drunk almost every weekend he worked on

Bonfire.

As an all-male military-style institution, aspects of A&M's culture have long

been associated with hazing (see Figure 7). The university "has fought hazing, at least on

paper, from the very earliest days of the institution" (Tang, 2000, p. 95). Through

Figure 7. Bonfire hazing incident (TAMU, 2008)

Bonfire's 90-year history hazing has been a serious and on-going problem. The hazing

connected with Bonfire took on many different forms. Students were often paddled with

ax handles or forced to do push-ups on command. One study respondent, Terry, a

graduate student, described how he and other members of his dormitory were forced into

a grudge-match with students from rival dorms:

> There was another time when we were supposed to go as two or three
> halls over to the field in between Smith and Vincent and Richards Halls;
> it was just a big mud pit and they said that we were going to do
> something called "mortal combat," which didn't sound good in the first
> place. Our crew chiefs were leading this and were saying Thomas Hall is
> going to get over here and then Richards going to get on the other side of
> the field and you're just going to charge each other and start wrestling.
> During that time, one guy had popped me pretty good in the jaw and kind
> of popped my jaw out a little bit, and I popped him back in the jaw and
> knocked two teeth out. Another kid came up to me and as he was coming
> to tackle me his feet slid out from underneath him and he broke his ankle
> . . . but now you're here in college and the peer pressure and the desire to
> fit in has got me knocking people's teeth out; guys willingly breaking
> their ankles. [R3-BIHF:75-89]

Further, just a few weeks before the 1999 Bonfire collapsed, Walton Hall residents were

officially banned from participating in Bonfire activities because of hazing incidents that

occurred the previous year (Menczer, 1999).

From 1909 to 1979, Bonfire was an all-male event. Even after women were

allowed admission to TAMU, they were not welcome on the cut or stack sites. Female

students in the late 60s and early 70s were limited to helping out in the first-aid tents and

serving cookies and coffee. As the following story illustrates, even as recent as the mid-

90s, sexism and violence were still tolerated by Bonfire leadership.

> Two years ago, as a freshman, I was very enthusiastic about Bonfire—cut
> and stack. I attended them until I was turned off by the treatment that I
> received from a redpot.
>   One night, I was going to visit some friends who were camping
> out at stack. It was raining, and I stepped over a log to avoid a mud hole.
> Suddenly, I was approached by a redpot who yelled at me and shoved me
> back to the other side of the log.
>   I am very petite—5 feet 4 inches, 95 pounds—not a size that
> responds well to being shoved by a large male. Had he simply asked me

to leave his area, I would have gladly left. Upon reaching my friend's campsite, I was told that I had stepped into redpot perimeters, an area that females must not enter unless they have slept with a redpot. (Kelley, 1999)

Concerning student violence, only a few weeks before the collapse of Bonfire, Ramiro Reyes, a senior political science major, was reportedly assaulted by two Bonfire redpots. According to Reyes, he was walking across the corner of the Polo Fields, which was about 200 yards from the Bonfire site, when a member of the Corps of Cadets came running towards him yelling obscenities. The cadet tried to push and shove Reyes off of the field, but he resisted. Soon a second cadet came running and, to the surprise of Reyes, joined in the attack. When Reyes asked why he was being assaulted, the first assailant yelled, "Because you're on my field, and I'm a junior redpot" (Bennyhoff, 1999).

These are but two examples of the inappropriate behavior associated with Bonfire. Although the tradition was the very embodiment of the Aggie spirit, many of the actions displayed by students were reprehensible and, some believed, threatened A&M's ambition to become a world-class research institution. Ironically, as TAMU tried to reinvent itself, it became increasingly important for many students to cling to established tradition. Findings by the ICT suggest that,

At some point Bonfire was no longer simply a tradition, which is to say an annual event—it was the physical embodiment of Tradition, a visible assurance that the essential values of the University were being preserved even as the school itself was changed beyond recognition.

Bonfire served as a symbol that allowed Aggies to identify with the past. . . . [It served] as an illustration and confirmation of the Aggie's belief that they are fundamentally unlike the student bodies of other universities. . . . Bonfire does indeed demonstrate an unusual ability to

organize, cooperate, and dedicate one's self to the goals of the group.
(Texas A&M University, 2001, p. 5)

It can be argued that, from a historical point of view, the violent aspects associated with

Bonfire came to a head when significant social and cultural changes were established,

most notably the addition of women. The push by TAMU for greater gender and racial

diversity brought about a form of resistance which expressed itself as vulgarity, sexual

harassment, hazing, and exclusion.

Notwithstanding its detractors, that Bonfire was able to elicit cooperation,

dedication, and sacrifice supports my contention that the relationship between A&M

students and the "Spirit of Aggieland" is covenantal in nature. Specifically, students

chose to commit themselves to one another and to Bonfire, which is representative of the

Aggie spirit. From a faith development perspective, Bonfire is a symbol of a shared

center of supraordinate value (see Figure 1, p. 12). Since Bonfire was such an important

part of students' personal narratives, its demise was difficult to accept for many.

Bonfire – Concluding the Story

From a historical point of view, it is possible to see the development of Bonfire's three-

phase construction process (i.e., cut, stack, and burn) as a *serial* narrative. Specifically,

Bonfire can be understood as a narrative ritual that students repeated year in and year

out. As Olivia, a recent graduate from TAMU, noted,

> Literally within Bonfire, that season from September to when it burns in
> November, there's just this whole little story within itself. There are these
> four special events that mark the major construction milestones. It starts
> with cutting down the trees. . . . Then they have perimeter pull night. . . .
> Then they bring in Center Pole and then there's stack and you're out
> working with people from all over the place. . . . Then they put all the

finishing touches on it and it burns and you get ready for the next year.
It's just kind of one big cycle with its own little world. [Olivia-BI:84-97]

Although Bonfire slowly changed over the years, the basic narrative elements of cut, stack, and burn remained the same (See Figure 8). This seemingly perpetual ritual was, however, tragically interrupted on November 18, 1999 when the stack collapsed killing 12 Aggies and physically and emotionally wounding hundreds more. Because the serial narrative (or cycle) was never completed, Aggies were left emotionally hanging. They were left with a void that needed to be filled.

Two solutions were offered to fill this void. One came from the TAMU administration in the form of a memorial that was built upon the exact site of the 1999 Bonfire. Dedicated in November, 2004, the Bonfire Memorial was erected by the administration as a means to conclude the Bonfire story. A second alternative solution
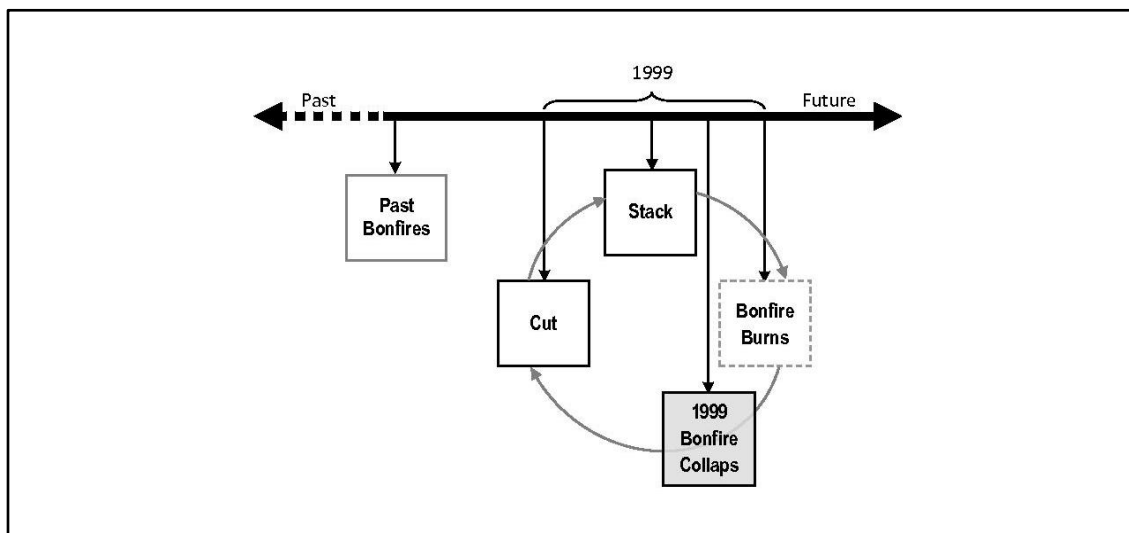
Figure 8. Bonfire as serial narrative

came from the Aggie Student Bonfire, a non-profit organization that has been building off-campus bonfires since 2002 and seeks to perpetuate the tradition. In 2005, the organization, which is not sanctioned by TAMU, had 842 members committed to the construction and burning of Bonfire (Moghe, 2005). In 2009 over 1500 students participated in the construction of Bonfire, while thousands more came to watch it burn. For the students and leaders associated with the Aggie Student Bonfire, the Bonfire tradition must continue. The story cannot end. As noted on the Student Bonfire website, "Bonfire is alive and is growing every year. The spirit and traditions at Bonfire are the same as all past Bonfires" (Student Bonfire, 2011).

Making Sense of Bonfire – A Faith Development Perspective

In the previous section a historical and cultural narrative of Bonfire was presented in order to establish a horizon from which to approach the three research questions. Having completed that task, answers to the research questions were explored through the narrative accounts of Bonfire derived from respondent interviews. Accounts provided by the respondents were analyzed, first, through a hermeneutic of faith/restoration and, second, through a hermeneutic of suspicion/demystification. From the first standpoint study participants are understood as experts of their lived experiences. Answers to interview questions are viewed as transparent. The participants' original responses were interpreted and reconstructed around four major themes (see Appendix A). The first theme (questions 1-4), "Becoming an Aggie," focused on how respondents came to TAMU and how they defined the spirit of Aggieland. Answers to these questions were shaped into narrative vignettes and focused on historical events leading up to the

respondents' involvement with Bonfire. The second theme focused on the respondents personal story of the '99 tragedy. Answers to questions 5-9 were analyzed and also co-constructed into vignettes. The third theme (questions 10-12) explored how study participants responded to the actions of various Aggie stakeholders and the construction of the Bonfire memorial. The fourth theme (questions 13-16) explored how study respondents may have changed as a result of the Bonfire tragedy and whether or not they experienced transformational learning.

After the narrative accounts were interpreted through a hermeneutic of faith, the accounts were further analyzed through a hermeneutic of demystification. In this instance respondents' narrative accounts are viewed with "suspicion" and reconstructed from insight drawn from faith development theory. As mentioned, each respondent participated in two interviews: (1) a semi-structured interview that allowed him or her to articulate a narrative account of Bonfire, and (2) the classic Faith Development Interview (Fowler, et al., 2004). After completing the first round of analysis, I used results from the respondents' FDI as a lens through which the Bonfire interviews were demystified.

Introduction to the Respondents

Between December 16, 2003 and July 28, 2004, I interviewed nine Aggies for this study. All research participants (5 male and 4 female) were enrolled at TAMU when Bonfire collapsed in 1999. Of these nine students, eight had significant experience with Bonfire and personally knew at least one of the Bonfire victims. The remaining respondent had limited experience with Bonfire and only knew one of the victims as a fellow classmate.

Concerning religion or spirituality, all of the students identified themselves as Christian. Of these nine, three were Lutherans, two Catholics, one Episcopalian, one Methodist, one Church of Christ, and one non-denomination. Seven of the nine respondents regularly attended a house of worship while attending TAMU. Study respondents ranged in age from 22 to 34 years old.

Biographical Sketches & Faith Stage Assignment

In the following subsection biographical sketches of three study participants will be presented. In addition to the sketches, the respondents' narrative-accounts of the Bonfire tragedy along with preliminary observations will be included. These accounts are co-constructed interpretations that are the result of the hermeneutic of faith analysis with focused attention on the participants' commitments and responses to various centers of value and power. Further, highlights from the respondents' FD interview and his or her level of faith development will be discussed.

Through the application of FDT, it appears that all three respondents were moving from synthetic-conventional (stage 3) to individuative-reflective (stage 4). Olivia, at 3.14 was just beginning the synthetic-conventional faith dance. Natalie (3.88) and Terry (3.81) were nearing the last movement of the 3-4 transition, for all intents and purposes they had reached stage 4 of faith development. Further, a respondent's stage assignment is an average derived from answers to questions that have been keyed to the seven aspects of faith development. Respondents' stage assignments on these aspects are noted in Figure 9 (see below). From this chart it is possible to see the variance in faith stage assignment along the seven cognitive and psychosocial dimensions.
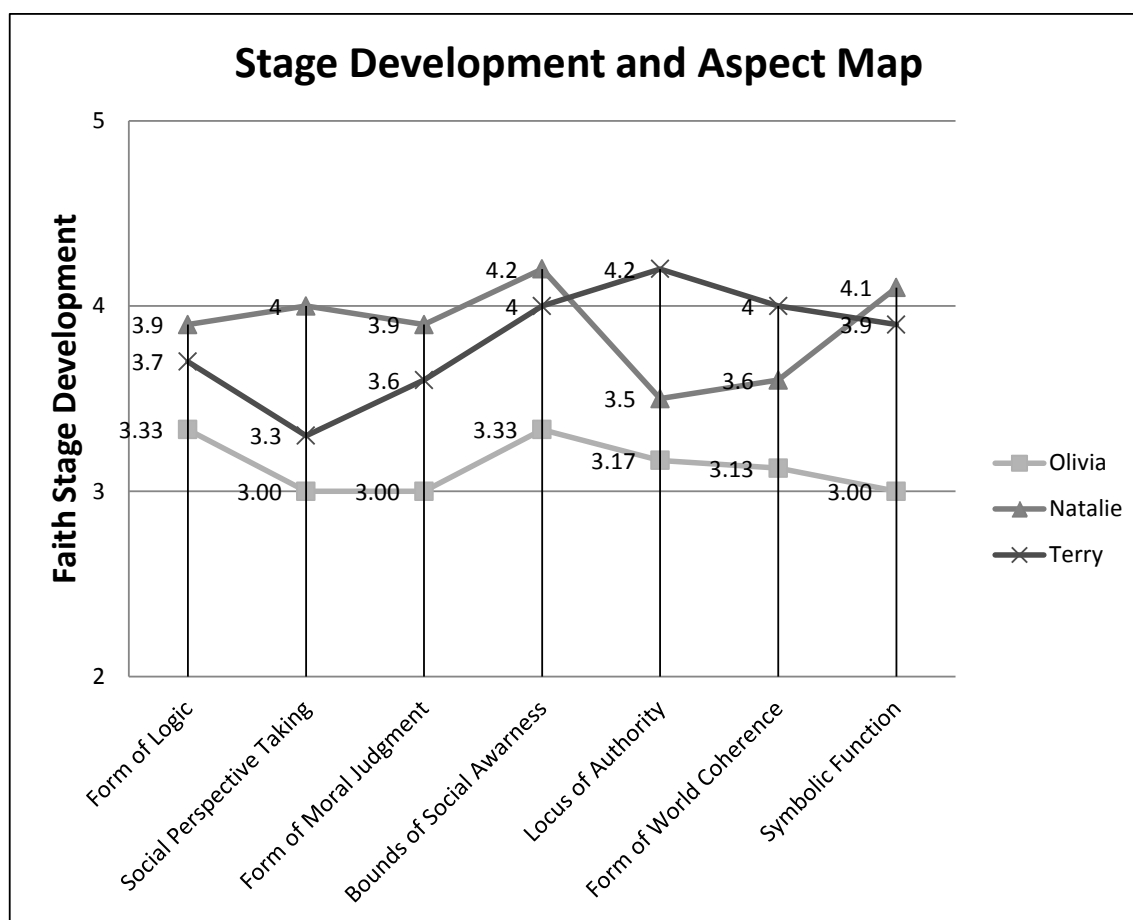
Figure 9. Respondents' faith stage assignments

Olivia

I interviewed Olivia in her home in south-central Texas. Olivia and her husband, Sam, are Aggies to the core. Their home is a testament to the role Bonfire played in shaping their identities as individuals and as a couple. Ax handles, pots, Aggie slogans and illustrations of A&M were readily apparent throughout their house. Hanging on one wall was a picture of Olivia and Sam cutting their wedding cake that was made to look like a miniature Bonfire. Olivia was twenty-three-years-old at the time of the interview and was working toward the completion of her teaching credential. Further, it must be noted

that two months prior to being interviewed, Olivia's younger sister tragically died in an

auto accident. In her FD interview, Olivia stated that "Our family dealt with [my sister's

death] really well but you still have so much of it tucked away." [R9-FDI:187-188]

Before coming to A&M, Olivia's favorite pastimes included soccer and

horseback riding. Many of Olivia's junior-high and high school friends were also

involved in the riding club. One of the most important mentor's in Olivia's life was her

riding coach, through whom she learned the importance of taking responsibility for her

actions and of having a strong work ethic. Because she grew up in College Station,

Olivia had many direct ties to A&M. She considers herself fortunate that she was able to

attend many A&M functions throughout her early life. She was raised, to use her own

words, in an "Aggie family" and although her family lived only a short distance from the

university, she chose to live on campus. In response to questions about how she became

an Aggie, Olivia noted:

> You could say I come from an Aggie family. I just loved all of the
> traditions, the school spirit, and the uniqueness of it all. I just knew that's
> where I wanted to go. To be honest with you, my parents didn't even
> pressure me into it; it wasn't like "You have to go" or "there's nowhere
> else!"
>   Even though we lived in College Station, I insisted on living on
> campus. I wanted to "go away" to college. During my first year, I didn't
> intentionally leave my high school friends behind per se, but I did make a
> conscious decision to make new friends. That first year was just amazing.
> There were so many different organizations and things to get involved in
> at A&M. You kind of get consumed with it. [R6-BIHF:7-16]

Like most of the study respondents, Olivia found it difficult to describe the

"Spirit of Aggieland." Being an Aggie is a unique experience that seemingly defies any

reductionistic explanations. Olivia described what it was like watching her friends try to

articulate what it meant to be an Aggie to their parents and how she, also, found it difficult to explain this experience.

> That first year was a really great year! I would go home on weekends with some of my roommates and friends from the dorm. They were from places like Austin or San Antonio and I would go back home with them over the holidays and see them interact with their friends and trying to tell them about A&M and it's hard. To be an Aggie you need to kind of look at the Aggie Code of Honor and kind of see that as a standard that you set for yourself and have in common with your group. But then also... it's just hard to describe... it's just a big family that you're part of. And even though there's all these different little groups and you might give each other a hard time while you're on campus, you're always Aggies together and so you always care for each other. I really don't know how to describe it really, but to be an Aggie is to really be true to yourself and your school and just set a good example. [R6-BIHF:20-31]

Olivia was recruited to participate in Bonfire through her dormitory. As her level of commitment deepened, she grew to love Bonfire and the camaraderie it offered. Like other study respondents, Olivia characterized her involvement with Bonfire as "being a part of something bigger than yourself." For her, Bonfire was a "big symbol" that provided an opportunity for her to show support for A&M and within that to have a chance to build lasting relationships.

Olivia described the Bonfire tragedy as follows:

> In 1998, I was a sophomore and I was serving as one of three co-chairs at Roberts Hall. Kind of the way it works, you're usually co-chair or crew chief for one year and then you pick someone to take your place. We had picked—and we call them our girls—the students that we wanted to take our place. So, although in 1999 I didn't have any formal responsibilities, I still went out there. At that time I was dating Sam, who is now my husband. He was crew chief for his dorm the same year I was co-chair for mine. So Sam and I went out there in order to keep an eye on the boys and girls to be sure that they were doing their jobs and taking care of all their little freshmen. They had gone out to cut several times and had gone out to stack several times as well so we were still pretty closely tied to it even though it was our junior year. We felt like we still had

responsibilities to make sure the leaders from our dorms knew what they were doing. It's fun. As juniors you're able to go out and have a good time and not worry about having to prove yourself too much. To top it off too, we had some good friends involved with coordinating Bonfire that year and so we would go out to visit with them. We were pretty involved.

The actual night it fell, I was supposed to be there but I had a big accounting test and needed to study. So Sam went out there and I told him I would try to meet him later if possible. I stayed home and I was studying and I remember falling asleep and then I woke up around 2:00 a.m. For some reason I was actually ironing my pants for the next day. So, at about 2:45 a.m., I was awake when Sam called and told me what had happened. I went straight out there because I had girls that I needed to find; not everybody was accounted for. I went out there to pick up one of my girls from the field and then she and I went to the hospital to see another one of the girls that had been injured. Then I met back up with Sam. That day was kind of a blur; we spent time in the hospital where another one of our friends was being treated and then back out to the field and I just remember it being a really, really, really long day. We were at the hospital for a long time, and then we went back out to the field because rescue workers were still on the back side of stack looking for the last of the missing people. Rachael, a student from our dorm, was the last person to be pulled out. So after we knew that everybody was accounted for, we went home...just numb.

