Linking Burnout and Epistemology in Community Activists: 
Towards a Better Understanding of the Psychological Factors 
that Put Adults At-Risk of Burning Out 

by 

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ABSTRACT

Burnout. It has been described as "the disease of modern life." And rightly so. In light of some of the principles of constructivist developmental psychology, burnout can be-- or perhaps should be-- seen as a negative consequence of an extreme cognitive mismatch: that of an individual's internal meaning-making system and her environment's cognitive demands. This thesis sheds light on the cause(s) of burnout by examining the ways "burned-out" and "still-energized" adults deal with the dis-ease of modern living. More specifically, it uses Robert Kegan's "Orders of Consciousness" to explore how community activists construct meaning in light of the increasing complexity of the mental demands of modern life.

The central hypothesis of this paper is-- to use Kegan's subject-object vernacular-- that a person is more prone to burning-out if they deal with multiple (n)th order demands while operating in an (n-1) order of consciousness. Thus, this paper shows 1) that front-line urban professionals operate in a work environment that is densely packed with 4th order demands; and 2) that these activists are more prone to burning-out if they deal with the above demands while operating in the 3rd order of consciousness.

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My most heartfelt thanks go out to what the literature would call my support network. I call them my family and friends. Thank you Mom, Helen, Pay, Juliet, Craig, "Corinne," Sep, Sasha, Tony, and my family-away-from-home: Homer, Marge, Bart, Lisa, Maggie, Grampa and the rest of 5-West. I love you all. Except for the guys.
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INTRODUCTION

In the much larger picture, the term "burnout" had its 15 minutes of fame in the mid- to late-1980s. Ten years prior to that heyday, there was very little public discourse on the topic. As Maslach writes,

The first articles appeared in the mid-1970s, and although they were few in number and scattered among lesser known publications, they generated an enthusiastic response. Interest in the topic mushroomed, and with all the writing, teaching, and consulting on burnout [in the 1980s], it became something of a small growth industry.¹

Now, nearly a decade later, the public and the media's fascination with this condition is all but history.²

That is not to say, however, that institutions have sufficiently responded to an incapacitating condition which still strikes many dedicated, committed members of the work force. This is especially true for the world of non-profits in general, and front-line community activism in particular. In these lines of work, burnout is more than just a brain drain; it is the continual loss of caring, compassionate, idealistic people.


² For the most part, current interest in this topic is confined to select academicians, therapists, and management consultants. The notable exception is the current/popular discourse on exhaustion (see LynNell Hancock's "Breaking Point" in Newsweek, March 6, 1995).
The Front-Line Urban Professional

The non-profit work world has lost a disproportionate number of its front-line urban professionals to less demanding work. People such as:

managers and tenant organizers who try to cope with crime, drugs, and social chaos in the context of public or community based housing; police... social workers... teachers in urban schools... youth workers... project managers in community and economic development programs... street-level welfare workers... staff who work in drug rehabilitation and detox centers... teachers and counselors who provide employment training (Keyes et al, 1995).

If these are the soldiers in the urban trenches, then the war is more than just against poverty, illiteracy, and injustice; and the costs are more than just simply not winning. The war is also against one's internal limits and the ultimate cost can be burnout-induced withdrawal; not just from the battle in the street, but also from the battle within.

If, as Maslach suggests, burnout is the cost of caring, then the world of non-profits can not afford to sit by idly. The front-line urban professional desperately needs her supporting institution(s) to understand what it means to support: she needs her managers to better understand what she is managing psychologically, and she needs her work-based training to be less informative and much more transformative.

By approaching burnout from the perspective of constructivist developmental psychology in general, and

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subject-object theory in particular, this paper hopes to contribute to that larger understanding.

**Framework for Analysis**

Chapter One develops a rough sketch of the burnout-prone individual by 1) compiling and examining definitional points of consensus in the literature; 2) thinking critically about how the literature deals with the causes of burnout; and 3) using Christina Maslach's Burnout Inventory as a case study of how the literature views the burnout-prone individual.

Chapter Two outlines the basics of a new, developmental lens through which to view burnout; focusing specifically on one particular framework: Robert Kegan's "Orders of Consciousness."

Chapter Three re-examines the picture that was painted of the burnout-prone individual in Chapter One, applying Kegan's subject-object framework to Maslach's findings. Herein the foundation is laid for this paper's working hypothesis: namely, that a person embedded in stage three is more at-risk of burning-out than a person at stage four.

Chapter Four outlines the proposed method for testing the aforementioned hypothesis. First, it justifies the study's focus on front-line urban professionals by showing that inner-city work as a profession provides a work environment that is densely packed with fourth order demands. Then, it explains the two measures which will be used to assess 1) the
activist's way of making meaning, and 2) their propensity to burning out. This is done by focusing first on the intricacies of subject-object interviews and interviewing; and then on the use and usefulness of the Energy Depletion Index.

Finally, Chapters Five and Six share the tests' findings, providing both a textual and numerical analysis to help further explore this paper's working hypothesis.
CHAPTER ONE: THE LITERATURE ON BURNOUT

With almost two decades of research on the topic, definitions of burnout abound. That is not to say, however, that some level of definitional consensus has not been reached. As Maslach suggests, there are similarities among the many definitions and "an analysis of these common threads may reveal a working definition of burnout that is shared by most people" (Paine, 1982).

This chapter develops a sketch of the burnout-prone individual by 1) compiling and examining definitional points of consensus in the literature; 2) thinking critically about how the literature deals with the causes of burnout; and 3) using Maslach’s Burnout Inventory as a case study of how the literature views the burnout-prone individual.

Definitions of Burnout

Some of the more widely accepted definitions of burnout include:

To deplete oneself. To exhaust one’s physical and mental resources. To wear oneself out.... (Freudenberger, 1980)

An exhaustion reaction characterized by physical depletion, by feelings of helplessness and hopelessness, by emotional drain, and by the development of negative self-concept and negative attitudes towards work, life, and other people. (Pines and Aronson, 1981)

A debilitating psychological condition brought about by unrelieved work stress which results in: 1) depleted energy reserves; 2) lowered resistance to illness; 3) increased dissatisfaction and pessimism; and 4) increased absenteeism and inefficiency at work. (Veninga and Spradley, 1981)
A syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment... (Maslach, 1982)

Burnout is a psychological strain which is marked by... physical depletion; emotional and mental exhaustion; chronic fatigue; feelings of disillusionment and hopelessness; accompanied, often, by negative attitudes towards oneself and others. (Etzion, 1987)

In these definitions, the "common threads" of which Maslach writes have to do with the condition's intimate connection to exhaustion, negative self-image, and depersonalization.

Another point of definitional consensus is how the literature breaks down the symptoms of burnout. Symptoms generally fall into one of three categories: physical, mental and/or emotional, and organizational. Physical symptoms include increased fatigue, sleep problems, substance abuse, and susceptibility to illness. Mental and/or emotional symptoms include increased aggression, cynicism, depression and isolation; and a loss of self-esteem and coping mechanisms. Organizational symptoms include higher levels of absenteeism and tardiness, accident proneness, job dissatisfaction, unprofessionalism, and decreased productivity.

Finally, two other recurring definitional themes arise which are significant to the larger purpose of this paper. The first is that the condition of burnout always begins at a psychological level and then manifests itself at the physical, emotional and/or organizational level; implying that the source is, at least partly, a psychological one (Crowley, 1989). The second theme is that burnout is a progressive
condition, meaning that a person experiences burnout gradually (i.e., over a period of weeks, months, or years). In other words, she doesn’t wake up one day to find herself suddenly and mysteriously "completely burned-out."

