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PUNCTUATIONS IN LIFE: EXPLORING THE DEVELOPMENTAL JOURNEYS OF CAMPUS TRADITION BUILDERS

by

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ABSTRACT

PUNCTUATIONS IN LIFE: EXPLORING THE DEVELOPMENTAL JOURNEYS OF CAMPUS TRADITION BUILDERS

Preston Scott Reilly
Old Dominion University, 2019
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Campus traditions are powerful vehicles that can shape college life (Cowley & Waller, 1979). Students foster smaller identities through their involvement in traditions on campus, and these traditions often ritualize coming-of-age or the start of American adulthood (Bronner, 2012). However, the climate of higher education today may be putting campus traditions and the purposes they achieve at risk. Often mistaken as frivolous and unnecessary parts of campus life (Manning 1994), these critical meaning-shaping events could fall prey to cost-cutting and downsizing as college campuses continue to evolve.

Guided by narrative analysis methods described by Patton (2002) and the Standard Life Story Interview (McAdams & Guo, 2014), this study investigated the developmental journeys of 16 full-time, undergraduate campus tradition builders. Participants were asked to complete a brief story map reflection exercise to guide reflection on their experiences as a tradition builder. This reflection was used to guide a narrative interview which explored the student's developmental journey. Data were collected through story map submissions, interview transcripts, and extensive researcher field notes.

Themes were drawn from examination of three key pillars of developmental journeys. These pillars included initiations, flashbulb memories, and graduations. Interesting counter narratives are also shared to help illustrate the diverse experiences of tradition builders.

Initiation themes suggest that tradition builders both randomly fell into opportunities or intentionally sought them out. Participants often experienced traditions as an outsider first or were inspired by a "gatekeeper" to get further involved. Flashbulb memories surrounded three areas, including relationships, identity, and challenges. Graduation themes surrounded future career plans, craving the comforts that come from being a part of a community, and increasing leadership experience. The documented journeys all lead to traditions builders either wanting to maintain a connection to their organization/institution or needing a break. Experiences were typically framed by pressures that may be unique to the tradition builder experience. Implications for policy, practice, and future research are also discussed.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to tradition builders of the past, present, and future. From the halls of ivy, to the campus scene, your work is seen and appreciated. May your enthusiasm always inspire the next generation.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

"Students call on socially significant traditions to provide outlets for imagining, and imaging, the workings of life "out there." They use their folkloric occasions to relate to one another and share their private fears, joys, and hopes, often at the expense of the organizational giant. The problems dealt with in student lore are not just the college students to bear, they are society's." (Bronner, 1990, p. 231).

Student populations and the developmental issues they experience today are more diverse and complex than they have been in the history of higher education (Patton, Renn, Guido-DiBrito, & Quaye, 2016). As the landscape of higher education continues to change, higher education professionals must understand how to meet the needs of their students. Institutions rely on campus traditions to help students assimilate, develop a sense of belonging, and increase student loyalty (Bronner, 2012). Campus traditions are powerful vehicles that can shape college life (Cowley & Waller, 1979). However, budget crises (Manning, 1994) and changes in student populations (Bronner, 2012) are placing campus traditions and the purposes they achieve at risk. Often mistaken as frivolous and unnecessary parts of campus life (Manning 1994), these critical meaning-shaping events could fall prey to cost-cutting and downsizing in the current climate of higher education.

Despite often being misunderstood as just play, campus traditions have been shown to positively affect campus environments (Bronner, 2012). Students who participate in campus traditions have been shown to work through issues of their age and environment (Bronner, 2010). It is evident that campus traditions have a wide-reaching impact on college campuses and the students who participate in them (Bronner, 2012). The current study strives to better understand the unique, lived experiences of student tradition builders by employing a qualitative methodology framed narrative analysis of their developmental journeys.

Statement of the Problem

Campus traditions have long played a role on campuses through their ability to build community (Manning, 1994), connect students with the heritage of their alma mater (Cheng, 2004), develop institutional pride and loyalty (Helgesen & Nesset, 2007), and ritualize coming-of-age for students (Bronner, 2012). The question facing many administrators today is what should be done about traditions that marginalize or put students at risk (Van Jura, 2010). In the 1990s, folklorist Simon Bronner (1990) questioned if the widening representation of different age groups at many universities would lessen the cultural passage between adolescence and adulthood. The number of first-generation, non-traditional, underrepresented, and commuter students continues to increase, while incoming enrollment overall decreases (Payne, Hodges, & Hernandez, 2017). Modern budget realities may require institutions to change their storied traditions, which could have ripple effects on campus culture (Singer, 2004), and student development (Bronner, 2012). Student affairs administrators must understand the impacts traditions have on their campuses and their students (Van Jura, 2010).

Purpose of the Study

Higher education is currently at a crossroads. While many aspects of the collegiate experience remain the same, many qualities have evolved. Student populations continue to change and grow increasingly diverse (Payne et al., 2017). Students are coming to campuses that look vastly different than institutions looked if and when their parents attended. Classrooms no longer exist solely in ivory towers and ivy-covered buildings but have become supplemented with online programs, internships, service learning, and various other extracurricular learning opportunities outside the classroom.

The current study aims to understand better the unique, lived experiences of today's student tradition builders by using narrative identity as a frame. The developmental journeys and narratives of student tradition builders were explored through semi-structured interviews guided by a story map reflection exercise.

Research Question

The purpose of this study is to investigate the developmental journeys of student tradition builders at colleges and universities in the United States. I focused on the following research question to guide this study:

What are the developmental journeys of students who build campus traditions? This question and data analysis were rooted in narrative identity theory (McAdams & McLean, 2013), a psychosocial theory that uses narratives to explore identity development. As such, this question will be explored from a narrative perspective looking at the beginnings of this journey, key moments that affect identity development, and the outcomes of these experiences. In this study, tradition builder beginnings are referred to as initiations, key moments are referred to as flashbulb memories, and outcomes are referred to as graduations.

Summary of the Research Design

To investigate the lived experiences and developmental journeys of student leaders involved in campus traditions, I employed a qualitative approach through the narrative analysis of student experiences. This narratological design explored the developmental journeys of tradition builders through two interviews. These interviews were based on the Standard Life Story interview format (McAdams & Guo, 2014).

 Sixteen participants were selected through snowball sampling while using purposeful and criterion-based selection (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). This method required a list of criteria

that participants needed to meet to be included in the study. Participants were full-time, undergraduate students and were currently enrolled in classes at their institution. Participants were also required to be currently serving, or have served in the past academic year, in a leadership position on their campus that works directly with a campus tradition.

Once selected, participants scheduled a 20-minute introductory interview. In this introduction, demographic information was collected, and the story map reflection exercise was explained. After the first interview was completed, participants were asked to reflect on their experiences surrounding campus traditions and their development. After reflecting, participants completed a story map graphic organizer exercise (Appendix B) that focused on their developmental journey as a tradition builder. Once finished, participants were asked to submit a copy of their story map graphic organizer to the researcher.

After receiving the story map graphic organizer submissions from participants, I scheduled a 60-minute interview with each participant. These semi-structured interviews surrounded the participant's developmental journey through their involvement in campus traditions. The interview protocol (Appendix C) was structured around the Standard Life Story Interview (McAdams & Guo, 2014), and focused on the beginnings of their journey, key moments that may impact identity development and the outcomes of these experiences.

Upon completion of the narrative interviews, data analysis was performed by examining participant story map graphic organizer submissions, interview transcripts, and extensive field notes. When coding, I focused on attributes that surrounded identity development. Reduction and imaginative variation processes allowed me to develop structural themes based on participant responses (Moustakas, 1994). These themes were used to attempt to understand the essence of the participants' developmental journeys surrounding campus traditions.

Significance of the Study

This study has the potential to significantly impact how higher education professionals understand the experiences of student tradition builders. Findings from the study may influence how scholars, leaders, and practitioners conceptualize the impacts campus traditions have on student development.

Practical Implications

This study has the potential for wide-reaching practical application. Ultimately, the most significant impact may surround how student tradition builders develop through their involvement in building campus traditions. Direct focus on the developmental journeys of student leaders involved in campus traditions may refocus how administrators perceive student involvement opportunities. Most importantly, the current study may reframe the importance of campus traditions in the experiences of students today. This is especially important as student demographics continue to shift, and student affairs budgets are evaluated in the future. Higher education administrators who work with campus traditions may also find the current study helpful in understanding the impact that traditions have on their campuses and the individual student experience. This study aims to complement the existing literature that examines the developmental journeys of college students, the impacts that campus traditions have on institutional culture, and the importance of traditions in higher education.

Theoretical Implications

In addition to many practical implications, the current study may also identify a new area for future research in higher education. While traditions in higher education are not a new phenomenon, the current study may inspire scholars to create additional studies that allow us to understand them better. This study may also spark further examination of the various pieces of

its theoretical framework, including how narrative identity impacts college student development. Further longitudinal studies have the potential to paint a more detailed picture of the developmental journeys of student leaders involved in tradition building. Finally, findings from this study may lead to the development of a typology of different campus traditions.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Scope

Like all studies, the current study is not without limitations. Due to small sampling and the nature of qualitative methods, the study is not generalizable to the general population. The current study is focused on the description of a phenomenon, rather than quantifying or operationalizing it. The experiences participants shared may be due to additional variables or other involvements outside of their involvement with campus traditions. While the methodology included asking participants about their motivations for engaging in campus traditions, influences and consequences may exist outside of their awareness. Finally, researcher bias must be assumed, primarily due to the qualitative methodologies used and their subjective nature. The results of this study will still be valuable to a broad audience, including both researchers and practitioners.

Chapter Summary

Due to the changing landscape of higher education, the developmental issues students experience today are more diverse and complex than they have been in the history of higher education (Patton et al., 2016). Campus traditions are powerful vehicles that can shape student life (Cowley & Waller, 1979). As many factors continue to change, many institutions are grappling with how to program their campus traditions successfully (Clement, 2002). Better understanding of how campus traditions play a role in the development of student tradition builders may help administrators preserve and strengthen their communities (Van Jura, 2010).

In the chapters that follow, I present a more detailed discussion of the points outlined in Chapter 1. Chapter 2 explores the current literature surrounding campus traditions while also providing readers foundational knowledge in narrative identity theory. Chapter 3 is used to map how the research question was explored using a qualitative, narrative analysis approach. Chapter 4 contains the results of this study and highlights key themes and findings that emerged from the research. Finally, Chapter 5 illuminates how the results from the study may answer the research question, as well as limitations, implications, and areas for future research.

CHAPTER II: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

"…Students are usually in college for only a few years, and locations of their education vary widely, but I argue that undergraduates in their hallowed halls, more than in any other place of their scholastic experience, embrace distinctive traditions because campuses constitute transitional spaces and times, precariously between childhood and adulthood, parental and societal authority, home and corporation, play and work" *(Bronner, 2012).*

In Chapter 1, I presented a general outline for this study, including a brief review of current perspectives on campus traditions in higher education and a preview of how I intend to address the research question presented. The purpose of Chapter 2 is to situate the study within the context of the literature. Scholarly, practical, and contextual discourses from the fields of higher education, sociology, and folklore help frame the understanding of developmental journeys and campus traditions. These frames will create a foundation for answering the question posed in this study.

The first half of this chapter explores the concept of student development as a journey. An in-depth review of narrative identity is shared so that it may be used as a conceptual framework for the current study. The second half of this chapter shares a discussion about traditions, how they are passed between generations, their place in higher education, and their outcomes that have been shared in the literature. The chapter concludes with a summary of how this study may extend the scholarship presented in this literature review, while also addressing gaps in understanding regarding developmental journeys in campus tradition builders.

Narrative Identity

Human beings are natural storytellers. Modern forms of storytelling are diverse and wide-ranging, including traditional folk tales, reality television, and everything in between (McAdams & McLean, 2013). Humans often construct and share stories about themselves, detailing particular events, episodes, experiences, and periods of their lives that have meaning (McAdams

& McLean, 2013). A person may construct and internalize an evolving and integrative story for life or what psychologists call a narrative identity (Singer, 2004).

Narrative identity reconstructs the autobiographical past and imagines the future to provide a person's life with unity, purpose, and meaning. A person's life story synthesizes memories with envisioned goals, creating a coherent account of identity in time (McAdams & McLean, 2013). Through narrative identity, one can convey to themselves and to others who they are now, how they came to be, and where they think their lives may be going in the future.

The idea that people create identity through constructing stories about their lives has emerged in both the humanities and the social sciences (McAdams, 2001). In psychological science, researchers use empirical studies to examine internal dynamics of life narration and external factors that shape the expression of stories about the self publicly (McAdams & McLean, 2013). Researchers often ask participants to tell extended stories about scenes or periods of their lives, looking to code the narrative accounts, dimensions, and features.

The Formation of Narrative Identity

It is essential to understand how individuals develop the ability to engage in the complex process of narrating stories about the self (McAdams & McLean, 2013). Stemming from Erikson's (1950) theory of psychosocial development, McAdams (1985) posits that narrative identity emerges in the late adolescent and early adult years. This emergence is partly a function of societal expectations regarding identity and partly due to the maturation of formal operational thinking (McAdams & McLean, 2013). Erikson's key identity questions of Who am I? How did I come to be? Where is my life going? may be answered by constructing and internalizing a life story. Habermas and Bluck (2000) believe that once they are adolescents, people can construct stories about their lives through exhibiting causal and thematic coherence. Causal coherence is a

convincing account of how early events in one's life may cause later events (Habermas & Bluck, 2000). Thematic coherence is the derivation of organization themes or trends throughout a period, like a lifetime, decade, or length of time marking a relationship (Habermas & Bluck, 2000).

To understand the identity formation process is to understand how individuals craft narratives from experiences, how they tell these stories, and ultimately apply these stories to the knowledge of self, other, and the world in general (Singer, 2004). To develop a narrative identity, a person must learn how to share stories "in accord with particular cultural parameters and within particular groups – in families, with peers, and in other formal and informal social contexts" (McAdams & McLean, 2013, p. 235). While developing a narrative identity may be an advanced form of self-reflection and meaning-making, some humans may start learning this skill early in childhood. Beginning even in childhood, people begin to draw selectively as they develop stories that capture their personal experience (McAdams & McLean, 2013). Reese, Jack, and White (2010) found that early parent-child conversations can provide the foundations for children to learn how to make meaning of personal events and their narrative identities. This meaning-making is essential to the development of narrative identity (Reese et al., 2010).

Student Development

Student development occurs throughout student life on campus. This development occurs through scholarly experiences in the classroom, involvement in extracurriculars, or distinctive traditions. With college often serving as a traditional time between childhood and adulthood, students often point to personal development when reflecting on collegiate experiences.

Development as a Journey

Erikson (1950) believed that identity provides a person with a deep sense of temporal continuity. When individuals have this continuity, they not only better understand who they are, but they also understand how they came to be, and where they are heading in the future (McAdams & Guo, 2014). Once life experiences have been reflected upon and filtered through a narrative lens, humans can make use of the narratives they have created and use them to chart the future. These stories can be used to raise spirits, guide actions, or influence others (Singer, 2004). Constant reflection on the integrated and reconstructed past and the imagined future creates an evolving life story (McAdams & McLean, 2013).

As humans, we can learn to draw parallels between different stories and draw inferences from stories with particular relevance. These stories can also be used to gain insight into our nature, values, and goals (Singer, 2004). The knowledge that emerges provides a story schema that provides causal, temporal, and thematic coherence to an overall l sense of identity (Bluck & Habermas, 2001). All of these experiences are forms of meaning-making and can be distinguished as narrative identity building or autobiographical reasoning (Singer & Bluck, 2001).

Development in College

American educators have long considered college to be a time where young people struggle to find out who they are and how they will lead lives that matter (McAdams & Guo, 2014). Whether the paternalistic faculty authority figures that supervised Harvard students in 1636 or today's student affairs professionals using developmental theories to understand their students, both have been interested in the development of their students (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). Although student populations have been studied throughout the years,

student populations and the developmental issues they experience today are more diverse and complex than they have been in the history of higher education (Patton et al., 2016).

As college students reflect, they often extract lessons from their experiences (Singer, 2004). Lessons like hard work, love conquering all, and growth through adversity reflect personal insights; however, they are also heavily informed by shared culture (Singer, 2004). By recognizing this, one may infer that sociocultural contexts play a role in how narratives are shaped based on experiences. As important as it is to acknowledge the role reflection plays in building one's narrative identity, it is also important to consider what external factors may also impact one's developmental journey.

Traditions

Traditions are often physical representations of cultural contexts on college campuses. The following section of this chapter provides a foundation for understanding traditions on a broad scale. As the chapter progresses, I explore the role of traditions on campus, and finally, I touch on what is known about the impact campus traditions play in student development.

Tradition Defined

The idea of tradition on campus often refers to a connection. This connection can be to many things, including a connection to past, to people, and to place (Bronner, 2012), whether this idea comes through in customs planned to be repeated or in cultural practices that happen organically. In both cases, the feature of tradition allowing participants to socialize and feel a part of something larger than themselves is recognized (Bronner, 2012).

The works of folklorist Simon Bronner (1990, 2011, 2012) have provided the most in-depth examination of campus traditions in the literature. Bronner has examined the ability of campus traditions to help students form identity while exploring student life and lore in the

campus environment. These environments have evolved from the "old-time college to the modern mega-university" (Bronner, 2012, p. XIV). In *The Rise and Fall – and Return – of the Class Rush*, Bronner (2011) explores campus traditions through a social control, hierarchical, and identity lenses. In *Piled High and Deeper*, Bronner (1990) focuses on the traditions, and social trials students endure while pursuing a degree.

Other works surrounding the subject of campus traditions are broad and sweeping and tend to cover institutional folklore at the surface. Cowley (1979) framed the study of collegiate traditions as "a sociological study of student life" (p. 377) ultimately allowing the inherited behavior to be examined. Other studies, including Manning (2000) have explored the pieces that are manifested in traditions, including ceremonies and rites of passage that are both literal and figurative.