The days that followed were just a blur...we had one good friend in the hospital and so we spent time going up to visit him and one of the girls was still in the hospital, so I really don't remember too much. I think in the weeks that followed, we were absorbed with trying to understand why Bonfire fell and this was real difficult too because we had so many close friends that were coordinators and so closely involved with it. It was real tough trying to help them too because they felt so much responsibility for it. [R6-BIHF:78-116]

Content analysis: Commitment & response. Even though she didn't have any formal responsibilities in 1999, Olivia was still committed to her "girls' " success and wanted to make sure they were doing what that were supposed to be doing. When pressed to prepare for a major accounting test, Olivia's response was to stay home and study while her boyfriend went out to the Bonfire site. Said another way, Olivia was committed to her "girls" and to Sam, but she was also committed to her education. As a junior, Olivia

felt pressed to study for her accounting test. When Sam called to inform Olivia about Bonfire collapsing, the magnitude of the situation led her to immediately go to the site and check on her Bonfire "family." As events unfolded we sense Olivia in a blur going to the hospital, then returning to the Bonfire site, then going to the hospital to check on a friend, and then back to the site to wait with Sam for the last of her students to be untangled from the logs. When all her students were accounted for, she was finally able to go home. She felt numb.

Level of faith development. Olivia comes from a "traditional" Lutheran family. Although she was born in Dallas, she spent the majority of her early years growing up under the shadow of Texas A&M University. Olivia is the middle child in the family, having one younger sister (who had recently died in a car accident) and one older sister. At the age of twelve she was confirmed in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America. She characterizes this period in her life as a time when she had a better understanding of God. During her high school years, Olivia would typically spend part of her summers involved with the Lutheran Youth Organization camp. As she grew older she continued to have what she called a "strong faith in God," but, ultimately, with the passage of time her relationship with the Divine became more distant.

Olivia scored 3.14 on the FDI. This places her within the *Synthetic-Conventional* stage of faith development. Fowler (1996) reminds us, that "to be 'in' a given stage of faith means to have a characteristic way of finding and giving meaning to everyday life" (p. 68). In the synthetic-conventional stage we see the development of early formal operational thinking. This thinking is frequently tacit and will not usually display second

order reflection, "i.e., it does not perform operations on thought itself" (Fowler, et al., 2004, p. 33). This stage of faith development is characterized by a revolution is cognitive functioning and in the development of interpersonal perspective thinking.

Although Olivia scored 3.14, which is within the synthetic-conventional stage of faith development, there is some evidence suggesting her true score may be higher. A case in point, when asked about how Bonfire may have affected her, Olivia's answer demonstrated the ability of third-person perspective taking. . .

> I think it gave all of us a new appreciation for life to think that it could have been any of us . . Sam and I [have] two friends who have decided to go into the seminary now and we both wonder if that was a big part of it because the role that they played in the Bonfire culture and our little family, I think they had a big void there after that and it probably did affect them in that way to make them look elsewhere for that type of support and then they looked to the church and looked to God and it made sense for them. [R6-FDI:83-88]

Although certainly not exhaustive evidence, Olivia's response displays third-person perspective taking, which is normally indicative of individuative-reflective (or stage 4) faith. Olivia's ability (pattern of mental operations) of social perspective taking may be scored above stage 3 because a person's faith score is the average of the seven stage aspects. Development is rarely uniform among the seven aspects (Fowler, et al., 2004). Further, in response to FD interview questions, several of Olivia's answers were difficult to code because they were quite brief and lacked sufficient depth. For example, when asked "Do you feel that life has meaning at the present; what makes life meaningful to you?" Olivia answered:

> I think that life is a precious gift that should be valued. I find meaning in life by caring about others or trying to make a difference in their life. I decided to go into teaching for this reason. I believe that sharing in all

life's experiences and supporting others makes life worth living ... just
wanting to be there for other people and to contribute back to ... what you
can give back and just feel fortunate for what we have.

In response to this I asked additional probing questions with the hope of securing

more comprehensive answers. Ultimately, though, Olivia's responses continued to lack

depth and, therefore, caution is warranted when assigning a stage of faith development.

Nevertheless, although Olivia's responses were sometimes brief, the answer above

supports the preliminary finding that she makes meaning at the synthetic-conventional

level of faith development. Olivia's answer reveals that her identity, her view of self, is

constituted by its relationships and its roles (Fowler, 1987). The establishment of

selfhood in a web of the interpersonal relations is indicative of synthetic-conventional

faith development.

Natalie

I interviewed Natalie on a warm winter day on the A&M campus. She had invited me

over to her academic department where the atmosphere was pleasant and very

professional. After arriving at her office, she ushered me into a large conference room.

Sitting on one end of a long table, we took a few brief moments before the interview to

chat. In a very real sense I felt we were meeting as peers since, at the time of the

interview, Natalie and I were both graduate students who were also working as full time

academic advisors.

Natalie was born in a tiny farming community in the Texas panhandle. Although

her family experienced hard times and money was tight, they never "wanted for

anything." Growing up, Natalie understood she needed to take care of her things because

she didn't know if she would ever get another one. Natalie has one older brother, whom she describes as her "best friend." Since her mother was a widow who had remarried, Natalie grew up with three sets of grandparents, which she thought was normal. Natalie was and is very close to her family which has been a center of value and power her whole life.

Unlike Olivia, Natalie did not come from an Aggie family. In fact, up until her senior year in high school, Natalie knew very little about Texas A&M.

> I grew up in a little bitty town of three hundred in North Texas. My school had about one hundred and twenty students; kindergarten through twelfth grade. I graduated with eighteen other students; that's a huge class! Since my high school was small, everybody was involved. Everybody played basketball; everybody played football, and everybody had to or we didn't have a team. I was a good student: class valedictorian, all A's; studied, didn't go out, didn't party, didn't drink—didn't want to, so that wasn't even a factor in my high school experience.
>
> Probably my most important activity in high school was with FFA. I successfully competed in public speaking tournaments at both the state and national levels. And one time...on the way to state competition...my teacher brought me by Texas A&M and said "You need to look at this place."..."What's Texas A&M?"... I'd heard of it but "What is it?" I came here and I thought "This is a neat place!" and then I did some research and realized how important leadership was and the spirit and the traditions, so I applied to here and I applied to Harvard and I got this acceptance letter first and never opened the envelope from Harvard. Who knows except that I got into Agriculture and that was and is my passion. So I was the first Aggie in forty-seven years from my hometown. I didn't look back; it was the best decision that I ever could have made. [R5-BIHF:1-23]

Because of deeply shared values (the importance of agriculture, leadership, and traditions), Natalie was able to quickly commit to TAMU as her college of choice. She felt blessed to be an Aggie. She recalls a time as a freshman going for an early morning run on campus when she thought to herself, "I'm at Texas A&M University, other

people want to be here and I'm here!" And then she thought about all the other people that had walked in that same place and thought, "Wow, a lot of really good people have been here!' " [R5-BIHF:39]

When recalling her first year at college, Natalie found it difficult to describe the Aggie spirit. She recalls that it was during that early morning run when she realized she was a part of something that was bigger than herself. She remembers thinking,

> I'm here and I'm involved and I'm a part of this thing!" I don't think you really can explain it.. family, camaraderie, faith, duty, honor. I don't know.. it's hard to explain it and I don't know if I can. I think that truly it is the people that make A&M special. We attract people who are of a higher standard academically, but also have a high level of integrity. I'm not going to say that everybody here is this glorious go-getter but I think that we do attract people with just a higher standard for living in general; just the way they live their lives; the way they act; the way they treat others. So I think that it is the people that encompass that spirit but I don't know how to explain that. [R5-BIHF:37-49]

During her freshman year, Natalie got involved with Bonfire through a student organization that promoted "Bonfire Buddies." According to Natalie all of the women on her dorm floor were buddies with members from the Corps of Cadets. Although she participated in cut once, which she characterizes as fun, but hard work, it was through the Buddies program that she was drawn into the Bonfire culture. Like Olivia, Natalie was eager to make new friends and the Buddy program did much to support this goal. As Natalie noted, "It was nothing for ten of us to go out there together or twelve of us or twenty of us at a time and so relationships were built because of it and I think those friendships enhanced the experience of the building Bonfire." [R5-BIHF:72-75]

When Bonfire fell, Natalie was working toward completing a graduate degree

and was an adjunct teacher and academic advisor in the College of Agriculture. She was

also deeply involved in a relationship with Nick, her future husband. This is her story:

I hate to say it, but I had outgrown Bonfire. I was at a different place in
my life. I had done it for three years and moved on. Many of the leaders
were students of mine. So I was more in the supportive role of "Are you
going to class?" "What can I do to make sure that you don't flunk out this
semester?" The year that Bonfire fell, I was twenty-two-years-old and in
transition between being a student affairs professional and a student. I
was finishing up grad school and student advising was becoming more of
my focus. One of my good friends, Audrey, was a Pink Pot, very
involved, drove a truck, never missed anything. She was out there a lot
and I talked to her a whole bunch, so that was my role; more or less
supporting the people out there and making sure they stayed in school.
    In the fall of '99, I was staying with Nick. On the night of
November 18th the phone rang early, early, early and Nick answered it.
Since he was working for the university, it wasn't unusual for him to get
called during dinner or have to go take care of a situation on campus. He
put the phone down and said "It's bad, Bonfire fell and there could be one
hundred students dead" and he was out of the house in a second and he
said "Stay here, I'll call you later." Of course, I turned on the news,
"What does this mean?"..."Why am I at the house?"..."What am I going
to do?" "And what am I supposed to be doing...my students...my
friends?" After about fifteen minutes I figured out that I couldn't stay at
the house and I drove over to the campus as well. It wasn't even an hour
after Bonfire fell that I got there. When I turned onto Texas Avenue I
could see the dust in the air and the lights and by this time there were
helicopters flying around and sirens and mass chaos...just mass chaos! I
parked the car and quickly ran to the site and found my good friend Gary
Brown... shock, unbelief, just seeing a panic and yet a calm panic. I knew
that I had to be the adult; you know that role I was talking about earlier,
about becoming a professional…boom click it in, what do you do? I
remember helping students find cell phones so they could call their
parents and say that they were safe. I was keeping students from running
out into this mass chaos. Things were orderly. It was weird; there was a
sense of . . . I wouldn't say calm, but it wasn't crazy; people weren't
running around screaming. [R5-BIHF:136-174]
        . . .
    After the collapse, I had two primary roles, comforting my
students and then comforting Nick through this tragedy. The following

day was extremely difficult in that we had the memorial service out at the Reid Arena and I remember being with the redpots and getting them in the Suburban and getting them on the front row and seeing their anguish and their pain from this. They felt a lot of guilt; a lot of guilt!!! I sat on the end of the row and Nick came and joined me and he put his head on my shoulder and just started crying and sobbing and it was the first time that he'd stopped all day; in twenty-one hours it was the first time that he had stopped and it was just this release of emotion and then I felt that even more that I had to be strong for Nick because he's going to be dealing with this; he'd seen horrible things; he saw the body parts; the arm; the leg that was just out in the middle of nowhere off of the stack, so that was difficult; so my role took on a support role, particularly with the redpots and those students that I knew; double checking; re-checking on them; getting them the help they needed. [R5-BIHF:189-203]

. . .

About a week and a half later I went to Stew Nelson's funeral. He was a classmate of mine and I knew him very well and it was at his funeral that I actually mourned for the first time. I mourned the whole thing at that occurrence. I hadn't let myself stop; I was the strong one; I had to support others. At the funeral, I thought "Oh, this is real, this is real!" whereas before I thought "This is real, but I have to support." It was good that I took that role. I felt that I was far enough away from it that I could and yet close enough that I could understand, so I felt good about that role. That was the first time that I had mourned because that was even closer to home; this was one of the guys that I built Bonfire with; one of my classmates who happened to be out there; who happened to be on stack; who happened to die and all of a sudden the reality of how fragile life is kind of hit me. [R5-BIHF:204-216]

Content analysis: Commitment & response. As a college applicant, Natalie felt an

affinity with TAMU values and traditions. This almost instinctive connection made it

easy for Natalie to respond affirmatively to the offer of admission. Her commitment was

so resolute she felt no compulsion to open the letter from Harvard Admissions.

Natalie's Bonfire narrative is built largely around two marker events. The first

marker event was her transition between being a student and becoming a student affairs

professional. The second marker event was her on-going and deepening relationship

with her future husband, Nick. According to Fowler (1987), marker events are intrusive

occasions after which a person's life is never the same. Now that Natalie was a graduate student and academic advisor she no longer related to Bonfire leaders as her peers; they were her students. There was a fundamental change in the structure of these relationships. As a young woman in a committed relationship, Natalie believed it was her responsibility to take care of Nick after the collapse of Bonfire. She felt compelled to be "strong" for Nick and her students. It was a role she felt "good" about.

As a student affairs professional and instructor, Natalie was committed to her students. She was now concerned about how Bonfire negatively affected the academic standing of her students. Her caring and supportive response toward the students was a result not only of her commitment to the students, but also to the student affairs profession, and to the university.

Level of faith development. Natalie grew up on a farm in a small town in north Texas. It was the kind of town where everyone knew everyone else and you couldn't get away with anything. Although she has only one brother, her extended family, which included three sets of grandparents, was and remains a center of value and power. Besides her family, the most consistent center of value and power throughout her life has been her church family.

Based on an analysis of her FD interview, Natalie's level of faith development is nearly to the Individuative-Reflective stage. Her score of 3.88 on the FD scale indicates that she in nearing the completion of her movement from synthetic-conventional faith to individuative-reflective faith development. According to Fowler (2000), "The rise of individuative-reflective faith is occasioned by a variety of experiences that make is

necessary for persons to objectify, examine, and make critical choices about the defining elements of their identity and faith" (p. 49). As discussed, the characteristics of the movement between synthetic-conventional and individuative-reflective faith are also indicative to transformational learning. Fowler contends that there are two fundamental movements in the stage 3-4 transition. First, there must be a shift in the grounding and orientation of the self. That is, the formation of the self as derived from one's relationships and roles (and the claims they make upon a person's life) to a self that is and acts from a quality of self-authorization. To accomplish this, individuals "must take into themselves much of the authority they previously invested in others for determining and sanctioning their goals and values" (Fowler, 1996, p. 62). Second, the tacit system of beliefs, values, and commitments held by a person at the synthetic-conventional level of development must be critically evaluated. For this to happen the synthetic-conventional person must be willing to allow their "configuration of meanings" to become problematic (p. 62).

The capacity for self-authorship was revealed in Natalie's response to questions concerning past influential relationships and changes in important relationships. Natalie spoke of several relationships, but her description of how she broke up with her old boyfriend, David, was most telling.

> I dated a guy for five years who had a big impact on me as a person, both positive and negative. He . . . probably one of the reasons I am getting a PhD is because of him. I realized, "I could do that." He was a doctoral student. I was like "that's interesting," you know. It kind of got me in the mindset for that, although my dad is very educated. Seeing it firsthand and experiencing a dissertation and supporting somebody through that, that was an interesting experience. I also learned what I didn't want to become, or who I wanted to have in my life through him … somebody

who wasn't focused on God, somebody who didn't have a really good relationship with parts of his family . . . so that was both positive and negative.

. . .

It took a lot for me to walk away from that relationship, 'cause it's all I knew. He's the only guy that I dated in college … uh, I just supposed I would get married to him, I guess, and then one day I woke up and went "whoa, what am I doing? I cannot do this. This is crazy." Yeah, that had a big, really, I came into my own . . . when I did that. So, it was kind of interesting, yeah. I stood on my own two feet, so, and walked away. [R5-FDI:186-196, 213-218]

Although they were in a relationship that lasted throughout her undergraduate years, Natalie had come to the conclusion that she and David had different values. David did not get along with some of his family and had little or no interest in having a relationship with God. As Natalie was able to gain third-person perspective of their relationship, she was able to identify the negative impact David was having upon her. Even though they had dated for many years, Natalie garnered the courage to leave her boyfriend. When she "woke up" and stood on her own two feet, Natalie took a decisive step in self-authorization and individuation.

Terry

Terry grew up in a semi-rural town in central Texas. The younger of two children, Terry characterized his family life as "good" and childhood as "happy." He was raised "in a kind of Plain Jane religious Catholic family." Though his parents taught Sunday school, they were never, to use Terry's word "overzealous." Growing up, Terry's parents encouraged him to get involved in many activities: Boy Scouts, band, and lots of sports. He played every sport imaginable. Having a sizable frame and being from Texas,

football became his central activity. So much so, that by the time Terry reached high

school, he already had had surgery on both knees.

Terry described his high school football experience and transition to A&M as

follows:

> My parents never told me that I had to play football but it was just a way
> of life in my hometown and that's just the way that it went. When I went
> into high school football, coaches recognized that I wasn't going to quit
> and so they let me play. I was pretty much a tackling dummy for the first
> few years but we won state every year that I was in high school. My
> senior year, I was just falling apart. I had a shoulder operation because I
> popped my shoulder out in a playoff game; it was the last game in my
> high school career. I had plenty of recruiters approaching me, TCU and
> Texas Tech had pretty much signed me up. At that time I was still talking
> to A&M and the University of Texas, didn't expect to play much for
> either one of those. But, after I hurt my shoulder, nobody wanted me
> anymore! I'd already been admitted to A&M and to all the other schools
> as well. Since I couldn't play football, I decided the best place would be
> A&M.
>   I was able to make that decision largely because of my sister; it
> was kind of a legacy type thing. My folks had looked over the schools.
> My mom didn't get to go to college...but my dad had gone to TCU and
> two other universities. He even went here for a semester. And, even
> though he went here for a semester and didn't do too hot, I always heard
> him tell these stories about A&M. But my sister went here and I can still
> remember staying in Fowler Hall with her for the first time and I just kind
> of fell in love with the place because of her. After football was a no go I
> just thought, "Well, A&M is the next best place." [R3-BIHF:5-25]

On his very first night as a college freshman, Terry's reputation as a tough

football player paved the way for his entrance into the Bonfire subculture. This was a

culture that most Aggies were not aware of. Terry's depiction of his initial experiences

reveals both the positive and negative aspects of Bonfire.

> "What is bonfire about?"...a lot of people have been saying or were
> saying it's just the burning desire to beat the University of Texas and I
> think that that's part of it; I think that's a small part of it though. I think
> it's a desire to be a unified family; a group of friends doing one thing

that's quite awesome, it's a feat that it was ever built to the size that it was, though that's a double edged sword, as we know now. The major players for me in 1998, when I was really active, were the yellow pots and the crew chiefs in my hall, who are still here and still going to school; they haven't even graduated! Above that there was a red pot who lived in my hall, and I have an interesting story about the first night I was in college and I had a run in with him. The yellow pots told me, "You go tackle this guy!" Now, I was just out of high school football, a lot more muscular, a lot more lean, but this guy was big, with massive arms and that's why he was a red pot! Me being a naïve little freshman and wanting to fit in...this was my first night and my parents had just left…so...the yellow pots were all pumping me up and saying they had heard of me from football and I went and did this! I started tackling this guy and he just decked me, right in the ear, right in the side of my face with a full out swing and just knocked me down and I thought "I'm out or my league!" I got back up and as I was getting up he threw some sand in my face and that kind of pissed me off and threw me into a rage and so then they start telling me that this was "good bull;" you know this is the way the Aggie Spirit should be; hard work….I don't know what that had to do with hard work….so I get up and he took me upstairs and gave me a beer. It was my first night in college and I was already having my first beer. [R3-BIHF:43-65]

Terry then goes on to describe the "mortal combat" contest that was previously mentioned. Set up by crew chiefs as a grudge match between multiple dorms, this event eventually led Terry to question his commitment to Bonfire. Before starting his sophomore year and being in need of more money, Terry made a decisive move by becoming the new resident advisor (RA) in his dorm. Such a move quickly ostracized Terry from his friends and spoiled his opportunity to become crew chief.