Suggested Causes of Burnout

While the literature has very adequately described the physical and psychological symptoms of burnout-- and has even reached some level of agreement as to the basics\(^4\)-- it has failed to reach a similar consensus on the cause(s) of burnout. Some of the seemingly competing theories\(^5\) which explain the sources of burnout include:

- excessive striving to reach some unrealistic expectation imposed by oneself or by the values of society. (Freudenberger, 1980)

- constant or repeated emotional pressure associated with an intense involvement with people over long periods of time. (Pines and Aronson, 1981)

- a condition that occurs among individuals who do "people work" of some kind. (Maslach, 1982)

- an exhaustion born of excessive demands which may be self-imposed or externally imposed by families, jobs, friends, lovers, value systems, or society, which deplete one’s energy, coping mechanisms, and internal resources. (Freudenberger and North, 1985)

There is consensus here-- at least on the most general level--

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\(^4\) The term "basics" here refers to definitional issues. See Maslach’s "Understanding Burnout: Definitional Issues in Analyzing a Complex Phenomenon" in Paine (1982).

\(^5\) The term "seemingly competing theories" is used here because of the implications of subject-object theory (see Chapters 2, 3).
in that burned-out individuals (as described above) all fail to meet a set of demands that are imposed on them either internally (i.e., set by self) or externally (i.e., set by surround). After this point of agreement, however, there is little similarity. The literature tends to divide the cause(s) of burnout into several categories: individual, interpersonal, workplace and organizational.

Individual and Interpersonal

A lot of the early research in burnout asserts that the primary source of work-based depression is psychological loss. The idea is that "all change involves loss of some type" (McLean, 1979), and that "all change = psychological loss = anger = depression" (Johnson, 1981). As Klerman (1979) writes, the limits to these "loss" theories are:

1) loss and separation are not antecedent events in all clinical depressions;

2) not all individuals who are exposed to loss, separation, or dissolution of attachment bonds become depressed; and

3) loss, separation, and disruption are not specific to depression.

These critiques notwithstanding, the remedy to burnout--given this particular reading--involves spending time in therapy,

6 Before Herbert Freudenberger used the term "burnout" in his milestone works, "Staff Burnout" (1974) and Burn-out: The High Cost of Achievement (1980), the literature used more specific terms like job stress and work-based depression. These conditions later became part and parcel of the literature's working definition of burnout.
by oneself, and/or with "healthy" friends and family (Watkins 1983).

The transitional bridge from this school of thought to the next is represented by Lattanzi (1981) who suggests that burnout mostly affects:

...individuals who are often idealistic and have a high need for job-satisfaction and self-actualization. The vision or desire to make things better versus helplessness and situational reality can result in insidious loss....

While this school doesn't focus exclusively on issues of psychological loss, it does link the propensity to burnout with either the "Type A Personality," described as hard driving, persistent, and overly involved with work (Freudenberger, 1974; Watkins, 1982); or a "Pollyannish personality," described as foolishly or blindly optimistic (Matlin and Stang, 1978; Edelwich and Brodsky, 1980).

To this second school, the most susceptible to burnout is either the workaholic who can't move away from her problem and thus can't develop perspective (Boronson, 1976) or the young idealist who sets unrealistic goals and then overinvests himself (Veninga, 1979). Strangely, the treatment for burnout--given this second reading--also involves getting help (i.e., therapy), taking a vacation, and/or socializing (McConnell, 1981).

Why is this "strange"? It is particularly significant to

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7 The differing "schools of thought" which are discussed here are mostly a consequence of the historical development of the term "burnout." See the last footnote.
the purpose of this paper that regardless of the suggested cause(s) of burnout, the literature’s suggested treatments for burnout remains the same. This could imply a more tenuous correlation between these given causes and THE cure (see page 14).

If this paper’s hypothesis prove to be true-- and there is a significant, correlative link between a person’s meaning-making system and their tendency to burnout-- then burnout itself can be viewed as a kind of learned helplessness: a condition which requires treatments much like those prescribed for burnout.

**Workplace and Organizational**

At the organizational level, a key distinction is made in the literature between tedium and burnout. The former is the result of any prolonged chronic pressures; it is the result of having too many negative and too few positive features in one’s environment-- too many pressures, conflicts, and demands, combined with too few acknowledgements and meaningful accomplishments. (Pines and Aronson, 1981)

The latter term-- burnout-- is limited by this portion of the literature to mean a condition resulting from constant or repeated emotional pressure associated with an intense involvement with people over long periods of time. Such involvement is particularly prevalent in all human-service professions. (Pines and Aronson, 1981)

Thus, burnout is linked to doing "people work," while tedium is linked with work overload, poor working conditions, unsatisfactory work relationships, and the lack of variety,
autonomy, self-actualization and success (Kanner, Kafry, and Pines, 1978; Cooper, Mallinger, and Kahn, 1978). Organizational remedies for tedium include actions like reducing client-staff ratios, limiting the number of hours one works, making office policy more flexible, promoting a team approach and/or the ever popular - vacation (Sammons, 1980).8

In thinking critically about these issues, it both reassures and alarms me that regardless of how these "competing" schools define the burnout problem-- or, more specifically, define the cause and/or source of burnout-- all suggest the same solutions. This reassures me on one level in that it implies that these solutions are the "tried-and-true" treatments for burnout (regardless of what causes it). On another level, however, I'm alarmed that no one is explaining the problem in a way that justifies the solution.9 This might

8 An interesting side-note is that developmental psychology generally divides personal growth into three separate lines: cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. This last subsection of the literature on organizational burnout unintentionally divides along similar lines. Here, the term burnout is linked to interpersonal issues, while the word tedium refers to issues that are more intrapersonal and cognitive. This helps explain why organizational remedies (for tedium) differ slightly from the two treatments (for burnout) previously discussed.

9 In the Dark Ages, rats were carriers of bubonic plague. Scientists of the time saw a correlative link between the incidence of the plague and high cat populations and came to the erroneous conclusion that cats caused the plague. After they wiped out the entire cat population, the rats (and the plague) overran the cities. If one were to think of burnout in the same terms, one could argue that the literature today (at the very least) recognizes that the cat is an effective remedy. There is nothing in the literature, however, that points the finger at the rat!
imply that there is a significant gap both between theory and practice, and between academics and practitioners.

Examining the Burnout-Prone Individual: Maslach’s Burnout Inventory as Case Study

Perhaps the best example of how the literature "puts together" all this information or "constructs" a picture of the burnout-prone individual is Christina Maslach’s *Burnout: The Cost of Caring* (1982). A result of ten years of research and thousands of interviews, *Burnout* contains a detailed list of demographic and personality traits that can be attributed to the burnout-prone individual.

The following is Crowley’s (1989) summary of Maslach’s demographic findings:

**AGE**
Burnout is greatest when people are young, and lower for older workers. With increased age, people are more stable, more mature, have a more balanced perspective on life, and are less prone to the excesses of burnout.

**MARITAL/FAMILY STATUS**
Workers who are single experience the most burnout, while those who are married experience the least. Burnout is least common for professionals with families.

**GENDER**
Overall, men and women are fairly similar in their experience of burnout. Women tend to experience more emotional exhaustion than men. However, men are more likely to have depersonalized and callous feelings about the people with whom they work.

**EDUCATION**
In general, the greatest amount of burnout is found among providers who have completed college, but have not had any post-graduate training.

Crowley also combined Maslach’s findings with those of
Freudenberg and came up with the following list of personality traits that are characteristically linked with the burnout-prone individual:

POOR SELF-CONCEPT
Low self-esteem, low self-concept, need to define self through others.

STRONG NEED FOR APPROVAL
Tries to establish sense of self-worth by winning approval and affection from others; dependent on whims and wishes of clients and colleagues; works hard to please others.

DIFFICULTY SETTING LIMITS
Unable to recognize personal limitations; feels responsible for success and failure of others; tends to over-identify with job, clients, professional role.

STRONG NEED TO ACHIEVE
Sets unrealistically high goals for self and others; views failure to reach goals as reflection of self-worth; goals are often vague and unclear. (Freudenberg only)

HIGH EMOTIONAL EMPATHY
Able to experience another person’s feelings vicariously; unable to detach self emotionally from situations.

IMPATIENT/IMPULSIVE STYLE
Easily angered by obstacles in path; may have difficulty controlling hostile impulses.