Traditions have been explored by academics and folklorists in numerous fields. Edward Shils (1971) defined traditions simply as beliefs with a social structure. These beliefs are shared and passed along by society, throughout generations, and over an extended period. When people are new to a community, work environment, group, social circle, or institution, they are given shared beliefs from an established member of the group. This helps people understand their new surroundings and continue the existing order (Shils, 1971). Shils highlights many examples of groups joining ongoing situations where traditions already exist, including new college students, employees, army recruits, and even immigrants (1971).

Traditions can help make something new become more familiar and can become a powerful tool in assimilation to a new group. Traditions are also vital to newcomers in an organization, as they provide a structure that is widely understood (Norwood, 2016). Many newcomers embrace traditions, not because they have an extensive history, but because they

offer comfort as they transition into a new organization, allowing them to live within the existing order (Norwood, 2016). Not only have traditions provided structure for students of the past and present, but they also set a precedent for the future. Bronner (2011) has discussed the inherent value of traditions for newcomers, while also noting their importance in everyday life:

> Every day people are involved in events they recognize as traditional, and at the same time, they look to establish precedents for traditions of the future. They do so because tradition fuels their culture. Traditions provide the precedents by which they make their cultural choices and locate themselves in place and time. In short, tradition informs people where to begin and guides them on how to proceed. (p. 8)

Traditions in Higher Education

Traditions play a unique role in the culture of student life. They have the potential to teach students about the history of the institution, provide a means of building community, instill common values that span generations and generate pride and enthusiasm (Van Jura, 2010). Traditions serve as punctuation in a person's life; this punctuation is increasingly meaningful because we have so few of them (Manning, 1994). Traditions in higher education are also as diverse as the campuses they exist on. It is important to note that many view the terms: traditions, rituals, ceremonies, and events as interchangeable (Manning, 1994). Traditions can occur as customs that are planned to be often repeated, or they can be cultural practices that happen organically (Bronner, 2012). While campus officials often have a hand in organizing campus events, all traditions must be embraced by students, or they will not continue. The importance of students embracing traditions suggests that students often appropriate the customs or narratives of traditions for their own purposes (Bronner, 2012).

Examples of Traditions

Campus traditions exist all around the university, including academics, athletics, legends, activities, and other areas of student life. There are widespread traditions that happen at most institutions like first-year student orientation, graduation ceremonies complete with regalia, and class ring ceremonies. There are also smaller traditions, like Taylor University's Silent Night Game, a tradition as unique as any in college basketball, and a favorite athletic tradition of many. All students attending a marked home game stay completely silent, making the arena stay eerily quiet until their team scores their tenth point. Upon scoring the 10th point, the whole arena erupts, with fans, often dressed in Halloween costumes, rushing the floor and celebrating, interrupting the game entirely (Boone, 2017). At Michigan State University, students break from studying during final exams by screaming out of their windows at midnight each night during finals week (Williams, 2014).

While the traditions listed above represent relatively small traditions that students enjoy and continue to pass on throughout the years, other traditions take more planning and university resources. Homecoming weeks are often viewed as campus traditions, with alumni flocking "home" to reminisce and reconnect with their alma maters. Large concerts, events on campus, dance marathons, family weekends, and extended orientation programs all may be considered traditions today.

Other traditions are quirky and exclusive. At Bowling Green State University (BGSU), SICSIC, a secret spirit organization was founded in 1946 by President Frank Prout in hopes of increasing school spirit on campus following war time. The mascot-like group still exists today, with six students donning coveralls and masks to conceal their identities while attending events, interacting with students, and covering the campus with random signs to uplift student spirits.

Students serve in the role for 3.5 years of their undergraduate career, and at the end of each year, senior SICSIC members are unmasked at halftime of a basketball game or between periods of a hockey game to recognize them for their service to the university (Limbacher, n.d.). Also, at BGSU, the mascots, Freddie and Frieda Falcon, are chosen annually and must keep their identities a secret until they are "beheaded" at the end of their year of service.

Cowley and Waller (1979) explored college traditions by examining socially-inherited behaviors in college students. Cultural traits are either invented by members of a group or are borrowed from another group. Patterns from the past help shape the behavior of college students today. During their study of student life, Cowley and Waller established that the context of university life is continuously being shaped and reshaped by inventions and diffusions over time. These shared traits can be seen throughout campus "in dramatics, in debating, in student publications, and in fact all down the line of extra-curricular activities" (Cowley & Waller, 1979, p. 379).

Shared traits can also bleed between institutions, as seen when Harvard and Yale engaged in the first intercollegiate athletic contest, students from other institutions soon followed suit (Cowley & Waller, 1979). When Rutgers and Princeton played the first intercollegiate football game in the United States, it quickly spread and has now become recognized as more of a national past-time than baseball (Cowley & Waller, 1979). The pairing of the surging presence of social media and the many clubs and organizations that have individual chapters on numerous campuses has made it easier for traditions and cultures to spread between institutions of higher education today.

Indoctrination

Campus traditions are passed down between generations through social control (Cowley & Waller, 1979). Patterns from the past shape the behavior of students in the future. Behavioral norms are established and enforced, as one generation of students transmits them to the next. This form of social control is known as indoctrination. It is interesting to note that despite the fact some students may find that rituals are corny and stupid those same students often shared that those traditions were indispensable (Manning, 1994). While some students may complain about being exposed to traditions, campuses without salient traditions are often riddled with complaints from students about a lack of community or school spirit (Manning, 1994).

An example of indoctrination is the tradition of the Princeton honor system. This tradition has been in effect since 1893 and has been in effect without interruption since its inception (Haile, 2018). All in-class examinations, including finals, midterms, and quizzes are administered under the Honor Code, which all students pledge to upon enrollment. In exchange for this pledge, faculty proctors are not present in exam rooms (Haile, 2018).

In addition to indoctrination, student consciousness is also shaped by initiation practices and other forms of assimilation, ceremonies, informal gossip, and nonverbalized codes (Cowley & Waller, 1979). These forms of social control are found in campus traditions, and impact student experiences throughout the years. These forms of social control are especially salient in selective activity groups which can include fraternities and sororities, athletic teams, campus publications, and other forms of extracurricular activities (Cowley & Waller, 1979).

Documented Outcomes of Campus Traditions

Studies of campus traditions in the past have documented several outcomes. Most documented outcomes have surrounded institutional impacts, including the celebration of

institutional heritage and building community. Other negative impacts have also been documented, including risks to student health, safety, and hazing. The current study hopes to further these outcomes, by exploring the impacts campus traditions may have on student identity development.

Celebration of Institutional Heritage

Much of the research surrounding campus traditions discusses their impact on the campus community (Bronner, 1990, 2011, 2012; Cheng, 2004, Manning, 1994; Van Jura, 2010). Rituals and traditions related to institutional history and heritage play a powerful role in shaping a sense of community on campus (Cheng, 2004). When discussing how to build community on campus, Celebrating the traditions and the heritage of the institution is one of the factors student affairs administrators should consider when trying to build community. Traditions also can play a role in connecting increasingly diverse groups of students. As student populations become increasingly diverse and inclusive, institutions should not only celebrate their history and heritage but also find ways to create new rituals and expand older traditions to connect diverse populations (Cheng, 2004).

Building Community

College rituals are events rich with messages and statements about the college (Manning, 1994). Many different types of traditions, including rituals and ceremonies, have been shown to help build the campus community (Manning, 1994). With community being a dynamic condition, it can be difficult to synthesize. The central issue when striving to build community is learning how groups build a collective identity, despite varying cultures, personalities, and goals. Campus traditions can provide common experiences which may serve as a foundation to build community on (Manning, 1994). This may be of specific interest to younger institutions, which

can use particular ritual forms and content to shape new ideas, build a common purpose, and shape new traditions (Manning, 1994). Complimenting a strong community, traditions also have been found to create environments where students' culture, experiences, and identities are validated (Dobiyanski, 2017).

Negative Outcomes

Not all outcomes of campus traditions are positive. As institutions have grown and changed, many campus traditions have evolved. As certain rituals become ingrained in university culture, it may become increasingly difficult to recognize the risks that some traditions pose to health and safety (Van Jura, 2010). With an increased focus on safety, extensive planning for major campus events has become essential to creating a safe environment for participants (Clement, 2002). On November 18, 1999, 12 people were killed, and 27 were injured at Texas A&M University when students were preparing for their annual bonfire and the tower of logs they erected collapsed (Van Jura, 2010). Critiques surrounding hazing also have arisen over the years (Bronner, 2012). As campuses become increasingly diverse, some traditions may also fail to create inclusive environments for historically marginalized students. To correct, strengthen, and preserve campus traditions today, it is vital that practitioners understand all aspects of the traditions, including their faults.

The social hierarchies of college campuses often parallel those of the outside world (Cowley & Waller, 1979). Not all campus traditions that are passed between generations are accepted and they often exhibit an imbalance in power. This imbalance fosters an exclusionary culture rather than an inclusive one. Admissions barriers in social organizations are a strong example. In the 1970s, many fraternities universally discriminated against Jewish and Catholic students, and a large number would not consider individuals that did not come from wealthy

families (Cowley & Waller, 1979). Students at Harvard College in the colonial days were seated in classes according to the social positions of their fathers (Cowley & Waller, 1979).

University staff are often tasked with overseeing major campus traditions. Student affairs staff are usually expected to be involved in the management of challenges and crises (Sandeen, 1991). These challenges and crises often surface throughout the various obligations those who plan and manage events hold. These obligations may include pre-event planning, the participation by large numbers of people, the involvement of multiple campus situations, complex traffic situations, risks to personal safety, potential campus vandalism, and through public relations efforts (Clement, 2002).

Chapter Summary

In the following chapter, I have laid out a detailed plan for how this study will address the following research question: What are the developmental journeys of students who build campus traditions? Chapter 3 will also explore how this study is designed using qualitative methods, primarily using a narratological approach. Subsequent chapters will present the results, a discussion of how the findings answer the stated research question, and the impacts of the research on student development and higher education.

CHAPTER III: METHOD

In the previous chapters, I explored campus traditions and their role in higher education. I also highlighted the lack of attention surrounding the development of student leaders that choose to be involved in campus traditions. The first half of this chapter focuses on the research paradigm that guides this study and the research question to be answered. I also cover my role as the researcher and the potential biases I brought to the current study. The second half of this chapter includes a detailed description of how the research question was explored. This exploration consists of a reflection exercise and narrative interviews with each participant. The chapter concludes with an exploration of the current study's trustworthiness, limitations, and delimitations.

Research Question

Given that the design of this study centers on the research question being investigated, it is essential to understand the question driving the current study. To better understand the impact(s) campus traditions have on the student leaders who build them, I aimed to answer the following question: What are the developmental journeys of students who build campus traditions?

Research Design and Paradigm

Merriam (2009) describes the goal of qualitative research as understanding "how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p. 23). Diverging from quantitative research, qualitative research does not attempt to predict, generalize, or ascribe correlation or causation. Qualitative research aims to describe and make meaning of studied phenomena (Merriam, 2009). The current study attempted

to use narrative analysis, a qualitative methodology, to better understand campus traditions and student development.

The current study embraced the social constructivist paradigm that multiple realities are constructed through social interactions, thereby generating knowledge of a phenomenon. Based on this paradigm, multiple realities of the phenomenon surrounding campus traditions and student development were recognized. For the purposes of this study, campus traditions are defined as customs that are embraced by students and planned to be repeated.

Personal reflection guided the discussion during narrative interviews, which were used to describe student tradition builder experiences (Patton, 2015). The social constructivist roots of this study acknowledge that human beings construct their social realities to one another, and that reality is both subjective and experiential. In other words, there is no universal truth (Hays & Singh, 2012). One participant's construction of reality might be shared with other people, but other people may also construct that same reality in varying ways.

Narrative Identity Analysis

Moving deeper into the qualitative research paradigm, I used narrative analysis in the current study. Definitions of narrative analysis vary; however most recognize that it seeks to understand what stories or narratives reveal about an individual (Hays & Singh, 2012). With origins in social sciences and literature, narrative analysis or narratology examines data from diverse sources including interview transcripts, life history, and other historical narratives, and creative nonfiction (Patton, 2002).

The current study utilized narrative identity, or a person's "internalized and evolving life story, integrating the reconstructed past and imagined future to provide life with some degree of unity and purpose" (McAdams & McLean, 2013, p. 233). Narrative identity theory embraces the

fact that human beings are natural storytellers. With forms ranging from traditional folk tales to reality television shows, stories are performed in every known human culture (McAdams & McLean, 2013). Narrative identity theory posits that people construct and share stories about themselves, particularly detailing specific episodes that have meaning. Out of these episodic autobiographical memories a person may construct and internalize an evolving and integrative life story or narrative identity (Singer, 2004). College students often share their thoughts and feelings about their ideals, their work, and their identities with each other, parents, counselors, student affairs professionals, and others that they trust (McAdams & Guo, 2014). Whether happening in student organization meetings or coffee shops, residence halls, or even over the internet, for many students, college is the ideal forum for "self-talk" and exploring one's self through conversation (McAdams & Guo, 2014, p. 16).

The Life Story Interview

Many college students struggle to determine who they are and what they truly want to do with their lives. However, the Life Story Interview can promote self-exploration (McAdams & Guo, 2014). The Life Story Interview consists of a series of questions designed to uncover key scenes, characters, trends, and themes in a person's life story. Participants divide their experience into chapters and provide brief plot summaries of each (McAdams & Guo, 2014). After discussing the chapters, participants reflect upon "high points, low points, and turning points" before ultimately sharing central lessons and insights learned from their experience (McAdams & Guo, 2014, p. 17). The interview ends by asking participants to discuss and predict what is in store for them in the future, along with dreams, plans, goals, and fears that were impacted by the experiences that were reflected upon in the interview.

Rationale for Methodology

The conceptual framework for this study stemmed from an extensive review of the literature and my personal experiences as a higher education professional. Narrative interviewing allows the researcher to understand better the unique experiences and traditions that participants have built. Utilizing the Life Story Interview format provides a strong conceptual framework that parallels college student identity development. Narrative identity also explores the imagined future, which will help showcase where participants believe they are currently in their development. The strongest advantage to using narrative identity is perhaps its ability to allow participants to be authentic and share their real stories (McAdams & Guo, 2014).

Epoché

Following the phenomenological philosophy outlined by Moustakas (1994), it is important to recognize my interest and experiences surrounding the phenomena being studied. This process is known as the *epoché,* which stems from Greek roots meaning "to stay away from or abstain" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 33). The *epoché* technique is used surface the researcher's underlying feelings about the research topic, allowing the researcher to relinquish biases and examine the topic with a fresh eye (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). By reflecting on my interest in campus traditions and unpacking my experiences surrounding it, I identified pre-existing biases with an understanding that these biases may impact my understanding of the essence of the phenomenon being studied. In this section, I will highlight my experiences and perspective as a higher education professional who has worked with campus traditions closely since my time as an undergraduate. It is vital for me to recognize my experiences with traditions as I performed this research. *Epoché* helps researchers better understand and control their biases.

I first experienced the power of campus traditions as an upperclassman in high school in the early 2000s. While exploring potential colleges and universities to attend, I always found myself engulfed and in awe of the collegiate setting. Looking past the ivory towers and ivy-covered walls, I found myself inspired, but not fully understanding why at the time, I regularly found myself doing further research about each institution I visited, often surrounding the stories, legends, and lore of the institution that I experienced on each campus visit.

My professional career has been built on campus traditions. As an undergraduate I found myself developing a foundation by getting involved in opportunities all across campus. However, I found the most meaning in my involvement and development surrounded traditions on campus. I was trained to highlight campus traditions to others in my first job as a campus tour guide. In 2009, I began my career in higher education as a graduate assistant at a large institution where traditions permeated every part of campus. For my first professional role, I held the title of Activities and Spirit Coordinator, ultimately tasked to build traditions on campus at a small, private, religiously-affiliated institution.

As campus traditions have been the common thread of each my roles in higher education, I found it essential and energizing to examine them in this study. Over the years, I have advised numerous student organizations and individual student leaders who have articulated to me their desire to experience, add to, modify, or build new traditions on campus. Through my work with student leaders, it is evident that campus traditions, and their desired outcomes, are still crucial to students today, whether at small institutions or the modern mega-university (Bronner, 2012). Although the impacts that campus traditions have on campuses and communities have been examined, the effects traditions have on the development of the contemporary student are largely

unexplored. It is essential for higher education professionals to understand the impacts that campus traditions are having on the development of our students.

Participant Selection and Recruitment

To explore the multiple and varied experiences of student leaders that work with traditions on their diverse campuses, 16 student leaders were selected as participants for this study in attempt to reach saturation. Participants were selected through snowball sampling while using purposeful and criterion-based selection (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). This method required a list of criteria that participants must meet to be included in the study. Participants had to identify as full-time, undergraduate students and be currently enrolled in classes at their institution during the time of their interview. Participants were also be required to be currently serving, or have served in the past academic year, in a leadership position on their campus that works directly with a tradition on their campus.

Understanding the experiences of the traditional college student is important, however care was be taken to recruit students with other distinguishing characteristics, including first-generation, veteran, non-traditional age, etc. To recruit participants, I shared the background of this study with colleagues who work in administration at institutions throughout the United States and ask them to nominate undergraduates who build campus traditions. Some colleagues nominated students on branch campuses outside of the United States. When selecting colleagues to nominate participants, I was purposeful in choosing diverse access points to attempt to represent the diversity of the contemporary college student today. Strategically reaching out to a diverse array of student affairs professionals helped me select a diverse and purposeful sample that strives to reflect the diversity of contemporary student life.