I never was really an official crew chief because I took the RA job. I'd been passed down to be a crew chief and that's a whole other story, but I took the RA job and I was very quickly ostracized by the other crew chiefs . . . they told me "You know what, you're just an idiot and we don't want to talk to you anymore!" Now, looking back, I realize to some extent I ostracized myself. When I got into that RA job it really opened my eyes and I realized what an idiot I was being . . . knocking peoples teeth out . . . I asked myself what I was doing. I was really going down the wrong road, so I was kind of happy to be distancing myself from that

group. It was very sad though because these had been the guys from my first year in college, guys that I had formed really strong bonds with. When I got the job they perceived that I wouldn't be able to do some of the things that they wanted me to do; that you do in the Bonfire culture, like drinking; every weekend I was drunk as a freshman. There's also a deep rooted hazing culture that I still fight today in my hall. . . For example, when you get passed down to be the next crew chief you get ax handled across the behind – they just basically give you pops with an ax handle and then the ax handle is yours. I couldn't be a part of that because I was getting a paycheck now; that was the first kind of step; hey, I need this paycheck, and I didn't want to be a part of it morally just because that wasn't what I was about. [R3-BIHF:92-110]

Being a resident advisor, as Terry was, is generally considered a 24/7 job. If school is in session an RA must be ready and willing to address a myriad of problems that can arise at any time of any day. Such was the case on November 18, 1999 at 1:00 a.m. in the morning. Terry recalled,

When Bonfire fell it was my first semester as an RA. I came back in August and was a little scared. I had stayed in the hall where I was a previous resident...this soon to be crew member if not crew chief was staying on in that same hall, that same community, as a resident advisor . . . and I was pretty scared! I went to most of the cuts that I really could; when I had a test I studied . . . that was a new thing for me because during my freshman year I felt I had to go to every cut, no matter what! Now I was doing it in a more balanced way, which was good. I went to a few of the swamps, that's when you start moving and lining up the logs to build the stack, and did some other things, but I really down played it mostly. The last time that I went to Bonfire was about two weeks or so before it fell and I didn't really want to go back after that because there were some nasty things that really bothered me. They used to put road kill inside; like they'd stack the logs up on the eighteen wheelers and they would put all the road kill they could find inside the logs so that, for instance, when you're picking up a log there's a dead cat looking you in the face, and I just didn't want to do that anymore!

When I decided that I wasn't going back to Bonfire, my attitude was like look at the proverbial middle finger . . . "To Hell with bonfire, I really don't want to do anything with it anymore!" Two weeks later on November 18, 1999, I was with another good friend who was also an RA and we had sneaked into my hall director's apartment to bake a pizza, because he had an oven and we didn't. So we were in his apartment and

he wasn't there and it was about 1:00 a.m. We were eating pizza and watching his TV and making ourselves at home when the phone starts ringing around 2:00 a.m. When the hall director's phone rings at 2:00 a.m. you know that something is going on! The hall director's boss left a message explaining what had happened. We heard this and the hall director wasn't around, obviously, so I decided that I was going to go out to the Bonfire site, but my friend said we need to call the rest of the RA's and make sure that our guys are okay and that everyone is accounted for. That took us about thirty minutes to do, and by that time the hall director had gotten there we had done everything; we checked everybody; we woke everybody up; got everybody outside.

The Bonfire image that really sticks with me is not so much the collapsed lump of logs, though that was really impactful...when I went out there and saw it...it was just too gruesome, too tragic for me to handle. But the thing that really sticks with me is the image I have when I first walked out of dorm at 3:00 a.m. on my way to the Bonfire site . . . like wow! All the helicopters in the air; this is a big thing. I don't know why that hit me like that, but whenever I hear a helicopter, like yesterday there were two Chinook helicopters flying over and I thought "I remember the time other helicopters were flying over here" and that's really the image that I remember the most. If I stand outside Thomas Hall right now, I could pinpoint where every one of those helicopters were and what news company they represented...that's just what stuck with me. I went over to Bonfire and found a female RA from my dorm. She had already been there awhile and I found her and we helped with the rescue efforts a little bit. I'd say we moved maybe five logs and at that point she said that she just couldn't do it and that she couldn't be there and she was crying and I can remember comforting her and just thinking "Thank God we can go home now, she's given me a way to go home and still feel macho." Even then I was kind of trying not to let my emotions out.

That week was just pure hell; I didn't go to a few of my classes and people were just walking around in a daze. You'd walk outside and there'd be a group of students just crying! It's like something that...I just don't know… the emotions... I don't ever want to have that happen to a group of nineteen or twenty year old kids again. In the weeks that followed guys from my dorm would come to me needing support, their friends died in the collapse. I really felt like I needed to help them through this, but it was kind of like the blind leading the blind really. The person that I met that really helped me through this was Gary Brown and he was a big support for most of the people really deep into the Bonfire culture, like the red pots and the brown pots. A lot of the guys at the time really felt like the administration didn't really do anything for them; like they just kind of left them out there. Now that I'm looking back, I know that we did everything we could, but how do you really deal with

something like that; it's not like you can just fit some crisis model onto it! Gary offered a huge support network for I'd say easily, directly twenty to thirty people, who were themselves a support network for thousands of people. When I look back at certain things about the Bonfire culture on this campus, I can say that we've progressed past certain things in large part because of his work; he's an angel if you ask me. That's about it; that's my story! [R3-BIHF:116-184]

Content analysis: Commitment & response. Terry's admission to A&M was a bittersweet experience. Although already admitted to the university (and to several other institutions as well), Terry was still hoping to get a football scholarship. Any chance for a scholarship, however, evaporated when he incurred a shoulder injury during his team's final playoff game. Terry's strong, but costly, commitment to football adversely impacted him in the form of numerous physical injuries. Too banged up to be worth recruiting, Terry came to realized that he was no longer wanted as a collegiate football player. On many levels this marker event was devastating, especially since so much of his identity was wrapped up in football. Now that his dream of being a football player was over, where would he go? What would he do? As will be discussed below, there is evidence that Terry experienced an identity crisis that made him vulnerable to social pressures associated with the Bonfire subculture.

Reviewing Terry's story from the perspective of commitment and response to various centers of values and power, it is readily apparent that Terry experienced a conflict (disorienting dilemma) that resulted from his prior commitment to Bonfire and his new commitment to the student affairs profession. Terry was dedicated to Bonfire. This is evident by his reluctance to miss even a single opportunity to go to cut and by his selection to become a new crew chief. But as he continued to learn about student affairs

and began to draw a paycheck from the university, Terry inwardly knew that he would have to disassociate himself from his friends and from the Bonfire subculture. As Terry embraced the values and commitment of the student affairs profession he began to think critically about his past actions, like his participation in mortal combat. Since these two issues are antithetical to each other, Terry's level of cognitive dissonance logically increased. Eventually Terry was forced, intrinsically and extrinsically, to make clear where his loyalty was placed.

Level of faith development. As mentioned, Terry grew up in a very traditional Catholic family. Both of Terry's parents taught Sunday school and going to mass on a regular basis was deemed important. His family was "really religious" but not fanatical.

Based on an analysis of his FD interview, Terry's level of faith development is almost to the Individuative-Reflective stage. His score of 3.81 on the FD scale indicates that he is nearing the end of the 3-4 stage transition. Reviewing Terry's Life Tapestry Exercise (Appendix B), it is clear that his life story is shaped by several marker events that included his parents contemplating divorce, a career-ending sport injury, and the collapse of Bonfire.

Of the twenty-five questions that make up the FDI, seven of Terry's answers were scored in the 3.0-3.5 range and eighteen were scored in the 4.0-4.5 range. Based on this distribution it is clear that Terry makes meaning primarily from the Individuative-reflective level of faith development (see Figure 9). When asked what he considered to be a model of mature faith (faith aspect: *form of world coherence*), Terry answered:

> a mature faith is one that you've accepted as some sort of guiding
> philosophy in your life, so in other words it's not just going to church on

Sundays 'cause you have to, but it's making a decision because or living your life in a certain way because you believe that something good will come of this interaction for you; maybe at a later point in the afterlife or because simply it's just the right thing to do and your faith is telling you that. It gets back a little bit to the blind faith aspect because someone told you it's the right thing to do, but I don't believe that you should always do something just because someone told you to. [R6-FDI:325-332]

At the individuative-reflective stage of faith development, Terry's world coherence displays his ability to reflect on his worldview or faith perspective. At this stage of development, Terry is reviewing many of the Catholic beliefs in which he was socialized. When asked about his current relationship with his parents, Terry's remarked

I love them both but I don't like per se going home because they argue a lot and especially now that I've got this girlfriend and am in a serious relationship, I just don't like her seeing that; maybe since that's my family that I might interact with a future wife like that; that kind of hits on my dad, but my mom's kind of nagging on him too. That's kind of my relationship with them. [R3-FDI:144-148]

Terry's answer clearly reveals third-person perspective taking. He is aware that his girlfriend may judge his future performance as a husband based on her perception of his parent's relationship. In this instance, Terry plainly takes a transcendent perspective of his parent's relationship.

Exploring Answers to the Research Questions

The primary focus in this study is the application of FDT by student affairs professionals to explore potential transformational learning that is a result of the Bonfire tragedy. In order to accomplish this, the problem of whether or not the Bonfire tragedy is a disorienting dilemma comes to the forefront. For this reason, the question of how the loss of Bonfire, a significant communal ritual, can be understood as a disorienting dilemma will be addressed first.

Research Question #2

How can the loss of Bonfire, a significant communal ritual, be understood as a disorienting dilemma as delineated in Mezirow's transformational learning theory?

According to Mezirow (1991) the first phase in the TL process is the experiencing of a disorienting dilemma. Events such as Bonfire are described by Mezirow as an "externally imposed epochal dilemma" (p. 168). There is no doubt that the collapse of Bonfire in 1999 was a horrific event that propelled many Aggies into a period of grief. The question is whether that event caused study respondents to think critically and reflect on or deconstruct any of their assumptions concerning their relationship to and the meaning of Bonfire. In order to answer this question, it is necessary to (1) consider if the respondents, as a result of the Bonfire tragedy, experienced a magnitude of cognitive dissonance high enough to bring about psychological discomfort and (2) whether such dissonance rendered explicit any of the respondents' taken-for-granted assumptions.

Olivia. Of the respondents analyzed in detail, Olivia is the only one who came from an Aggie family. Her socialization into the Aggie culture was deeper and more pervasive than either Natalie's or Terry's. Growing up, Olivia frequently visited her father at his campus office and attended university and athletic events. In her words, "I just loved all of the traditions, the school spirit, and the uniqueness of it all" [R6-BIHF:7-8]. Olivia's commitment to A&M was so resolute she never applied for admission to any other school. As she said, "I just knew that's where I wanted to go" [R6-BIHF:8-9].

That Olivia was socialized into the Aggie culture at an early age is significant when considering whether or not the '99 Bonfire tragedy was a disorienting dilemma. Much of what Olivia holds dear about the Aggie culture is tacit and simply taken for granted. When describing the collapse of Bonfire and her response to that event, Olivia failed to use any words that might be considered synonyms to disorienting dilemma. Olivia described the day of the tragedy as "a blur," and "really long." The emotional and physical impact of the tragedy—the "shock factor"—made her feel "numb." She and others were just "consumed" by the aftermath. Olivia doesn't believe she was led into a period of mourning because of Bonfire, but it definitely was "surreal almost as if you felt like you were in a movie." [R6-BI:192-205].

In the weeks following the collapse, people became "absorbed" trying to figure out why Bonfire fell and who was responsible, notes Olivia. This latter issue was quite difficult for her because so many of her friends were closely involved with Bonfire. In this instance we can identify a higher level of cognitive dissonance resulting from her commitment to TAMU in general and her commitment to her Bonfire family in particular. Olivia felt a significant level of animosity toward A&M as it moved forward with the investigation of the incident and then instituted the moratorium on future Bonfires. As Olivia said, "it seemed like a lot of fingers were pointed and I guess that it was just really hard to deal with the fact that there might never be Bonfire again. . . when you're that close to it and you're that used to it happening every year; it was really hard to deal with." [R6-BI:227-229]. As time passed, however, Olivia's view of A&M became "a bit more realistic." The cognitive dissonance that resulted from Olivia's

expectations of the university and the actions of the administration led to a separation of sort. Olivia commented, "Any time that you're real young and really involved in [something like Bonfire] you always kind of get wrapped up in it and you separate yourself a little bit more and a little bit more. We still love A&M obviously, even if we don't light the fire." [R6-BI:240-243]

Although Olivia did experience higher levels of cognitive dissonance due to the cessation of Bonfire there is little evidence suggesting the tragedy became a disorienting dilemma for her. When asked what she learned from Bonfire, Olivia answered:

> I think that we learned a lot from it; I don't know, I guess … I think that those of us involved in it felt really fortunate that we were able to be a part of it; I don't know … I guess that you just learn to appreciate things more and not take so much for granted maybe. You learn the importance of those friendships and those bonds and those things that you went through, so that's a big lesson learned. So, yes, it'll always be a big part of us no matter what we do. [R6-BI:325-330]

Based on her answer, it appears that Olivia's taken-for-granted assumptions were never made explicit and therefore no change in meaning perspective was made. Olivia's answers to the question on whether or not her views of A&M have changed, indicates a minor change in meaning scheme. Although she still loved the university, it is clear that Olivia's view of the administration had tarnished. Olivia's answer that she learned to appreciate her Bonfire friendships and experiences more deeply, suggest that Bonfire continues to be a significant center of value and power in her life. Although she and her husband will not be able to watch future Bonfires burn, she will continue to cherish her memories.

Natalie. Unlike Olivia, Natalie did not come from an Aggie family. In fact, up until her junior year in high school, Natalie knew almost nothing about TAMU. As was already mentioned, Natalie was able to make a strong commitment to TAMU because of a shared value system. It made sense to her to attend TAMU; it was a good fit and to this day she does not question her decision.

To answer the question of whether or not the Bonfire tragedy was a disorienting dilemma for Natalie, it is important to recognize that she was, at the time of the interview, a doctoral student, academic advisor, student affairs professional, and adjunct instructor. She was deeply committed to her advisees, her students, the TAMU administration, and to the student affairs profession.

Natalie was profoundly impacted on many levels by the Bonfire tragedy. She described the scene following the accident paradoxically as "mass chaos" and "quiet chaos." There were helicopters flying overhead and sirens blaring. But "things were orderly;" people were not running around screaming. Her immediate feelings included "shock" and "unbelief." When she saw a hearse and body bags, she knew things were "really bad." After quickly assessing the situation she knew that she had "to be the adult and support the students." She couldn't really express her "shock and disbelief." It was a "scary" night in which Natalie willingly took on two roles: supporting her students and supporting her future husband through this crisis. [see R5-BIHF:164-183]

Though the Bonfire tragedy ushered in a period of mourning, Natalie's account offers little evidence of an increase in cognitive dissonance. Many of Natalie's thoughts and cognitions were disturbing but they were not illogical. The presence of a hearse and

body bags are relevant to a collapsed stack of logs. Although the physical collapse of

Bonfire and rescue efforts did not bring about a significant rise in cognitive dissonance,

Natalie's role as an advisor provided ample opportunity for personal and interpersonal

reflection. These times of reflection would later provide for an increase in cognitive

dissonance.

When asked whether or not the 1999 Bonfire led to a change in her

understanding or life, death, and/or God, Natalie commented that, although she had a

new appreciation for life and an awareness of death, her understanding of God was

unchanged. Regarding her new awareness of death, Natalie made the following remark:

> I think that it's the reality of realizing our mortality at eighteen or twenty-two. "We can't die, we're invincible!" All of that was gone for these students; it was gone for me at twenty-two! The idea that I could conquer the world was gone, especially the day after, so it was the aftermath; the shock was wearing off and the reality was setting in and all of a sudden you realize you could die…that could have been you…my life is fragile. [R5-BIHF:227-233]

Natalie's level of cognitive dissonance increased dramatically when the

possibility of her own mortality was exposed as real. The sight of body bags filled with

fellow Aggies was dissonant to thoughts concerning the invincibility of youth. In order

to address this increase in cognitive dissonance, Natalie began to consider God's role in

the death of the Bonfire workers.

> [After 9/11], I developed a fear of flying, although it wasn't really a fear of flying but of dying in a plane and it was funny because somebody told me "If God wants to take you he will" and I was like "You're right, look at those 12 students on Bonfire, God was ready for them to go and he took their lives; it just so happens that all 12 of them died on this bonfire stack and that was the way that he took them home." So, I guess that it goes back to his power and his control.

> Do I believe that we're predestined? Not necessarily, but I do think that God has a plan for us and that this just reinforces the fact that he is powerful and that he is in control and that it is out of our hands. . . I guess [Bonfire] probably strengthened my faith because of the fact that what else do you do at a time like this but rely on God and the faith that he knows better than we do; we have to trust in him because we don't know what's going on here and why this happened. [R5-BI:537-553]

Although the issue of whether or not Natalie experienced some form of transformational learning will be discussed below, it appears that her level of cognitive dissonance was high enough to become a disorienting dilemma. Because of Bonfire and the 9/11 tragedies, Natalie developed a fear of death that was difficult to reconcile with her faith. In Natalie's case, I believe we see the disorienting dilemma not so much as a singular event but as a cumulative process (Taylor, 2000). While the '99 tragedy may be considered a triggering event, other events and time for reflection were needed before the transformative learning process could continue.

Before continuing to the next respondent, Natalie's response to the issue of the off-campus bonfire must be briefly addressed. When asked how she felt about Aggies wishing to see Bonfire return, she gave the following heated response:

> I think that they're idiots. I hate to say that, but they weren't here, I know some of the former students were, but those students who are on the campus who go out and build those little dinky bonfires and think "Oh, this is great" they miss the point all together; they need to get a life. They weren't here; they didn't bury one of their classmates; they didn't marry somebody who had to pick up the arm of a student and put it in a body bag because they didn't know who it belonged to and they really don't have an understanding of what spirit or tradition is and those students who think that the spirit of A&M was upheld by this one tradition never belonged here anyway – not that they didn't belong at A&M – but that they'll never understand the spirit. [R5-BI:424-432]

Even though Natalie showed a lot of antagonism toward Bonfire advocates, she was challenged to find that many of her current students were working on the off-campus bonfire. She was faced with the dilemma of how to show support for her students without appearing to condone their choice of activity.

> I have tons of students who are still involved in it and I listen and I encourage them, I do. I'm not going to lie and say that I don't. I say "I'm glad that you had a good time building Bonfire yesterday, I remember when I built Bonfire" but then I also say when they leave my office "I pray that when you go out there that I see you tomorrow because I don't think you're making a wise decision." So, I have a real hard time because I am known as the encourager and my students come to me for encouragement . . . I believe in solutions so when a student comes in . . . I question them; I question their energy and their time and their effort that they're putting into something that to me is not good; I question that. I never question their intentions of why they're doing it. .. But what I do is question the value of what they're doing with their time and their energy. So, that angers me and it's very frustrating! [R5-BI:437-452]

When faced with students wanting to work on Bonfire, Natalie experienced a rise in cognitive dissonance; supporting her students and supporting the off-campus Bonfire are antithetical to each other. Reflecting upon the importance of the Bonfire memorial, Natalie commented: "I think that it'll be another step in our healing process . . I hope it puts some closure to these silly renditions of Bonfire. . . I think that it will provide the families some closure" [R5-BI:574-577]. In order to alleviate the increase in cognitive dissonance, Natalie avoided questioning her students' intentions. She wanted the students to put their energy into something else, but she couldn't force them. Ultimately, Natalie's account suggests that her cognitive dissonance stems from the incompatibility of the serial-narrative offered by supporters of the off-campus Bonfire and the concluding-narrative offered through the Bonfire memorial and TAMU administration.

Terry. Although Terry had developed affection for TAMU while staying in Fowler Hall with his sister, he was not solely committed to the institution. As a successful football athlete, Terry was being recruited by a number of colleges. When his chance to receive a football scholarship died, TAMU became Terry's college of choice. In contrast to the accounts provide by Olivia and Natalie, Terry's commitment to TAMU was not a simple straightforward decision.

Similar to Natalie, Terry's disorienting dilemma is best understood as a cumulative process rather than a single event. In his narrative account there is evidence that Terry experienced an identity crisis when his football career was abruptly ended. Although there was no future for him in college football, it was his reputation as a football player that brought him to the attention of Bonfire leadership and made him vulnerable to social pressures associated with the Bonfire subculture. When asked why he got involved with Bonfire, Terry answered:

> Originally it was a desire to belong. Once I belonged, it was the sense of being cool; of being liked; huge peer pressure aspect; ninety percent of everything I did in Bonfire was because of peer pressure, the other ten percent was kind of like the team effort kind of stuff, "You don't let your team down, get over there and chop that tree down; You don't let your team down, go knock that guy's tooth out!" Those are the really big reasons. [R3-BI:232-237].

As an adolescent, Terry's identity was wrapped up in football. The social and institutional structures that supported his identity and development as a football player were gone and Terry was left to navigate a university that had an enrollment eight times larger than the size of his home town. As a freshman looking for a group to which he could belong, Terry quickly found himself surrendering to peer pressure from others

within his dorm. The residence hall in which he lived, according to Terry, was filled with "the craziest, rudest bunch of Bonfire guys on the campus; we [were] kind of like the Animal House dorm" [R3-BI:142-144]. These guys became his buddies and formed the core of his first-year social relationships.