When it comes to personality sketches, it’s not a pretty picture; especially so when one considers that Maslach’s goal in writing *Burnout* was to "go beyond the fact that certain people do burn out and **discover just what kind of people they are**" (emphasis mine).

And what kind of people did they end up being? In Maslach’s words:

The burnout-prone individual is, first of all, someone

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who is weak and unassertive in dealing with people. Such a person is submissive, anxious, and fearful of involvement and has difficulty in setting limits within the helping relationship.... (emphasis mine)

The burnout-prone individual is also someone who is impatient and intolerant. Such a person will get easily angered and frustrated by any obstacles in his or her path and may have difficulty controlling any hostile impulses.... (emphasis mine)

The burnout-prone individual is someone who lacks self-confidence, has little ambition, and is more reserved and conventional. Such a person has neither a clearly defined set of goals nor the determination and self-assurance needed to achieve them. He or she acquiesces and adapts to the constraints of the situation, rather than confronting the challenges and being more forceful and enterprising. Faced with self-doubts this person tries to establish a sense of self worth by winning the approval and acceptance of other people.... (emphasis mine)

Perhaps the question here shouldn't be about "what kind of people they are." Perhaps the more appropriate question would be: what kind of a picture does the literature paint of the people who might suffer from this condition?

In fact, it is on this point that the emerging literature in developmental psychology has begun to critique the "punishing nature of the literature on burnout." Kegan (1994) argues that when the burnout-prone individual is described as lacking self worth, ambition, forcefulness, or "enterprisingness," the burnout literature is oblivious to the equally valid (alternative) assumption that these are values and actions "being evinced on behalf of a different construction of what is most important in the world."

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11 Ibid., pp.62-63.
Illustrations of Kegan’s point are presented in Chapter 3. But before one gets to that, one needs to understand his theoretical framework. To that end, chapter two outlines a refreshingly new, developmental lens through which to view burnout: namely, Kegan’s take on Piaget’s subject-object theory.
CHAPTER TWO: THE SUBJECT-OBJECT LITERATURE

There is a growing recognition that burnout is-- or perhaps could be-- very intimately linked with the increasing complexity of the mental demands of modern life. As Maslach herself suggests, more and more:

burnout is being used as a metaphor for some fundamental problems facing our society. The overwhelming stresses of life and the difficulties in coping with them, the failure to achieve one's goals, the dissatisfaction and malaise of the worker, the search for personal fulfillment and meaning in life.... (Paine, 1982)

It is within the context of this "search for meaning in life"-- or more succinctly, the search for a different way of making meaning in life-- that the emerging literature in developmental psychology has something to contribute to the understanding of burnout.

While the general literature in developmental psychology is filled with useful and applicable theoretical frameworks for a student of burnout (i.e., Loevinger's Ego Development, Levinson's Seasons in a Man's Life, Basseches' Dialectical Thinking and Adult Development), this chapter will focus specifically on only one: Robert Kegan's "Orders of Consciousness."¹²

Think of what follows as an outline of the basics of a new, developmental lens through which to view burnout.

¹² Kegan is not the only Neo-Piagetian subject-object theorist. Other notables include Carlsen (1988), Lahey, and Torbert (1987).
An Epistemological Framework

The three underlying points in Kegan's subject-object framework are:

1) that every individual is subject to an "epistemology" or "principle of meaning-coherence" at every point in their life;

2) that an individual's epistemology determines-- and to some extent, limits-- what they know and how they know it; and

3) that cognitive development is all about the gradual process of transforming what was once a system of knowing (subject) into the known (object).

To use such a framework effectively, one needs to understand the distinction between a system of knowing (what a person is subject to) and the elements that system organizes (what is object to that person).

One also needs to understand that every individual is subject to an unselfconscious epistemology: a metaphorical lens (subject) through which they see their world (object). It is important to note that the lens is unselfconscious, meaning that the individual is unaware that it exists; or

* FOR EXAMPLE *

Consider a young child who, like most, is subject to his impulse to eat cookies. Given what it means to be "subject to" something, the child has little (if any) choice in whether or not to follow the impulse. He simply eats the cookie. He is unaware that his impulse "has" him. There is no internal conversation about controlling this impulse.

Now consider a young adult who, like most, is subject to his perspective. He has little (if any) choice in whether or not live by this perspective or to see life through this "lens." Why? Because his perspective "has" him. He is subject to his lens.
more precisely, unaware of its level of complexity. This implies that the individual cannot "control" his own meaning-making system because he is subject to it. If he could "control" it, then it would be object to him.

As a person develops, their way of constructing meaning becomes more and more complex. And eventually, what was once subject to a person becomes object to them. At that point, however, they are subject to some newer, more complex epistemology. At that point, the individual's ongoing process of making what is subject into object begins anew.

The question which now remains pertains to the exact nature of these various cognitive stages or epistemologies. What follows are some descriptions of Kegan's "Orders of Consciousness."

Stages One and Two: The Pre-Adult Years

Stage 1 meaning makers-- children from roughly 2 to 6 years of age-- can recognize that objects and persons exist independent from their own sense of themselves. But, they
cannot separate their own perceptions of that object or person from its actual qualities. A stage 1 child, for instance, would not realize that his mother has a purpose independent of his own. He would not be able to take her point of view as distinct from his own.

Also, at this stage, a child is subject to his impulses, which means that he cannot distinguish himself from them. (Recall the earlier example of the child who was unable to make his impulses a part of his inner conversation.) Like Sesame Street's Cookie-Monster, a stage 1 meaning maker's world can be summarized in three simple steps to happiness: see cookie (outside stimulation), want cookie (internal sensation), do anything to get cookie.

The movement from stage 1 to stage 2 begins the moment a child starts to construct his own point of view and/or grant others their own distinct point of view. This transition is complete when the child is fully embedded in a single point of view. And, as with every shift into a more complex epistemology, what was subject in stage X becomes object in stage X+1.

So, a fully stage 2 child, for instance, now has a certain modicum of "control" over his impulses (which are object to him). Why? Because his impulses have become a part of his inner conversation and he can now distinguish them from himself.

The level of "control" the child exhibits over his
**STAGE ONE MEANING-MAKERS ARE:**

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<th>HOLD OBJECT:</th>
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<td>MOVEMENT</td>
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<td>Fantasy</td>
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**INTERPERSONALLY:**
- SOCIAL PERCEPTIONS

**INTRAPERSONALLY:**
- IMPULSES
- SENSATION

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**STAGE TWO MEANING-MAKERS ARE:**

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<tr>
<th>COGNITIVELY:</th>
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<td>CONCRETE</td>
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<td>Actuality, Data</td>
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<td>Cause-and-Effect</td>
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**INTERPERSONALLY:**
- POINT OF VIEW
  - SOCIAL **
  - Role-Concept
  - Simple Reciprocity
  - (tit-for-tat)

**INTRAPERSONALLY:**
- ENDURING DISPOSITIONS,
  - NEEDS, PREFERENCES
  - IMPULSES
  - Self Concept

From Kegan's *In Over Our Heads* (1994)

impulses is also effected by his newly acquired stage 2 subject-ness to the principle of cause-and-effect. A stage 2 child can now think to himself: "if I go for the cookie, I deal with Mom's wrath." But, given that the stage 2 child is now also subject to (and at the mercy of) his needs, plans, goals, and interests, the cute little Cookie Monster becomes the Cookie Strategist. And everyone (and everything) becomes a strategic pawn in fulfilling his needs, plans, goals, and interest.
Stage Three: Traditional Adulthood

The transition into stage 3 starts the moment a person is able to begin considering another person's independent view at the same time that she is taking into account her own. The movement is complete when that person fully internalizes the other's point of view in the co-construction of personal experience.13

Stage three allows for a variety of new capacities: a more internal identification with and understanding of another's situations, feelings, and motives; a more meaningful sharing than at the transactive level; and an awareness of shared passions, agreements, and expectations that take primacy over individual interests. Thus, at this stage, the Cookie Strategist becomes the Cookie Empath, finally able to understand and perhaps even relate to "where Mom is coming from."