Procedures and Data Sources

Once nominated, I contacted participants via email with further details of the study and provided a link to schedule their initial interview. If a participant did not sign up within a week of the initial email invitation, a follow-up email was sent seeking to schedule their interview. The study used three phases, including an initial interview, a story map graphic organizer reflection exercise, and a wrap-up interview. During the first interview, an overview of the study and preliminary questions were asked. Participants were also given an overview of the story mapping exercise. One week before their scheduled second interview, a reminder email was sent to the participants to remind them of their second interview and to complete their graphic organizer. All interviews were recorded using WebEx software. Once recorded, interview files were saved and backed up onto a password-protected folder accessible only by the researcher. At the completion of the study these data files will be deleted.

Initial Interview

The initial interview aimed at gathering demographic information about participants and their institutions to help account for varied perspectives of the phenomenon at hand. The current study attempted to assemble a diverse group of participants, notably striving for differences in age, race, gender, institutional-type, and type of campus tradition. The initial interview also served to learn the preliminary thoughts that participants have surrounding their tradition building experiences. Later in the study, participants were asked to reflect further.

Story Mapping Graphic Organizer Reflection Exercise

After the initial interview, participants were asked to reflect on their experiences with campus traditions and their development by engaging in a story mapping reflection exercise. Allowing participants to contribute to the study in this additional form not only enriched the data

for the study but also reduced the power dynamic in the researcher-participant relationship (Shaw, 2013). Adding additional mediums for participants to provide insight contributed to better understanding of the phenomena when compared to solely relying on interviews. Giving participants an option to contribute other content allowed participants to share their feelings and narratives as they saw fit best.

Participants were asked to spend at least 30 minutes reflecting on their experiences in their role developing or building traditions on their campus, if applicable, while also taking note of how their experiences have shaped their experiences in college. After reflecting, participants were asked to complete a graphic organizer as a representation of their reflection. This graphic organizer asked participants to share key parts of their developmental journeys as tradition builders. The analysis focused particularly on the beginnings of tradition building journeys, key moments that may have affected identity development, and the outcomes of these experiences. Outside of the graphic organizer worksheet (Appendix B), little restriction was given for this exercise. Participants were able to choose a pseudonym for themselves and anyone they mention in their narratives to protect their anonymity. Before their final interview, participants were asked to submit a copy of their final story map graphic organizer product to the researcher via email.

Reflective Interview

After submitting their completed graphic organizer, participants were scheduled for a 60 to 90-minute interview with the researcher. Interviews were semi-structured, which means an initial interview protocol was used to guide the discussion. A copy of this protocol can be found in Appendix C. The discussion was unscripted, as follow up questions were asked, and discussion was guided by information shared by participants. Semi-structured interviews

complement the qualitative and phenomenological paradigm by allowing participants to reflect

on their unique, lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Consent was gained from each participant

to record their reflective interview using WebEx online meeting software.

Reflective interviews were structured around the story mapping exercise, covering

beginnings, key moments, and outcomes of the participant's experiences. Participants were asked

to talk about their product and explain the inspirations behind it. Probing questions were asked to

gain a better understanding of participant narratives.

The last part of the reflective interview process asked participants to discuss their

experiences throughout the current study. This debrief served as a wrap-up conversation and

allowed participants to share any information that was not previously shared in the interview.

Data Analysis

After all interviews were completed, the recordings were saved in .mp3 format for

transcription purposes. NVivo software was used to help manage the data analysis process. In

keeping with the narratological tradition, data was analyzed using thematic analysis techniques

as described by Avdi and Georgaca (2007).

Generally, the job of the narrative researcher is to interpret the stories people tell

(Riessman, 1993). Although all of us are generally adept at interpreting the stories we hear in our

everyday lives, rigorous methods of analysis are useful when interpreting stories or research

(Feldman, Skoldberg, Brown, & Horner, 2004). A general outline of the analytical process is

described below and is guided by Creswell (2006).

Step One: Organization of Data Files

In the first step of biographical data analysis, Creswell encourages researchers to

organize their data files into a framework to facilitate coding (2006). In this step, I immersed

myself in the data from each participant. Data was organized using the story map graphic organizer outline as a design. Transcript data was categorized based on the sections of the graphic organizer. These sections are based on the Standard Life Story Interview (McAdams & Guo, 2014) and include beginnings (initiations), key events (flashbulb memories), and endings (graduations).

Step Two: Coding and Thematic Analysis

Once organized, data was organized by emergent themes. Themes that emerged naturally from researcher notes and reading through transcripts were highlighted. Each data file was also uploaded into Nvivo software for analysis. Statements that were identified as central to understanding participant narratives and their identity development or that emerged frequently were categorized into themes. I strived to ensure that themes were not repeated or overlapping with other themes. Data were shared with one other researcher with qualitative research experience for secondary coding and to improve reliability. Once secondary coding was received, themes that emerged consistently were recorded and used for the rest of the data analysis. Secondary themes that emerged throughout coding were still noted.

Step Three: Description Development

Once themes emerged, I developed descriptions for each theme. These descriptions attempted to concisely summarize the emergent themes using thick description. These descriptions were also supplemented with direct quotations from participants for illustration.

Quotes from each participant were shared with each participant, and participants were given an opportunity to clarify, edit, reiterate, or share any feedback they may have over their words. Participants were given a week to review their quotes and provide any edits. This served

as a form of member checking, an important factor in establishing the trustworthiness of the study.

Step Four: Development of Theory or Framework

Creswell (2006) encourages researchers to work towards the development of a theory or framework that serves as an organizing structure for patterns and meanings identified in data analysis. I began arranging the emergent themes as to how they related to the overall developmental journeys shared by the participants. What resulted was the Tradition Builder Developmental Journey Framework. This framework strives to encompass the mainstream themes that emerged to help capture the essence of the developmental journeys of campus tradition builders.

It is important to note that not all participant experiences that were shared throughout the study fit into this framework cleanly. Many participant narratives fit the framework beautifully and formed the foundation that the framework was developed on. Other participants fit partially. Moreover, there were a handful of other experiences that sharply differed. These experiences are shared in this manuscript as counter narratives and play a vital role in understanding that not all journeys can be represented by the Tradition Builder Developmental Journey Framework proposed in this dissertation.

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Trustworthiness

</div>

Critics of qualitative research often question the trustworthiness of findings, especially in comparison to traditional quantitative methodologies (Hays & Singh, 2012; Merriam 2009; Moustakas, 1994). However, qualitative research differs from quantitative research by attempting to describe a phenomenon, rather than quantifying or generalizing it. To combat the critique of trustworthiness, Shenton (2004) developed four constructs that may be used to

describe trustworthiness in qualitative research. These constructs include Credibility,

Transferability, Dependability, and Confirmability.

Credibility

Lincoln and Guba (1985) referred to credibility as the believability of a study. It may also

be associated with internal validity in quantitative research. According to Shenton (2004), there

are a number of ways to augment a study's credibility, including triangulation, using established

research methods, iterative questioning, peer scrutiny, researcher reflective commentary,

researcher qualifications, member checking, thick description of results, and contextualizing

within the literature.

To contribute to the current study's credibility, I have addressed the items listed above.

Triangulation was met by using multiple sources of data (Creswell, 2007), with data sources

including multiple participant interviews and the graphic organizer reflection exercise.

Narratology has become an accepted qualitative research methodology and has roots tracing back

structuralist narratology which emerged in the 1960s (Darby, 2001). Reflective commentary was

included throughout the results section, while I also used an extensive system of field notes and

journaling following each interview. These notes helped me reflect and record my thoughts,

feelings, connections, contexts, and epiphanies from each interview (Merriam, 2009).

Transferability

Transferability is similar to external validity in quantitative research. Generalizability is

not the goal of qualitative research. Qualitative researchers hope to provide a detailed enough

description of the research process for readers to make decisions about whether or not any

findings are applicable in additional settings (Hayes & Singh, 2012). Transferability was

strengthened in the current study by the use of rich, thick description to help readers better contextualize results and transfer them to their environments (Creswell, 2007).

Dependability

Dependability refers to the results of the study, mainly concerning their ability to be consistent over time (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Similar to reliability in quantitative research, dependability ensures that readers and researchers agree with the study's findings. Dependability of the current study was strengthened by using narratology, a well-accepted methodology, and by being as detailed as possible when describing methods and results. The use of graphic organizer submissions also allowed participants to share their experiences in a different and unique way.

Confirmability

Confirmability is associated with the degree the findings of the study are genuine reflections of the participants investigated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Achieving confirmability means the researcher was able to avoid interference and the voice of the participant is heard clearly and interpreted correctly (Hays & Singh, 2012). The use of triangulation, detailed descriptions of methodologies and findings, and the sharing of researcher bias will contribute to confirmability.

The use of member checking with participants contributed to confirmability. Participants were able to view transcripts from each interview, and were also be given the opportunity to clarify, reiterate, or provide additional information upon their analysis. Participants were given the opportunity to confirm themes once they were compiled from all the interviews. Secondary coding was also completed by an additional researcher with experience in qualitative research.

Methodological Limitations

Like all studies, the current study is not without limitations. Due to small sampling and the nature of qualitative methods, the study is not generalizable to the general population. Narrative analysis is focused on describing participant experiences, rather than quantifying or operationalizing particular phenomenon. The experiences participants shared may be due to additional variables or other involvements outside of their involvement with campus traditions. Participants were also assumed to give honest responses but may not represent their experiences accurately. While the methodology included asking participants about their motivations for engaging in campus traditions, influences and consequences may exist outside of their awareness. Finally, researcher bias must be assumed, mainly due to the qualitative methodologies used and their subjective nature.

Chapter Summary

This summary served as a roadmap for understanding the methodology for how this study attempted to answer the proposed research question regarding the phenomenon of developmental journeys of student tradition builders. To understand the nature of these developmental journeys, I employed a qualitative approach that used narrative interviews and a graphic organizer reflection exercise. The results of this exercise served as a foundation and communication aid during semi-structured interviews with participants. Results of the graphic organizer activity and the interviews were then analyzed, paying particular attention to the beginnings, key moments, and outcomes of the participant's experiences.

Results are summarized in the chapters that follow. Chapter 4 will serve to explore emerging themes surrounding the *what* and *how* of the developmental journeys of student tradition builders on college campuses. Finally, Chapter 5 is used to discuss how the research

findings answer the research question presented in this chapter. Practical and theoretical

implications for higher education, as well as limitations and suggestions for future research, are

also covered.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

Previous chapters of this dissertation explored the nature of campus traditions and narrative identity development in college students. This study aimed to address the gap in the higher education literature by exploring the unique, lived experiences of undergraduate campus tradition builders. Specifically, this study allowed participants to share their developmental journeys through storytelling. Participants shared their stories through semi-structured interviews that mirror the Standard Life Story Interview (McAdams & Guo, 2014). In keeping with McAdam's proposal that identity is a life story (1985), particular focus was given to the unique beginnings (initiations), key events (flashbulb memories), and outcomes (graduations) of these developmental journeys. In this chapter, the results of this investigation are revealed through emergent themes and rich description of participant experiences as they apply to the study's research question: What are the developmental journeys of students who build campus traditions?

The study examined the experiences of 16 undergraduate campus tradition builders from colleges and universities. Fourteen participants attended institutions in the United States, while two attended U.S. institutions but on international satellite campuses. The sample included ten seniors, one junior, and five sophomores. Two participants identified as first-generation college students. Further detail about the demographic information of each participant and their institution can be found in the Participant Profile Table (Appendix A).

I met with each participant twice via WebEx video technology. The first meeting allowed for introductions, testing of technology, and an overview of the study. After the first meeting, participants were given a story mapping reflection worksheet to encourage them to reflect on their developmental journey before the second meeting. The second interview lasted 45-90

minutes and used a series of open-ended questions designed to spark discussion about each participant's developmental journey as a campus tradition builder. Participant demographics varied greatly, and each represented a diverse array of campus traditions including homecoming directors, programming board chairs, fraternity and sorority life leaders, traditions council members, society members, mascots, and other spirit crews. Interviewing a group with such diverse backgrounds and experiences provided deep insight into the lives of modern campus tradition builders.

The rest of this chapter will be organized in three parts to mirror the three pillars of the study, including initiations, flashbulb memories, and graduations. Table 4.1 outlines the three pillars and the various themes associated with each. Each section will illustrate the common themes that highlight the experiences of most participants, as well as fascinating counter-narratives which play vital roles when attempting to understand the developmental experiences of the group. Each theme is portrayed by a narrative, as well as direct words from participants when possible.

Table 4.1

Themes of Tradition Builder Developmental Journeys

Pillar	Conventional Narrative	Counter-narratives
Initiations	Random versus intentional	Upholding a legacy
	Experience as an outsider	A last resort
	Gatekeeper introduction	Being a trailblazer
Flashbulb Memories	Identity • Being a part of something • Making an impact • Confidence • Reflection	Reluctance and nerves
	Relationships • With mentors • With administration	Change • As a positive • As a negative
	Formative challenges • Juggling multiple roles • Managing peers • Secrecy • Missing out on other opportunities • Keeping up with academics	
Graduations	Self-empowerment	A "new normal"
	Finding a place in community	An early exit
	Leaving what is comfortable	Needing a break
	Vocational calling	

The findings from this study are also illustrated by the Conventional Tradition Builder Experience Model (Figure 4.1). While they are not represented in the model, it is important to note the counter-narratives shared in these results. The counter-narratives highlight the complexity of the developmental journeys shared by participants in this study and how not every experience fits neatly in the model.

The model illustrates themes many tradition builders reflected on throughout their journeys. Most participants felt their experiences were shaped by the unique pressures they felt

as a tradition builder. Campus traditions were often described as high-profile, widely-known, and popular campus events on campus. As a student leader responsible for building these traditions, participants often felt an immense amount of pressure from peers, administrators, and alumni.
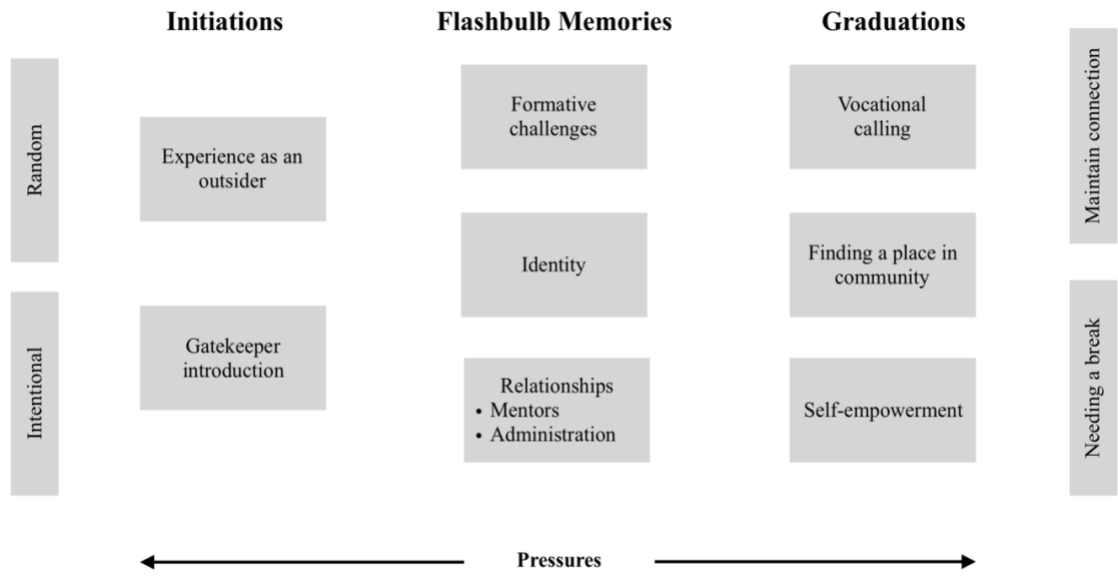
Figure 4.1 Conventional Tradition Builder Experience Model

Initiations

"My friends noticed a huge change in me from my freshman to sophomore year, once I was initiated into the group. I had this long brown hair. I chopped it all off and went blonde. My boyfriend and I broke up, so they thought the change was due to a breakup, but it was the group that helped me find myself." (Chloe, participant)

Stories are often distinguished by their distinct arc, encompassing a beginning, an ending, and everything in between. In essence, stories take us from one place to another. To understand how participants developed over time, it was vital to learn about their beginnings, or initiations, as a tradition builder. Narratives around the beginnings often surrounded inspirations, the questioning of the role of traditions on campus, and specific catalysts that led to involvement as a tradition builder.

The Conventional Narrative: Caleb

Caleb reluctantly pursued higher education at South Central University, a public, state institution in the south. Holding a strong affinity for his family, he chose to search for colleges close to home. After touring three other institutions, he promised his parents he would also look at South Central University, as it was only twenty minutes down the road from his house. Caleb did not want to go to SCU and toured the campus only to appease his parents.

During his tour, he learned about a scholarship program that would cover his full-tuition. After his tour and still reluctant about attending SCU, Caleb applied for the scholarship. Soon, Caleb's uneasiness grew immensely when he learned he was a finalist for the prestigious scholarship, still not wanting to go to SCU. After sharing the news with his parents, they told him they would buy him the truck he had been saving up for that school year. Despite what felt like half of his graduating class also attending SCU, Caleb declared his decision to attend SCU the next day.

Caleb wanted desperately for his college experience to be different than his time in high school. Going to SCU alongside so many of his high school friends would make it more difficult for him to redefine himself, however, he vowed he would do his best.

Jen Cook, a family friend who was a junior at SCU, met Caleb at orientation before his freshman year. Jen was involved in a sorority at SCU and asked him if he had ever considered getting involved in a fraternity. Before Caleb could respond, Jen grabbed his hand and walked him to a couple of young men standing behind their fraternity's table. She introduced Caleb to them, making sure to highlight his involvement in the prestigious scholarship program. After talking about SCU, girls, trucks, and sports for a half hour, Caleb saw one of the members write his name down with a big star next to it on their table's signup sheet. After what seemed like a three-month blur of pledging he was initiated into that fraternity, the most formative experience of his time at SCU. Caleb confidently declared getting involved in Greek life as the catalyst to further involvements on campus, including undergraduate research and serving on Traditions Council.