When he decided to become a residence advisor in his dorm, Terry's level of cognitive dissonance relating to his Bonfire friendships began to grow. Terry admits that he was "pretty scared" when the new school year began. This "soon to be [Bonfire] crew chief" was instead a residence advisor in his old dorm. According to Terry, his friends from his first year thought he was an "idiot" and didn't want to have anything to do with him anymore. Looking back, though, Terry realized that he also had ostracized himself. "When I got into that RA job," he recounted, "it really opened my eyes and I realized what an idiot I was being...knocking peoples' teeth out. . . I was really going down the wrong road, so I was kind of happy to be distancing myself from that group" [R3-BIHF:415-417]. Terry's "distancing" of himself from the Bonfire subculture was a move to reduce his cognitive dissonance. By choosing to become a residence advisor, Terry came to realize that he couldn't be a part of the Bonfire culture. Although he continued to participate in Bonfire activities for a short while, Terry eventually gave up on the tradition completely.

Two weeks before Bonfire collapsed Terry decided he didn't want to have anything to do with the tradition ever again. But on the night of the tragedy, it was, to quote another respondent, "all hands on deck." When he arrived at the Bonfire site, Terry was overwhelmed by what he saw. He remembered how helicopters filled the air,

the giant collapsed stack of logs, the pain and anguish on people's faces. The tragic scene was too gruesome for him to handle. Although Terry aided in the removal of several logs, he was relieved when a fellow RA came to him and tearfully confessed she couldn't help any longer. As Terry consoled the grief-stricken RA, he thought to himself, "Thank God, we can go home now. She's given me a way to go home and still feel macho." [R3-BI:219-220] It is particularly worth noting that the Bonfire tragedy caused Terry to reevaluate his career goals. Growing up, Terry always thought he was going to be a doctor, but when he "saw the blood and the pain and the anguish on the parents' faces," he knew he couldn't do that anymore. He recounted, "I don't want to be a part of death and anguish, I want to be one of the folks helping to rebuild; helping people get back together" [R3-BI:444-446].

As will be discussed in the next section, by the time Bonfire collapsed, Terry was well within the transformational learning process. In his second year of college, Terry was busy adjusting to his new role as a residence advisor. He no longer considered himself an athlete. He saw his life as now being about education. From his narrative account, Terry admitted the tragedy led him into a period of grief. The grief, he recounted, "didn't hit me because I was so focused on finding these folks and making sure that everything was okay, but then like a day or two afterwards I really started getting depressed and got down really bad!" Terry reported further that it was the support of family and friends outside of the Bonfire subculture that helped him through the crisis.

> I realized that what really helped me process it at the beginning was that amidst all these phone calls and everybody coming to me and saying "Is

this guy okay?" Two or three of my old high school buddies called; my ex-high school girlfriend called; my grandmother called; my uncle called me; my next door neighbor called me from back home, and it kind of pulled me back to a time when I wasn't clouded with all the drinking and all the sexual favor type stuff and everything that had gone on and all the negative parts that I was so pulled into; it pulled me back to that good happy time. [R3-BI:291-297]

According to Terry, the collapse of Bonfire ushered in a period of grief, but it was also one piece of a larger disorienting dilemma surrounding his Bonfire experiences. As he continued to learn about the student affairs profession, Terry reflected upon his activities within the Bonfire subculture. When asked to comment about TAMU's response to the tragedy, Terry recounted,

Individual administrators could have handled it better. . . I think a lot of administrators at the time knew that these things were going on and that folks were drunk out there. . . [They] knew what happened in the perimeter pole sheds the night of Bonfire; knew about the hazing. And some of them, because they had been here as undergraduates, turned a deaf ear or they didn't do as much as they could and when folks said "Hey, I think that this thing is leaning," [they would respond by saying] "Oh no, shut up and get it done, you don't know what you're talking about!" As a young administrator in student affairs and someone who's in a job search and saying "Do I go here, do I go there, do I stay at home, what do I do?" that's really impactful to me; seeing what happened then and wondering if my blinders are up [as well]. So that's another way that Bonfire is impacting. [R3-BI:309-321]

People who questioned the integrity of the Bonfire stack were simply dismissed by those too wrapped up in the tradition. These administrators were blinded to dangers associated with Bonfire's construction. This troubled Terry and was a source of cognitive dissonance because, in his mind, committing to a career in students affairs meant helping students reach their fullest potential. As a young student affairs professional, Terry became mindful not to follow in such footsteps. In due course, out of

his many and varied Bonfire experiences, Terry came to reevaluate several of his meaning schemes and perspectives. Terry's participation in the broader historical Bonfire narrative became a disorienting dilemma that led to transformational learning. *Comparing respondents' accounts.* When comparing the narrative accounts presented, there is no doubt the Bonfire tradition and 1999 tragedy deeply impacted the respondents. All of the study participants, in their unique ways, became involved with Bonfire within the first few weeks of their freshman experience. Their involvement with the tradition was an important part of a larger "going to college" narrative. Although Olivia did not have to move away to attend college, for her it was vital to create the excitement of moving away and starting a new chapter in her life. She, like Natalie and Terry, was looking for new friends and experiences. As young freshmen in a new environment, they all needed to feel a sense of belonging. It is therefore understandable that the camaraderie and sense of purpose offered by Bonfire was so attractive.

It is clear from the accounts provided that the level of cognitive dissonance experienced by the respondents was in part tied to their social commitments. Olivia was strongly committed to Bonfire and to her "girls." From her narrative account there is little evidence that Bonfire was a disorienting dilemma for her. According to Olivia, "the more you learn about [Bonfire] the more you want to get involved in it" [R6-BIHF:59-60]. Terry, on the other hand, had a different experience. The more he knew about Bonfire and its subculture, the less he wanted to be involved with the tradition. All in all, the majority of Terry's Bonfire experiences were antithetical to his pre-established moral and value systems and a source of significant cognitive dissonance. Unlike Olivia or

Terry, Natalie was, from the start, more committed to the university and individual friendships than to Bonfire. Natalie's involvement with Bonfire was directly tied to supporting her friends. If her friends didn't need her, she didn't feel compelled to participate in Bonfire activities. Because Bonfire was not a center of value and power for Natalie, the cessation of the tradition did not become a disorienting dilemma. However, the experience of the untimely death of so many young students was a source of cognitive dissonance that impacted her understanding of God and His sovereignty.

Research Question #1

How does a student's level of faith development relate to her type and intensity of transformational learning resulting from the Bonfire tragedy at Texas A&M University?

Based on an analysis of Olivia's Bonfire interview, there is some indication that she experienced higher levels of cognitive dissonance associated with the moratorium on Bonfire. There is, however, no evidence to suggest that any of Olivia's tacitly held assumptions were made explicit in any significant way. From the perspective of FDT, Olivia is operating at the synthetic-conventional stage of faith development. Although she had developed the nascent ability to generate third-person perspectives of past and current relationships (an individuative-reflective faith stage ability), the ability of self-authorship remains elusive. Because Olivia's transformational learning is apparently limited to minor changes in meaning schemes, attention will turn to Natalie's and Terry's narrative-accounts.

Natalie. Natalie, like Olivia and Terry, is moving from the synthetic-conventional to the individuative-reflective stage in faith development (a.k.a., stage 3 to 4 transition). While

Olivia is in the early stage of this journey (measuring 3.14 on the FD scale), Natalie and

Terry are nearing its completion (measuring 3.88 and 3.81 respectively). The transition

to the individuative-reflective stage of faith development is marked largely by the

advancement of self-authorship and the reevaluation of one's beliefs, values, and

commitments.

There is little doubt that events associated with the Bonfire tragedy became a

disorienting dilemma (or marker event) for Natalie. She readily admits that she often

reflects upon Bonfire which is, to use her words, "a mark in my life," and "a milestone."

One theme that is identifiable in Natalie's periods of heightened cognitive dissonance is

death. The idea of death is clearly visible in her answers to questions concerning the

significance of Bonfire, the Bonfire memorial, and what she may have learned about life,

death, and God because of Bonfire. Answers to these questions can be understood from

Natalie's *form of world coherence,* which is an aspect of a person's faith development

and basically answers the question of how things make sense or fit together (Fowler, et

al., 2004). For Natalie, the images of death associated with the Bonfire tragedy brought

attention to the prospect of premature death and led to an increase in anxiety. This fear

impacted her emotional response to the prospect of flying and also impacted how she

advised her students. From a more personal perspective, Natalie even thought about the

risk of having children.

> I think about the families [of the Bonfire victims] more than anything
> probably, particularly as I begin to question my opportunities to have
> children and to start a family and the risks of losing a child or someone
> you love. I think that all those things come to mind and even before I
> have a child I start to think that I don't want to lose a child to something
> like Bonfire.

When she shared these concerns with a friend, she was challenged to consider God's sovereignty and power when it comes to life and death, which she did.

When Natalie shifted to a more transcendent point of view (which is a meaning scheme), she started to focus on God's power and control. This shift of perspective ultimately helped to reduce her cognitive dissonance. From her new point of view, the 12 students who died in Bonfire died because their time on earth was up. As Natalie remarked:

> It happened; it was happenstance! In my opinion those students … it was their time! God found a way to take their lives … they had lived for what He had put them here on earth to live for; that's my explanation of it. [R5-BI:390-393]

Natalie's focus on the sovereignty of God gave her a new awareness and appreciation for the lives of her students, her own life, and that time is fleeting. "Life really is too short" she said. When Natalie embraced a more transcendent view of the Bonfire tragedy (a form of third-person perspective taking), her cognitive dissonance was reduced. Upon review of her FD and Bonfire interviews it is apparent that the content of Natalie's faith was altered slightly when she fully embraced the notion of God's power and sovereignty. There was not, however, a systematic review of her basic understanding of life, death and God. From a FD standpoint, Natalie's commitment to the Sovereign-Lord ordered the rest of her commitments. Based on the general tone of Natalie's narrative accounts and the modification in faith content, there is evidence that transformational learning did occur in the form of a modified meaning scheme. For Natalie, the collapse of Bonfire was a disorienting dilemma that led her into a time marked by a fear of dying. Further, as she talked with others about her fears she experienced what appears to be a

moderate level of embarrassment or shame. This also is an indication of transformational learning.

Terry. Like Natalie, Terry is on the cusp of completing the synthetic-conventional to individuative-reflective transition in faith development. There is strong evidence in his FD interview that, as far as his self-identity, he has reached a level of self-authorship and his locus of authority is inward. Terry's answer to the question on the meaning and purpose of life is helpful here.

> My life's meaning is to create citizens and that's why I got involved in Student Affairs. I want to build students to be strong and moral citizens of a democratic society. What gives my life meaning is seeing students succeed at starting their life. The best feelings I've ever felt have come when a student tells me that I've made a difference and got them on the right track. . . . I think some people would say that that's the stereotypical student affairs answer; that what every Student Affairs person says, and again that's because I really believe the simplest answer is the best answer and I try to keep things simple because things in the world today are so damn complex. . . . I really believe that in terms of the American society, getting good men and women in our society and making leaders out of them is what I think my life's calling is going to be. [R3-FDI:225-242]

While Terry's response to the question of life purpose is a stereotypical student affairs answer, it still comes from a point self-authorship. Based on my overall impression of Terry responses, I believe there is strong evidence of Terry reflecting deeply upon the tacit assumptions that comprise what he calls "blind faith" and his professional values. Also, typical of individuative-reflective faith, Terry tends to see individuals as part of a system or group.

After analyzing Terry's narrative-accounts from a TL and FD perspective, it became clear that his life story can be divided into multiple life chapters, each of which

begins with a marker event. Three of these events are identified by Terry as his parents

contemplate divorce (age 9), innocence shattered (age 19, i.e. football injury, loss of

identity), and reconciling Bonfire and death (age 22). On this later event, it is clear the

Bonfire tragedy was a disorienting dilemma for Terry. Based upon an overall impression

from his two interviews, though, it appears the '99 tragedy is better understood as a

triggering event that is part of a longer cumulative process (Pope, 1996). Two themes

inherent in this longer process are *identity* and *conflict*.

Terry vividly remembers the day his mom informed him that she and his dad

were thinking about getting a divorce.

> I remember the exact moment and the exact time and even the exact
> space, place when my mom said "Your dad and I are thinking about
> getting a divorce." My mom was taking me to Boy Scouts ... and even
> when she told me ... it was like the stoplight we drove through [became]
> the "Divorce Light!" [R3-FDI:156-160]

When Terry found out that his parents were thinking about getting a divorce his life

changed. As Terry remarked, the news "had a profound impact on me, because then

again, my parents weren't supposed to do this, they were the Sunday School teachers . .

[I come from] a good little quaint family." Based on his answers in the Life Tapestry

exercise, I believe the revelation of this news strongly impacted his identity and

advanced his transition to synthetic-conventional faith. The appearance of peer pressure

at age 13 is a strong indication of interpersonal perspective taking.

As a cumulative process, Terry's disorienting dilemma can be broken down as

follows: (1) his career as football player was ended due to injury, no offers of athletic

scholarship came through, (2) his "innocence shattered," (3) moved to A&M and the

need to belong became a central concern, (4) recruited by and willingly committed to Bonfire, (5) experienced an increase in cognitive dissonance due to practices of Bonfire leadership and their demands for Terry's allegiance, (6) financial need led to new job as resident advisor, (7) rejected by friends and rejected friends, (8) Bonfire collapsed and renewed identity crisis, (9) experienced more cognitive dissonance due to value conflict between Bonfire subculture and employer expectations and goals, and (10) increased cognitive dissonance due to conflict between professional goals and off-campus bonfire participants.

Terry's conflict with off-campus bonfire personnel clearly reveals his high level of cognitive dissonance. When asked how he felt about the off-campus bonfire, Terry's response clearly demonstrates his frustration.

> One of the [off-campus bonfire] crew chiefs, and I never call him that because I don't want to empower him, but he.. there are just bad things like.. I saw him run up to a person, a guy walking with a girl.. run up to the guy and start humping him; you know; rubbing his crotch on him and I'm like that can't happen! I told him to stop and come in and talk with him and we did the whole judicial thing. A week later he goes through the entire hall, his girlfriend's sorority, and as many female groups as he can, and he asks females if he can have their used feminine products, and I'm like why are you doing this, where is this coming from and what is the basis of doing this? They were taking all these used feminine products and tying them to their perimeter pole outside the off-campus bonfire to scare other people off.. this is disgusting! This is the exact same kind of thing that I disliked! I'd hear stories about him and other guys passing down to our freshman, and I was there, I had the same thing happen to me and I'm thinking "We're just doomed to repeat ourselves." So, you ask me how I feel.. hateful! Honestly, I just purely do not like these people and it's because they're doing things like asking girls for tampons and rubbing their crotch on people! One of the freshman doesn't walk straight right now because he got hit so hard with the ax handle that he started bleeding. I report this and I do everything that I can or feel like I should just short of going out and beating the crap out of the guy myself, and it just doesn't get anywhere! [R3-BI:348-367]

Based on his story presented in the Tapestry of Life exercise, it is likely that
Terry completed most of his on-going transition from synthetic-conventional to
individuative-reflective faith during his undergraduate years. In Terry's case we see a
slight change in the content of faith and the final dance in the stage 3-4 transition, i.e. the
change from synthetic-conventional to individuative-reflective faith. From TL
perspective, Terry experiences both the transformation of meaning schemes and meaning
perspectives. As a student affairs professional, Terry often reflected upon his past
involvement with Bonfire. This self-examination led to feelings of guilt and/or shame,
which is additional evidence that he was going through a period of transformational
learning. Of the ten phases that mark perspective transformation outlined by Mezirow
(1991), seven are evident in Terry's FD interview and narrative accounts: (1) a
disorienting dilemma; (2) self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt, or shame;
(3) a critical assessment of assumptions; (4) exploration of options for new roles,
relationships and actions; (5) provisional trying of new roles; (6) building competence
and self-confidence in new roles and relationships; and (7) a reintegration into one's life
on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective.

Research Question #3

How can Fowler's faith development theory be applied by student affairs professionals
and other college administrators to contextualize the students' response to the Bonfire
tragedy?

The narrative-accounts provided by respondents to answer this question were
interpreted with a hermeneutic of demystification. From this position it is assumed that

surface appearances of accounts provided are masked by depth realities and that for

every told story there is an untold one. "Since the message is seen as one in disguise, the

researcher must decode using some hypothesized codebook—or create one," notes

Josselson (2004). The "codebook" used to demystify respondent narratives is Fowler's

faith development theory. By applying FDT as a tool to explore the narrative-accounts

provided, I was able to identify many relationships that comprise the respondents' social

environment as it related to Bonfire and TAMU. An hypothesis underlying this study is

that FDT can be used to contextualize students' loss resulting from the Bonfire tragedy.

To "contextualize" the students' response to the Bonfire tragedy means to place

that phenomenon in a particular context. Context, as a notion, is not easily defined.

Goodwin and Duranti (1992) point out that "it does not seem possible at the present time

to give a single, precise, technical definition to context" (p.2). However, in order to

answer the third research question a preliminary definition is required, even if that

definition is later found to be inadequate. One possible approach to defining the notion

of context is to think of it in terms of connections, notes Dilley (1999).

> A phenomenon is connected to its surroundings: contexts are sets of
> connections construed as relevant to someone, to something or to a
> particular problem, and this process yields an explanation, a sense, an
> interpretation for the object so connected. The context [or frame] also
> creates a disjunction between the object of interest and its surroundings
> on the one hand, and those features which are excluded and deemed as
> irrelevant on the other (p. 2)

Returning to Lewin's interactionist formula where behavior is a product of a

person and her/his environment, $B=f(P+E)$, we can see that in order to make an

interpretation of respondents' behavior, we must also delineate the environment (or

context) in which that behavior takes place. It is my argument that FDT and the recognition that all relationships have a triadic or covenantal structure can be used to identify the core relations of students impacted by the Bonfire tragedy as a means of contextualizing their loss and response.

Olivia. According to Olivia, Bonfire is two things: first, it's a way to demonstrate her loyalty to TAMU and, second, it is an avenue through which to have meaningful experiences with other students. "Ultimately," she said, "the goal of Bonfire is to build this really great symbol for A&M and to show all your support for your school and within that you find yourself really building relationships." Even though Bonfire symbolized her loyalty to the university, Olivia saw TAMU and Bonfire as separate from each other. Bonfire is "its own little world." Although the intended purpose of Bonfire was to support the Aggie football team and the university, the event was ultimately meaningful in and of itself.

From FDT perspective, Bonfire is a center of value and power in its own right and a triadic/covenant relationship that included Olivia, other Bonfire workers, and the Bonfire tradition is clearly evident. Since Bonfire is separate from TAMU, it's undoubtedly possible to be loyal to Bonfire without being loyal to the university and vice versa. Because the experiences associated with Bonfire are so unique, people on the outside, contends Olivia, cannot truly comprehend what it's all about. This notion of Bonfire being "unknowable," was shared by other respondents. Because Bonfire is a center of value and power which forms part of Olivia's identity, it, logically and emotionally, must be protected. Criticism against Bonfire or the suggestion that it never

return increased Olivia's cognitive dissonance. Further, the import of personal sacrifices associated with Bonfire must be protected as well. At some point criticism against Bonfire is viewed as a criticism against those loyal to it. This desire to remain loyal to Bonfire fueled romantic notions surrounding the tradition. In this way Olivia's view of Bonfire remains mythic. Although Olivia frequently refers to Bonfire as a symbol, evidence suggests she protects the sanctity of the relationship by her confessed inability to explain the tradition in a way that is comprehensible to outsiders. According to Olivia, Bonfire "is kind of unique; it's just hard to explain to people who haven't experienced it because it is so different from anything else."

Natalie. Based on her responses in both interviews, it is clear that TAMU was a center of values and power for Natalie. When asked why Aggieland is special, Natalie, like Olivia, found it difficult to explain. Her description focused on transcendent ideals, such as family, camaraderie, faith and loyalty. People, according to Natalie, are what make A&M special. In this regard the triadic/covenant relation is clearly evident consisting of Natalie, fellow Aggies, and the spirit of Aggieland.

Although Natalie had a tremendous amount of respect for Bonfire workers and was awestruck when she saw the bonfire stack for the first time, she was more committed to her friends than to the Bonfire tradition. She got involved with Bonfire because it was "one more fun thing to do" and afforded her the opportunity to make more friends. When asked about the possibility of being over involved in Bonfire, Natalie contended that she didn't give Bonfire any more attention than her other activities, unless her Bonfire buddy needed her, then she was there.