With these newly acquired skills come several powerful new limiters:

the cognitive inability to systematically test hypotheses (which makes the individual subject to his assumptions);

the inability to construct a generalized system of interpersonal relations (which makes the individual subject to his mutuality/interpersonalism); and

the inability to distinguish oneself from one's relationships (which makes the individual subject to his inner states).

13 "Co-construction" means that a person constructs a way of meaning-making that is based on another person's life experiences. Adolescents, for example, operate by/with their parents' and peer's standards and values.
These are especially powerful because they allow us as adults (in practicing what our culture defines as adulthood) to make external sources responsible for our thoughts, feelings, and actions. While there is no "need" to define oneself through others, it DOES happen on an unselfconscious level and it both follows and affirms one's co-constructing value system.

An important theoretical implication here is that stage 3 employees cannot and do not set their own personal limits (despite how self-originating they proclaim to be). They therefore set unrealistically high goals for themselves and others, paving the way for eventual burnout.

**Stage Four: Modern Adulthood**

The movement from stage 3 to 4 starts with the self's gradual separation from internalized points of view which originated in the external surround (i.e., values and beliefs communicated through family, peer group, state, religion, etc.). A person is considered fully stage 4 once they've made the internal self itself a coherent system for value-generation. As Kegan writes, this new capacity represents a qualitatively more complex system for organizing experience than the mental operations that create values, beliefs, convictions, generalizations, ideals, abstractions, interpersonal loyalty, and intrapersonal states of mind. It is qualitatively more complex because it takes all of these as objects or elements of its system, rather than as the system itself; it does not identify with them but views them as parts of a new whole. This new whole is an ideology, an internal identity, a self-authorship that can coordinate, integrate, act upon, or invent values, beliefs, convictions, generalizations, ideals, abstractions,
interpersonal loyalties, and intrapersonal states. It is no longer authored by them, it authors them and thereby achieves a personal authority. (p.185)

According to Kegan and his colleagues, some of the real-world, task-oriented advantages of being one's own value generator include being able to more effectively set limits, create roles, manage boundaries, regulate relationships, take stands, and even, facilitate development.

Strangely enough, the strongest limiter at this stage is identification with the value generator. In other words, the stage 4 person is subject to that internal generator. He does not invite the self (or others) to question the basic workings of the value-generator. In fact, once he does, the movement from stage 4 to 5 has begun.14

Summary

Given the developmental perspective, the literature on burnout both blames and punishes the individual for having an equally valid (and yet different) way of making meaning in a given situation. It is "blaming" because it suggests—both explicitly and implicitly— that burnout is a personal

14 Although this paper does not deal with stage 5 (or "post-modern adulthood" as Kegan calls it), a brief explanation follows. The evolution to stage 5 begins with a gradual separation from being identified with one’s own internal value-generator. A person is considered fully stage 5 when they’ve fully internalized competing systems, theories, or forms; they can distinguish (but are subject to) the relationship between forms and the process of form creation; and they can focus on (but are subject to) the interpenetration of selves.
weakness and/or a character flaw. And it is "punishing" because its remedies fail to recognize-- and therefore are insensitive to-- a person’s developmental stage.

One example of this kind of insensitivity is Maslach’s Burnout Inventory (presented in Chapter One). Developmental psychologists like Kegan argue that when the burnout-prone individual is described as lacking self worth, ambition, forcefulness, or "enterprisingness" (a la Maslach), the burnout literature is oblivious to the equally valid (alternative) assumption that these are values and actions "being evinced on behalf of a different construction of what is most important in the world."

Chapter three systematically applies Kegan’s theories to Maslach’s findings, and attempts to show that the peculiarities of a burnout-prone person are not necessarily indicative of some kind of personal weakness and/or character flaw-- as the burnout literature might suggest-- but rather could be viewed as part and parcel to a developmental stage as fundamental to adulthood as acne is to adolescence.
CHAPTER THREE: LINKING THE TWO LITERATURES

One of the theoretical implications of the epistemological framework presented in the last chapter is that the burnout-prone individual is one who operates in the 3rd order of consciousness while in a work environment that makes excessive 4th order demands. The idea is that the person burns out when they repeatedly attempt to meet those 4th order demands with-- what rightfully can be called-- "the best of their ability" given that they make meaning in the third order.\textsuperscript{15} The next question, then, is whether there is any evidence-- given the literature on burnout-- to suggest that the burnout-prone individual actually might be one embedded in the 3rd order of consciousness?

This chapter re-examines the picture that was painted of the burnout-prone individual in Chapter One, applying Kegan’s subject-object framework to Maslach’s findings.

\textsuperscript{15} Note that if one accepts the developmental take on the problem, the remedies for burnout which the literature does point to-- getting help (i.e., therapy), taking a vacation, and/or socializing-- actually make sense.

Therapy facilitates the move into the fourth order;

taking a vacation removes one physically from the problem when one can’t remove oneself psychologically (i.e., a third order inability); and

socializing provides a developmentally-appropriate, potentially-nurturing support system.

This explains the mismatch pointed out in Chapter One between the burnout literature’s various reads of the problem and their one agreed-upon set of solutions.
Re-Examining the Burnout-Prone Individual: Maslach in Light of Subject-Object Theory

The following is a composite portrait of the burnout-prone individual that Maslach and the larger literature presents. The burnout-prone individual:

... has unrealistic goals and high expectations... is probably young, single, inexperienced, well-educated, and highly motivated... may possess externally imposed goals regarding how he or she should perform as an employee, and what to expect of co-workers and clients... may have a great capacity for emotional empathy... has difficulty separating the self from interpersonal relationships, and tends to become bogged down by the demands of constant interaction with others... is highly dependent on others for approval and affection... experiences difficulty setting personal limits, and establishing boundaries between him- or herself and others. 16

If one were to apply the developmental framework of subject-object theory to this description, one could assert that these values and actions are indicative of an individual who is operating from a stage three perspective.

For instance, Maslach found the burnout-prone individual to be young, inexperienced, and well-educated. Subject-object theory would assert that the transition into stage three typically occurs in the years following adolescence. Thus, young adults who enter the work-force are more likely to be struggling with "stage three" issues than, say, older, more experienced adults.

Maslach found the burnout-prone individual to possess externally imposed goals. Subject-object theory already asserts that at stage three, goals are defined by the external

16 Crowley, Burnout, pp.7-8.
surround.

Maslach found the burnout-prone individual to have unrealistic goals and high expectations. By definition, a young adult who functions in the interpersonal balance (stage 3) does not have her goals and aspirations defined by her own coherent psychological self; a self who has-- and knows she has-- specific strengths and weaknesses. In fact, she has only recently begun the process to develop her internal ability to sort through her goals and expectations, prioritize them, and fashion them to fit the needs and constraints of the work world. It should come as no surprise then that Maslach also found the burnout-prone individual to have difficulty setting personal limits, and establishing boundaries. Why? Because by definition, a stage three individual is incapable of effective self-regulation, and hence, is more prone to over-extending herself.

Maslach found burnout-prone individuals to have a great capacity for emotional empathy. She also found them to have difficulty separating the self from interpersonal relationships. Stage three is all about the ability to empathize and the inability to separate the inner self from the interpersonal context. This latter point helps explain why Maslach found the burnout-prone individual to be highly dependent on others for approval and affection. The stage three individual cannot remove herself (or her thinking of herself) from her relationships. Thus, as Crowley suggests,
this means that she not only shares the inner reality of others, but feels responsible for it as well.¹⁷

Summary

While none of this evidence proves unequivocally that the burnout-prone individual is actually a person embedded in stage three, it does demonstrate a striking similarity between the two classifications (i.e., burnout-prone-ness and stage-three-embeddedness). At the very least, this comparison provides this paper with a potentially testable hypothesis: namely, that a person embedded in stage three is more at-risk of burning-out than say, a person at stage four. Chapter four outlines one possible way to test just such a hypothesis.