Caleb's experience exemplified common themes among participants in this study beautifully. Although participant experiences differed significantly in how they decided to get involved, it was evident that motivations for getting involved were memorable. Participants were able to recall their experiences easily and painted vivid pictures of their entry points as tradition builders. Some fell into tradition building roles on campus randomly like Caleb. Others were intentional and methodical in their beginnings. Often participants found themselves inspired to get involved after experiencing a tradition firsthand as a "typical student" or "outsider." Others, like Caleb, shared they were inspired by another person who had further knowledge about traditions, or a "gatekeeper." Caleb still attributes joining his fraternity to his friend Jen

introducing him that summer day during orientation. Other participants shared they were unknowingly nominated or tapped to join groups or organizations, without any foundational knowledge about the group.

Both random and intentional starts. Participants shared there were numerous ways they chose to get involved as tradition builders. Through my discussions with participants it was evident that several participants never intentionally planned to get involved in campus traditions and they just randomly fell into their roles. Whether random or intentional, initiations were memorable and played a major role in the participant's journeys as tradition builders.

While she was heavily involved in high school, Sophia, a senior from Texas majoring in human resources management, got involved with Traditions Council by chance. The Traditions Council was the first organization that approached her while recruiting for new members at South Central University. Sophia discusses her recruitment experience below:

> In high school, I was really involved, so when I came to South Central University, I already had it in my mind that I was going to get involved with something but didn't know what. I was approached during my orientation by Traditions Council, so right away I joined that, since I had no connection to anything else on campus. Right off the bat, my first meeting with the council, I knew that I wanted to dive more into the organization. Traditions Council was kind of the stepping stone that I needed to branch out and continue looking more into what I could get involved in.

Naomi, a sophomore from Virginia studying nursing, reflected about how her resident assistant emailed her a link to apply for a leadership position on the Homecoming Committee. Not knowing what the committee entailed or how prestigious the positions were on campus; she

decided to randomly apply. Naomi shares how being naïve may have helped her during the interview process:

> Honestly, I think it helped me going into it just randomly doing it rather than looking into it. That sounds really bad, since within any position I feel like you should probably do a little bit of research, but me going in randomly and blindsided, I think that helped me calm my nerves. Because I felt like if I knew that I was applying for a really big position, I probably wouldn't have done as well in my interview. Knowing that I'm shy and don't really like to put myself out there. Randomly getting involved definitely helped me.

Chloe, a senior from Ohio studying special education, joined an exclusive spirit group after randomly receiving an email invitation to the unveiling of the group's senior members. The group only initiates two first-year students every year. Members are anonymous for three years and are unveiled to the Midwest State University community their senior year. Chloe shares:

> I didn't know this at the time, but I ended up being intentionally tapped to try out for the group. At the time it seemed so random. After getting a personal invitation, I asked a few other people trying to figure out if they all got an invitation to try out. People looked at me like I was crazy. I was so confused because I got this personal invitation to see the seniors get unveiled. I thought everyone got one. So, I responded to the email from the Dean of Students on campus who is the advisor of the group: "Great I'll be there!" I later met with the advisor, and he convinced me to apply, even though I thought it'd be a longshot. He told me the application and interview process could be fun, but I just thought the group was so big. I never thought a person like me could get into a role like that and make that big of a difference anywhere. It just felt like an untouchable thing for me.

Other participants shared initiations that juxtaposed the seemingly random experiences Sophia, Naomi, and Chloe shared. Madalyn, perhaps the most organized and detail-oriented participant interviewed in this study, shared her extensive plans to get involved right away on campus. These plans stemmed from Madalyn's meticulous plan in choosing a school to go. Madalyn shares why she chose Green College, an all-female, liberal arts school where all students are involved in many class traditions:

> I had a very extensive college search process. I think between my freshman and senior years of high school, and I toured over 35 colleges. I applied to 16 colleges and stayed overnight at five my senior year. I knew that atmosphere of the college was really important to me, and that I wanted it to feel like home. I wanted to feel like a family. I wanted liberal arts for sure, smaller, with like 5-10 thousand students being my cap. And really, 5,000 was the sweet spot. Green College is much smaller than that. Being from Texas, I am very prideful about my home state. I really wanted to go out of state since the best way to say it's really the best is to go prove it by going somewhere else. I knew having a college with a strong history, and sense of tradition would make me feel connected, and I wanted to be a part of a special class of individuals based off of my alma mater. All students became part of the traditions right off the bat.

Madalyn was not the only participant with strategic beginnings to her journey as a tradition builder. Victor, a senior from Ohio, discussed the difficult transition from being a leader in high school to starting all over in a new environment. This was particularly interesting, as Victor talked about his involvement being a major part of his identity, not just as a student, but as a person.

It was really difficult for me because in high school I was very involved in a lot of different things and then coming to college I had to restart. I wasn't this big fish in a small pond anymore; I was a small fish in a big sea. It was a weird feeling, so to me, the solution was to jump right in, try to get involved, and do a lot of different things. I learned a lesson from that. I learned that it's important to pursue your ambitions and things like that, but I also learned to take a step back and not dive head first into things because a lot of times, especially as you get into the upper-level type organizations that do traditions work, people think you're only self-interested and that you only want the big position for a line on your resume, not because you want to make an impact.

Christine, a senior from South Korea promptly joined the Korean Interest Group as a freshman. She was able to intentionally seek out the group right away to try to connect with others who shared her affinity for her heritage. Christine shares how she joined and was disappointed by the group's events. Her disappointment led to her diving in and becoming a leader in the group to try and implement new ideas and other changes.

I joined the Korean Interest Group, and honestly, I was disappointed. It was a new club since we are such a new school. It seemed as if it was built just for sharing food and dinner nights with Korean students and their friends. I felt there needed to be more of an outreach to the wider community. And I really wanted to see more engagement between the Korean community and the outside. So, I joined the executive board my freshman year and tried to implement as many of my ideas as I could.

First experienced the tradition as an outsider. Most of the participants first encountered a campus tradition as an outsider before pursuing their involvement as tradition

builders. Experiencing major traditional programs like orientation, welcome weeks, homecoming, and other campus rituals often inspired the participants to get further involved.

Anthony, a junior from Michigan first encountered the multiple-decade old spirit group he ended up joining during the opening of school his freshman year. Here he explains how seeing the group interact with students as an outsider inspired him to apply:

> It kind of really all started my first year, opening weekend like going through all of the activities. When I first saw the group, that's where it sparked my interest. I saw them, and I was like, "Okay this is weird, but it was like weirdly amazing because after seeing what they do, I really started to understand what their purpose was. I knew I needed to be a part of it.

Several other participants also remembered feeling an explicit "need" to be a part of a tradition or organization after experiencing it as an outsider. Experiencing a tradition was often a powerful enough experience to inspire students to want to get further involved.

After experiencing over a year of the programming board hosting weekend events and major traditions like Homecoming, Family Weekend, and Sibs-N-Kids weekend, Erin, a senior from Pennsylvania decided to apply for the board. As a senior, she served as Chair of the programming board, a highly sought-after leadership position on campus. Erin explains her beginnings below:

> My sophomore year I ended up going to a lot of the programming board events. I got to know a lot of the people. I got to meet the advisor and see some pretty cool things happening behind the scenes. I realized they were the group that brought the big spring concert and did all the programming for the big traditions like the big Springfest Concert, Homecoming, and Welcome Week. The board was the group that planned all of those

major traditions that all students recognize. When I finally learned what they did I realized it was something that I wanted to be a part of.

Before Victor, a senior from Ohio studying intelligence studies became heavily involved in his work planning traditions through the Campus Ministry department, he attended a retreat as a participant, or an outsider. He credits that first retreat he attended with helping him through a difficult period in his life and getting him connected with the right kind of people on campus:

> I connected with a lot of people when I first went on the retreat and this past fall, I ended up leading one on my own. For me, I credit that first retreat with helping me in my journey and my growth as a person, growing my self-confidence. I wanted to be able to turn around and do that for other people because I know a lot of people go on that retreat because they're in a dark place. I wanted an opportunity to help bring people out of that place like the leaders at my retreat did for me.

Gatekeeper introduction. Peers, mentors, and upperclassmen often inspire their classmates to get involved in campus traditions. These gatekeepers have experienced the traditions before and serve as catalysts to other's involvement. Whether physically pulling other students to an event or just suggesting a student might be a good fit for a group or leadership position on campus, these gatekeepers sparked the idea of involvement in others. The concept of a gatekeeper is consistent with literature that discusses how traditions are passed down between different groups of people.

Naomi, a sophomore nursing major from Virginia, was inspired to apply for a position on the Homecoming Planning Committee by her resident assistant. After noticing she was staying in her room a lot when not in classes, Naomi's resident assistant sent her the application link.

During her interview Naomi shared she would not have applied for the position without the help of a gatekeeper:

> I realized that I was staying in my room a lot, and I'm the type of person where I'm very shy, and I have my own little insecurities. So, networking with people, going out and just making myself known on campus wasn't easy for me. So, my RA, he actually sent me the link to apply for homecoming. I was just like, hmm, I don't even know what this is, but I'm just going to apply for it. I don't care what it is, I need to do it. I wouldn't have applied if he didn't send me that link.

Caleb, a senior, from Texas, double majoring in exercise science and biology, went to college at South Central University with many of his peers from high school. At his orientation, he met up with a family friend a few years older who served as a gatekeeper and introduced him to his future fraternity while tabling.

> I just will always remember Jen Cook. She was a family friend that was also in a sorority on campus at SCU. She was actually at my new student orientation tabling and recruiting for sororities. She walked out to me and told me "You're coming with me" and brought me to my fraternity's table and introduced me to the guy working it. Before I knew it, I was connecting with this guy and talking about trucks for 20 minutes. He wrote my name down on his list and put a star next to it when I told him about my scholarship program. That felt pretty cool.

Caroline, a senior, communications major, who ended up being Homecoming Queen, shared she would have never gotten involved with homecoming if it wasn't for her floor getting engaged as a group:

I first participated in homecoming with my floor as well as another floor on campus. We were a part of a competition team, and we all went to homecoming events together. It was pretty cool to be part of the parade, the bonfire, and to be a part of the student body.

Had Caroline's residence hall floor not gotten involved as a group, she may not have gotten to see all of the events and details that make homecoming such a special part of her life now. As a junior, she was voted Homecoming Queen and senior year she ended up serving on the planning committee. Both positions are honors she shares with potential students as she currently works in admissions at her university.

Counter-Narratives

Contrary to the experiences of most others, several participants had unique initiations into their journey as tradition builders. Identifying one's self as a "legacy" came up with two participants who wanted to follow in the footsteps of family members. Another participant discussed how her decision to join a spirit group was a last resort in hopes to find a connection and prevent her from transferring and losing valuable scholarship funding. Other participants spoke of struggling to find the right "fit" in other campus involvements. Unable to find this fit, two participants shared stories of starting their own traditions or organizations and how that experience oriented them to the campus community.

Upholding a legacy. Two participants referred to themselves as a "legacy" and had family lines running deep at their respective institutions. Another participant shared his intentions to get involved stemmed from witnessing his siblings experience campus traditions and hearing stories from his parents who also attended the institution.

On the more extreme end of the legacy spectrum, Caroline, a senior, studying communications, continued her family's tradition of attending North State University (NSU).

With over 30 family members who attended NSU at some point in time, being an alumnus of NSU is a point of pride. Caroline shares about her family's legacy at NSU below:

> I have around 30 family members that all went to North State University. I have three aunts and uncles that were all part of student ambassadors, and they gave tours of campus. Right now, I also work with the ambassador program as an advisor. I learned from my uncle that he actually made the student ambassadors a recognized student organization. He went in front of student senate, proposed a budget, and proposed that it should be a student organization. Thirty-five years later it still is today, which is pretty cool. My parents both grew up from pretty low-income backgrounds, so they didn't have the financial means to stay on campus or anything, but they were commuter students. My experience was different, getting to live on campus. They were really excited when I got really involved on campus in all the activities and clubs. My brothers have been very involved too on campus as well. I think that's definitely been a family point of pride.

Kyle, a sophomore at Midwest State University studying psychology represented being a legacy perfectly. He recalled throughout the interview how he had been on campus numerous times before he was of college age, often on family visits to see siblings. Being exposed to campus throughout his childhood and learning everything that made it special to his family members helped make his decision when choosing a college:

> I mean, it wasn't only because my parents and siblings went and I was like, oh I have to go. It was more because I had seen the campus and kind of experienced it before. So, I was kind of pre-exposed to all the things they did and realized it was kind of the place for me. I've loved MSU since I don't know, before I was even in high school. When it came down to decide where to go, I was looking at either doing community college for a

couple of years to save money, or head to Midwest State like everyone else in my family did.

A last resort. While many of the conversations in this study surrounding initiations highlighted positive experiences on campus, one did not. Chloe, a senior from Ohio, was on the verge of transferring schools from having such a negative experience throughout her transition from high school to college. She had a full-ride scholarship and parents who were strictly against her withdrawing from school. Both the scholarship and her parents drove Chloe to search far and wide for a way to connect with campus. Below Chloe shares her negative situation and how she found her niche in an exclusive spirit group on campus:

Well, my first few weeks on campus were horrible. I cried almost every night. I was so homesick. I also had a boyfriend at the time, we dated for like five years, and I was learning that long distance never works. So, I wanted to go home all the time. I really didn't feel like I had a sense of purpose here. I had an intense summer bridge program through my scholarship, and I had classes every day from nine to five with forced friendships. I felt like everything was terrible and found myself saying "I don't want this." It was a rough first few weeks of school, getting used to being away from home. I was so close to transferring, but my parents wouldn't let me consider that with a full-ride scholarship. I told them I wanted to transfer, and they were like "absolutely not, you're staying there." So, I told myself I had to adapt. I'm going to love what I'm doing. It was just like I had to change my mindset. As a last-ditch effort, I started getting involved, and things started to click. I started to find my niche. After I found my friends, I found my people and I started to enjoy my classes.

Similar to Chloe, Shannon, a senior from Ohio studying exercise science, had looked extensively for an organization she felt at home in. She tried joining organizations of all sizes and even went through the rigorous formal recruitment process for sororities on campus. Shannon shares below how she was not convinced she found her fit until joining an exclusive spirit group that initiates two students every year:

> Freshman year I joined a bunch of different organizations. I was actually in a sorority for a little bit. That was also not for me, and I dropped it once I got into the spirit group. I was just trying different things out because Greek life is big here, so I was like I'll try that. I'll try this club. I'll try this club. So, I tried a bunch of different things. It was a long road, but I eventually found my fit.

Being a trailblazer. Not all tradition builders found their fit on campus right away. A major theme that emerged throughout the conversations was the ability for students to make campus traditions their own. Two participants shared how powerful of an experience it was to pave the way as a trailblazer and make their own way into on campus traditions. Both spoke at length about starting new organizations on campus that have grown in size over the years and will continue to impact others for years to come.

Caleb, a senior, from Texas, double majoring in exercise science and biology, highlighted how starting a fraternity "from scratch" gave him a unique experience unrivaled by any other in his four years as a student leader:

> We started it. I mean, I got there, and later that year the national fraternity came down, but it was basically from scratch. So that gave me a better appreciation for the organization because we had to build it, from nothing, you know? That gave me a better appreciation for it then, different from any of my other involvement experiences.

Jackie, a senior from South Korea, pursued her undergraduate degree from a US institution's satellite campus in the Middle East. Attending a young institution that did not have many established traditions or groups left Jackie wanting more. She shares about her experiences proposing the formation of a programming board:

> Before I proposed that we start a programming board, there wasn't anybody doing any strategic programs or traditions. It was so unclear who would be doing these new ideas. After we started the board, now we have passionate freshmen who pour their hearts and souls into these events. Before it all began it felt like nobody cared. Now to see that people are into this idea of programming, continuing these traditions that I helped start, is a really good moment for me.

Much of the conversation I had with Jackie surrounded her worry that others would not buy into her new ideas about tradition on campus. As a trailblazer, she was often the only one trying to implement new ideas on a campus that she worried would be unreceptive. A significant turning point for her was when she realized others were buying in:

> I really thought there wasn't a lot of interest in programming, so I thought it was going to be a really small team at first. We were not going to be doing huge things. People are so busy. Then we opened up applications, and I saw we received 33 applicants. The passion I felt at that moment was contagious. The passion I felt in their applications was really, really exciting. So that summer I was so hyped to do this. I think that's when things started to change on campus, and we started the culture of tradition at our young school.

I remember feeling goosebumps as Jackie shared how she felt she was taking this huge risk in wanting to build traditions, while also putting herself out there not knowing how her peers would

react. I was inspired as Jackie talked about how energized she was when she received her first batch of applications for others to join the programming board. Her story highlights what a powerful experience it is to be a trailblazer and start a series of traditions for others despite feelings of vulnerability and risk-taking.

Flashbulb Memories

Even though it happened three years ago, I still can see it. That night plays out in my mind like a movie. When something is that important to you, it just kind of sticks. I don't think I'll ever forget it. (Steven, participant)

A primary focus of this study surrounded the flashbulb memories tradition builders shared as they discussed their developmental journeys. An overarching finding that emerged in all 16 interviews was how impactful specific events and memories were on participant development. Although events often occurred years ago, participants were able to paint vivid pictures and share rich detail about key events in their journeys. These events served as punctuations that affirmed or challenged the stories of participants. These punctuations parallel the concept of a flashbulb memory (Brown & Kulik, 1977). Flashbulb memories provide highly detailed and exceptionally vivid snapshots of moments or circumstances that are personally significant, highly distinctive, or repeatedly rehearsed (Brown & Kulik, 1977). The key events and punctuations that emerged in participants interviews are referred to as flashbulb memories in this manuscript, in hopes of reflecting the remarkable detail in which they were shared.

While specific traditions, institutions, and student populations often varied, there were many common themes that emerged from the narratives shared with me by participants. Due to the diverse backgrounds and experiences of the tradition builders interviewed in this study, emergent themes are numerous and provide fruitful insight into the unique lived-experiences of

tradition builders. Three selected counter narratives also illuminate interesting facets of the participant's developmental journeys.