Natalie acknowledges that by the fall of '99 she had "outgrown" Bonfire. This is reasonable, since by that time it was unlikely that her Aggie buddy was involved with Bonfire in any significant way. As mentioned, Bonfire was built primarily by freshman and to a lesser extent sophomores. The event was sometimes called "the freshman Bonfire." Although an assumption, my reading of the evidence suggest that Natalie outgrew Bonfire because her Bonfire buddy was no longer involved in the annual ritual. By 1999, Natalie's buddy had likely graduated or was a 5th-year senior.

As a graduate student working as an academic advisor, Natalie's peers were fellow graduate students and student affairs professionals. From a broader third-person perspective (stage 4 faith), Natalie readily discerned the harm that an over-commitment to Bonfire could inflict upon a student's academic standing. After Bonfire collapsed, Natalie quickly became a support for her students, many of whom were involved in Bonfire leadership. Natalie's support can be perceived as an act of loyalty to both TAMU and to her profession. As a committed Aggie, Natalie was deeply concerned about her fellow Aggies. She considers them family. Natalie was vividly moved by pain and look of guilt on the Red Pots' faces [R6-BI:256-259]. However, although genuinely concerned about her fellow Aggies, as a student affairs professional it was Natalie's job to offer support and comfort to the students and to uphold the mission and values of TAMU. In this instance we can identify two separate centers of values and commitment in Natalie's life that were not in conflict with each other: TAMU and her student affairs profession.

Concerning her boyfriend, Nick, Natalie's commitment was neither a professional obligation nor group affiliation. By choosing to support Nick through the tragedy, Natalie displayed her deep affection and personal commitment to her boyfriend.

> I know that the reason . . I was able to marry my husband in four and a half months after starting to date him was because of Bonfire. That's weird to say that but for the first time he had to rely on somebody beside himself and he relied on me. I think that we would have ended up being married anyway, but that progressed our relationship really fast because I had to get his laundry and I had to make sure that he was fed. . . He didn't come home for over seventy-eight hours the first round. From the time that he got out there, three days later is when he finally came home. You know that was interesting when I look back on [Bonfire] and realize that those two weeks really progressed my life in that sense. [R6-BI:283-292]

In concrete ways Natalie demonstrated her affection for Nick. She knew that he needed her to be strong during this trial. It was a role that she willingly accepted and in which she felt a certain level of pride.

It is somewhat ironic to note that Natalie's commitment to Nick helped fuel her resentment toward those seeking the return of Bonfire. When Natalie was asked to comment about students advocating the return to Bonfire, she called those student "idiots" who were never here; "they didn't bury one of their classmates; they didn't marry somebody who had to pick up the arm of a student and put it in a body bag because they didn't know [to] whom it belonged" [R6-BI:424-429]. Although clearly agitated, Natalie demonstrates third-person (stage 4) perspective taking. Others, in this case advocates for off-campus bonfire, are thought of in terms of their ideas. They want to see Bonfire return because of some misguided notion that the "spirit of A&M was upheld" by this one tradition. These students will "never understand the spirit" of Aggieland [R6-BI:426-432]. From this stage of faith development social perspective

taking will focus on "the forms of relationship and institutional values, rather than the value of interpersonal harmony and concordance" (Fowler, et al., 2004, p. 39). As a student affairs professional and employee of TAMU, Natalie was concerned about her students involved with off-campus Bonfire. She wanted them to make better choices and, because she was not limited by mutual-interpersonal perspective taking, she was willing to challenge them in their beliefs. As a form of moral judgment, Natalie's view of off-campus supporters reflected the value of maintaining the institution or social order. Further, from the bounds of social awareness (stage 4), Natalie tended to see Aggies on the basis of ideological compatibility. Aggies who advocate the return of Bonfire are, to a certain extent, misguided and don't understand what the spirit of Aggieland is all about. From this point of view, individual are seen as part of a system or group.

Terry. Many scholars hypothesize that humans have a basic motivation to belong to some group or organization. Baumeister and Leary (1995) contend that "the need to belong, that is, a need to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of interpersonal relationships, is innately prepared (and hence nearly universal) among human beings" (p. 499). As previously mentioned, when asked why he got involved with Bonfire in the first place, Terry said, "It was a desire to belong. . . Once I belonged, it was a sense of being cool; of being liked." This desire may have been uniquely intense for Terry due to the termination of his football career. When asked to comment about changes in relationships that had impacted him, the one relationship that he identified was football.

> I could say one relationship, and it wouldn't be human, was [with]
> football. When I was playing football I was going to go to the University

of Texas or to A&M to play and in my senior year I had only eight
minutes left to play for the year and this guy.. came in and hit me in the
shoulder with his helmet and knocked my shoulder out of socket and.. in
those eight minutes the University of Texas and A&M stopped calling. . .
. My relationships with a lot of people, but also sports in general, really
changed. . . . I can remember thinking "How in the world could God let
this happen to me? I was going to college, why did this happen?" . . . A
lot of the folks that I knew through sports, our relationships just stopped
or just changed and kind of faded. [R3-BI:71-84]

From the account of how he was injured in his last football game it is arguable

that Terry was in a triadic/covenant relationship with other football players and athletic

pride (objectified in game victories and titles) is revealed. As Fowler points out,

extensions of a person's ego, such as prestige and recognition can also be a center of

value and power (Fowler, 1981). Terry was committed to playing football because every

victory on the football field brought honor and recognition to himself and his team.

Terry recalls, "We won state every year that I was in high school and only lost one

game.. that really weighs down on a kid."

Based on the foregoing, it is reasonable to assume that Terry had a profound need

to find a group of people with which he could connect. Because he was in line to have

the crew chief position "passed down" to him we know Terry's commitment to Bonfire

was very high. Operating from a synthetic-conventional level of faith (stage 3), Terry's

identity was largely constructed on the basis of interpersonal expectations. At this point

in Terry's life his bounds of social awareness did not readily extend beyond his chosen

group, i.e. Bonfire.

We know from Terry's account that he had serious reservations about some of

his Bonfire related activities. Peer pressure was very strong among bonfire enthusiasts.

In point of fact, Terry confessed that he was intimidated by the brown pots who were "untouchable" to him. He, therefore, did what he was told. Terry recalled the following story:

> In 1998, when Bonfire burned we had a perimeter pole. There were four poles at the edge of bonfire that held up lights and cables and [my dorm] had one. This was a big honor, and that was because our brown pots and our yellow pots were so cool in the Bonfire culture and so when Bonfire burned, that meant that our whole dorm could be right there when it burned, like right next to it...that's what they tell you, right? That's not what happened! For me, as a freshman, to get to come to perimeter pole, even though I built this thing...and [was] a driving force in my hall's building of bonfire, I had to get this brown pot...I had to find him a girl! I thought, "So what, I've got a friend that wants a date and she thinks he's cute; I'll hook them up!" He wasn't really talking about a date, he was talking about sexual favors on the Bonfire site when it's burning in a shed and I'm like...! The reason that I'm so intimidated by those guys is because that was so cool in the Bonfire culture. But there's no way I could ever be that person on the inside; I just could never do that kind of stuff! [R3-BI:255-268]

While Terry did "hook" the brown pot with someone that he knew, in retrospect he felt a lot of shame. At stage 3 of faith development a person's form of moral judgment will generally display values which are important to the maintenance of interpersonal relationships. "Stage 3 is concerned with living up to the expectations of significant others and with fulfilling its role obligations" (Fowler, et al., 2004, p. 42). The desire to fit in and belong caused Terry a high level of cognitive dissonance. Although he was doing his duty to support Bonfire, he increasingly found it difficult to reconcile his activity with his sense of values. Further, when Terry accepted the RA job, he chose to be involved with a group whose goals and values were largely antithetical to Bonfire. As Terry's bounds of social awareness expanded, he realized that a lot of his Bonfire activities were questionable at best.

While the locus of values in stage 3 faith is in interpersonal relations, in stage 4 (individuative-reflective) development moral judgment reflects the values of maintaining institutions or social order. Terry's response to FDI questions keyed to the form of moral judgment point to 3-4 stage transition. His acquiescence to the demands of the brown pots in 1998 indicates stage 3 development, but, by the time he took part in this study, stage 4 faith development is evident in his answers to questions concerning what makes an action right or wrong.

> I believe that there's a kind of global set of right virtues and those would be always right under any actions, such as, do not harm, don't kill anybody, don't harm someone else . . I believe that that's probably one of the guiding ones. From that "Do no harm to someone else" that being universal, I think where it gets a lot more gray is what is "harm." I would say that killing somebody is a pretty global wrong and to not kill someone is the right….the global right, but stealing may be harming somebody but is there a situation where stealing something from someone may be the right thing to do? [R3-FDI:382-389]

Terry's answer shows preliminary evidence of "'prior to society' perspective where principles of right or justice are seen as prior to the upholding of a given social order" and suggest preliminary signs of stage 5 development, (Fowler, et al., 2004, p. 44). However, it is also possible that Terry's statement could actually reflect the value of maintaining social order from a Catholic point of view. In this case stage 4 development is indicated.

CHAPTER VI

FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS &

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

> Faith is: 1) the process of constitutive-knowing 2) underlying a person's composition and maintenance of a comprehensive frame(s) of meaning; 3) generated from the person's attachments or commitments to centers of supraordinate value which have power to unify his or her experiences of the world; 4) thereby endowing the relationships, contexts, and patterns of everyday life, past and future, with significance (Fowler, 1986b, pp. 25 & 26).

I begin this chapter by quoting Fowler's complex definition of faith to remind the reader from where we have come. For Fowler (1981), faith is the universal way we make meaning and is not always religious in its content or context. Put more simply, faith is a way of knowing and committing to a center(s) of value and power. Borrowing from Tillich, Fowler notes that faith is our true devotion to objects of ultimate concern. It can center "in our own ego or its extensions—work, prestige and recognition, power and influence, wealth. One's ultimate concern may be invested in family, university, nation, or church ... Faith so understood is serious business" (Fowler, 1981, p. 4-5).

In what follows I will provide a summary of the purpose of my research concerning faith development and, based on the findings to be presented, offer a number of conclusions. Additionally, I will also discuss implications for student affairs policy and practice, and make recommendations for future research.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of my study was to investigate FDT and its potential contribution to the

student affairs theory base. Through this investigation I sought to understand how students made sense of the 1999 Bonfire tragedy and the subsequent cessation of the Bonfire ritual at Texas A&M University. Additionally, I explored the type and intensity of the students' transformational learning resulting from Bonfire and how this learning related to FDT and the developmental process of young-adult students (Mezirow, 1991).

Findings

1. *How does a student's level of faith development relate to her type and intensity of transformational learning resulting from the Bonfire tragedy at Texas A&M University?*

Respondents were asked questions related to the impact of the Bonfire tragedy, whether they felt they changed as a result of the tragedy, whether their understanding of life, death and God had changed, and what they learned from the experience. Based on the analysis of her interviews, Olivia is operating at the synthetic-conventional stage of faith development (stage score 3.18) and her transformational learning resulting from Bonfire is apparently limited to minor changes in meaning schemes. Although Olivia's regard for TAMU administration has lessened, indicating a sociolinguistic change in her meaning schemes, she remains loyal to the institution. Olivia's locus of identity is centered largely on her peer groups, i.e. her Bonfire family and, more recently, her fellow teachers. Her images of Bonfire family and Bonfire norms are largely tacit and remain unproblematic.

The analysis of Natalie's FD and Bonfire interviews indicates she makes meaning at the individuative-reflective stage of faith development (stage score: 3.88)

and that transformational learning did occur in the form of a modified meaning scheme. Based on her narrative account it is apparent that Natalie experienced an increased level of cognitive dissonance due to the Bonfire tragedy. This dissonance caused Natalie to develop a fear of her own premature death, e.g. dying in a plane crash. In communicative action with respected others in her faith, Natalie more fully embraced the notion of God's power and control. By more fully incorporating God's sovereignty and providence into her theology, Natalie addressed her fear of premature death and, in so doing, significantly reduced her level of cognitive dissonance. However, an important caveat must be addressed. As Segal (1999) suggests, sometimes people become defensive when confronted by ruptures in their taken-for-granted assumptions. Strengthening one's beliefs in the sovereignty of a transcendent God often results in the reduction of cognitive dissonance (Burris, Harmon-Jones, & Tarpley, 1997). Although Natalie did not reflect systematically on her basic understanding of life, death and God, her response suggests that her understanding of God was altered in a way that accounts for the Bonfire tragedy. It goes without saying that Natalie was wrestling with the perennial question: Why does a good God allow bad things to happen? By focusing more on God's power and control and reminding herself that life is a precious gift, Natalie was able to hold in tension the view that the Creator-God is holy and that his purposes, which are ultimately incomprehensible, may allow creation to experience pain and death. Theologically, Natalie's religious commitment is monotheistic, and all of her other commitments are subordinate to that. To use Fowler's (1986b) terminology,

Natalie's allegiance to Christianity is "a bid for a relationship to a center of value and power adequate to ground, unify, and order the whole force-field of life" (p. 18)

Based on the results from his FD interview and his narrative accounts of Bonfire, Terry had essentially reached the individuative-reflective stage of faith development (stage score: 3.81). Evidence from his Life Tapestry exercise showed that he reached the synthetic-conventional stage of faith development during his adolescence. Terry's movement from synthetic-conventional to individuative-reflective stage was likely stimulated by the ending of his collegiate football aspiration. When he arrived on the A&M campus, his reputation as a successful football player brought him to the attention of Bonfire leadership. From his very first day on campus Terry was recruited into the Bonfire subculture. As a new freshman looking to find acceptance, Terry was quickly enmeshed into activities that he knew were wrong, including excessive drinking, hazing, and crude behavior. As time went on, Terry began to realize that much within the Bonfire culture was antithetical to his own views. That Terry began to question the assumptions and values foundational to the Bonfire tradition, is another indication of advancement to individuative-reflective faith. By the time Terry was struggling with an off-campus bonfire worker, he had developed third-person perspective taking and was continuing to evaluate his beliefs, values, and commitments.

From TL perspective, Terry experienced both the transformation of meaning schemes and meaning perspectives. As a student affairs professional, Terry often reflected upon his past involvement with Bonfire. This self-examination led to feelings of guilt and/or shame and to the realization that some of his assumptions were

problematic. Seven of the ten phases common to perspective transformation were evident in his narrative account and FD interview (Mezirow, 1991). Further, many of Terry's meaning schemes, as the "concrete manifestations" of his "habitual orientation and expectations," began to be transformed (Mezirow, 1991). Not only was Terry critically examining the Bonfire culture, but he was also moving away from his "blind faith" in the Catholic Church and exploring other philosophies.

2. *How can the loss of Bonfire, a significant communal ritual, be understood as a disorienting dilemma as delineated in Mezirow's transformational learning theory (TLT)?*

Respondents were asked questions concerning the Bonfire tradition (its social structure and purpose) and about their involvement with the tradition prior to 1999. The respondents were also asked to give an account of their personal experience of the tragedy and how it affected them. Based on their narrative accounts, Natalie and Terry were propelled into a period of mourning when Bonfire collapsed. Olivia, on the other hand, contends she did not enter into such a period. She characterized the Bonfire aftermath as surreal; it was "almost like you were in a movie." Although there remained the possibility that Olivia was in denial, it needs to be understood that to experience grief does not necessarily increase cognitive dissonance. Grief as a response to a significant loss, such as the Bonfire tragedy, is logical and does not necessarily cause people to question their various assumptions. For example, in her research of survivors of suicide victims, Van Dongen (1999) found that survivors who anticipated that a suicide would occur experienced significantly less cognitive dissonance when compared to survivors

who had no such expectations. Survivors who were surprised by the suicide of a loved one struggled with agonizing "why" questions. Van Dongen (1999) noted that "searching for answers to these questions was a major survival strategy or effort by survivors to cope with the impact of the suicide on their lives" (p. 225). For Olivia, Bonfire was a "really big lesson to remain strong in [her] faith" [R6-BI: 339-340]. She tried "not to question too much why" it happened [335-336]. In comparison, both Natalie and Terry displayed significant levels of reflection concerning the Bonfire tradition and the 1999 tragedy. Based on their narrative accounts, the Bonfire tragedy was a triggering event for Natalie and Terry, but it was part of a larger cumulative process leading to the transformation of meaning perspectives. In this sense, Bonfire can be understood as a disorienting dilemma.

Aside from the tragedy, all of the respondents also experienced an increase in cognitive dissonance associated with the activities of the off-campus bonfire, although for somewhat different reasons. Olivia was upset because she felt the off-campus bonfire would not be inclusive of the entire Aggie community and threatened the return of the traditional on-campus Bonfire. Natalie was upset because she felt her students were wasting their time and energy on a project that was not truly representative of the Aggie spirit and ideals. Terry was upset with the off-campus bonfire workers because they represented the likely return of a subculture that was harmful to both students and the university.

Differences in cognitive dissonance experienced by the respondents can also be explained, in part, when considering their social commitments in relation to their bounds

of social awareness (see Figure 7, p. 106). Both Natalie and Terry scored relatively high in the aspect of social awareness, 4.2 and 4.0 respectively. Olivia, by contrast, measured 3.33. At the stage 3 level of faith development, Olivia's identity was largely derived on the basis of interpersonal expectations and the desire to please significant others (Fowler, et al., 2004). Based on her narrative account, there is little evidence that Olivia's bounds of social awareness extended beyond her biological, Bonfire, and Aggie "families." As mentioned, a significant level of cognitive dissonance expressed by Olivia stemmed from the risk that off-campus bonfire posed to the possible return of Bonfire. After the tragedy, Olivia "felt closer" to anyone who was involved with Bonfire. Any threats perceived by Olivia to hinder the potential return of Bonfire and the cohesion of her Bonfire family were met with resistance.

At the individuative-reflective stage of faith development, Natalie's and Terry's primary ego concern is the maintenance of their systems of beliefs, values, and commitments which form the foundations of their identities. At stage 4 we see the emergence of the "executive ego"—the self can be differentiated from the many roles that one bears (Fowler, 2000). When transitioning from stage 3 to stage 4 a person's capacity for social awareness broadens, but there is the tendency to "see others as parts or representatives of systems or social orders, rather than as individuals" (Fowler, et al., 2004, p. 46). Based on their narrative-accounts, both Natalie and Terry displayed higher levels of cognitive dissonance when discussing issues associated with the off-campus bonfire. From their perspective students supporting the off-campus bonfire were either wasting their time or threatening the success of the university. Of the three respondents,

Terry most clearly exhibited the tendency to see individuals as part of a system or group. University administrators viewed by Terry as tolerant of off-campus Bonfire were a source of cognitive dissonance because they were not holding up the highest ideals of the university or the student affairs profession. Terry believed the high level of animosity he felt toward students involved with off-campus bonfire frustrated his efforts to be the "best" resident advisor that he could be. He simply didn't want to have anything to do with those students anymore. As a committed student affairs professional, Terry perceived any tacit or overt support of the off-campus bonfire as antithetical to his values and harmful to the university's future success.

3. *How can Fowler's faith development theory be applied by student affairs professionals and other college administrators to contextualize the students' response to the Bonfire tragedy?*

The third research question is predicated on H. Richard Niebuhr's theory that all social relationships can be understood as having a triadic/covenantal structure—*I* and *thou* in relation to an *it*. From this notion, I hypothesized that it would be possible to contextualize students' response to the Bonfire tragedy by interpreting their narrative accounts through FDT. Specifically that Bonfire and/or the Bonfire tradition could be understood as a center of supraordinate value and power to which students commit their allegiance.

From a FD standpoint, Olivia was committed, along with her Bonfire family, to Bonfire as a center of value and power. Much of Olivia's identity was derived from the relationships she forged through this significant communal ritual. From the synthetic-

conventional stage of faith development, a person's sense of self is a synthesis of various images of self constructed by others and one's own felt image of self (Fowler, 2000). Supporting Bonfire was a way for Olivia to demonstrate her loyalty to TAMU and to unite with a group of like-minded individuals. Although Bonfire is connected to TAMU, Olivia related to the entities with different levels of commitment and trust. As a student, Olivia's relationship with TAMU was based on mutually agreed upon expectations. The relationship was more contractual than covenantal. However, Olivia's relationship with her Bonfire sisters and brothers was more familial, being based on the notion of shared sacrifice and the commitment necessary to uphold the Bonfire tradition. When Bonfire collapsed, it was her responsibility to her "girls" that propelled her into action. She was obligated to do what she could to support her Bonfire family through this time of crisis. This support also included protecting Bonfire from the off-campus bonfire proponents, which she construed primarily as a threat to the potential return of Bonfire. It should be noted that, throughout her entire narrative account, Olivia did not offer any criticism of Bonfire or the Bonfire tradition.