¹⁷ Ibid., p.9.
CHAPTER FOUR: TESTING THE LINK IN COMMUNITY ACTIVISM

How would one test the hypothesis that a person embedded in stage three is more at-risk of burning-out than say, a person at stage four? Since it isn't "third-staged-ness" itself that burns a person out, but rather, dealing with fourth order demands while in the third stage, one would have to

1) find a specific group of adults (i.e., community activists) who one could argue were barraged with fourth order demands on a day to day basis;

2) assess both their personal epistemologies and their feelings of burned-out-ness; and,

3) determine if there is any correlation between how they make meaning and their propensity to feeling burned-out.

This paper follows the above model. But before it presents its study results (in Chapter Five), it will 1) explain and justify the choice of community activists as a sample and 2) explain and justify the methods involved. To these ends, this chapter will:

1) show that front-line, inner-city activism as a professional work environment is densely packed with fourth order demands;

2) explain the intricacies of subject-object interviews and interviewing; and

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The study participants-- a group of community activists in MIT's Community Fellows Program-- were administered the Subject-Object Interview (SOI) to determine their epistemology. They then were administered a stress questionnaire that uses the Energy Depletion Index (EDI) to determine their level of burnout. Their EDI scores were compared to their SOI results, thus helping determine if their current stage of meaning making (i.e., 3rd order, 4th order) is linked with their propensity to burnout.
3) demonstrate the use and usefulness of the Energy Depletion Index.

Why Use Community Activists as the Sample?
The Demands of Front-Line Community Activism

Inner-city work as a profession provides a work environment that is densely packed with fourth order demands. Activism in general and human service delivery in particular asks the activist/employee to:

be the inventor or owner of her work (rather than see it as owned and created by the employer).

be self-initiating, self-correcting, self-evaluating (rather than dependent on others to frame the problems, initiate adjustments, or determine whether things are going acceptably well).

be guided by her own visions at work (rather than be without a vision or captive of the authority's agenda).

take responsibility for what happens to her at work externally and internally (rather than see her present internal circumstances and future external possibilities as caused by someone else).

be an accomplished master of her particular work roles (rather than have an apprenticing or imitating relationship to what she does).

conceive of the organization from the "outside in," as a whole; see her relation to the whole; see the relation of the parts to the whole (rather than see the rest of the organization and its parts only from the perspective of her own part, from the "inside out.")\(^{19}\)

Note that the above are fourth order demands that Kegan suggests might be part of ANY modern job. The leap which I make is that when it comes to front-line activism

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\(^{19}\) Kegan, *In Over Our Heads*, p.302.
specifically, there is rarely a work context that doesn’t have an unusually high density of fourth order demands. The interviews, for instance, show numerous examples of these work-based demands within the context of front-line urban professionalism.

* 

What follows are several illustrations of work-based 4th order demands taken from the experience of the activists who participated in this paper’s study:²⁰

OWNING ONE’S WORK
For Elizabeth, a school teacher in California, "school-based management" is a demand by the system for her to rely more on herself than on her principal. It’s policies asks her first to engage in systematic needs assessment and then to develop the appropriate programs and curricula. One can think of school-based management as a demand on Elizabeth by the school system to own her work, to be her own boss.

BEING SELF-AUTHORING
Dhaya, a youth worker in Boston, is in a similar position. During her interview, she spoke extensively of meeting both her funder’s evaluation criteria AND her own (potentially conflicting) definition of success. She said,

The thing that’s interesting is that my definition of success for the program may not be other people’s definition of success.... My definition would be that I am able give the participants a place where they are all able to develop on their own. Now some may do that more rapidly than others. Some may only move an inch. But they all have to gain something. If I can have a large affect on just five of ten of those girls-- a life-altering impact which gives them a new direction-- as opposed to having all ten of the girls just come and show up and get through the program... I’d say that the more successful thing would be to have an impact on the 5 girls. Some people would say "but you lost 5 girls." I know I

²⁰ See Chapter Five for a more in depth textual analysis.
think differently.
What’s intriguing is that this duality necessarily requires that Dhaya make explicit her internal standards. In other words, being her own boss AND also serving her funder asks Dhaya both externally and internally to be self-initiating, self-correcting, self-evaluating.

HAVING VISION
During her interview, Elizabeth (who was mentioned earlier) spoke of how she developed a program to increase parent involvement in the classroom. She mostly focused on the system’s resistance to her vision, saying

I can talk about it in terms of values or process.
I can say if [their] values are not in line with mine and they don’t care to share the structure of power as it is in public schools, then I still have to be true to my own process of being both representative of them and committed to change.
Yes, she possesses a vision (i.e., sharing the power with parents), but it was a work-based demand that forced her to 1) develop, 2) articulate and 3) be guided by it.

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY
Jessica, a social worker who works with gangs, has a tough time taking responsibility for what happens to her at work. When asked what part of her job most frustrates her, she replies:

I can give you examples of things that bother me. Things like people coming in high, people coming in two, three, four, five hours late, people coming in to work with gangs who are still very connected to their own gangs. There was an incident where one of the people I work with beat up one of the camp counselors. I mean really! We’re supposed to be role-models.... You know you’re sitting there working your ass off and next to you are sitting people who are doing shit and they’re getting paid like you.... I’ve become so frustrated by everything that I can’t even go to my job anymore. I used to work long hours, and really love my work. And now I’m tired! I really feel like I’m not going to be as committed when I return.
Jessica inaccurately sees her present internal circumstances (i.e., exhaustion) and her future external possibilities (i.e., switching jobs) as being caused by her irresponsible co-workers. For Jessica, it is their actions (and not her reactions) that are the problem.

MASTERING WORK AND THE INSTITUTIONAL PERSPECTIVE
Of the eleven study participants who were taking a year off from activism to study at MIT, nearly all stated (in
one way or another) that the reason they came back to school was

1) to become a more effective (i.e., to become more of an accomplished master of their particular work role); and/or

2) to develop a broader perspective (i.e., to see one’s relation to the "larger picture").

Nearly every class discussion (and exercise) was used to these ends.

What makes activism an especially appropriate context for this paper is that (in addition to the above demands) people in the human services fields ALSO have the added cognitive burden of working directly with demanding people/clients. One interview, for example, turned up this chilling description:

I have this one kid who is in protective custody with his crack-addicted mother. He’s in protective custody because his dad used to abuse him and his Mom. He’s been sexually molested by his uncle. His brother’s in jail. And this is an 8-year old kid and this is what he sees! [He] is my favorite kid but I deal with forty like him... if not worse off.... I used to come home crying because I would have to send them back to their homes. I mean its rough. Real rough. Because you feel it too.

The point here is that activists in the human services also have to deal with fourth order demands that would (under normal circumstances) only be associated with partnering and/or parenting. So, on top of all the "normal" demands of the non-profit work world, perpetual contact with human clientele ALSO asks the activist/employee to:

be psychologically independent of her clients.

have a well-differentiated and clearly defined sense of self.

transcend an idealized, romanticized approach to activism.
set limits on client involvement.
support the client’s development.
listen empathically and non-defensively.
have an awareness of how her psychological history inclines or directs her.\textsuperscript{21}

Note that the above are fourth order demands that Kegan links to partnering and parenting. The leap which I make here is that activists doing people-work "deal" with these sorts of partnering and parenting demands \textit{in the context of their jobs}. And if the first set of demands is already a tall order for the average adult (regardless of her cognitive stage), then these added work-based demands could be overwhelming... and that much more so for a person still making meaning in the 3rd order of consciousness.

The bottom line here is that activists are a very appropriate sample for this study, especially given the multiple lists of fourth order demands which are unique to front-line community activism in general, and human service delivery in particular.