The Conventional Narrative: Madalyn

For many of the participants in this study, involvement in campus traditions became the focal point of their collegiate experience. Many often got involved reluctantly at first, but soon became a part of something life-changing. Madalyn, a junior from Texas, joined class council as a way to find comfort in her college experience at Green College, a small PWI in the southeast. She had been on student council all through high school and class council "felt like home."

After joining class council, Madalyn quickly gained confidence and realized the impact she could make on campus through involvement. She joined student government and was quickly nominated to join a secret tap club for campus student leaders. Through the whirlwind of her first two years and all of her involvement, she formed relationships with peers and administrators. She vividly recounted many experiences that were especially meaningful to her, which gave her "skin in the game" and connected her to a community that was much bigger than anything she had been a part of before.

A large part of Madalyn's experience as a tradition builder revolved around secrecy. Green College has a storied history of tap clubs on campus, which bring rivalry and competition among clubs as they compete to initiate the most influential leaders on campus and make the most significant impact on the Green College community. Madalyn had to keep her membership a secret, often lying to her friends about what she was doing in the late hours of the night and early hours of the morning. She often missed out on other opportunities due to her obligations of being in her tap club. Madalyn also recounts her first semester in the tap club being exceptionally

tough, not knowing how to cover up her membership and struggling to balance her academics and other involvements.

As Madalyn reflected deeply on her experiences through her junior year, her focus naturally began to turn to the future. She discussed the meaningful relationships she had built so far and how they would help her as a rising senior. She reflected on the importance of tradition and passing down customs, legends, and keys to success to her peers in her organizations. Ultimately, Madalyn shared how meaningful it was to be a part of something bigger than herself, and the symbiotic relationship she had with traditions at Green College. Madalyn reflected on how traditions shaped her collegiate experiences and also highlighted the numerous ways she felt she had impacted traditions and Green College in return.

Like Madalyn, most participants often highlighted specific scenes surrounding positive developmental growth. Participants spoke about better understanding their own identity, including how they "fit in" as a part of something bigger than themselves on campus. Other emerging themes included increases in leadership potential, emotional intelligence, and confidence. Finally, like Madalyn, most tradition builders also discussed being impacted by others and the importance of relationships with mentors, administrators, and their peers.

Other themes highlighted negative experiences. Many participants shared their difficulties managing the duties and obligations of such high-impact positions on campus. Several participants shared their struggles to juggle their multiple roles on campus. Others shared how they were often criticized by peers or had to miss out on other opportunities due to their roles as a tradition builder. Participants also often discussed their academic performance dropping. Finally, many traditions required participants to maintain a certain amount of secrecy which was challenging to navigate.

Being a part of something bigger than oneself. Several participants shared they felt they were doing vital work on their campuses. In their important roles as tradition builders, they were entrusted to carry on traditions that have existed for years. Often these traditions play significant roles on their respective campuses and have impacted students over time. It was fascinating to learn about how participants let their roles on campus manifest as part of their identities.

I spoke to both Kyle and Olivia separately. However, both are sophomores at Midwest State University and are members of an exclusive spirit group on campus. As the two newest members of the group this year, they both touched on how special it was to be a part of such a unique group that has over 70 years of history on campus. Kyle, a psychology major, from Ohio shares:

> It feels so good, knowing why the group was founded. It was post-war time, the campus needed something, so the group was founded. People needed something different, something unique, and now we have this insanely long-lasting tradition that blows other schools out of the water. Every school has a mascot, but no one has a spirit group on the same level that we do. So, it's really cool to see people get excited about it. Like yeah, this is part of the school, this is what we do, nobody else does this. The fact that it has been around so long, people rally behind it so much more. It's special.

Olivia, a sophomore, public relations major from Germany, elaborates on the impact the group has had on students since its inception:

> I've seen the great things that MSU does and that our spirit group can do for it. I think college can be awesome and a lot of people love it. But it can also be a place where people come, and they end up really lonely. They kind of struggle and they don't know

how to fit in. And I think that our group tries to allow everyone to fit in, excite

everybody, go to events with everyone. We try to go to everything, see everyone, and talk

to everyone. Giving out candy. We really just try to give everyone that chance to connect.

Finally, Kyle articulates the benefits of being a part of something that has such long-reaching

effects on others:

The ability to be a part of something so big and so much bigger than yourself and exposes

you to so many different things I would have never done otherwise. Being in the group is

an automatic all-access pass to everything on campus. It lets you break out of your

comfort zone and dive in head first to everything that is going on on-campus.

Sophia, a senior, from Texas, who has been heavily involved in Traditions Council since

her freshman year touched on the importance of the organization. She shared how the traditions

on campus impact different aspects of the institution, including school pride and spirit. Below,

Sophia shares how this impact is felt not only by students, but also faculty on campus at South

Central University:

Traditions Council not only keeps history alive, but it helps us with our school pride. It's

something we can get other students involved in. We have so much school spirit at SCU,

and we take so much pride in our school, what we do, and what students create. A lot of

our tradition's students created. Faculty see that, and they're amazed by it. They are happy

we continue it, and we keep getting students involved.

Making a personal impact. Participants were excited to share the significance of their

efforts on their respective campuses and their peers. Several tradition builders learned how they

were able to impact various situations of different magnitudes.

Caleb, a senior from Texas detailed how he diffused a stressful and problematic situation that arose during a Traditions Council meeting. The newly-established council had released their schedule for homecoming week, and the African American community on campus at South Central University began protesting that their traditional events had not been included. This was perhaps due to ignorance and lack of representation of that population on Traditions Council but had a widespread effect on a large community on campus. Caleb discusses how he felt when he diffused the situation as a freshman by suggesting they offer the group a seat at the table below:

> I was able to really calm down the situation. I was a freshman at the time, and I just remember being like "Wow, what I say really can have an impact in a situation. It doesn't matter that I'm a freshman. People are listening. That's pretty cool." I think that was also the first time that I ever really met Dr. Moran (an upper-level student affairs administrator), too. That was just a major turning point for me, where I realized, you know, what I say can have a huge impact in the direction that things are going at South Central.

Naomi, a sophomore, studying Nursing at an institution in Virginia, talked about wanting to ensure her mark was left on the event she was planning during homecoming week. Naomi felt it was important to showcase the diversity that existed on campus in her event. By taking personal ownership of the event she was able to ensure the diversity was highlighted. She elaborates on taking ownership and how it made her feel below:

> Personally, I believe we have diversity on this campus, but I feel like diversity isn't shown through some of the activities and traditions we have planned. So, I wanted to be sure to incorporate that into the planning of my part of the homecoming tradition. Within the limitations that I had, I tried my best to make the event highlight the diversity of

campus, which was definitely a high point. Challenging myself, immersing myself in this position, opening doors for myself, and putting my stamp on a campus tradition. Having my own code to an office space and my own reports to give was pretty cool to me. It definitely made me feel a different kind of important on this campus. Before I was involved in homecoming, I didn't feel known on this campus. But in this position, I became known in a different kind of way. I had advisors knowing me. I have people who work in special buildings that do incredible things for this school, know me, personally. Making that impact felt good to me. It just made me feel important, like one of those people that actually do things for this campus.

Confidence. One area of personal growth all sixteen of the participants touched on was the development of confidence. Being in tradition building positions gave participants a chance to prove themselves in front of their peers, faculty, staff, and the university community as a whole. Increasing confidence was a major developmental milestone for most tradition builders interviewed.

Chloe, a senior, from Midwest State University, studying special education, discussed her personal growth, being comfortable and becoming confident in who she is today. Below she shares how her confidence has grown exponentially and how she feels it will impact her going forward:

I think I'm more confident. I hate being 5'10. I think it makes me stand out in ways I don't really want to. But I don't know, I've learned being in this group that it's okay to be weird. Your purpose is to be weird. And I'm just so much more confident now being weird. I think I have started to enjoy becoming the person that makes everyone laugh or happy or whatever. This group helped me realize that being different is really cool. I

bring that into the classroom when I teach. You will see me dancing down the hallways at 8:00 AM on a Monday. I will have the time of my life and incorporating that into my teaching showing students it's okay to be who you are. Love who you are. Who cares what other people think? So, I think that confidence has changed my teaching style and all of that. Who I want to be, what I want to be. Making sure my special needs students know they may have a hard time, but that we can get through it being who we are.

Elena, a senior from Macedonia, talked about how her friends instilled confidence in her to run for President of the Student Government Association. Much of her self-doubt stemmed from English being her second language and the SGA President position being a very prestigious on campus. She shares about her confidence below:

I think the biggest piece I've gained is confidence. Even right now, I'm not an insecure person, but I don't like to put myself out there if that makes any sense. I was very much the person that like even though I was really involved in SGA, it didn't cross my mind to run for president, because in my head there has got to be someone better to do it. If it wasn't for the support of my peers and them reaching out to me like "Hey you are going to be president next year, right?" I wasn't going to do it. Not just being involved in SGA but being in a university that really made me take risks has really made me build confidence in myself. Not in a pompous way but just like recognizing what your strengths are and how to put those into context.

Victor, a senior, from Ohio, majoring in intelligence studies, was also a student government association president. He shared about his confidence level being related to doing something of importance on campus. As a freshman, he felt like he needed to get involved in

something big to be the confident guy he was when he was highly involved in high school. He elaborates on his struggle gaining confidence in a new setting below:

I try to project confidence in myself out to the world so that people see me as a confident individual, but in reality, I wasn't the most confident, especially in my freshman year. I felt like I had to be doing something and I had to be involved in something big in order to mean something, in order to be worthwhile. So, it was difficult being in a position where I didn't have anything important that I could do right off the bat which made me feel like nothing. I think that over my entire journey I've learned a lot from that process, and I think I've grown from that time period and mentality as well.

Mentorship. The importance of mentors regularly surfaced throughout interviews. Whether learning from the mentorship of an older student, an advisor, or supervisor, many participants touched on the importance of mentorship in their developmental journeys. As the Standard Life Story Interview asks participants to share key characters in their story, participants in this study often pointed to mentors as impactful on their development.

Madalyn, a junior, business major, from Texas at a private, liberal arts college for women shared the importance of mentorship at her college. At her institution, many traditions are centered on student classification year (i.e., freshman, sophomore, etc.) The upperclassmen play vital roles in passing traditions and rituals down through generations. She elaborates below on the importance of relationships between the upperclassmen and younger students:

I've noticed at least with some of our traditions, there's a really big theme of kind of mentorship, and being able to instill values really. I mean, at the end of the day, a tradition shapes how you act, so that practice makes performance. If you start acting a certain way, just that at college you're going to live a certain way. So, a lot of college

traditions hope to instill maybe respect or integrity or loyalty, all these different core values to their students. The upperclassmen pass down these values through mentorship. The upperclassmen are supposed to help tell the freshmen what their core values need to be because they are not supposed to infiltrate our culture. Our culture is not broken by new faces. It's a weird dynamic, some traditions move forward, they bend, or they break. There are some things we can't do anymore. We pass them on because at the end of the day everyone wants to feel important, like they have skin in the game.

Naomi, a sophomore, from Virginia, studying nursing, shared how she saw her advisor and president of her organization as mentors. Below she shares how she leaned on them to help her succeed in her role on the homecoming planning committee:

My advisor Eric, he guided me through almost everything. I leaned on him a lot. I had never done any contracting before, never sent emails to local businesses before. He walked me through it, and then our president sent me tips and kept me focused on the tasks that I needed to do to be successful. Our team can all agree that we were open communicators, which helped a lot. Especially since this position was such a big deal, and I don't think I fully knew what I was getting myself into. Having people that had done it before to lean on was so helpful.

Mentorship seemed to play an even greater role when the participants were first getting started as tradition builders. Sophia, a senior from Texas, talked about how her advisor helped her grow as a professional when she started her officer position on Traditions Council as a second-semester freshman:

When I first became an officer, my advisor definitely helped me grow in and out of my

role as member relations officer. She gave me advice on how I needed to act, what I

needed to do, how to speak better. She helped me build my resume and act more

professional in certain situations. She definitely still helps me manage my stress and

helps me stay organized because she's the queen of organization.

Relationships with administration. In addition to forming influential relationships with

mentors, many participants shared their roles as tradition builders allowed them to connect with

higher education administrators. Participants discussed building relationships with upper-level

administrators including college presidents, vice presidents, deans, and other advisors.

Xavier, a senior, from Virginia studying political science, formed a relationship with the

college president due to his involvements over the years. Now the student body president, Xavier

discusses mutually beneficial meetings with the president below:

Being able to have a relationship with the college president, that was definitely a high for

me. Being able to go to his house and eat lunch and breakfast with him. Even now,

meeting with him on a monthly basis just checking in and debriefing the student

experience. It just reinstalls that this school is dedicated to student success. I first met him

when I was a Director in SGA at a student luncheon. As I got more involved, I got to

know him and his wife. I've talked to him about so many things. Meeting with him on a

monthly basis lets me share some of my challenges with him and him to share some of

the challenges he's working on.

As advisor of a spirit group on campus, the Dean of Students meets with students

regularly at Midwest State University (MSU). Anthony, a junior at MSU, studying Computer

Science, discusses receiving advice from the Dean on a regular basis below. He also touches on

how their relationship feels more like a friendship than anything else:

> I feel like I can call him whenever and text him whenever if I need to talk about
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> something and set up a meeting. We'll just talk for however long we need to talk. And I
>
> think those meetings mean so much to me because I'm able to tell him whatever I need to
>
> tell him. He gives really great advice. He makes it clear that I don't have to take it, but I
>
> know he'll always give it. I feel like there are some things I can tell him that I can't tell
>
> other people. You know what I'm saying? Some people may perceive it as a teacher-
>
> student kind of relationship, but it's really not because we're able to talk about different
>
> things. It doesn't feel like there are any levels if that makes sense. It doesn't feel like he's
>
> superior to me; it feels like they are a friend that I can reach out to and can trust. That
>
> means a lot to me that I can reach out to someone in a position like his and he can be
>
> there for me when I need him.

In contrast to other positive experiences with administrators, other participants shared

administrators had increased interest in their efforts due to the high-profile nature of campus

traditions. Madalyn discusses her opinion on how administration attempt to shape traditions

despite the students craving independence below:

> I think now a lot of our traditions have a very subtle or obvious hand from administration
>
> in them. Wanting to shape our traditions, wanting to cultivate them in a way that is
>
> appropriate in their eyes. Right, wrong, or indifferent, they want to shape them to be more
>
> appropriate. In the past, instead of administration wanting to be involved in traditions and
>
> stopping problems or whatever, a lot of traditions were formed because of decisions by
>
> the administration. There would be a policy, and students would be like, "Wow but we

want to do this, so let's find a way to not break the rules or find a loophole to work for us. There is this groundwork where students created like a social contract with each other, and I think the administration is constantly trying to find ways to influence that contract.

Madalyn elaborated later in our conversation, suggesting students purposely strive to go against the wants of administrators:

I think there is kind of a feeling of anarchy, where students were like, "You know what? Even though this might not be the most ethical thing we're gonna do, because it really perpetuates a tradition being really intense. I saw it with initiations, pledge processes, stuff like that." And I think that high intensity grabs people in.

Erin, a senior, from Pennsylvania, studying Hospitality Management, now plans on a career in higher education and student affairs. In her interview she discussed how she fell into working with multiple administrators unexpectedly. As chair of the programming board, she oversaw the development of Family Weekend, a major campus tradition at Red University. With dreams of making it bigger than previous years, Erin found herself needing to meet with multiple offices on campus she had never interacted with before. She shares:

In my effort to make our Family Weekend tradition bigger, I had to work with the Alumni Engagement, Marketing, and President's Offices. Once we started working with them, the administration was very hands-on, and it meant me working with more professional staff members, which I don't think I was necessarily prepared for. Working with so many professionals made things a little more tricky, and I don't think I was ready for that level of planning quite yet.

Reflection. Reflection was a common theme of each conversation as participants often found themselves reflecting during their journey as a tradition builder. Examples covered instances where reflection was facilitated and where it occurred organically or unplanned.

Several participants discussed facilitated reflection that happened during a retreat, group meeting, or with an advisor. Anthony, a junior, Computer Science major from Michigan, discussed the power of reflection, even if it was with a team of peers he had just met below:

> One of the retreats we went on first felt like we were just stuck in a room full of strangers. Throughout the weekend we did a lot of activities that made us vulnerable in a way. I felt like that was the only way for us to connect and really build relationships. A lot of the activities we did centered around personal reflection, identity, diversity, and inclusion. I felt like doing those activities made me feel more kindness in the world around me and coming from a high school that was predominantly African American people like myself, I had never had experiences like that with people that did not look like me. At that retreat, I started to be more cognitive of my values, and other people's values as well. It gave me my first real chance in college to reflect on myself.

A few participants shared they were inspired to reflect on a personal level after a memorable encounter with their peers. Erin, a senior, hospitality management major, shared about an instance where her peers questioned who she was in a group setting. Erin had always seen herself as a shy and introverted person, while her peers saw her as a leader who brought people together. She shares the experience that sparked her reflection for the next few years below:

> My junior year on the programming board, we were doing an icebreaker and tossing a ball around a circle. When you caught the ball, you had to pick an adjective that

described yourself. I chose "shy" and everyone in the circle laughed at me saying things like "no way that is so not true, that's not who you are" and so through the next year and a half from that point on, I really started discovering myself as an extrovert, which I never would have thought I was or could ever be.

Chloe, a senior from Ohio studying special education referred to the immense amount of personal reflection she did her sophomore year as "soul-searching." Having encountered some significant life changes that year, she found herself depressed and wanting more. She soon joined a spirit organization on campus, which helped her reflect on who she was, pushing her to make changes accordingly. She highlights the changes below:

My friends noticed this huge change in me from my freshman to sophomore year, and I guess I did too once I got into the group. I had this long brown hair. I chopped it all off and went blonde. My boyfriend and I broke up at the end of my freshman year, and then I got into the group as a sophomore, so everyone thought the change in my behavior and my personality was because of the breakup. Looking back now, I think that was a huge, defining moment for me, feeling so accepted for who I am and meeting some of my closest friends in the group.