Unlike Olivia, Natalie's commitment to TAMU resulted from the discovery of shared values. Whereas Olivia was socialized into the TAMU and Bonfire cultures, Natalie made a commitment to the university based on a deeper level of reflection. Through her research, Natalie identified key values that she shared with the university. Based on her response, it is clear that Aggieland was a center of value and power for Natalie. It was a relationship that she shared with other Aggies. For Natalie, it was the people that made A&M special.

As a first-year student, Natalie was eager to make as many new friends as possible. Through her search for new student activities, Natalie was introduced to the Bonfire tradition and culture. In Natalie's case, the annual tradition was not separate from TAMU. Of all the respondents, it was Natalie who spoke of supporting the university's "burning desire to beat the hell out of t.u." The very reason Bonfire existed was for students to demonstrate support for their school. In response to the collapse of Bonfire, Natalie's commitments to the student affairs profession and to her employer, TAMU, was clearly demonstrated. Evidence from her narrative account did not reveal any significant tension between these two centers of value and power.

The only group Natalie expressed any antagonism toward was supporters of the off-campus bonfire. Operating from the individuative-reflective stage of faith development, Natalie tended to group people by their ideologies. Aggies supporting the return of Bonfire were considered misguided and ignorant of the true Aggie spirit. As a form of moral judgment, Natalie's opinion of those advocating for the return of Bonfire reflected the value of maintaining the university and its social order.

Terry's narrative account indicated there was a major restructuring in his self-image triggered by the ending of his relationship with football and the beginning of his new relationship with Bonfire. From the synthetic-conventional level of faith, the locus of Terry's identity was in his Bonfire peers. Terry was challenged, however, by the group's activities that included violence, hazing, and alcohol abuse. When Terry accepted the resident advisor position in his college dorm, he established a new relationship with the university. Although certainly contractual, key relationships with

student affairs professionals helped him forge a new identity that focused on education and serving others. Before Bonfire, Terry had grown up wanting to be a doctor (his major was biology). However, after "seeing the response that some people in student affairs had [to the Bonfire tragedy] and what they did for a lot of people" turned Terry toward a career in higher education [R3:BI:44-51].

Conclusions

This study has contributed to the body of knowledge concerning (1) how Fowler's Theory of Faith Development can be used for relating students' faith development with transformational learning that is the result of a significant crisis, (2) our understanding of communal or personal crises as potential triggering events for transformational learning, and (3) how FDT can be applied by student affairs professionals to contextualize their students' trust and commitment to institutions of higher learning, peers, and family in response to significant crises.

Research Question 1

The first question looks at how Fowler's Theory of Faith Development can be used for relating students' faith development with transformational learning resulting from a significant crisis. This question takes serious Mezirow's (1991) contention that perspective transformation is the central process of *adult* development. As previously mentioned, the relationship between FDT and TLT is very strong when details concerning stage 3 to stage 4 faith transition are compared with perspective transformation. However, FDT is a theory of human development and TLT is a theory of adult learning. Although both theories focus on long-term processes, FDT takes a wider

life-long perspective. Based on responses to FD interview questions, Olivia (age: 23) was assigned to the synthetic-conventional level of faith development (stage 3). While Natalie (age: 27) and Terry (age 23) were assigned to the individuative-reflective level of development (stage 4), their scores indicate that they are in a time of developmental transition. Transitions between faith stages are often long and protracted (Fowler, 1987).

Olivia's score of 3.18 indicates that she is in a state of equilibrium. Her meaning systems remain tacit and her self-identity is embedded in a web of social relations. In spite of the trauma associated with the Bonfire tragedy, Olivia did not begin the process of objectifying and examining her beliefs, values, and commitments. As such, no revision in meaning perspectives seemed warranted by her. Although not definite, at the relatively young age of 23, Olivia may not have reached a point of maturity where the revision of established meaning perspectives could take place (Taylor, 2000). Research considering age as a relevant factor in TLT remains very thin, so any conclusions on this point would be speculative.

Based on Olivia's account of the Bonfire tragedy, however, it appears that some modification of meaning schemes did take place. Since there is little evidence of significant movement in her faith development and perspective transformations, Olivia's account lends supports for the affinity between FDT and TLT. From the FD perspective Olivia occupied a relatively stable position in the synthetic-conventional stage of faith. Her religious faith, though tacitly held, formed a canopy of meaning that supported her commitment to family and friends and, ultimately, sustained her through the Bonfire crisis.

Taken together, Natalie's and Terry's narrative-accounts also support the pairing of FD and TL theories. Regarding Natalie, there is little evidence to suggest that any perspective transformation took place as a result of Bonfire. However, there is evidence to suggest that perspective transformation and a change in the structure of her faith took place prior to the '99 tragedy. When Natalie summoned the courage to end a 4-year relationship with her college boyfriend she demonstrated third-person perspective taking and a new level of self-authorship. In Natalie's case we have no significant change in the formal structuring operations of her faith and the overall content of her faith remains intact. Changes in meaning schemes were present, however, namely, the deepening of her belief in the sovereignty of God and the realization that life is fragile.

Similar to Natalie, Terry was also nearing the end of the stage 3-4 transition and was essentially operating at the individuative-reflective level. As mentioned above, there was evidence that Terry started his transition from stage 3 to stage 4 when he began college and became involved in the Bonfire subculture. His transition continued through his undergraduate years. From the TL perspective it is also apparent that Terry experienced transformation of meaning perspective and meaning schemes. Ultimately, for Terry and Natalie, the college experience was a time of significant growth. Their advancement in faith development add support to the findings of Holcomb and Nonneman (2004) whose longitudinal study showed roughly half of a college freshman cohort at a liberal arts college successfully transitioned to a higher level faith development by the time they were seniors.

Research Question 2

The second research question considers whether or not the Bonfire tragedy and associated events could be qualified as disorienting dilemmas as delineated in TLT. Reviewing accounts of the Bonfire tragedy, it is apparent that the respondents were all affected by the crisis but each in their own unique ways. The level of cognitive dissonance encountered by respondents was often directly tied to their level of commitment to various centers of value and power.

Coming from an Aggie family, Olivia displayed a very strong commitment to her Bonfire family, the tradition, and to her fellow A&M students. While she experienced some cognitive dissonance concerning the push to determine who was responsible for Bonfire collapsing and from proponents of the off-campus bonfire, neither the tragedy itself nor the tradition were sources of cognitive dissonance.

Natalie exhibited a deeper level of commitment to the university and to her students/advisees when compared to the Bonfire tradition. She was deeply affected by the events of that tragic night and experienced an increase in cognitive dissonance concerning her own mortality and the feeling that college students (late adolescents) shouldn't die. She also experienced a growing level of cognitive dissonance when advising students who were participating in the off-campus Bonfire.

Findings from Terry's narrative account also support the idea that triggering events have internal and external characteristics. Because he had already accounted for his students, Terry didn't have to stay and watch the rescue efforts. Though he was committed to his job at the university, the tragedy (an external event) was just too

painful to watch and he needed to escape (an internal event). The Bonfire tragedy caused a severe amount of cognitive dissonance for Terry. Reflecting upon this experience, Terry realized that he couldn't be a doctor. He had to figure out another way to help people during times of crises.

The narrative accounts offered by Natalie and Terry also support the notion that a disorienting dilemma may not be a specific event but a cumulative process. Pope (1996) "found triggering events to be 'a gradual accumulation of energy . . . like an unfolding evolution rather than a response to a crisis'" (as cited in Taylor, 2000). In support of findings presented by Holcomb and Nonneman (2004), the Bonfire tragedy, as a disorienting dilemma, was not simply a short term event. Rather, for Natalie and Terry, Bonfire was a triggering event that was marked by an extended period of reflection upon the competing rules and ideologies of their multiple value commitments, i.e. Bonfire, TAMU, and student affairs profession.

Research Question 3

The third research question explores the application of FDT for contextualizing students' response to the Bonfire tragedy. I hypothesized that it would be possible to contextualize students' response to the tragedy by interpreting their narrative accounts through Fowler's Theory of Faith Development. Specifically that Bonfire and/or the Bonfire tradition could be understood as a center of supraordinate value and power to which students commit their allegiance (see Figure 1, p. 12). As far as I know, my application of FDT with a special focus on the respondents' commitment to centers of value and power is unique. Stewart's (2001, 2002) study concerning identity integration of Black

students on a predominantly white campus comes close to my application of FDT. He also used FDT for researching the dynamics of loyalty and commitment of college students. His findings suggest that students' organizational commitments provided clues about their socio-cultural identities.

At the beginning of the previous chapter, I mentioned the Bonfire tradition could be compared to an immense religious-style ceremony. To be more specific, Bonfire, in its organizational structure, leadership, ideology, and goals, shares certain traits with what D. M. Kelley (1986) called "strong" social organizations. Kelley (1986), in his classic work, *Why Conservative Churches are Growing*, proposed a model of strong religious groups that included three dimensions of social strength: goals, controls, and communications; and three traits of strictness: absolutism, conformity, and fanaticism. Social strength in a strong religious group includes followers who demonstrate an unwavering (even sacrificial) commitment to the group's goals. A high level of loyalty throughout the rank-and-file would be observable. Members would also willingly obey the commands of their leaders and suffer sanctions for any infraction they might have committed. Group members would also be missionaries, eager to spread the group's ideology. Also observable would be an internal communication code, "a special terminology peculiar to the group and less intelligible to outsiders" (D. M. Kelley, 1986, p. 58). Traits of strictness include for example an uncritical and unreflective attachment to the group's values, an intolerance of dissent, and the shared stigmata of belonging.

While Kelley did not extend his model of social strength to non-religious groups, he was not unaware of its potential application outside ecclesiastical walls.

Indeed, "many of the dynamics of social strength described . . . may well apply to all or most types of organizations," including, I might add, Bonfire (D. M. Kelley, 1986, p. 106). I believe that even a cursory comparison between the Bonfire tradition and Kelley's model reveals many similarities. For example, according to all study respondents the primary values extoled by Bonfire were loyalty, camaraderie, and commitment. There is no doubt that for many years students have made great sacrifices to see Bonfire get built. Discipline in the form of hazing has been historically documented. Crew chiefs and hall directors charged with recruiting Bonfire workers used bullying tactics to accomplish their goals. The blind faith in Bonfire tradition could be considered a form of absolutism; criticism of tradition was not tolerated by true believers. According to many Bonfire proponents, Highway 6 (the major thoroughfare leading to College Station) "goes both ways." Additionally, the trait of conformity is evidenced through the wearing of pots, not washing work clothes, following traditions, and participating in group yells.

Further, if the Bonfire tradition and the "strictness" of its supporting social structure are best understood from a religious standpoint, it is possible then to view the actual Bonfire ceremony as a "pagan-style" ritual. The spectacle of Bonfire—i.e., its mammoth size, ceremonial procession, igniting the stack, and communal chants—was a cultic expression of the tradition's myth and was designed to produce positive emotions that supported the institutional culture and professed ideals of Bonfire.

Kelley points out that dimensions of social strength and strictness typical of conservative religious groups offer something very important to its members—a life of

meaning. Religious or political ideologies are mere notions when they come without demands. "Meanings are addressed to persons and demand something from them: assent, commitment, adherence (or rejection)" (D. M. Kelley, 1986, p. 52). All the foregoing is important and will help to draw out conclusions to the final research question.

When I proposed to investigate how FDT could be applied by student affairs professionals and other college administrators to contextualize students' responses to the Bonfire tragedy, I predicated it on the hypothesis that Bonfire could be understood as a center of supraordinate value and power to which students commit their allegiance. I believe the narrative accounts provided by study respondents support my hypothesis.

Following Niebuhr, the structure of a person's faith flows out of the triadic relationships to which he or she is committed. Based on his narrative account, Terry had at least three centers of value and power that helped shape his identity: the Christian God, Bonfire, and the student affairs profession. When Terry arrived on campus, he was undergoing a profound restructuring of his personal narrative. Two narrative details support this observation. First, due to his rejection from football, one of Terry's key covenant relationships was broken. He felt betrayed. Second, because Terry was in the process of objectifying and evaluating many of his core beliefs, much of his core values and commitments had become unmoored. As a new freshman floating in a sea filled with thousands of undergraduates, Terry's self-identity was adrift and he had a very strong need to identify a group to which he could belong. He was therefore a prime candidate for recruitment into the Bonfire subculture. I believe this helps to explain why Terry, on his first night as a college student and under direction from a yellowpot, went out and

instigated a fight with a redpot. That night he learned that such behavior was "good bull," which is Aggie slang for the proper display of the Aggie spirit.

As his first year in college progressed, Terry was drawn deeper into the Bonfire culture. Whenever Bonfire needed him, he was there. His weekly sacrifice of time and physical effort was a testament not only to his allegiance, but also to the demands of Bonfire. Looking back, Terry referred to the Aggie spirit as a "wonderful tying bond" that students could rely upon. Terry knew that if he got into any sticky situations, his "buddies" had his back. Ironically, though, it was his friendships with his buddies that got him into sticky situations in the first place. [R3-BI:67-75]

By the end of his first year, Terry began to have serious reservations about his Bonfire activities. As he advanced toward individuative-reflective faith, Terry was re-authoring his life. His previously "tacit and unexamined convictions and beliefs" became "matters of more explicit commitment and responsibilities" (Fowler, 2000, p. 49). Terry still considered himself Catholic and there came a point in time when he saw Bonfire values and culture as something he could no longer be a part of. I believe this demonstrates Terry's commitment to the Catholic faith as more profound than his other commitments and that, ultimately, his response to the claims of God upon his life caused him to let Bonfire go. Bonfire ceased to be a center of power and value in his life.

Based on her narrative account, Olivia had at least two centers of value and power in her life: the Christian God and Bonfire. We know from her narrative account that Olivia was socialized into the Aggie culture. Aggieland and the Aggie spirit were part of her life. Like the other respondents, Olivia got involved with Bonfire because she

wanted to find a group of friends to which she belonged. Although Olivia was involved with Bonfire leadership, her experience with the Bonfire culture was significantly different from Terry's. As previously discussed, certain elements of the Bonfire tradition were sexist. Many adherents believed that women should not be a part of Bonfire. Although speculative, I believe the cost of Olivia's allegiance regarding time and effort was undoubtedly high, but, as a woman, she may not have been privy to the rougher Bonfire elements, i.e. hazing, mortal combat, alcohol and sexual harassment. That said, I must acknowledge that Olivia may well have known or experienced the seamier side of Bonfire, but, because of her continued allegiance to her Bonfire family and, perhaps, the notion of "super-secret Bonfire sh*t," she was unwilling to disclose that information.

Based on her narrative account, Natalie had at least three centers of value and power in her life: the Christian God, Texas A&M University, and the student affairs profession. Unlike Terry or Olivia, Bonfire was never a center of value and power for Natalie. Rather, her involvement with Bonfire was subordinate to her commitment to the university. When Bonfire collapsed, Natalie was able to set aside her own need to grieve and accept the support role for her boyfriend and her many students. She was being true to her commitments. Although the Bonfire tragedy caused a significant rise in cognitive dissonance, that one event was not a disorienting dilemma for her. Rather, the events of that tragic night became part of a longer cumulative process that helped to speed up her transition from synthetic-conventional to individuative-reflective stage of faith development.

Implications

Although issues concerning the relationship of spirituality and college student development have increasingly been the subject of scholarly research, studies on the applicability of FDT within the context of college student affairs has been limited. A general review of the relevant literature indicates that FDT has value for exploring the inner perspective of others, promoting the holistic development of college students, and is congruent with the purposes of higher education.

Based on the finding of my research, I believe that, first, there is evidence to support the argument that transformation of meaning schemes and meaning perspectives are key components of young-adult faith development. The affinity between perspective transformation and the stage 3 to stage 4 transition in faith development theory is very strong. Second, evidence indicates that Bonfire was a student activity that was unique to TAMU and had the potential to become a center of supraordinate value and power for many students. Historically, Bonfire had the power to offer a significant amount of meaning and purpose in the lives of students if they were willing to make the necessary sacrifice. Third, FDT can be an effective tool for exploring the structure of students' faith relationships and their commitments thereto.

In order to explore the potential implication of my findings for student affairs professionals and college administrators, I have decided to limit my observation to Texas A&M University. According the Division of Student Affairs, it is their mission to provide "exceptional services, facilities, programs, and experiences that enrich student learning and development, foster an inclusive campus community, and promote Aggie

Core Values[*] in support of the educational mission of Texas" (Texas A&M University,

Division of Student Affairs, n.d.). The core values of the Division of Student Affairs are:

Caring, diversity, respect, integrity, excellence and service.

Although Bonfire was a longstanding symbol of TAMU culture, it was never

really a student affairs program. Historically, Bonfire was a student-led activity and its

leadership had a tremendous amount of autonomy. We now know that level of autonomy

was unwise and twelve Aggies had to pay the ultimate price for administrators at A&M

to understand that. As the literature suggests, student affairs professionals need to seek a

balance between administrative control and student autonomy. Sponsored student

activities and their leaders must be held to the standards and values promoted by their

college or university.

Through my unique application of FDT, I was able to develop an understanding

of the negative impact that Bonfire, as a center of supraordinate value and power, had on

at least one Aggie's life. There is no doubt the Bonfire subculture that Terry was

involved with commanded a level of loyalty, sacrifice and commitment that was

antithetical to the core values of A&M and the Division of Student Affairs. For example,

we know from past reports that many students suffered academically because of Bonfire

time demands. Because leadership promoted loyalty, sacrifice, and commitment to

tradition, it was ultimately antagonistic to the values of diversity, respect, and

excellence. I would argue that Bonfire ultimately valued conformity, power, and duty

above all else. Beyond the tragedy of 12 Aggies dying and 40 being physically injured

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[*] Aggie Core Values include loyalty, integrity, excellence, leadership, selfless service, and respect (Texas
A&M University, Division of Student Affairs, n.d.)

by the collapse of Bonfire stack, the next biggest tragedy was that Bonfire did promote

camaraderie and a shared sense of sacrifice among the students and allegiance to the

university, but at too high a price.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on conclusions drawn from the research questions, recommendations for research

concerning the application of FDT in the context of higher education student affairs will

be offered in this final section. Concerning the first question and how a student's level of

faith development relate to her transformational learning, additional research is needed

to explore the connections between FD and TL theories. From this study and others, we

know that many college students will likely advance from stage 3 to stage 4 faith

development during their undergraduate experience. However, if the transition between

late adolescence and young adulthood is also, as Fowler (1983) contends, the optimal

time for beginning the transition from synthetic-conventional to individuative-reflective

faith development, than how are college graduates distinct from the general young-adult

population? Specifically, do young adults who are college graduates display higher

levels of stage development when compared with the young-adult population that has

forgone higher education? Is there something inherent to the college-going experience

that engenders faith development or transformational learning?

Further, because FDT measures the formal structures of a person's faith and not

its content, TLT may be a better tool for promoting the communicative action and

personal reflection required to address the tacit assumptions that so often hampers

student learning. This is in line with the claim made by Fowler and others that it is

inappropriate to design curriculum specifically to promote faith development and has

implications for student program development. For that reason, research focusing on the

practical application of TLT in support of student faith development may be warranted.

Regarding the second research question, findings from this study suggests the

1999 Bonfire tragedy was not a singular event promoting student transformational

learning. Although the tragedy was of immense proportion, none of the study

respondents were driven to question their taken-for-granted assumptions based on that

one event. As previously mentioned, the respondents' experience of cognitive

dissonance appears to be directly tied to their level of commitment to various center(s)

of value and power. Based on these findings, additional research that considers how

students' commitments to centers of value and power may encourage or hinder the

critical reflection of taken-for-granted assumptions is justified. Faith, it needs to be

remembered, is an active way of being and committing to others. The nature and

strength of our commitments to family, friends, groups, and institutions impacts our faith

development and whether or not tragic events, such as Bonfire, and the inevitable *why*

questions that follow are met with a reflective open mind or with an attitude of

defensiveness.

Regarding the application of FDT to contextualize students' response to

traumatic events in light of their commitment to center(s) of value and power, I believe

more research is warranted. Additional studies exploring Niebuhr's thoughts concerning

the triadic structure of faith and center(s) of supraordinate value and power could be

very beneficial to student affairs scholars and practitioners. Findings from this study

offer nascent support for my hypothesis that Bonfire was a center of value and power for some students. More research should be conducted exploring this phenomenon. Questions worth considering include: Can Greek fraternities and sororities be conceived as centers of value and power? What are the pedagogical and policy implications for holding such a view? Could student organizations (especially those supporting political, social, or environmental causes) be better understood from this perspective? Are students at higher levels of faith development less likely to succumb to the demands of more radical student organizations?