Given the "appropriateness" of the sample, the key methodological question then becomes one of how to determine the activists’ epistemological and psycho-physical state. To that end, the next two sections provide a closer look at 1) the Subject Object Interview and 2) the Energy Depletion Index.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., p.302.
The Subject-Object Interview

An approximately hour-long interview procedure, the Subject-Object Interview (SOI) is used to assess an individual's unselfconscious epistemology. The procedures for administering and assessing the interview were designed by Dr. Robert Kegan and his associates of the Harvard Graduate School of Education to assess the natural epistemological structures written about his books, The Evolving Self (1982) and In Over Our Heads (1994). The formal research procedure for obtaining and analyzing the data of the interview is described in detail in A Guide to the Subject-Object Interview: Its Administration and Analysis (Lahey et al.).

The interview procedure is in the tradition of the Piagetian semi-clinical interview in which the experimenter asks questions to determine how a given "content" is constructed. The chief innovations of the Subject-Object Interview are that the contents:

- are generated from the real life experiences of the interviewee;
- involve emotional as well as cognitive, and intrapersonal as well as interpersonal aspects of psychological organization.

In order to understand how the interviewee organizes interpersonal and intrapersonal experiences, real-life situations are elicited from a series of ten uniform probes (i.e., "Can you tell me of a recent experience of being quite angry about work?") which the interviewer then explores at the level of discerning its underlying epistemology.
Interviews are transcribed and those portions of the interview where structure is clarified are the units of analysis. A typical interview may have from eight to fifteen such units. Each unit is scored independently and an overall score is arrived at through a uniform process.

As was outlined in Chapter 2, subject-object theory distinguishes five increasingly complicated epistemologies, believed to evolve in sequence, each successive epistemology containing the last. The traditional assessment procedure is able to distinguish five gradations between each epistemology, so over 20 epistemological distinctions can be made.

Taken in sequence, the six qualitative transformations from one subject-object balance to another are designated thus: X, X(Y), X/Y, Y/X, Y(X), Y. Scores in the stage three world, for instance, are as follows: 3, 3(4), 3/4, 4/3, 4(3), 4.

Although the Subject-Object assessment procedure is at an early stage in its development (the first doctoral dissertation using the measure was completed in 1983), the designers have completed over 200 interviews with children as young as eight and adults in their seventies; with psychologically troubled persons and those functioning well and happily; with all social classes; with males and females. Interrater reliability in the several doctoral dissertations using the measure has ranged from .75 to .90. One dissertation reports a test-retest reliability of .83.
Several report expectably high correlations with like-measures (cognitive and social-cognitive measures), a preliminary support for the measure's construct validity.

The Energy Depletion Index

The EDI is a heuristic tool in the measurement and analysis of feeling burned-out. This indicator assesses how depleted a subject feels during the course of work; energy depletion being a dimension of burnout in which there is definitional consensus.

The measure and the stress questionnaire which facilitates it were first developed for use in Anna Maria Garden's *Burnout: The Effect of Personality* (1985). They have since been used by other MIT thesis and dissertation (Jessel, 1988).

The stress questionnaire was administered by myself during one of the Fellows' class sessions. Some of the questionnaire's contents were amended to better fit the experiences of MIT's Community Fellows Program. For example, the amendments tried to account for the fact that the Fellows were in a year of reflection, and were, for the most part, recalling how they felt while back on the job.

The questionnaire was split into three parts: the first focused on basic demographic information (i.e., age, gender, marital status, etc.); the second contained an evaluation of the Community Fellows Program (i.e., do you feel
overchallenged and/or underchallenged?); and the third was the detailed examination of the activists' mental and physical state while "on the job."

This last part-- the one connected to the EDI-- was a set of 80 questions (i.e., do you feel exhausted upon waking?). Each was answered by circling one of five choices:

1) never
2) Occasionally
3) Fairly often
4) Frequently, and
5) Always.

For most of the questions, burnout was more likely the higher the question was rated (i.e., "I always feel exhausted upon waking" = higher chance that the person is burned-out). Approximately 1 out of every 4 questions, however, was a positive condition (i.e., do you feel life is meaningful?). These questions were rated in reverse (i.e., "Yes, life is always meaningful" = lower chance that the person is burned out).

Finally, once the questionnaires were completed, each was given an EDI score of between 1 (not depleted of energy) and 5 (very depleted of energy), and these scores were linked to the activists' propensity to burnout (i.e., the higher the score the more the activist was at-risk of burning-out).

Summary

Given the arguments for using community activists as a
sample and given the tools presented in this chapter, one can reliably explore the hypothesis that an activist embedded in stage three is more at-risk of burning-out. If our hypothesis is validated, then we gain a new, developmental lens through which to view this ailment. We gain a lens which doesn’t blame or punish the many dedicated, committed members of the work force who are still affected by this incapacitating condition. And, finally, we gain a new direction for both therapeutic and organizational thinking on how to prevent burnout.
CHAPTER FIVE: THE TEXTUAL FINDINGS

The study participants-- a sample of 12 community activists in MIT's Community Fellows Program-- were a diverse group of adults aged 21-40. The Fellows consisted of 9 women and 2 men, of which 4 were African American, 2 were Asian American, 2 were white, 1 was Native American, and 1 was Latina. One non-Fellow who participated in the Fellows seminar (and had experience as a community activist) was also used in the sample.

During the first stage of the project, each member of the group was administered an hour-long Subject-Object Interview (SOI) to determine his or her epistemology. This chapter is devoted to the textual analysis of those interviews. It also contains several detailed case studies of what this paper calls "3-ish Traditionalists" and "4-ish Institutionalists."

A Textual Analysis of the Subject-Object Interviews

At an early stage in this project, it was decided that a very specific SOI score was not necessary for the larger purpose of this paper. Rather, the participants would be divided into two categories: the "3-ish traditionalists" and the "4-ish institutionalists."

The first group would consist of the participants who were able to:

- distinguish their own point of view from that of others (what Kegan describes as a stage 2 capacity)
- "take" the point of view of another who is "taking" the
point of view of them (i.e., "she doesn’t feel that I am deprived");

find it threatening to have a different "take" on a situation from that of their significant other; BUT

have difficulty maintaining the differentiation between their "self" and the views they internalize.

The second group would consist of the participants who:

have or are developing a relationship with their internal value generator;

are unusually interested in issues of process;

are able to find and test assumptions about their own "take" on situations;

don’t find it threatening to have a different "take" on a situation from that of their significant other; AND

have less difficulty maintaining the differentiation between their "self" and the views they internalize.

There is no contention here that these "4-ish institutionalists" would necessarily be scored with an SOI rating of 4 or greater. They would, however, be scored higher that the "3-ish traditionalists."

If, as Kegan suggests, the evolution between stage 3 and stage 4 is the story of gradually separating internalized points of view from their original sources in others and making the self itself a coherent system for their generation and correlation, then one can think of this study’s two groups as people who are at different stages within this developmental evolution.

What follows are some case studies that accentuate the difference between 3-ish traditionalism and 4-ish institutionalism. They also aim to clarify the process behind
determining 3-ish-ness versus 4-ish-ness.

Brooke: A Case Study of a "3-ish Traditionalist"

Born and raised in a disadvantaged rural community, Brooke chooses to become an activist after having her first and only child, Felicia. As a young mother, Brooke slowly began to become outraged by the lack of good jobs and educational opportunities in her area. Using Felicia's future as her motivation, she joined the staff of the local Job Corp, and became active in the area's education reform movement.

The ongoing relationship between Brooke (age 24) and Felicia (age 5) serves as a great context for determining the way Brooke makes meaning. During the interview, Brooke described her relationship with Felicia in depth.

WHAT'S THE TOUGHEST PART OF BEING WITHOUT YOUR DAUGHTER?

She's my shield to the outside world.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN? HOW IS SHE A SHIELD?

She's a shield because when she's in my life, I don't have to deal with anyone else. Because she is the reason why I don't go do anything. She can be the reason why I stay at home. She can be the reason why I didn't make to that class that day. She can be the reason why I just sit there and am very, very quiet.