Navigating multiple roles. One of the primary stressors on participants that emerged was navigating their multiple roles on campus. In addition to their studies, many of the participants held numerous other roles on campus. A few worked jobs and most held multiple leadership positions in several organizations. Having to navigate wearing multiple hats was a struggle touched upon numerous times.

As tradition builders, students often are the face of their organizations. Xavier, a senior from Virginia, talked about how his peers and others on campus often forgot he was also a student in addition to serving as the President of Student Government Association (SGA). He details his experience needing to "switch hats" to balance his different roles below:

> I think some people forget that I am a student when I have the student body president hat on. I get pulled a lot of different places and am invited to a lot of different stuff. I think, as far as matureness as a student leader, you have to remember to always be a student first. That's one thing I've learned to do. It is a lot to manage those roles. Sometimes I see myself changing hats a lot. Sometimes I literally have to take that student body president hat off, lock myself in my room, and focus on work, so I am always juggling different roles.

Elena, a senior, from Macedonia, who also served as student body president, discussed the particular difficulties stemming from being a science major with a vested interest in student government. Despite having set office hours, she detailed how she is frequently approached with SGA concerns when in the lab and with lab concerns while in SGA:

> Anytime I meet a first-year their immediate assumption is "Oh you study political science," and I always have to say, "No I'm a science major" and I think it's just really interesting that people think it's so weird that I'm a science major that is also interested in government. I constantly say that I feel like I'm living a triple life in university. Two of those that are interesting are wearing my student government hat and then taking it off and walking into the lab where I'm not allowed to touch my phone and in high panic doing research. I think it's an interesting juxtaposition, but I really hope it doesn't deter people from getting involved on campus and in all the traditional leadership roles at

North University Middle East. I think until like a year ago it was pretty easy to take one hat off and put another on. I think this year it has become significantly more difficult and I think part of it is we live on campus in our bubble, and a lot of people choose not to leave. People have meetings until late in the evening. It's completely normal to have SGA meetings at 10:00 PM. I can catch myself being at the gym and someone would stop me and ask me something about SGA. It doesn't matter if I tell them about my office hours or not. Or I'd go to the lab and see one of my science buddies wanting to share concerns about class offerings. It makes the line blurred for outsiders.

Managing peers. Tradition builders usually serve in leadership positions on campus where they have to manage their peers. Participants shared numerous issues where they struggled with being held accountable for the poor work of their peers, needing to have uncomfortable conversations, or having to inspire others who are not paid for their work. These issues were seen in participants who held various roles on campus, however, concerns were especially salient among student body presidents.

Xavier, a senior student body president from Virginia, shared difficulties overseeing a group of 14 of his peers who served on the SGA Executive Board. Many of these positions were not paid and were elected by the student body. Below, Xavier elaborates on the struggles of managing others who are the same age as him:

Sometimes it can be challenging managing your peers. People who are the same age as you. It's hard doing that because sometimes you don't think the same. And you would think that you do sometimes because you're the same age. Honestly, managing some of my peers was one of my low points in my journey. Sometimes you're put into situations

where you have to have uncomfortable conversations with your peers. Sometimes they don't take it the way they should.

Victor, a senior from Ohio, is also a president of an organization that oversees many major campus traditions. He shared his struggle to hold his peers accountable and to a high standard when there is little he can do from a supervisory or disciplinary standpoint as a peer:

Leading my peers has been one of the biggest challenges I've ever gone through because I think it brings a lot of challenges that leading someone who is ten years younger than you doesn't necessarily bring. It's difficult because at the end of the day you're all students. So how do you sit down with a member of your exec board and say: "Hey listen, I asked you to do this thing three weeks ago and you told me you had it done. Here we are, and it's not done, and now we need to talk about what that means and where do we go from here and what kind of disciplinary action might there be." It's really difficult when that person is the same age as you. You're a student. I'm a student. We all make mistakes, but at the same time I have a responsibility to make sure this organization is doing what it needs to be doing, and it's a really hard balance.

Elena, also a student body president, shared her struggle when she tried to develop a new tradition and was not able to control how her peers reacted below:

One of the things we have at North University Middle East (NUME) is a giant #MyNUME sign when you enter our campus. They are just giant blank white letters that are about waist high. For spirit week we decided to do a campaign of "#MyNUME is _____" and left a bunch of post-it notes and pens for people to write what their NUME is and post there. Well, we didn't know what would happen, but the day it

launched a friend of mine texted me "Hey, can we meet up? This is urgent," and she took me there. Our sign was filled with like 50 post-it notes of very, very depressing things like #MYNUME is masochistic, #MYNUME is depressing, all of these things. It was evident that not everyone was on board with us starting a brand-new spirit week to celebrate NUME. That can make it hard to start new traditions.

Secrecy. Many tradition builders shared their struggles to maintain secrecy. Traditions sometimes required participants to keep secrets to maintain sacred or storied rituals. Whether concealing the identity of their peers in a secret spirit group, or not revealing the homecoming concert artist until they were ready, it was often shared that keeping secrets was difficult. Several participants noted particular difficulties when dealing with strict rituals, secret societies, spirit groups, or sacred initiation ceremonies. Participants felt serving as a tradition builder often meant holding oneself to a higher standard than other campus involvements, simply because of the legend and secrecy the positions entailed.

Madalyn, a junior at Green College, a small, private, liberal arts women's college, detailed her experiences when she and her friends started being tapped to join the storied "tap clubs" on campus. With 11 tap clubs on campus and less than 1,000 total undergraduates, many students found themselves in the same situation. Madalyn details the pressures that came with the tradition of secrecy and how they impacted her relationships with her friends:

All of my closest friends were all selected for tap clubs. When my friend got tapped, the club has like six weeks of really, really intense pledging. Part of the first two or three weeks they are only allowed to talk from 5:00 AM to 5:00 PM and they can only talk to members from their club. So, she couldn't talk to me for two to three weeks, or she wasn't supposed to. And she really didn't! In my mind I had to be like: "Okay she doesn't hate

me. She just can't talk to me." Which is like the hardest thing to convince yourself. If someone's not talking to you, but they don't hate you, that's just really hard to understand. It's really hard when you're moving forward in your own club and doing your own traditions but can't share with others. It was a very complicated situation.

Chloe, a senior at Midwest State University, studying special education, also shared the toll keeping secrecy paramount can take on a student leader. As a member of an extremely selective spirit group on campus, Chloe had to keep her identity, and the identities of the five others in the group a secret from everyone on campus. Chloe expressed she wouldn't trade the unique opportunity for anything, but it still made life more difficult sometimes. She details her struggle to hide this part of her identity from others below:

I think it's those moments where I have to be just with myself through an entire weekend just in this hideout that I really get to think about what I'm doing and what I'm doing it for. I'm letting down my friends, and I think that's what bothers me so much is that I hate lying, and I've had to do it for three years to protect my spot in the group. But I think that makes me appreciate this group and what we've been doing. Definitely football games have made me reflect a lot and enjoy this, even though my personal life is struggling at that moment. It is so worth it when we go to the games and see the difference that we make.

Fear of missing out. Serving as a tradition builder often means long hours, an immense amount of planning, and always being "plugged in" to happenings on campus. This commitment can impact a student's ability to do other things. Most participants detailed having to perfect their time management skills in order to meet important deadlines, keep up their grades, and still have

a social life. No matter how well they managed their time, tradition builders shared instances where they were "double booked" and had to miss out on opportunities.

Anthony, a junior, from Michigan, studying computer science, shared his struggle of being double booked during Midwest State University's Welcome Week. As an orientation leader, and a member of a secret spirit group, he had to sacrifice his time in the spirit group during orientation programs. While an alumni member of the spirit group was able to cover for him, he details his frustration of not being able to be in two places at once:

> On the flip side, even though getting involved in orientation was a great experience, I couldn't be as involved with the MSU spirit group as I wanted to during opening weekend. The schedules overlapped and since I had a role working orientation I couldn't be with the group. We actually had an alumni take my place in the spirit group during opening weekends. While I am appreciative of the alumni to be able to do that for me, I obviously felt bad I couldn't be there myself.

Caroline, a senior from Minnesota studying communications and marketing at North State University (NSU), was heavily involved in the homecoming planning committee. Her senior year she was in charge of the homecoming parade which happened on Saturday morning. Friday night NSU has their annual homecoming concert that students look forward to for months every year. Caroline was excited for the show just like her peers but was unable to attend due to a last-minute mix-up in preparation for the parade the next day. She details her experience below:

> During homecoming week on the night of the concert, we had a really big country artist playing that night. I was really excited to go, but the next day was the homecoming parade that I was in charge of planning. I had to go set up all the stations for the parade

before the concert. As it turned out, my advisor was pulled to the concert to help there, so it was just me and another person that had to set up all the parade stations. We ended up setting them up in the wrong spots, so we had to spend three hours fixing it, and I had to miss the concert. It was definitely a low point but also a lesson for me to make sure I confirmed everything with an advisor before doing something that big on my own.

Chloe, a senior, from Ohio, studying special education, while also being involved in a spirit organization on campus, felt torn throughout her junior year. She wanted to make the most of her junior year as an emerging leader in the spirit organization. However, her mother was diagnosed with breast cancer and she wanted to be home spending time with her family at the same time. She detailed her struggle balancing the need to be home with wanting to make the most of her junior year below. Chloe also highlights how the spirit group helped her cope during her darkest time in college:

> My junior year was a really hard year for me because I just wanted to be home with my mom. She was diagnosed with breast cancer, and she went through some huge changes. She lost her hair, and then she had a double mastectomy, so she lost a lot of her feminine qualities about herself, which was really hard for her. So of course, I wanted to be there for her, but then we had football games, or we had hockey games to be at with the group. Trying to find that balance was probably my lowest low, wanting to be there for the group because junior year is supposed to be the best year, but at the same time needing to be home for my family. Times were tough for me that year. So, I'd come to the hideout and text the group asking if anyone wanted to come hang out. And someone would always be there for me. They just knew that I needed them, without knowing everything.

I would just sit here. It was just such a dark time in my life, but this group was the sunshine I needed, and everyone in it was the light. It was so good.

Trouble keeping up with academics. With other themes touching on participants having difficulty balancing their obligations, it was natural academic performance suffered as well. Participants chronicled having multiple commitments and needing to be "all-hands-on-deck" during events, while also being held back by various exams and projects. Multiple participants lamented there was not enough time in the day to get everything done. These pressures compounded and were evident in many of the experiences explored in this study.

Naomi, a sophomore from Virginia, experienced the struggle of keeping up her grades while also planning major traditional events for homecoming. Below, she talks about how work for both homecoming and school simultaneously piled up. While reflecting, she discussed not meeting expectations in either realm:

I felt so overwhelmed, but I had to realize that school came first. Even though I felt bad for maybe not doing things, or getting things done by a certain time, I had to remember what I was here for. I came here for school, for an education, not to run homecoming. When my schoolwork started to pile up, I also felt like even more work was piling up for homecoming. The timing was horrible. I don't know who chose the dates, but my professors just decided to pile on exams and projects right on top of me, right during homecoming.

Anthony, a junior, from Michigan, studying computer science, started to see his grades slip his junior year when he struggled to manage his time. As his grades slipped, his peers in the spirit group he was in at Midwest State University began to "call him out" while urging him to

get his act together. Below, Anthony shares how he felt as his GPA dropped while also letting his friends in the spirit group down:

My first two years were really great academically, my GPA was really high. I had a 3.85 going into school last year, and then last semester it took a blow. I had a lot of adjusting to do with my new positions on campus. I feel like I didn't prioritize my time well. I didn't get a chance to hang out with the people that I wanted to hang out with and keep those relationships that I formed going. And it actually impacted me in the spirit group. One of my peers sat me down one day and we just kind of talked about stuff. It got me really emotional, and I knew at that moment I felt like I let her and the group down.

Sophia, a senior, from Texas, studying human resource management, discussed how being involved and her schoolwork seemed to collide and how Traditions Council works to help new members learn to balance this issue:

Being involved and school are my two main things that always seem to collide. I'm trying to give 100% in both areas, but sometimes it gets overwhelming. I would say my freshman year through my senior year definitely went from being involved as a main priority for me and school took a backseat. At the halfway point I started realizing school and my education is, should be more important. Now as a senior, I'm able to help some of our incoming members deal with the same thing. We have Traditions Council study nights. We put that focus on school so we can stay involved but also put our education first.

The Counter-Narratives

Several experiences also emerged throughout interviews; however, they differed from the experiences provided by most participants. It is essential to understand these experiences as they also shed light on developmental experiences. One participant discussed having anxiety, nervousness, and was reluctant to get involved in mandated class traditions her first year. Another two participants talked about the importance of recognizing when it is time for traditions to change, no matter how old the tradition. Finally, an additional tradition builder reflected on a major change to a tradition on her campus that was negatively received at first, despite it being embraced and celebrated years later.

Reluctance and nerves. At smaller institutions like the one Madalyn attends, there may be an expectation that all new students take part in campus traditions as part of their transition into college. This expectation is often passed down between generations, which can make new students anxious. This anxiety often surfaces when students do not know what to expect and are unable to research the tradition on their own. Madalyn, a junior at Green College, a small, private, liberal arts college for women, recalled her anxiety and nerves before attending her first Step Singing event. Step Singing is a tradition where all the classes of students gather, and each class sings a teasing or admiring song to another class. Madalyn shared about her nerves and how the once foreign event ends up bringing together alumnae below:

> Well, I think at the very first big tradition I was very nervous. I had never obviously been to a step singing event before, and there were no videos to watch online. I couldn't be like, "Oh this is what it looks like." It all felt very foreign because it was. Having been through several now, I think it's based on the concept that if we don't explain it or make something just complicated enough to where it is hard to explain, then it makes the

memory more memorable. Then you can connect with an alum and say, "Oh step singing is so fantastic" and they agree. Everyone else is like "wait what?" and you're just like, "Well we just sing songs." It's a simple thing, but it's just complicated enough to where it's hard to transfer without experience.

Seeing change to traditions as a positive. One of the significant assumptions about traditions participants shared is that traditions do not change and remain consistent over the years. Two participants discussed the need for change over time to accommodate societal changes. While both acknowledged remembering the values of the institution or group is vital, they also stressed the importance of changing with the times.

Chloe, a senior, from Ohio, studying Special Education, is a member of a secret spirit organization on campus. The organization is highly selective and always consists of six members. Senior members are revealed to campus in the spring at halftime of a major athletic event. The revealed members are quickly replaced with freshmen members who remain anonymous until their senior year. Historically, the group has initiated one male and one female member every year. When Chloe was applying, the group brought in two female members, a feat that had only been done once before in the organizations 70+ year history. She details her experience below:

The group was like "Do we bring two girls in? That's only happened one other time in the 72 years of the tradition!" and it was something they were super conflicted about. They took such a huge risk changing the tradition of picking a male and a female every year, and I think that was a huge turning point in my life knowing that people are willing to take risks for who they think is best. It has changed my perspective on our group too. Traditions are important, but sometimes changing them can make a huge difference too.

We've definitely grown a lot since then. Early on I felt like I had to prove myself when I first got in, to show them I'm supposed to be here. I felt like I needed to prove myself even though the members in the group kept telling me I was meant to be here. They made me feel good, but when I first got in, I felt like this outsider needing to prove myself because of the chance they took on me.

Victor, a senior, from Ohio, majoring in intelligence studies, noted his appreciation for his institution fostering a strong culture surrounding tradition. He appreciated his institution still being innovative while also respecting the vision and values that make it special. He elaborates below:

I feel like tradition means remembering our roots as an organization and institution. It's recognizing where the founders and their values and what they wanted this institution to be. Even though it's not run by them anymore, we have an obligation and responsibility to run it the way they would have run it. At the same time, I think Blue University does a very good job of being innovators while at the same time respecting our traditions. We introduce new ones all the time, but they fall in line with what we believe as an institution.

Seeing change to traditions as a negative. While some participants saw evolution of traditions as a positive, another participant shared how backlash can come with changing something special on campus. Erin, a senior from Pennsylvania, shared the negative reaction her programming board had when administration forced a major change. The programming board was forced to move substantial resources towards the development of a new multicultural

programming board. Erin detailed how her opinions swayed from negative to positive as time passed:

It was one of our regularly scheduled programming board meetings, and I don't think any of us saw a change coming. We're sitting around the table, and after we went through all other business, our advisor shared that we were expanding our programming board. He outlined that we'd be adding another arm to the programming board and that there were a lot of unknowns still at that point. As someone who was planning to run for Activities Board Chair the next year, that change was really frightening. I just remember for the next week or two everyone, including the Student Government Executive Board, were confused and had no idea why we were making such a big change. It wasn't explained well to us, and we didn't have very many answers. The change was very intimidating and frightening, to the point where I had considered not applying to be the chair, a position I had wanted for years. There were definitely some learning curves the first year it was implemented, but I ended up learning a lot, and I think looking back now at the experience it was probably one of the best things we could have done.

Graduations

"Even if I go back home to Texas, I might be home, but Green College has been my home for four years. It's where I spent the majority of my time, where I found myself, even with summer vacation and everything else. So, I think an identity crisis will definitely be in order" (Madalyn, participant)

The Conventional Narrative: Xavier

Narrative identity discussions in this study were as much about the imagined future as they were about the reflective past. The last part of every interview asked participants to imagine what the future has in store for them and to describe what the next chapter of their story might be. Responses from graduating senior participants were especially interesting, as those discussions often centered around leaving a comfort on campus they had developed as a tradition builder.