It should also be noted that the demands inherent in our interconnected, global, and complex society often weigh heavy on college students. Undergraduates are pressured to commit themselves to numerous institutions, social groups, and religious affiliations. Research considering potential conflict between competing demands from these social entities could prove beneficial for promoting student academic success and spiritual wellbeing.

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APPENDIX A

BONFIRE INTERVIEW (BI) PROTOCOL

A. Becoming an Aggie & The Aggie Spirit - *(events prior to Bonfire '99)*

1) Tell me a little about yourself and your family. Where you were born? What's your family like?

2) Tell me a little bit about your high school to college transition.

3) Why did you choose to attend Texas A&M University? What attracted you to this institution?

4) Think back to your freshman year, how would you describe the "Spirit of Aggieland" to outsider? And what does it mean to be an Aggie?

B. Understanding Bonfire and the 1999 Tragedy - *(personal story of Bonfire)*

5) Give me a general introduction to Bonfire? Who were the major players? What was it all about, from your perspective?

6) Tell me about your involvement with Bonfire prior to 1999.

7) Why did you get involved with Bonfire? What were you hoping to get out of it?

8) Tell me about the 1999 Bonfire. Tell me your story prior to, during, and after the collapse.

9) Do you feel that the 1999 tragedy led you into a period of grief, and if so, how did you go about processing that experience?

C. Responding to Others *(events following Bonfire '99)*

10) How do you feel about the university's response to the tragedy? Do you view the university differently today?

11) How do you feel about Aggies who want to see Bonfire return?

12) What does it mean to be a "loyal Aggie?" Do you consider those who don't want to see the return of Bonfire to be loyal to the Spirit of Aggieland.

D. **What has changed and what have you learned? -** *(transformational learning)*

13) Today, how would you describe the "Spirit of Aggieland" to an outsider? What does it mean to be an Aggie? How important is being an Aggie to you?

14) Do you feel that you were changed as a result of the 1999 tragedy? If so, how were you changed?

15) Did the 1999 Bonfire change your understanding the life, death or God? Is your faith different today because of Bonfire? Is so, how is it different?

16) What have you learned from this experience?

APPENDIX B

The Unfolding Tapestry of My Life*

Calendar Year	Your Age	"Place"- Geographic & Soc-Economic	Key Relationships	Uses & Directions of the Self	Marker Events	Events & Conditions in Society/World	Images of "God"	Centers of Value & Power	Authorities

Using the Life Tapestry Exercise: Instructions for the Respondent

Take a moment to look over the work sheets that you have in front of you. After you have looked at the chart for a few minutes, turn back to this page for some explanation of the categories at the top of the work sheet.

1. **Calendar Years from Birth**. Starting at the left column of the work sheet, number down the column from the year of your birth to the present year. If there is a substantial number of years in your life, you may wish to number the columns in two, three, or five year intervals.

2. **Age by Year**. This column simply gives you another chronological point of reference. Fill it in with the same intervals you used for calendar years on the left-hand side of the chart.

3. **Place-Geographic and Socioeconomic**. Here you may record your sense of place in several different ways. It could be the physical place you lived in at different times in your life, including the geographic area where you lived, or it could be your sense of your position in society or in the community. Record your sense of place in whatever way it seems most appropriate to you.

4. **Key Relationships**. These can be any types of relationships that you feel had a significant impact on your life at the time. The persons mentioned need not be living presently, and you need not have known them personally. (That is, they could be persons who influenced you through your reading or hearing about them, etc.)

5. **Uses and Directions of the Self**. Here you can record not only how you spent your time but also what you thought you were doing at that time.

6. **Marker Events**. Here you may record the events that you remember which marked turning points in your life—moves, marriages, divorces, etc. Major events occur and things are never the same again.

7. **Events of Conditions in Society**. In this column we ask you to record what you remember of what was going on in the world at various times in your life. Record this as an image or phrase, or a series of images and phrases, that best sums up the period for you.

8. **Images of God**. This is an invitation for you to record briefly, in a phrase or two, what your thoughts or images of God—positive and negative—were at different times of your life. If you had no image of God or cannot remember one, answer appropriately.

9. **Centers of Value**. What were the persons, objects, institutions, or goals that formed a center for your life at this time? What attracted you, what repelled you, what did you commit your time and energy to, and what did you choose to avoid? Record only the one or two most important ones.

10. **Authorities**. This column asks to whom or what did you look for guidance, or to ratify your decisions and choices at various points in your life.

As you work on the chart, make brief notes to yourself indicating the insights or thoughts you have under each of the columns. It is not necessary to fill out the columns in great detail. You are doing the exercise for yourself, so use shorthand or brief notes. Later you can use the second work sheet to make a copy of your tapestry to bring to the interview.

After you have finished your work with the chart, spend some time thinking about your life as a whole. Try to feel its movement and its flow, its continuities and discontinuities. As you look at the tapestry of your life, let yourself imagine it as a drama or a play. Where would the divisions of it naturally fall? If you were to divide it into chapters or episodes, how would these be titled? When you have a sense of how your life might be divided, draw lines through these areas on the chart and jot down the titles on the reverse side of work sheet

This is the unfolding tapestry of your life at this particular time. In the coming days or months you may want to return to it for further reflection, or to add to it things that may come to you later. Some people find that the Unfolding Tapestry exercise is a good beginning for keeping a regular journal or diary. You may find too, that if you come back to this exercise after some time has passed, the chapters and titles in your life will be different as you look at them in light of new experiences. We hope you have enjoyed doing this exercise.

APPENDIX C

FAITH DEVELOPMENT INTERVIEW[*]

Life Tapestry/Life Review

□ Reflecting on your life, identify its major chapters. What marker events stand out as especially import?

□ Are there past relationships that have been important to your development as a person?

□ Do you recall any changes in relationships that have had a significant impact on your life or your way of thinking about things?

□ How has your image of God in relation to God changed across your life's chapters? Who or what is God to you now?

□ Have you ever had moments of intense joy or breakthrough experiences that have affirmed or changed your sense of life's meaning?

□ Have you experienced times of crisis or suffering in your life, or times when you felt profound disillusionment, or that life had no meaning? What happened to you at these types? How have these experiences affected you?

Relationships

□ Focusing now on the present, how would you describe your parents and your current relationship to them? Have there been any changes in your perceptions of your parents over the years? If so, what caused the change?

□ Are there any other current relationships that seem important you?

□ What groups, institutions, or causes, do you identify with? Why do you think that these are important to you?

Present Values and Commitments

□ Do you feel that your life has meaning at present? What makes life meaningful to you?

□ If you could change one thing about yourself or your life, what would you most want to change?

□ Are there any belief, values, or commitments that seem important to your life right how?

□ When or where do you find yourself most in communion or harmony with God or the universe?

☐ What is your image or model (an idea or a person) of mature faith?
☐ When you have an important decision to make, how do you generally go about making it? Can you give me an example? If you have a very difficult problem to solve, to who or what would you look for guidance?
☐ Do you think that actions can be right or wrong? If so, what makes an action right in your opinion?
☐ Are there certain actions or types of actions that are always right under any circumstances? Are there certain moral opinions that you think everyone should agree on?

Religion

☐ Do you think that human life has a purpose? If so, what do you think it is? Is there a plan for our lives, or are we affected by a power or powers beyond our control?
☐ What does death mean to you? What happens to us when we die?
☐ Do you consider yourself a religious person? What does this mean to you?
☐ Are there any religious ideas, symbols, or rituals that are important to you, or have been important to you? If so, what are these and why are they important?
☐ Do you pray, meditate, or perform any other spiritual discipline?
☐ What is sin, to your understanding?
☐ How do you explain the presence of evil in our world?
☐ If people disagree about a religious issue, how can such religious conflicts be resolved?

APPENDIX D

CO-CONSTRUCTED NARRATIVE ACCOUNTS DERIVED FROM

BONFIRE INTERVIEWS

HERMENEUTIC OF FAITH ANALYSIS

The narratives presented below are organized into themes derived from the Bonfire interview (BI) protocol. These narrative accounts are interpretations and co-constructions derived from a hermeneutic of faith position. In order to construct these accounts, it was necessary for me to remove some of the respondents' comments and to add a few of my own. This was done in an attempt to be true (faithful) to their meanings. As pointed out by Ely, Vinz, Downing, & Anzul (1997), "at times we can be more true to a person's meaning if we edit the passages—sometimes rather drastically—while leaving in enough of their pauses, colloquialism and idiosyncrasies to give their flavor" (p. 190). [*]

Each respondent was assigned a unique identifying number (R1 – R9) to protect their anonymity. The code "R6-BIHF" refers to *respondent 6*, *Bonfire interview* interpreted through a *hermeneutic of faith*.

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[*] Ely, M., Vinz, R., Downing, M., & Anzul, M. (1997). *On writing qualitative research: Living by words*. London: Routledge/Falmer.

Respondent: Olivia [R6-BIHF]

1   *Theme: Becoming an Aggie.*
2
3   I was born in Dallas, but my family moved to College Station when I was
4   eight-years-old. We've always had lots connections to A&M and, since my
5   father worked there, I was on campus a lot. Growing up, I had many
6   opportunities to watch Bonfire burn. I loved it.
7   You could say I come from an Aggie family. I just loved all of the
8   traditions, the school spirit, and the uniqueness of it all. I just knew that's where
9   I wanted to go. To be honest with you, my parents didn't even pressure me into
10   it; it wasn't like "You have to go" or "there's nowhere else!"
11   Even though we lived in College Station, I insisted on living on campus.
12   I wanted to "go away" to college. During my first year, I didn't intentionally
13   leave my high school friends behind per say, but I did make a conscious decision
14   to make new friends. That first year was just amazing. There were so many
15   different organizations and things to get involved in at A&M. You kind of get
16   consumed with it.
17
18   *Theme: The Aggie Spirit.*
19
20   That first year was a really great year! I would go home on weekends
21   with some of my roommates and friends from the dorm. They were from places
22   like Austin or San Antonio and I would go back home with them over the
23   holidays and see them interact with their friends and trying to tell them about
24   A&M and it's hard. To be an Aggie you need to kind of look at the Aggie Code
25   of Honor and kind of see that as a standard that you set for yourself and have in
26   common with your group. But then also... it's just hard to describe... it's just a
27   big family that you're part of. And even though there's all these different little
28   groups and you might give each other a hard time while you're on campus,
29   you're always Aggies together and so you always care for each other. I really
30   don't know how to describe it really, but to be an Aggie is to really be true to
31   yourself and your school and just set a good example.
32
33   *Theme: Understanding Bonfire*
34
35   I got involved with Bonfire through my dorm. That fall, I started going
36   out more and more with the dorm leaders. I just loved Bonfire and I loved the
37   camaraderie; having fun outside and doing all of that, but also being a part of
38   something bigger than yourself and it was just a really neat group; it didn't
39   matter where you came from, everybody just kind of had a place and fit in out
40   there.
41   Bonfire was its own little world; it's really was kind of funny. Being a
42   freshman you get absorbed in it, but you really don't fully understand it until you

43   kind of start working your way up in leadership roles. The first day of classes
44   there's an all-university yell at Kyle field and that's kind of the big kick off to
45   Bonfire and then you start realizing that there are leaders up in your dorm. Then
46   all these crazy people are coming out trying to recruit everyone to come out to
47   Bonfire. They want you to come out to cut, and you have no idea what cut is so
48   you go out and you realize that it's really fun and that you're having this really
49   neat time and sharing these unique experiences with people. You find yourself
50   doing things that you never thought you could do, like swinging an ax and
51   chopping down a tree. You never picture yourself doing that, but here you are
52   with all these other crazy Aggies and having a great time.
53   Ultimately, the goal of Bonfire is to build this really great symbol for
54   A&M and to show all your support for your school and within that you find
55   yourself really building relationships and learning about this whole other Bonfire
56   world. There are these four special events that mark the major construction
57   milestones. It starts with cutting down the trees. Then they have perimeter pull
58   nights and the best dorms get picked, so right away you realize there's kind of a
59   little pecking order of people in charge and people who are working. But the
60   more you learn about Bonfire the more you want to get involved in it. Perimeter
61   pull happens and then they bring in Center Pole and then there's stack and you're
62   out working with people from all over the place then. You find yourself out there
63   one night; sometimes you're working with corps guys and sometimes you're
64   working with other guys from rival dorms, but you're still out there working and
65   then they put all the finishing touches on it and it burns and you get ready for the
66   next year. It's just kind of one big cycle with its own little world.
67   It's funny; I'm sure you already know about the different leadership roles
68   involving the coordinators and so someone can be really impressed that you're a
69   Red Pot, but then somebody who has no idea what Bonfire is might say, "What
70   on earth is a Red Pot, why should I be impressed!" It's kind of funny; it's like it
71   has its own little world and there are different people that you have a lot respect
72   for but if you're not part of it then you might not realize all of the little things
73   that they did. So that's why it's kind of unique; it's just hard to explain to people
74   who haven't experienced it because it is so different from anything else.
75
76   *Theme: 1999 Bonfire tragedy*
77
78   In 1998, I was a sophomore and I was serving as one of three co-chairs at
79   Roberts Hall. Kind of the way it works, you're usually co-chair or crew chief for
80   one year and then you pick someone to take your place. We had picked—and we
81   call them our girls—the students that we wanted to take our place. So, although
82   in 1999 I didn't have any formal responsibilities, I still went out there. At that
83   time I was dating Sam, who is now my husband. He was crew chief for his dorm
84   the same year I was co-chair for mine. So Sam and I went out there in order to
85   keep an eye on the boys and girls to be sure that they were doing their jobs and
86   taking care of all their little freshmen. They had gone out to cut several times and

87 had gone out to stack several times as well so we were still pretty closely tied to
88 it even though it was our junior year. We felt like we still had responsibilities to
89 make sure the leaders from our dorms knew what they were doing. It's fun. As
90 juniors you're able to go out and have a good time and not worry about having to
91 prove yourself too much. To top it off too, we had some good friends involved
92 with coordinating Bonfire that year and so we would go out to visit with them.
93 We were pretty involved.
94   The actual night it fell, I was supposed to be there but I had a big
95 accounting test and needed to study. So Sam went out there and I told him I
96 would try to meet him later if possible. I stayed home and I was studying and I
97 remember falling asleep and then I woke up around 2:00 a.m. For some reason I
98 was actually ironing my pants for the next day. So, at about 2: 45 a.m., I was
99 awake when Sam called and told me what had happened. I went straight out
100 there because I had girls that I needed to find; not everybody was accounted for.
101 I went out there to pick up one of my girls from the field and then she and I went
102 to the hospital to see another one of the girls that had been injured. Then I met
103 back up with Sam. That day was kind of a blur; we spent time in the hospital
104 where another one of our friends was being treated and then back out to the field
105 and I just remember it being a really, really, really long day. We were at the
106 hospital for a long time. Then we went back out to the field because rescue
107 workers were still on the back side of stack looking for the last of the missing
108 people. Rachael, a student from our dorm, was the last person to be pulled out.
109 So after we knew that everybody was accounted for, we went home...just numb.
110   The days that followed were just a blur...we had one good friend in the
111 hospital and so we spent time going up to visit him and one of the girls was still
112 in the hospital, so I really don't remember too much. I think in the weeks that
113 followed, we were absorbed with trying to understand why Bonfire fell and this
114 was real difficult too because we had so many close friends that were
115 coordinators and so closely involved with it. It was real tough trying to help them
116 too because they felt so much responsibility for it.

Respondent: Natalie [R5-BIHF]

1 *Theme: Becoming an Aggie.*
2
3   I grew up in a little bitty town of three hundred in North Texas. My
4   school had about one hundred and twenty students, kindergarten through twelfth
5   grade. I graduated with eighteen other students; that's a huge class! Since my
6   high school was small, everybody was involved. Everybody played basketball;
7   everybody played football, and everybody had to or we didn't have a team. I was
8   a good student: class Valedictorian; all A's; studied; didn't go out; didn't party;
9   didn't drink—didn't want to, so that wasn't even a factor in my high school
10 experience.
11   Because of my involvement in FFA, which was probably my most
12 important activity in high school, I was able to get a large scholarship from the
13 National FFA foundation. I successfully competed in FFA public speaking
14 tournaments at the state and national levels. One time on the way to state
15 competition, my teacher brought me by Texas A&M and said "You need to look
16 at this place."..."What's Texas A&M?"... I'd heard of it but "What is it?" I came
17 here and I thought "This is a neat place!" And then I did some research and
18 realized how important leadership was and the other education and the spirit and
19 the traditions, so I applied to here and I applied to Harvard and I got this
20 acceptance letter first and never opened the envelope from Harvard. Who knows
21 except that I got into agriculture and that was and is my passion. So I was the
22 first Aggie in forty-seven years from my hometown. I didn't look back; it was
23 the best decision that I ever could have made.
24   It was an interesting transition to A&M, my first history class had more
25 people in it than my hometown…I dropped that class! Academically I was
26 challenged but I also got extremely involved; probably too involved. I never
27 skipped class, but I was involved in everything. I would say it was an easy
28 transition because the College of Agriculture had only about six thousand
29 people; it was like a small family. I lived on campus and had others watching out
30 for me.
31
32 *Theme: The Aggie Spirit.*
33
34   I'm an early riser and I remember one day going for a run about 6:00 a.m.
35 It was foggy and I was running through the academic plaza and there was the
36 statue of Sul Ross and as I stopped I got goose bumps and thought "I'm at Texas
37 A&M University, other people want to be here and I'm here!" And then I
38 thought about all the other people that had walked in that same place and thought
39 "Wow, a lot of really good people have been here!" So, that was my first
40 moment to really realize it, "I'm a part of this thing that's bigger than
41 myself…this spirit. I'm here and I'm involved and I'm a part of this thing!" I
42 don't think you really can explain it...family, camaraderie, faith, duty, honor. I

43   don't know... it's hard to explain it and I don't know if I can. I think that truly it
44   is the people that make A&M special. We attract people who are of a higher
45   standard academically, but also have a high level of integrity. I'm not going to
46   say that everybody here is this glorious go-getter but I think that we do attract
47   people with just a higher standard for living in general; just the way they live
48   their lives; the way they act; the way they treat others. So I think that it is the
49   people that encompass that spirit but I don't know how to explain that.
50
51   *Theme: Understanding Bonfire*
52
53   During my freshman year, one of the organizations that I was involved in
54   had "bonfire buddies" and I got a little tag one day and it had this guy's name on
55   it and I was supposed to contact him. So I contacted him, his name was Adam,
56   and we met for lunch one day. It was the beginning of a really tight friendship.
57   He took me out to the Bonfire site; it was my first introduction to Bonfire. I'm
58   not one of those people who had been to Bonfire all their lives. I knew it existed;
59   didn't know anything about it; never seen it; didn't even really know what it
60   looked like. So I had no previous experience with Bonfire. I kind of knew the
61   tradition around it, but as far as what it was, I had no idea, and he took me out
62   there and WOW! All these people were there; these students; me; my bonfire
63   buddy; out there building this thing. They were giving their heart and soul to this
64   structure that, to them, encompassed the spirit to beat the University of Texas in
65   a football game! Twenty-four hours a day they were out there and I'd often times
66   at 3:00 in the morning would go out there and walk around and watch; see who I
67   knew; see what was going on. I was in awe, truthfully. I'd never seen anything
68   quite like it.
69   So, that was my introduction to Bonfire and I think the experience was
70   enhanced by the friendships that I made during that time. All the girls in my hall
71   were Bonfire Buddies with the cadets in Adam's outfit and so my friends were
72   then their friends and so those relationships enhanced the whole experience. It
73   was nothing for ten of us to go out there together or twelve of us or twenty of us
74   at a time and so relationships were built because of it and I think those
75   friendships enhanced the experience of the building Bonfire.
76   I participated in cut once. It was hard work; fun, but hard work;
77   challenging; sweat. You know, who could outdo who; who's tougher. I never
78   saw the alcohol. Yes, the pots had profanity on them but the environment wasn't
79   rough, even at 3:00 in the morning. I wasn't around the Red Pots or the leaders
80   of Bonfire; I was around other freshmen who were told what to do and we did it
81   and that was that; you know? It was just hard work and fun and drive and this
82   spirit; this thing; this desire to show people; this desire to uphold the tradition,
83   and also the desire to show how we wanted to beat UT. But I think it's more the
84   desire to fulfill the tradition that was driving us to go out there.
85   The night of Bonfire...because my dorm was one of the lead groups we
86   were assigned to perimeter pull, which was a very high honor. So I got to go and