I KNOW YOUR DAUGHTER ISN'T AROUND FOR A COUPLE OF MONTHS. WHAT ARE YOU USING FOR A SHIELD? DO YOU HAVE A SHIELD WITHOUT HER?

No.

SO WHEN YOU'RE LATE FOR CLASS NOW WHAT DO YOU TELL PEOPLE.
Does it bother you that without her your excuses might seem that much lamer?

Yeah. For instance, when Mel asked if anyone could be there for the meeting and I said I won’t be there because I won’t get up that early. He must think I’m so lazy. Which is true, but if my daughter was here I would have used her. She’s also my shield in not having to deal with people.... That’s a lot to put on a five-year-old.... But she’s totally unaware.

In Chapter 2, an example was made of how a person can "have" a perspective, and how a perspective can "have" a person. If one applies this concept to the traditionalist mind-set, one can think of the above in terms of either "having" a relationship, or being "had" by one. The fascinating aspect of Brooke’s case is that when one thinks of such "controlling" relationships, one generally pictures either parents and/or partners as the "controlling force". Brooke is a great example of how a relationship with a child can "have" a person.

The bottom line here is that the way in which Brooke uses her "shield" reflects her difficulty with taking responsibility for her own emotions and actions. This is clearly a 3-ish quality.

And this quality is further reflected in Brooke’s struggle with self-esteem.

I’m learning to like myself. It’s something I’ve been working on for 5 years.

What do you do to like yourself?

I find things I like about other people. I mean, I’ve always liked other people. But it’s like I try to do
things that I like. And I try to treat people the way I like to be treated. And plus I've kind of "found God." I really started getting in touch with the inside of me as opposed to dealing with the outside of me. I started to live my life for me.

WHO WERE YOU LIVING YOUR LIFE FOR BEFORE THEN?

Anybody but me.

HOW MUCH OF THIS DO YOU ATTRIBUTE TO YOUR DAUGHTER?

Eighty percent. I can make it really simple for you. If it weren't for her, I wouldn't have turned 25 this year.

REMARKABLE LITTLE GIRL, AIN'T SHE?

[Laughter]

While Brooke sees herself as a person who is increasingly turning inward, and while she contends that she is finally living her life for herself, it is very apparent that she actually is living it for Felicia's sake. So the question is one of how much Felicia is responsible for Brooke's improved self-image.

She has a lot to do with it. But its not like I rely on her totally.... I'm just really thankful that I have her. And every day I'm thankful that I have her. I thank her for being her. But I don't thank her for saving my life. So she doesn't even know. Because she doesn't need to know that. Maybe later when she's 18 and she has her own shit to deal with. But not right now.

HER ACCEPTANCE OF YOU IS PRETTY IMPORTANT THEN?

Yeah. Unfortunately. It's not as important to me now as it used to be. When she was a baby it was a lot worse because I had a really hard time trying to figure out how to be a Mom. And that just has to do with my life and the way that it's been. Now, I know she's not going to like me sometimes. And I know that she's not always going to have nice things to say to me. And I know there's going to be times when she's going to tell me she hates me. She's told me that before. And there's a piece of me that gets real small but I'll be like "OK., fine. Hate me." It's rough.
There is no doubt that Brooke recognizes Felicia's significance. After all, she knows that Felicia has a lot to do with her self-esteem. What is at issue here is Brooke's real-life struggle both with her reliance on Felicia and with her see-saw-ing recognition of that reliance.

In the end, Brooke is a great example of 3-ish traditionalism. She can and does distinguish between her own point of view and that of Felicia (i.e., "That's a lot to put on a five-year-old.... But she's totally unaware"). She can and does "take" the point of view of other adults (i.e., "He must think I'm so lazy."). She is both "controlled" and threatened by Felicia's different "take" on their relationship (i.e., "she's told me [she hates me] before. And there's a piece of me that gets real small..."). And finally, she has difficulty maintaining the differentiation between her "self" and the views which she internalizes (i.e., "She has a lot to do with [my self esteem]. But its not like I rely on her totally....").

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Of the 12 study participants, seven were found to be 3-ish traditionalists. Each showed signs of difficulty in maintaining the differentiation between their "self" and the views they internalized.

Some-- like Heather, Philip and Robin-- expressed this through their heavy reliance on (praise from) others. For these three participants, the main source of their
internalized views were their parents. Philip, for instance, was asked if his Dad really wants him to go into medicine. His response was:

I have a joke for my Dad which I told my Mom and my Dad. The joke goes: "My Dad is very open-minded. He asked me if I wanted to be a brain-surgeon or an ObGyn." [Laughter]

YOU CAN SPECIALIZE IN WHATEVER YOU WANT. [LAUGHTER] SO HOW DO YOU THINK YOUR DAD WOULD REACT IF YOU TOLD HIM THAT ACTIVISM WASN'T REALLY A RESUME STUFFER FOR MED SCHOOL BUT RATHER THAT IT WAS YOUR LIFE’S CALLING?

When I told him about my choice to try activism for a year, he flipped out. He said "Well, so much could happen. I mean, who knows? You may not come back to college. You may not be in the medical track anymore. You might be in the collegiate track."

And I said "Well, Dad, if I choose to run off to Florida with a bunch of Gypsies-- that will be an active choice by me." I mean, yeah, I could do that. That's my choice.

It's interesting because in the arguments with my Dad, I've take very strong stands against actually going into medicine. But when it comes down to my actions, in essence, I do what my Dad would want me to do. Which makes it seem hypocritical. I don't know.

In the absence of Philip's "active choice" (i.e., joining the Gypsies or going ahead with activism), his father's choice becomes the default. His father is his "passive choice," his internalized point of view. Philip recognizes this but (as with Brooke) it remains a tremendous, real-life struggle.

Heather, too, spoke of her connection to her family. To use her words,

I see myself going through stages. I guess in some ways it could equate to a baby going through stages: learning how to crawl, learning to walk, maturing and becoming more and more independent. I think becoming independent is the key. I've gone through those changes. I've relied on other people. Started feeling my way around
for my place, for where I felt comfortable, my niche. And then finally, I’m maturing and breaking some of those ties. Not all of them because I still need some of them. I’m becoming independent. I’m still connected to my family, the church. And their influence was and probably still is overwhelming.

IN WHAT WAY ARE YOU CONNECTED TO YOUR FAMILY?

I need a lot of encouragement from my parents.

AND HOW IMPORTANT IS THEIR ENCOURAGEMENT?

Very Important. Because most of my life choices that I’ve made have gone through them. I don’t think I would have applied to this program without their support. With this program, I had the opportunity to say "Look, this is what I want to do!" Instead of them telling me what to do. So, I channeled it through them voluntarily instead of involuntarily. Their support is critical.

Heather, too, is see-saw-ing between what she calls dependence and independence. While she claims to be independent (or, more appropriately, to want to be independent) from her parents, she recognizes that she still needs them in order to make major life decisions. To her credit, she has taken a step towards independence but not a large one. Explicitly, she is saying "Look, this is what I want to do!" Implicitly, however, she is saying "I won’t do it without you!" That is the spirit in which she uses the term "channeling." Her parents are her internalized point of view.

Note that Heather’s 3-ish ranking was solidified later in the interview when she was asked if she saw herself as having changed. She responded with:

I’m also becoming more of, more like a people person. I’m not going to go to the extreme and say I am a people person because I’m not! Remember how the other night in class we had that thing that was passed out and we were supposed to pick if we were affiliation oriented or
achievement oriented or those other things? I first thought I was affiliation-oriented because I'm a people person. But then remember how we all went around and said what each of us thought we were. Well, before I said anything about me, someone said that they thought affiliation oriented people were just brown nosers. No one wants to be a kiss-ass. So when they came around and asked me what I was, I told them that I was achievement oriented.

The irony in this response is that Heather really is an "affiliation-oriented person"; or, to use the subject-object vernacular, she really is subject to her relationships. Her 3-ish tendencies only gave her one option when her peer second-guessed her and that was to second-guess herself. If she weren't subject to her relationships, she might have stuck to her original (more accurate) read of herself.