Xavier is a senior from Virginia who attended a public, minority-serving institution on the east coast. As a first generation college student he often found himself trying to forge his own way on the path to success in college. Once comfortable with his coursework, Xavier began joining various organizations on campus, including a gospel choir. Once he began meeting others, he was inspired to join student government, where he began learning about himself as a leader.

As Xavier progressed through his involvement in student government, it became a major part of his life and a part of his identity. His friends were all involved in student government. His coursework in his political science major paralleled what he was doing outside of the classroom. He was appointed to the executive board and his senior year he served as the student body president. His connections from SGA connected him to a job on-campus where he began learning about higher education. From there, he reconsidered his future goals and decided to pursue a future as a higher education administrator.

Being student body president had become a major part of Xavier's identity. When introducing himself he would highlight that part of his identity specifically. At the time of his interviews he was strongly considering pursuing a graduate degree on-campus just so he could

re-run for his position as president. Xavier portrayed confidence throughout his interviews, often sharing the many projects and accolades he had successfully completed as student body president. When asked what came next after graduation, Xavier's demeanor clearly changed and nervousness about the unknown surfaced. He was confident in who he had become, in a familiar place like Central State University. A major and salient part of his identity could be gone soon and that was a piece of his identity that he was not looking forward to losing.

Other participant responses often surrounded identifying closely with a similar sense of community as Xavier. Several participants discussed looking for ways to continue their involvements, with many planning to step up and increase their leadership roles in the future. A few participants spoke about changes in their vocational calling and their plans to pursue a different career path as a result of being a tradition builder. Many of these plans encompassed a change in career path or reconsidering personal values in order to continue making an impact through traditions or leadership positions.

Emerging as a leader. Many participants discussed discovering their personal leadership identity. Younger participants often shared their intentions to continue their journey as a tradition builder, hoping to pursue leadership spots in their respective groups. Several participants shared their desire to inspire others to get involved as well. Sophia, a sophomore, from Virginia, studying nursing, forecasts a bright future for herself on the homecoming planning committee at Central State University. After sharing how her advisors and the current leadership told her they were grooming her for a broader leadership role she discussed wanting to stay involved:

> Honestly, I do plan on getting more involved in homecoming next year, for sure. I plan on being involved in homecoming until I leave Central State University. Just because it is something that has definitely changed my life. It changed me. It is what started changing

me in college. I just hope to be successful and have more positions like this one. I want to
help others have the same type of an experience. Even though I like my classes and
nursing, I also like the business side of things. I like planning and organizing events.
Hopefully, in the future, I can do something like this on the side of nursing.

Anthony, a junior, from Michigan, studying computer science, shared how he felt next
year may be the most pivotal year for his development as a member of a spirit group. Much of
his development came from learning from the upperclassmen who had run the organization
before him. He discusses his anticipation and excitement to leave his legacy below:

I think my role will change a lot next year. As a senior it's kind of like being the rock, I
guess. Like kind of being that person connecting the new members to the seniors and just
kind of being the rock there. Being a senior means more responsibility, and I think that
I'm going to have to make even more adjustments and make sure I'm managing my time
well. Also making sure I'm around as much as possible with it being my last year in the
group, encouraging everyone to make the year a great one. I think that transition from
this year to next year, I already have ideas how I want the group to be different. I think
the seniors leaving this year have made a huge impact on me, and I feel like I'm at a point
where I'm ready to accept that role. Like it's a new chapter.

Olivia, a sophomore, public relations major, from Germany, shared her excitement to no
longer be an underclassman as she begins to identify herself as a leader. She touched on how
upperclassmen helped her gain confidence and assured her she was doing good work during her
first two years in the organization. She shares her excitement to similarly help younger members
below:

I think next year I'll transition into being a role model for the underclassmen. Just being

an important person for them. I know how much the juniors helped me this year,

explaining that it's okay to get stressed out. It's okay if something is imperfect. It's okay

if you miss out on a couple of things. It's okay and that everything is a learning process. I

want to be there to just tell the rookies that it's okay, you're doing things right. I think

that's important.

Becoming part of a community. Most graduating seniors touched on how they will miss

being a part of a community. Many participants shared that their roles in campus traditions

played a major part in their current identity. As many participants prepared for their roles to end,

it was evident there was a fear or apprehension about losing that part of their identity.

Rediscovering one's identity outside of their current role was something many participants

touched on as a source of nervousness or anxiety. It was not uncommon for participants to share

specific people and events that will cause increased reflection and nostalgia post-graduation.

Erin, a senior, studying hospitality management, details how everyone at her institution took

pride in calling it "home" below:

I'll miss the people and the community. I already miss knowing all the people around

campus. I miss being on all parts of campus and just doing things the student body as a

whole would be interested in and care about. Everyone on campus always refers to this

place as "home," and that holds true to me. It has been so impactful on my life in so many

ways, and I think it was because of all of those traditions I got to be a part of. Red

University was big on traditions, and it felt really good to be there.

Olivia, a sophomore, from Germany, studying public relations, shared how she hopes to someday teach her family about the importance of community. Below she shares how visiting campus as an alumnus and reflecting with her family will help her teach valuable lessons to her children eventually:

I think I'll always come back to MSU again. I think that sense of community and family, I'll want to teach my kids that. Just to recognize how important the people around you are and to appreciate every opportunity given to you because things don't last forever. The community taught me to take every opportunity that you can because to miss out on something amazing like this would be crazy.

Loss of identity. After playing significant roles in major campus traditions, it was evident tradition builders developed a sense of belonging, comfort, and identity on campus. Several students touched on how comfortable they became in their roles, often spending several years in them. Others discussed the need to pursue new experiences to challenge themselves and continue growing after becoming so comfortable.

Xavier, a senior, from Virginia, studying political science, talked about how comfortable he had gotten after serving as the Student Body President. Through his position, he had gotten to know everyone on campus, became familiar with the resources available and had found a niche that allowed him to develop personally. It was evident being Student Body President had become a major part of how he saw himself. Below he details needing to step outside his comfort zone to continue growing as a person, a professional, and as a leader:

I think the next chapter of my life looks like stepping out of my comfort zone. I think it's time. I think I've been very comfortable the last four years as a student and as a leader,

and there is no growth in comfort. So, putting myself in an uncomfortable situation intentionally, so that I can grow as a person and a future professional.

Elena, a senior from Macedonia, studying biology, talked about her comfort at North University in the Middle East (NUME), a satellite campus of a United States institution. While she built up her comfort level over her four years as an undergraduate, Elena is excited to start "from scratch" in a new place next. She details below:

> I'm looking ahead to my way forward, and I really want to put myself to the test of entering a new community and start things from scratch. I love NUME to my bones but being in such a heartwarming community, and now I'm eager to step out of it and enter a new one and see how that exercise looks like on a life level if that makes any sense. I'm leaning towards moving to a new place where I don't know a lot of people and I don't have a lot of ties rather than staying on campus where it's familiar. I feel like I'm setting myself onto a journey in a new place where I can start building the community from scratch and also a new place where I can have that exercise of meeting people and learning their stories again.

Madalyn, a junior, from Texas, studying business, discusses her fears of struggling to find an identity again after graduation from Green College. She explains the strong pieces of her identity, especially her heritage as a Texan, in contrast to her new home at Green College. She also shares how Green's values parallel her own and how Green College will always be a significant part of her identity:

> I definitely see myself as struggling to find an identity outside of Green College. And I think I'll really have a hard time with that. I had a hard time with coming to Green College. I went to the same school for 15 years, and I had a strong identity and there's

this weird moment when you transition to where, like physically feels like your body's in different areas, because I was very prideful about Texas, very prideful of my high school and that was a part of who I was, but now that once I set foot on Green College as a student, that immediately became part of my story. And through that, it became a part of me, but it wasn't really me. Like I wasn't truly home yet. I'd only been there for a week, and so developing into that, and that the same thing will happen when I graduate. I know, I'll be like, "Wow. Even if I go back home to Texas, I might be home, but Green College has been home for four years." It's where I spent the majority of my time even with summer vacation and everything else. So, I think an identity crisis will definitely be in order. I think that I found a college based off of my core values. At least I hope I did, and I'm not just attributing myself and personifying a college because that's who I am. It's different than with my friends that go to bigger schools, you know, it's hard to personify a large state university, it's a little bit more, difficult because part of that personification is diversity, it is uniqueness. Or is individualism on a mass scale.

A new calling. A few participants had such positive experiences as a tradition builder that they considered a new vocation. While each of these participants discussed possible futures in higher education administration, Jackie, a senior, from South Korea, shared her calling for a future centered on community building. She elaborates below:

I've definitely been super influenced by my experience with student government and all the programming experiences that I've had. I'm currently a computer science major, and I'm strongly considering going into event management after graduation now. They are very unrelated, but I've been so influenced by my experience and I feel really passionate about this. My values have changed to a point where I value this kind of community

development. When I saw people at our events and every time somebody thanks me for what I do, I get really happy I came here. I'm so happy to see others influenced by my work. It makes me feel like this really makes a powerful impact on people's lives and bring a community together. It has really shaped my values and made me realize I want to be involved more in this type of community building.

Erin, a senior, from Pennsylvania, studying hospitality management, and serving as programming board chair, was inspired to apply to graduate programs in higher education after attending a conference for programming board leaders. When she no longer found a connection to her major, she found a connection in her role as a tradition builder. She details the conference where the idea of a new future clicked below:

> I wanted to get as much out of it as I could again as a leader and at this point starting to think about my future. That conference [a regional conference for college programming board members] I think was the most life-changing experience for me throughout my involvement. That is what led me to come home and back to school and say, "Hey, I want to stay on the activities council for the rest of my life. How do I do that?" From there I began getting advice from mentors and my advisor which led me to start applying to graduate programs.

The Counter-Narratives

Some participants provided fascinating details into the endings of their journeys that differed from the rest of the data. While their experiences may not be typical, they are still essential to explore. One student shared her experiences as the first person to start many traditions at her young satellite campus, thus creating a "new normal" for her peers. Another

student withdrew entirely from all of his co-curricular involvements after having an extremely negative experience. Finally, one participant brought up being burnt out as a senior and needing a break from the traditions that filled his life in the past four years. Embracing this burn out and needing a break from campus was the main reason why he decided to search for graduate programs outside of his alma mater.

A new normal. Jackie, a senior, from South Korea, studying computer science, served as the first programming board chair at North University Middle East (NUME). Over her four years, Jackie started several tradition events on campus. As we spoke, she reflected on how her peers on campus felt like these traditions had been around for years and were part of the "new normal." Jackie shares below:

> I was sitting there reflecting and wow! This was my sixth student group leadership training during my four years on campus. That was really big because I don't think anyone else has ever been to that many. For me, being one of the few who were there at the beginning of programming board, to this semester, so much has changed. Just seeing all these changes and thinking back to how it used to be before, it almost seems impossible. It almost seems as if right now, the way it is, is so normal. I catch people actually saying: "Wait what? This is the first year of programming board? How come we never used to have this?" I don't know. Nobody really thought it was a necessary thing, although it seems so normal now. It's really fun thinking about how far we've come as group and as an institution.

Feeling powerless. Steven, a senior, from Illinois, studying physics, was heavily involved on campus in numerous co-curricular organizations. His major involvements included a fraternity, a spirit group, and a traditional philanthropic organization. In one of the most

powerful interviews of this study, Steven detailed how he encountered a clash between what one of his organizations said it valued and what was practiced. He chronicles the event below:

> Several years before my joining, our fraternity hosted many major traditional events that students looked forward to every year. After one of the events, a brother was pulled over for a DUI, wearing his pin and sharing that he had received the alcohol at an event that we had hosted. So, the organization got in a ton of trouble with the university, which it deserved after breaking so many university rules. During the re-colonization, I was the acting pledge class president and the national organization wanted me to help build a foundation for the chapter's resurgence. I was excited to be a part of the rebuilding of these traditions in an appropriate way. I was asked to fly to Los Angeles to defend the chapter to help us not get our charter revoked. I don't know why it wasn't, to be honest. It was the most intense, stressful, and kind of stupid experience of my college years. We were given probation status, but worst of it all, I had to meet with the Grand Master of the national organization. He was really stuck in the old ways of doing things. He wanted to haze people since he got hazed and I didn't get along with that. To me, he was the epitome of what fraternities shouldn't be. So yeah, that experience made me grow distant. I was really disheartened from the national organization's actions. There were zero developmental components, and it felt like they were just making sure we weren't an insurance liability. It just gave me a very bad taste in my mouth for national fraternity organizations. I removed myself from the chapter and a few months later the chapter's charter was fully revoked.

The clash between Steven and the national organization illustrates what can happen with an imbalance of power. His organization's leadership was passing down toxic beliefs that created

unsafe expectations and experiences for new members. There was an essence of fear of "standing up" to the organizational leadership which led to Steven and his fellow new members doing things they were uncomfortable with. This fear ultimately led to Steven reflecting on his personal values and withdrawing completely from the organization. When talking about what he learned from dropping his involvements, Steven shared his values were clarified and confirmed:

> I was going to say, it made me at least figure out who I wanted to be more. The fact that I was drawn to an organization because of the values and then I decided to leave because it wasn't living those values. Yeah, it definitely made me realize who I was.

From Steven's experience, it was evident that traditions still are used as vehicles to pass power between generations. While many may view traditions as powerful tools to foster inclusion, they also can be used to pass down exclusionary ideals. Caleb also

Burnout. After doing traditions work all four years of his undergraduate experience, Caleb, a senior, from Texas, double majoring in exercise science and biology, discussed his need to take a break. In some of his organizations, he felt like the younger students were looking at him like the "old guy in the back of the room" proclaiming how things used to be any time the organization looked at change. Below, he details how he went alumni status with his fraternity to step away from those perceptions:

> For me, I need a break from some of the student organizations at South Central. My work with Traditions Council is over. Actually, I went alumni with my fraternity this semester. Just, some stuff happened last semester, and I didn't feel super welcome anymore. I felt like I was that old guy in the back of the room, everybody's perceiving me always saying like "Oh, well we've always done it this way." Even though I was explaining why we

can't tweak a tradition a certain way, why the other way is against the rules, or how it's going to harm the organization in the long run.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I explored the three pillars of the developmental journeys of campus tradition builders proposed by this research study and inspired by the Standard Life Story Interview. These pillars included initiations, flashbulb memories, and graduations. Emergent themes were defined through the examination of the unique, lived experiences of 16 tradition builders. Beginning themes surrounded random versus intentional initiations, being introduced to traditions by gatekeepers, or experiencing a tradition as an outsider at first. Flashbulb memory themes emerged around relationships, identity, and challenges. With graduation themes focusing on changes in future career plans, craving comfort and community, and leadership. All of these themes led to two primary outcomes, either needing a break or maintaining a connection. Participant quotes added rich detail to their narratives and their experiences relating to each theme.

In Chapter 5, I will discuss the results of the study and how they may contribute to theory and practice in higher education. Recommendations for future research will also be outlined, as well as this study's limitations.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I will discuss my findings related to the research question: What are the developmental journeys of campus tradition builders? This chapter will share how this study contributes to both theory and practice in higher education. Implications for both further research and practice will also be discussed. Limitations will also be covered.

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore the developmental journeys of campus tradition builders through a qualitative, narrative-interview based method. The primary source of data was from semi-structured, one-on-one interviews. To spark their reflection, participants were given a Story Mapping Reflection Exercise (Appendix B) to fill out before their interview.

Both the Story Mapping Exercise and the interview protocol were based on the Standard Life Story Interview (McAdams & Guo, 2014). To analyze the data, I coded transcripts using the three key pillars of developmental journeys: initiations, flashbulb memories, and graduations. Themes that emerged were compiled and defined using thick description and participant quotations when possible. Participant initiations could be classified as either random or intentional. Themes surrounding tradition builder initiations included: First experiencing a tradition as an outsider and being inspired by a gatekeeper. Flashbulb memory themes encompassed: relationships, identity formation, and the unique challenges encountered by the participants. Finally, themes emerging around graduations included: craving comfort and community, an increase in leadership, and focus on future careers. Participants also either planned to maintain connection to their group/institution or shared they would seek out a break from their connection.

Findings from particularly counter-narratives were also examined to share the diverse experiences of campus tradition builders. It is important to note these counter-narratives may not fit with the themes described in this manuscript. These counter-narratives play a vital role in helping us understand the experiences of campus tradition builders cannot be rigidly defined.

Discussion of Findings

Higher education institutions have a multitude of campus traditions being repeated and honored by generations of students, faculty, staff, and alumni (Manning, 2000). In reviewing the existing literature on campus traditions, much of the past research focuses on the role of these traditions on campuses (Manning, 1994), their ability to connect students to campus (Cheng, 2004) and develop institutional pride and loyalty (Helgesen & Nesset, 2007). From reading the literature, it would appear students who get involved in traditions work would experience similar journeys as student leaders who pursue other involvement opportunities.

The climate of higher education today welcomes an increasingly diverse group of students to campuses across the United States, including first-generation, non-traditional, commuter, and online populations (Payne, Hodges, & Hernandez, 2017). This study examines the developmental journeys of a diverse group of undergraduate tradition builders from institutions across the country and their international satellite campuses. Despite the different cases studied, clear themes were seen surrounding three pillars of participant journeys. These pillars included initiations, flashbulb memories, and graduations. While there were common themes that emerged in each pillar, there were also counter-narratives that emerged which also painted a vivid picture of the experiences of some students.

Exploration of tradition builder's journeys using a narrative identity lens helped shed light on how these unique experiences impact participant identity development. Once the

tradition builders filtered their experience through a narrative lens, they were able to reflect and make use of the narratives they created. It was evident that these student leaders enjoyed reflecting on their experiences as tradition builders and that this study's guided reflection was used as a tool for participants to learn more about themselves. Similar to how McAdams (2013) frames Narrative Identity, participants in this study drew inferences from their stories. These inferences helped participants form meaning making and framed their self-relevance, the nature of their actions, their values, and future goals. This meaning making was internalized and continues to evolve every day (Singer, 2004). Participants were able to convey how they viewed themselves as tradition builders currently, in the past, and where they view themselves in the future. Reflecting on flashbulb memories particularly allowed participants to construct and internalize their life stories. These storied parallel Erikson's key identity questions of Who am I? How did I come to be? and Where is my life going?