87 be at perimeter pull with my buddies and my bonfire buddy Adam. And there we
88 were in the front; in the lead, so how cool am I as a freshman to be up there at
89 the perimeter pull with my Bonfire Buddy and all his friends and, you know, it
90 was just amazing! To see something people had worked for succeed and burn
91 and the excitement and the spirit. You could almost feel it in the air. I was a little
92 disappointed with the amount of alcohol that was consumed and the profanity
93 around the families. I remember thinking, "You know, that's really not
94 necessary." But, that's my old side; I've always been older than I am so it was
95 the old side coming out in me. I still had a great time, but part of me was like "I
96 wish there wasn't a lot of that."
97   . . .
98   I got involved with Bonfire not knowing what I would get out of it. I kind
99 of went into it blind since I really didn't know anything about it. I don't know if
100 I hoped to get anything out of it except maybe that my bonfire buddy was
101 cool...a new friend...a new group. I was into expanding my friends and so that
102 was the first thing I thought, "Yes, I want to sign up for bonfire buddy and that
103 way I'll have this new group of friends!" I went into it intentionally to develop
104 new relationships, but actually of the Bonfire and the build...I don't think that I
105 had any expectations, except to be a part of another tradition.
106   . . .
107   I was involved with Bonfire because it was one more fun thing to do!
108 You know it was one more thing I could do after my last meeting. Like I said, I
109 had to be at meetings until 11:00 p.m. and then go and study and then still be up.
110 I don't think that Bonfire took precedence over any of my other commitments. I
111 remember a thing that I did, as far as setting priority goes, Bonfire was probably
112 no more important than other things except when my bonfire buddy needed me
113 then I was there. There were nights when I knew that he would be working late
114 and that he would need a snack or something and I was there more for the
115 person; to go out there and help the people that were there was more important
116 than for me to put it on a list of what I had to do today. I'm a very big "list-
117 doer"... and Bonfire usually wasn't at the top of my list; it was always on there
118 and it was one of those things that "If I make it out there great!" but unless Adam
119 or one of his buddies were depending on me, it wasn't the top thing on my list.
120   Also, since I'm female, I just wouldn't normally and naturally go out to
121 the site; it wasn't just something a female runs out there and does; you go with
122 your friends; you go with your bonfire buddy in a group, but for me just to pick
123 up my pot and go out there and work on it...I could have, and girls do it, but it
124 just wasn't me. I respect the Corps of Cadets and most of them have the opinion
125 that females shouldn't be in the corps and I also respect their involvement at
126 Bonfire. This is the guys' project and yes, I want to help with it and you can help
127 as long as you want with the guys, but it wasn't something that I would just
128 naturally go out and do by myself. So, again, Bonfire was on . . my list but it
129 wasn't naturally a high priority every day. All of my involvement had the

130   priority of education, because school is school, but I will admit that I was overly
131   involved.
132
133   *Theme: 1999 Bonfire tragedy*
134
135   The year Bonfire fell, I was teaching and advising in the College of Agriculture
136   and at that time, I hate to say it, but I had outgrown Bonfire. I was at a different
137   place in my life. I had done it for three years and moved on. Many of the leaders
138   were students of mine. So I was more in the supportive role of "Are you going to
139   class?" "What can I do to make sure that you don't flunk out this semester?" The
140   year that Bonfire fell, I was twenty-two-years-old and in transition between
141   being a student affairs professional and a student. I was finishing up grad school
142   and student advising was becoming more of my focus. One of my good friends,
143   Audrey, was a Pink Pot, very involved, drove a truck, never missed anything.
144   She was out there a lot and I talked to her a whole bunch, so that was my role;
145   more or less supporting the people out there and making sure they stayed in
146   school. It was a normal fall, things were going well.
147   In the fall of '99, I was staying with Nick. On the night of November 18th
148   the phone rang early, early, early and Nick got up out of bed to answer it. Since
149   he was working in the student affairs department, it wasn't unusual for him to get
150   called during dinner or have to go take care of a situation on campus. He put the
151   phone down and he came in and said "It's bad, Bonfire fell and there could be
152   one hundred students dead" and he was out of the house in a second and he said
153   "Stay here, I'll call you later." Of course, I turned on the news, "What does this
154   mean?"... "Why am I at the house?"... "What am I going to do, and what am I
155   supposed to be doing...my students...my friends?" Another graduate student and
156   a dear friend of mine, Gary, was involved with a lot of the students and was
157   frequently out there, so my first instinct was to call him, which I did and he was
158   already on his way up. After about fifteen minutes I figured out that I couldn't
159   stay in the house and I drove over to the campus as well. It wasn't even an hour
160   after Bonfire fell that I got here. When I turned the corner on to Texas Avenue I
161   could see the dust in the air and the lights and by this time there were helicopters
162   flying around and sirens and mass chaos...just mass chaos! I parked and quickly
163   ran up and found Gary... shock, unbelief, just this disbelief; just seeing a panic
164   and yet a calm panic. I knew that I had to be the adult; you know that role I was
165   talking about becoming that more professional…boom click it in, what do you
166   do? People were looking for cell phones and I remember finding students
167   looking for cell phones so they could call their parents and say that they were
168   safe. I was keeping students from running out into mass chaos. Things were
169   orderly; it was weird; there was a sense of...I wouldn't say calm, but it wasn't
170   crazy; people weren't running around screaming. It was just a silent shock, this
171   quiet chaos. There was dirt on people's faces and tears. "What do we do next?"
172   You almost just wanted to sit down; it almost overwhelmed you to the point of
173   saying "I just have to sit here; don't talk to me, don't touch me!" It was just this

174   "What is this?" trying to soak it in all at once because it was so bad. Of course
175   ambulances and body bags and all of this, there's a hearse out here; okay this
176   really is bad! There's a body bag; okay that's really bad; and you're trying to be
177   the adult and support the students and not really show your shock and disbelief
178   and discomfort and your sadness and trying to be the strong one and that was
179   difficult.
180   I wanted to know if my friends were okay. I was asking Gary and I was
181   asking different people, "Have you seen so and so; have you seen so and so;
182   what happened to so and so" so that was scary. Around 6:00 a.m., former
183   students who I had worked on Bonfire with began calling me wondering what's
184   going on, so then trying to be a communication to those people who weren't on
185   campus and letting them know what was going on was difficult as well. After the
186   collapse, I had two primary roles, comforting my students and then comforting
187   Nick through this tragedy. The following day was extremely difficult in that we
188   had the memorial service out at the Reid Arena and I remember being with the
189   Red Pots and getting them in the Suburban and getting them on the front row and
190   they're anguish and their pain from this. They felt a lot of guilt; a lot of guilt!!! I
191   sat on the end of the row and Nick came and joined me and he put his head on
192   my shoulder and just started crying and sobbing and it was the first time that
193   he'd stopped all day; in twenty-one hours it was the first time that he had stopped
194   and it was just this release of emotion and then I felt that even more that I had to
195   be strong for Nick because he's going to be dealing with this; he'd seen horrible
196   things; he saw the body parts; the arm; the leg that was just out in the middle of
197   nowhere off of the stack, so that was difficult; so my role took on a support role,
198   particularly with the Red Pots and those students that I knew; double checking;
199   re-checking on them; getting them the help they needed.
200   About a week and a half later I went to Stew Nelson's funeral. He was a
201   classmate of mine and I knew him very well and it was at his funeral that I
202   actually mourned for the first time. I mourned the whole thing at that occurrence;
203   I hadn't let myself stop; I was the strong one; I had to support others. At the
204   point that I went to that funeral in Austin, I thought "Oh, this is real, this is real!"
205   whereas before I thought "This is real, but I have to support". It was good that I
206   took that role; I felt that I was far enough away from it that I could and yet close
207   enough that I could understand, so I felt good about that role. That was the first
208   time that I had mourned because that was even closer to home; this was one of
209   the guys that I built Bonfire with; one of my classmates who happened to be out
210   there; who happened to be on stack; who happened to come home; who
211   happened to die and all of a sudden the reality of how fragile life is kind of hit
212   me.
213   The day after Bonfire collapsed, I had two classes. We did nothing; we
214   sat and we talked about it. I refused to teach; nobody was going to learn and I
215   couldn't honestly teach, so we talked. Class was half empty or half full; however
216   you want to look at it. We processed and we talked and there were questions and
217   they knew my role as a student but also as a faculty, so I would probably have

218   more information, and they asked questions and I was open and shared what I
219   knew about what was going to happen next and what that meant. . . . It was a
220   quiet day and lots of tears in the classes; lots of panic phone calls from students
221   saying "I'm not coming to class today; I hope you understand I can't come to
222   class today!" or they rush in and say "I'm not going to stay for class today!" you
223   know, that kind of thing, but lots of uncertainty. But again I think that it's the
224   reality of realizing our mortality at eighteen or twenty-two. "We can't die, we're
225   invincible!" All of that was gone for these students; it was gone for me at
226   twenty-two! The ideas that I could conquer the world was gone, especially the
227   day after, so it was the aftermath; the shock was wearing off and the reality was
228   setting in and all of a sudden you realize you could die…that could have been
229   you…my life is fragile. A lot of reflection...a lot of reflection! I think it was a
230   growth period for the students at our campus; spiritually, mentally; but there was
231   a lot of reflection. I don't think I've ever been anywhere where you could feel
232   the sadness; there was an unexplainable depth; deepness, this sunken feeling,
233   almost like the entire campus had just fallen.

Respondent: Terry [R3-BIHF]

1 *Theme: Becoming an Aggie.*

2   I was plagued throughout all of junior high with sports injuries. In the
3 seventh grade I had a knee operation because of a football injury and in the
4 eighth grade I had the other knee operated on for the same injury. I kept on being
5 a fool and I kept coming back and playing football. My parents never told me
6 that I had to play football but it was just a way of life in my hometown and that's
7 just the way that it went. When I went into high school football, coaches
8 recognized that I wasn't going to quit and so they let me play. I was pretty much
9 a tackling dummy for the first few years but we won state every year that I was
10 in high school. My senior year, I was just falling apart. I had a shoulder
11 operation because I popped my shoulder out in a playoff game; it was the last
12 game in my high school career. I had plenty of recruiters approaching me, TCU
13 and Texas Tech had pretty much signed me up. At that time I was still talking to
14 A&M and the University of Texas, didn't expect to play much for either one of
15 those. But, after I hurt my shoulder, nobody wanted me anymore! I'd already
16 been admitted to A&M and to all the other schools as well. Since I couldn't play
17 football, I decided the best place would be A&M.
18   I was able to make that decision largely because of my sister; it was kind
19 of a legacy type thing. My folks had looked over the schools. My mom didn't get
20 to go to college...but my dad had gone to TCU and two other universities. He
21 even went here for a semester. And, even though he went here for a semester and
22 didn't do too hot, I'd always heard him tell these stories about A&M. But my
23 sister went here and I can still remember staying in Fowler Hall with her for the
24 first time and I just kind of fell in love with the place because of her. After
25 football was a no go I just thought ,"Well, A&M is the next best place."
26
27 *Theme: The Aggie Spirit*
28
29   If I take the perspective that I took in the Fall of 1998 when I was a
30 freshman I would say that the spirit of Aggieland is really strong; it's a
31 wonderful bond that students like to rely upon to feel good about the school that
32 they go to. There are plenty of examples when I was in a sticky situation that I
33 knew that I had buddies to help me out and that's kind of what the spirit of
34 Aggieland was really about; it was about friendship; it was about folks helping
35 each other out; it was about just getting you through college. But now I'm kind
36 of past some of that stuff and I've grown up a little bit and look back and realize
37 the Aggie spirit has had a lot of changes. It's kind of ironic but now I see that the
38 Aggie spirit, the Aggie friendships, actually put me in the sticky situations. So,
39 that's something that I still try to rectify from time to time…but, heck!...I'll
40 probably never get it fully squared away.

41   *Theme: Understanding Bonfire*

42

43   "What is bonfire about?"...a lot of people have been saying or were
44 saying it's just the burning desire to beat the University of Texas and I think that
45 that's part of it; I think that's a small part of it though. I think it's a desire to be a
46 unified family; a group of friends doing one thing that's quite awesome, it's a
47 feat that it was ever built to the size that it was, though that's a double edged
48 sword, as we know now. The major players for me in 1998, when I was really
49 active, were the yellow pots and the crew chiefs in my hall, who are still here
50 and still going to school; they haven't even graduated! Above that there was a
51 red pot who lived in my hall, and I have an interesting story about the first night
52 I was in college and I had a run in with him. The yellow pots told me, "You go
53 tackle this guy"! Now, I was just out of high school football, a lot more
54 muscular, a lot more lean, but this guy was big, with massive arms and that's
55 why he was a red pot! Me being a naïve little freshman and wanting to fit in.
56 This was my first night and my parents had just left…so...the yellow pots were
57 all pumping me up and saying they had heard of me from football and I went and
58 did this! I started tackling this guy and he just decked me, right in the ear, right
59 in the side of my face with a full out swing and just knocked me down and I
60 thought "I'm out or my league!" I got back up and as I was getting up he threw
61 some sand in my face and that kind of pissed me off and threw me into a rage
62 and so then they start telling me that this was "good bull;" you know this is the
63 way the Aggie Spirit should be; hard work...I don't know what that had to do
64 with hard work...so I get up and he took me upstairs and gave me a beer. It was
65 my first night in college and I was already having my first beer; I never even
66 really drank that much in high school, never mind the fact that I have this huge
67 lump inside the cartilage of my ear where this fool hit me!

68   So, I have made some stupid mistakes along the way. There were some
69 times with brown pots, who for me were like the untouchables...I wasn't even
70 supposed to consider talking to these guys...they would get up at the bonfire site
71 and we would all get in this circle and one of the guys in the middle would be a
72 brown pot and he'd say "Come on, who wants to go hit for hit?" and we'd get
73 out there and hit each other, it was like he'd hit me and I'd hit him and whoever
74 was left standing in the middle was king of the hill or whatever you want to call
75 it! There was another time, and I'm still in touch with this person and how the
76 Aggie Spirit could have perverted and contorted our sense of view, I don't know,
77 but there was another time when we were supposed to go as two or three halls
78 over to the field in between Smith, Vincent and Richards Halls; it was just a big
79 mud pit and they said that we were going to do something called "mortal
80 combat," which didn't sound good in the first place. Our crew chiefs were
81 leading this and were saying Thomas Hall is going to get over here and then
82 Richards going to get on the other side of the field and you're just going to
83 charge each other and start wrestling. During that time, one guy had popped me
84 pretty good in the jaw and kind of popped my jaw out a little bit, and I popped

85   him back in the jaw and knocked two teeth out. Another kid came up to me and
86   as he was coming to tackle me his feet slid out from underneath him and he
87   broke his ankle...but now you're here in college and the peer pressure and the
88   desire to fit in has got me knocking people's teeth out; guys willingly breaking
89   their ankles. To me that's kind of what Bonfire was about, not so much the
90   building, but the sub-cultural side effect type things.
91   . . .
92   I never was really an official crew chief because I took the RA job. I'd
93   been passed down to be a crew chief and that's a whole other story, but I took
94   the RA job and I was very quickly ostracized by the other crew chiefs. . . . They
95   told me "You know what, you're just an idiot and we don't want to talk to you
96   anymore!" Now, looking back, I realize to some extent I ostracized myself.
97   When I got into that RA job it really opened my eyes and I realized what an idiot
98   I was being...knocking peoples teeth out...I asked myself what I was doing. I was
99   really going down the wrong road, so I was kind of happy to be distancing
100   myself from that group. It was very sad though because these had been the guys
101   from my first year in college, guys that I had formed really strong bonds with.
102   When I got the job they perceived that I wouldn't be able to do some of the
103   things that they wanted me to do; that you do in the Bonfire culture, like
104   drinking; every weekend I was drunk as a freshman. There's also a deep rooted
105   hazing culture that I still fight today in my hall. . . . For example, when you get
106   passed down to be the next crew chief you get ax handled across the behind –
107   they just basically give you pops with an ax handle and then the ax handle is
108   yours. I couldn't be a part of that because I was getting a paycheck now; that was
109   the first kind of step; hey, I need this paycheck, and I didn't want to be a part of
110   it morally just because that wasn't what I was about. I must say, that at the time
111   my hall was definitely the craziest, rudest bunch of bonfire guys on the campus;
112   we were kind of like the Animal House Dorm.
113
114   *Theme: 1999 Bonfire tragedy*
115
116   When Bonfire fell it was my first semester as an RA. I came back in
117   August and was a little scared. I had stayed in the hall where I was a previous
118   resident...this soon to be crew member if not crew chief was staying on in that
119   same hall, that same community, as a resident advisor...and I was pretty scared! I
120   went to most of the cuts that I really could; when I had a test I studied...that was
121   a new thing for me because during my freshman year I felt I had to go to every
122   cut, no matter what! Now I was doing it in a more balanced way, which was
123   good. I went to a few of the swamps, that's when you start moving and lining up
124   the logs to build the stack, and did some other things, but I really down played it
125   mostly. The last time that I went to Bonfire was about two weeks or so before it
126   fell and I didn't really want to go back after that because there were some nasty
127   things that really bothered me. They used to put road kill inside; like they'd stack
128   the logs up on the eighteen wheelers and they would put all the road kill they

129   could find inside the logs so that, for instance, when you're picking up a log
130   there's a dead cat looking you in the face, and I just didn't want to do that
131   anymore!
132   When I decided that I wasn't going back to Bonfire, my attitude was like
133   look at the proverbial middle finger..."To Hell with bonfire, I really don't want
134   to do anything with it anymore!" Two weeks later on November 18, 1999, I was
135   with another good friend who was also an RA and we had sneaked into my hall
136   director's apartment to bake a pizza, because he has an oven and we didn't. So
137   we were in his apartment and he wasn't there and it was about 1:00 a.m. We
138   were eating pizza and watching his TV and making ourselves at home when the
139   phone starts ringing around 2:00 a.m. When the hall director's phone rings at
140   2:00 a.m. you know that something is going on! The hall director's boss left a
141   message explaining what had happened. We heard this and the hall director
142   wasn't around, obviously, so I decided that I was going to go out to the Bonfire
143   site, but my friend said we need to call the rest of the RA's and make sure that
144   our guys are okay and that everyone is accounted for. That took us about thirty
145   minutes to do, and by that time the hall director had gotten there we had done
146   everything; we checked everybody; we woke everybody up; got everybody
147   outside.
148   The Bonfire image that really sticks with me is not so much the collapsed
149   lump of logs, though that was really impactful...when I went out there and saw
150   it...it was just too gruesome, too tragic for me to handle. But the thing that really
151   sticks with me is the image I have when I first walked out of dorm at 3:00 a.m.
152   on my way to the Bonfire site...like wow! All the helicopters in the air; this is a
153   big thing. I don't know why that hit me like that, but whenever I hear a
154   helicopter, like yesterday there were two Chinook helicopters flying over and I
155   thought "I remember the time other helicopters were flying over here" and that's
156   really the image that I remember the most. If I stand outside Thomas Hall right
157   now, I could pinpoint where every one of those helicopters were and what news
158   company they represented...that's just what stuck with me. I went over to
159   Bonfire and found a female RA from my dorm. She had already been there
160   awhile and I found her and we helped with the rescue efforts a little bit. I'd say
161   we moved maybe five logs and at that point she said that she just couldn't do it
162   and that she couldn't be there and she was crying and I can remember
163   comforting her and just thinking "Thank God we can go home now, she's given
164   me a way to go home and still feel macho." Even then I was kind of trying not to
165   let my emotions out.
166   That week was just pure hell; I didn't go to a few of my classes and
167   people were just walking around in a daze. You'd walk outside and there'd be a
168   group of students just crying! It's like something that...I just don't know… the
169   emotions...I don't ever want to have that happen to a group of nineteen or twenty
170   year old kids again. In the weeks that followed guys from my dorm would come
171   to me needing support, their friends died in the collapse. I really felt like I
172   needed to help them through this, but it was kind of like the blind leading the

173   blind really. The person that I met that really helped me through this was Gary

174   Brown and he was a big support for most of the people really deep into the

175   Bonfire culture, like the red pots and the brown pots. A lot of the guys at the time

176   really felt like the administration didn't really do anything for them; like they

177   just kind of left them out there. Now that I'm looking back, I know that we did

178   everything we could, but how do you really deal with something like that; it's

179   not like you can just fit some crisis model onto it! Gary offered a huge support

180   network for I'd say easily, directly twenty to thirty people, who were themselves

181   a support network for thousands of people. When I look back at certain things

182   about the Bonfire culture on this campus, I can say that we've progressed past

183   certain things in large part because of his work; he's an angel if you ask me.

184   That's about it; that's my story!

VITA

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