Traditions as Punctuations in Life

This study parallels Manning's (1994) theory of traditions serving as important punctuations in a person's life. Participants interviewed in this study were able to clearly recall and paint vivid narratives of events that often happened several years ago. Participants described traditions with words such as: vital, pivotal, important, critical, and exciting. It was evident many campus traditions were particularly memorable for participants. Both positive and negative, these memories will likely remain over the years, as tradition builders all found them remarkably memorable.

Varied Initiations

Findings surrounding tradition builder initiations point to various inspirations leading to participant involvement in campus traditions. Often, participants randomly encountered a

tradition on campus and first experienced as an outsider. Other instances, participants intentionally sought out their tradition experiences. Despite random initiations, tradition builders often became extremely passionate about these traditions.

Some participants referenced their peers not feeling as strongly about campus traditions. This finding is congruent with Manning (1994) who shared some students may find traditions corny and stupid, driving them from further involvement. Some participants echoed similar feelings, ultimately citing a lack of community or school spirit as a driver for their desire to build campus traditions. These findings were also paralleled in Manning's previous research (1994).

The Importance of Gatekeepers and Networks

Gatekeepers emerged as essential stakeholders in campus tradition builder journeys. These gatekeepers were current students or staff who had prior knowledge or firsthand experience with a particular tradition. They often inspired commitment by personally inviting participants to join a pre-existing network or to get further involved. Similar to findings by Cowley and Waller (1979), gatekeepers were found to be vital in passing down traditions between one generation to the next. Older students continue to play a role in shaping the experiences of future students (Cowley & Waller, 1979) and behavioral norms are still transmitted between generations (Manning, 1994). While none of the participants in this study spoke of indoctrination in their responses, it is evident it still exists as a form of social control on college campuses today. University life continues to be shaped and reshaped (Cowley & Waller, 1979) by modern tradition builders, impacting the existing networks, and allowing new ones to form constantly.

Gatekeepers also played a significant role in the flashbulb memories that were shared in this study. Participants discussed key relationships with mentors, advisors, or administrators who

helped them along their journey. Many participants shared their role as a tradition builder lead to a personal relationship with upper-level administrators, including college presidents, deans, and vice-presidents.

Community

Much of the research surrounding campus traditions discusses their impact on the campus community (Bronner, 1990, 2011, 2012; Cheng, 2004, Manning, 1994; Van Jura, 2010). This study's themes parallel past findings where traditions were found to positively impact community. Participants shared the importance of continuing traditions which had been established long before their arrivals to campus. Data from this study also confirm Cheng's (2004) findings that traditions exponentially impact their institution's sense of community, heritage and history. The experiences of Jackie and Elena particularly confirm Cheng's belief that establishing new traditions can be a way to connect diverse populations. They each expressed the power of new traditions to connect peers at a young institution, especially when tradition and school spirit was lacking without an established programming board.

Identity

Tradition builders were able to reflect on their experiences and articulate the impacts these experiences had on their personal development. Participants often shared about personal growth and their identity exploration prior to being asked to discuss these topics. This study found building traditions often led participants to feel a part of something bigger than themselves. An overwhelming majority of participants also shared sharp increases in their confidence and ability to reflect. Participant responses confirmed their stories could be used to raise spirits, guide actions, and influence others (Singer, 2004). Parallel to McAdams and Guo's

(2014) findings, this study posits most participants better understand their identities also better understand where they are heading in the future.

High Risk and Difficult to Manage

Although his experience varied considerably from the experiences of other participants in this study, Steven's negative experience with campus traditions confirms Van Jura's (2010) findings about the high risks traditions can pose. While celebrating a major campus event, Steven's peers were arrested, ultimately starting his arduous journey to clean up the mess. Despite a year of trying to pick up the pieces shattered by one unfortunate night, Steven's organization was dissolved soon after. Steven's conduct record on campus was permanently blemished, and he had to spend countless hours meeting with administrators on campus. He even traveled across the country to meet with representatives from the national organization. Although student affairs staff are often tasked with overseeing major campus traditions (Sandeen, 1991), undergraduates often are stuck doing most of the legwork. Steven's experience confirms traditions today can be difficult to manage and often pose risks to student health and safety.

<div align="center">

Implications for Further Research

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There are numerous directions for future research of campus traditions in higher education. When compiling literature for this study it was evident that there is a lack of peer-reviewed, empirical research about campus traditions in higher education. This study answered Manning's (1989) call for researchers to further explore campus traditions and their impact on different types of institutions, however, there is still room for work to be done to learn more about the impact traditions have on student development.

A replication of this study but allowing young alumni to reflect on their experiences as past tradition builders could also be interesting. Utilizing narrative interviews similar to the

current study as methods for a longitudinal study could also provide fascinating data to compliment this study's findings. This would give additional insight into the experiences of campus tradition builders while they are actively undergoing their formative experiences. My study could be replicated again but with a focus on young alumni. When seeking participants for this study, I had many student affairs colleagues nominate young alumni as ideal participants. I had to make a cognizant decision to omit them from this study. However, it would be interesting to examine how impactful alumni view their experiences as undergraduate tradition builders.

It would also be interesting to further explore the emerging concept of tradition gatekeepers. A phenomenological exploration of the experiences of upperclassmen or student affairs professionals that serve as gatekeepers could yield important findings. Learning their experiences could help future gatekeepers be identified and indicate areas where additional training could be meaningful. Identifying gatekeepers early on could help build a pipeline of future student affairs professionals, as many participants in the current study indicated they would like to pursue a career in higher education.

A case study examining multiple types of traditions on a single campus could shed light on if developmental experiences differ based on type of tradition. The current study primarily examined the experiences of students at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) and Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs). Further research on other types of campuses would provide a more robust idea of the impact of traditions. A study focusing on tradition-heavy Historically Black College and Universities (HBCUs) would be of particular interest. Further studies around campus traditions in general would also be merited. A study examining the inclusiveness of traditions today would be beneficial in understanding how traditions should be shaped to be more inclusive moving forward.

Implications for Practice

This study has numerous implications for practice in higher education. First, institutions need to recognize campus traditions as impactful on student development. Traditions should be embraced and promoted on campus as vehicles that may facilitate student development, improve connection to campus, and can build community. It is important for administrators to support traditions, as traditions embraced by both students and administration are more powerful.

Traditions should be recognized as impactful and they often serve as punctuations in a student's story. Regardless of if they consider themselves tradition builders or not, participants in this study recognized the importance of traditions. Students may gain valuable leadership experiences and are able to lead peers in ways other involvement opportunities may miss. Tradition builders may vividly remember these events as flashbulb memories for the rest of their lives. These flashbulb memories existed in each participant's experience, despite diverse differences in their background and institutional types.

Higher education administrators must also recognize the history, power, and expectations that are passed down between generations of students through traditions. It is vital higher education professionals understand the organic experiences and power transmitted by gatekeepers to future generations. Student activities staff members should be able to identify who the key tradition builders on their campuses. Administrators may also benefit from identifying the existing gatekeepers on campus and training them to be more effective. Training upperclassmen and student affairs professionals who work closely with campus traditions in student development may yield positive results.

Finally, this study calls for institutions to evaluate their traditions continuously. Constant reflection allows institutions to examine whether or not traditions continue to communicate their

current values. Constant reflection is critical, as modern institutions are changing frequently. Without reflection and evaluation, a tradition can become outdated and may even put students at risk of experiencing danger. While stigmas and knee-jerk responses to changing traditions are usually negative, this study shows participants often value appropriate changes to traditions in hindsight. Institutions should embrace this finding and administrators should use it as a call to action and examine their traditions. Unsafe and non-inclusive traditions that may contradict the university's mission or vision should be re-evaluated or eliminated. Traditions that add to the community and connect students to campus should be celebrated and promoted. Studying traditions allows institutions to ensure their communities are relevant and inclusive.

Limitations

This study was not without limitations. Perhaps the most glaring has to do with studying traditions themselves. Traditions in higher education are as numerous and as diverse as the campuses they exist on. What some may consider a tradition on one campus, others may dismiss as a non-factor.

Several limitations must be considered surrounding the researcher. As a student affairs professional who has been working closely with traditions, as well as the students who build them for years, researcher bias must be recognized. The subjective nature of narrative interviews must also be considered, and despite using *epoché* to minimize bias, results from this study are framed through my lens as the researcher.

Limitations surrounding the participants in this study also exist. Volunteer bias may have been a factor, as students who are highly involved in tradition building may be more likely to volunteer a positive experience for the study. History may have impacted the participant's ability to reflect on events that happened years ago. Participant honesty may also have been a limitation,

as there is no guarantee they were honest in their responses during the interview. Extraneous variables may also exist. For example, a participant may have been impacted by other involvements outside of their scope of working as a tradition builder.

Conclusion

In closing, the developmental journeys of campus tradition builders are nuanced, diverse, and impactful. The Standard Life Story Interview provided a framework to explore the many narratives participants shared in this study. Themes emerged around the three key pillars examined in this study, including initiations, flashbulb memories, and graduations. Initiations were often random but also intentional. Flashbulb memories revolved around relationships with mentors and administration, exploring identity, and significant challenges tradition builders experienced along their journeys. Graduations shared were often bittersweet, and many participants described them as releases. In looking to the future, participants hoped to maintain their connection with their organization or institution, or they needed a break from their traditions work. This study offers an opportunity and call to action for higher education administrators to reconsider the role traditions play on today's college campuses and in the lives of their students.

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APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT PROFILES

Pseudonym	Demographic Information	Institution Information
Anthony	- Junior - African American - Male - From Michigan - Computer science major - Orientation leader, spirit group	- Midwest State University - Public, state, research university in the Midwest - Rural campus - Predominately white institution 15,000-20,000 undergraduates
Caleb	- Senior - White - Male - From Texas - Double major: Exercise science and biology - Fraternity, Traditions Council - Wants to go to med school	- South Central University - Public, state, doctoral university in the south - Urban campus - Predominately white institution 10,000-15,000 students
Caroline	- Senior - White - Female - From Minnesota - Communications studies major, marketing minor - Homecoming planning committee, peer advisor, orientation leader, tour guide - Received offer to work in admissions at alma mater - Over 30 relatives went to NSU	- North State University - Public university in the Midwest - Urban campus - Predominately white institution 15,000-20,000 undergraduates
Chloe	- Senior - White - Female - From Ohio - Special education major - Club volleyball and spirit group - Wants to become a special education teacher	- Midwest State University - Public, state, research university in the Midwest - Rural campus - Predominately white institution 15,000-20,000 undergraduates
Elena	- Senior - Multiple races - Female - From Macedonia	North University Middle East

	• Biology major • Wanted to go to an American university but didn't want to go far. • Student government • Wants to work abroad doing research in genetics	• Public, liberal arts, science university in the Middle East • International satellite campus of US institution • Less than 2,000 undergraduates
Erin	• Senior • White • Female • From Pennsylvania • Hospitality management major • Programming board, student government, senior class gift committee • Pursuing masters in higher education next year	• Red University • Private, liberal arts, doctoral/professional university in the southeast • Suburban campus • Predominately white institution • 5,000-10,000 undergraduates
Jackie	• Senior • Asian • Female • From South Korea but also lived in U.S. briefly • Computer science major • Programming board, Korean cultural club, student government • Wants to pursue a career in event management	• North University Middle East • Public, liberal arts, science university in the Middle East • International satellite campus of US institution • Less than 2,000 undergraduates
Kyle	• Sophomore • White • Male • From Ohio • Psychology major • Spirit group and fraternity • Not sure post-graduation steps yet	• Midwest State University • Public, state, research university in the Midwest • Rural campus • Predominately white institution • 15,000-20,000 undergraduates
Madalyn	• Junior • White • Female • From Texas • Business major • Class councils, student government officer, tap club member	• Green College • Private baccalaureate women's college in the southeast • Suburban campus • Predominately white institution • < 2,000 undergraduates

	• Excited to get a job in business	
Naomi	• Sophomore • African American • Female • From Virginia • Nursing major • First generation college student • Homecoming Planning Committee • Wants to go to nursing school	• Central State University • Public, state, doctoral, research university on the east coast • Rural campus • Minority serving institution • 20,000-25,000 students
Olivia	• Sophomore • White • Female • From Germany and also lived in Delaware • Public relations major, minors in communications and biology • Spirit group, Public Relations Society, media and communications organization • Excited to get a job after college, get married, and start a family	• Midwest State University • Public, state, research university in the Midwest • Rural campus • Predominately white institution • 15,000-20,000 undergraduates
Shannon	• Senior • White • Female • From Ohio • Started as an education major, switched to exercise science • Spirit group • Going to pursue a doctorate in physical therapy next year. Was recently accepted into a program.	• Midwest State University • Public, state, research university in the Midwest • Rural campus • Predominately white institution • 15,000-20,000 undergraduates
Sophia	• Senior • Hispanic • Female • From Texas • Human resources major • Traditions council • Excited to graduate and find a job in her career	• Public university in the south • Rural campus • Predominately white institution • 10,000-15,000 undergraduates
Steven	• Senior • White	• Orange University

	• Male • From Illinois • Physics and astronomy major • Fraternity and spirit group • Planning to do research in physics	• Private, research, doctoral university in the northeast • Suburban campus • Predominately white institution • 5,000-10,000 undergraduates
Victor	• Senior • White • Male • From Ohio • Intelligence studies major • Student government, programming board, tour guide • Going to graduate school next year	• Blue University • Private, liberal arts university in the northeast • Suburban campus • Predominately white institution • 2,500-5,000 undergraduates
Xavier	• Senior • African American • Male • From Virginia • Political science major • First generation college student • Student Government Association • Wants to go to graduate school for higher education	• Central State University • Public, state, doctoral, research university on the east coast • Rural campus • Minority serving institution • 20,000-25,000 students

APPENDIX B: STORY MAP REFLECTION EXERCISE

Please reflect on your experiences as a tradition builder and college student. Think of your journey as a tradition builder as a story and use this story map to share your experiences.

A story map is a strategy that uses a graphic organizer to facilitate reflection on the elements of a story. Reflection is guided by identifying key pieces of the story, including characters, plot, setting, problems and solutions.

Please fill out the graphic organizer below. You may use bullets or write in any way you feel comfortable. Feel free to share as much as you would like. All names and other details will be changed to protect participant anonymity.

Main Characters:

Support Characters:

Setting (Time, Place, etc.):

Plot – What are the chapters in your story?

High point(s):

Low Point(s):

Key theme(s) that run through the story:

Future – What does the next chapter look like?:

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

This interview will be modeled after a Structured Life Story Interview. Think of your experiences as if they were a book. What would the chapters be? What are the key scenes, high/low points, and challenges? Be sure to share all aspects of your journey, positive and negative. Remember, there are no wrong answers here, this is your story!

Introduction Questions:

1. Tell me about going to school at your institution. Why did you choose this institution?

Beginnings, Setting, Context:

2. Please tell me the story of your journey a tradition builder.

3. What are the key scenes that make up your experience?

4. Who are the influential characters in your journey?

5. How/why did you decide to get involved with traditions?

Key Moments:

6. What would define as the "high point" or greatest/happiest moment in your story?

7. What would you define as the "low point" or worst/unhappiest moment in your story?

8. Was there a turning point, or moment of significant change or transition in the story?

9. What was the biggest challenge you encountered in your journey?

Outcomes and Reflection:

10. How do you feel you have changed as a result of this journey?

11. What does the next chapter of your story look like?

12. How do you feel your journey as a tradition builder has impacted you personally?

13. Thinking back over our discussion, do you see a theme or motif that runs throughout the story? What might that theme be?

14. How was this interview for you?

APPENDIX D: IRB APPROVAL MEMO

OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY

OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT FOR RESEARCH

Physical Address
4111 Monarch Way, Suite 203
Norfolk, Virginia 23508
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Office of Research
1 Old Dominion University
Norfolk, Virginia 23529
Phone(757) 683-3460
Fax(757) 683-5902

DATE: December 9, 2018

TO: Chris R. Glass, PhD
FROM: Old Dominion University Education Human Subjects Review Committee

PROJECT TITLE: [1350625-1] Exploring the developmental journeys of campus tradition builders
REFERENCE #:
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS
DECISION DATE: December 9, 2018

REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption category # *6.2*

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The Old Dominion University Education Human Subjects Review Committee has determined this project is EXEMPT FROM IRB REVIEW according to federal regulations.

We will retain a copy of this correspondence within our records.

If you have any questions, please contact Laura Chezan at (757) 683-7055 or lchezan@odu.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Old Dominion University Education Human Subjects Review Committee's records.

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VITA

PRESTON SCOTT REILLY

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EDUCATION

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY, HIGHER EDUCATION   **SPRING 2019**
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MASTER OF SCIENCE, HIGHER EDUCATION   **MAY 2011**
FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY   *Tallahassee, FL*

BACHELOR OF ARTS, PSYCHOLOGY – MINOR SOCIOLOGY   **MAY 2009**
BOWLING GREEN STATE UNIVERSITY   *Bowling Green, OH*

SUMMARY OF WORK EXPERIENCE

Doctoral Graduate Assistant, Old Dominion University   06/2016 – Present
Activities and Spirit Coordinator, Mercyhurst University   02/2012 – 05/2016
Co-Curricular Assessment Coordinator, Mercyhurst University 02/2014 – 05/2016
Graduate Assistant, Florida State University   08/2009 – 07/2011

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

- Stansberry, D., Reilly, P., Harris, N., Villacorta, L., (2018, Summer). "Starting the conversation: Best practices for programing towards male students." *NASPA Men and Masculinities Knowledge Community Newsletter.*
- Reilly, P., Stansberry, D., Ndandula, R. (2017, March). *"A collaborative effort to support special population students." NASPA National Conference*, San Antonio, TX.
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