The above is an important side note because Heather and/or Philip (or even Brooke) could well have been 4-ish given their brief, initial excerpts. Their being assigned a 3-ish or a 4-ish ranking, however, was based on more than just that one excerpt. As was mentioned before, once the interviews were transcribed, those portions of the interview where structure was clarified (i.e., the units of analysis) were isolated and each unit was evaluated independently. Once all the units were evaluated, an overall designation was arrived at for that person.

This process was made more difficult because some participants sounded incredibly self-aware. But, despite their proficiency in what turned out to be the popular language of self-knowledge, the structure of what they said
broke through their glossy content. Robin, for instance, was ranked 3-ish despite the first paragraph of what follows.

In a way, there’s a lot of transference stuff going on. When I lost my Dad I lost a part of the male role-model in myself that integrated to my psyche that would enable me to relate to this other man. I don’t know if that makes sense but psychologically, it does to me! [Laughter]

WHY DO YOU THINK ITS IMPORTANT OR SIGNIFICANT THAT HE REMINDS YOU OF YOUR FATHER?

I guess I still want my Dad’s approval.

WITH YOUR DAD GONE, WHO DO YOU LOOK TO FOR APPROVAL?

Myself. That’s the scary part. I don’t have a lot of experience with it. I feel like I’ve grown up with certain models that have totally determined who I am. Now I’m on my own and there’s a bombardment of opinions from everywhere about who I am or who I’m supposed to be. I sometimes feel like I’m a sponge and all I have is those models.

Robin, too, is struggling with the "new"-ness (and "scary"-ness) of looking to herself for approval. And it is this struggle that marks her as a traditionalist. Even if she doesn’t rely on Dad for her internalized point of view, she is still at a loss when it comes to articulating her own coherent internal system.

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What’s key here is that the way in which Robin, Heather, and Philip relied on and interacted with their parents was very similar to the way in which other 3-ish participants related to their co-workers (i.e., Stephanie and Jessica), their significant others (i.e., Mon), and their children (i.e., Brooke).
How are these relationships similar? In every 3-ish case, the participant makes an external source (i.e., a parent, a co-worker, a child, etc.) responsible for his or her thoughts, feelings, and actions. Recall, for instance, the example of Jessica in Chapter 4. Her tough time with her co-workers could be (and was) re-framed into an issue of her taking responsibility for what happens to her at work. Recall that Jessica inaccurately saw her internal circumstances (i.e., exhaustion) and her future external possibilities (i.e., switching jobs) as being caused by her irresponsible co-workers.

I can give you examples of things that bother me. Things like people coming in high, people coming in two, three, four, five hours late, people coming in to work with gangs who are still very connected to their own gangs. There was an incident where one of the people I work with beat up one of the camp counselors. I mean really! We’re supposed to be role-models.... You know you’re sitting there working your ass off and next to you are sitting people who are doing shit and they’re getting paid like you.... I’ve become so frustrated by everything that I can’t even go to my job anymore. I used to work long hours, and really love my work. And now I’m tired! I really feel like I’m not going to be as committed when I return.

For Jessica, then, it was their actions (and not her reactions) that was the problem. Thus, the way in which Jessica relied on and interacted with her co-workers was very similar to the way Brooke related to her daughter.

The bottom line is that their relationships are similar because Jessica and Brooke (and the rest of the 3-ish participants) have difficulty maintaining the differentiation between their "self" and the views they internalized.

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A school teacher from Southern California, Elizabeth applied to MIT's Community Fellows program because she "needed a strategy to continue in the human services field." She used the year-long program to reflect and to "get in touch with the values underlying [her] work." She also used the year to develop an innovative program to get parents more involved at her school.

Halfway through the year, Elizabeth went back home to update "the higher ups" on how she was getting along on her research. To use her words:

The biggest resistance to my ideas came at the School Site-Council, where I least expected it. And from a person who could easily be my peer, who I don’t know very well. And she came up with all kinds of control and needs for control. She said that I had a method that wasn’t suited to her. In fact, what I got from her was that she may have some very different values than I do. She didn’t hear me saying "lets share opportunities with parents." She heard me saying "lets give up the power of the people here."

It was an insult because the Council sent me away to do research on their needs and I come back and they challenge my process. And they say "this doesn’t represent us!" And it hurt, because there’s some truth in it.

Before reading on, it's interesting to note that just in these two paragraphs, Elizabeth has demonstrated (and/or surpassed) 3 of the 4 basic requirements of the traditionalist classification: she has distinguished her own point of view from that of others; she has "taken" the point of view of another who is "taking" the point of view of her; and she has not found it threatening to have a different "take" on a
situation. This last point is made clearer when the interview continues:

AND WHAT IS THE TRUTH IN IT?

The truth in it is that I do have to be consistent with the method that says "you’re not listening to all the voices you represent." So I tried to thank her for speaking up and I ended feeling like it was a power struggle on my part, too.

As a school counselor, before I ever went away, I could have made a decision to start a program and just started it. And now, I have this wonderful site council that has the potential of blocking anything that I believe.

I can talk about it in terms of values or process. I can say if the council's values are not in line with mine and they don’t care to share the structure of power as it is in public schools, then I still have to be true to my own process of being both representative of them and committed to change....

AND WHAT WERE THE EMOTIONS FELT ON YOUR PART?

There were a lot of emotions. And, to be fair, I have to say that what I felt had more than one source. Clearly, one source of all the emotion was that there was a gut sense that I wasn’t doing the process right. Because of all the disagreement. That was anger. But anger at myself. I was a little shocked that I’d let my process get that compromised.

As per the definition of a 4-ish institutionalist, Elizabeth is incredibly interested in issues of process. She is frustrated both when she doesn’t meet her own standards-- a 4-ish skill-- and when she sees them as being compromised. She takes responsibility for both her actions and emotions; going so far as to thank the woman who is pointing out her deficiencies. She even uses the woman’s criticism as a tool for finding and testing an assumption about her own "take" on the situation.
Later in the interview, Elizabeth is asked what she thinks would have happened if her presentation to the Council hadn’t gone as well as it did.

Well, there’s a part of me that’s willing to quit pushing this ticket and say “I’m not a leader.” If I’m not cut out for it, I’m not cut out for it. I just think that if my project is not marketable I have to give a lot of thought to what kind of leader I expect to be: one who reflects the values of the led or one who changes them.

If my processes are an engine, I’d like to eventually think of myself as the mechanic. Right now though, I’m still discovering that I have this new value or this undiscovered value. It’s refreshing.

Elizabeth’s metaphor of the value-engine and the mechanic is by far the most concise, most developmentally-appropriate description of the evolutionary voyage of the 4-ish institutionalist that I’ve come across. And Elizabeth is most certainly on that voyage.

She is unusually interested in issues of process and has started to develop a relationship with her internal value generator. We know this because she has started to articulate a coherent inner system (i.e., "my own process of being both representative of them and committed to change"). Furthermore, she is able to find and test assumptions about her own "take" on situations (i.e., "there’s a part of me that’s willing to quit pushing this ticket").

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Of the 12 study participants, five were found to be 4-ish institutionalists. Each showed signs of possessing a coherent, internal value-generator and/or the ability to self-
set, self-actualize, and self-evaluate goals. There were plenty of examples of 4-ish capacities:

"You constantly have to evaluate yourself. You can't be afraid to say, I fucked up, or I made a mistake" -- Tim;

"Success for me is being able to come up with your own goals and pulling them off" -- Shampa;

"Even my holding-in is strategic in a way. I tend to look at my options and that helps diffuse the anger... at least in terms of telling me what options I have to improve the situation" -- Anders.

The best example, though, was the remaining 4-ish participant: Dhaya. In her words:

The thing that's interesting is that my definition of success for the program may not be other people's definition of success. My definition would be that I am able give the participants a place where they are all able to develop on their own. Now some may do that more rapidly than others. Some may only move an inch. But they all have to gain something. If I can have a large affect on just five of ten of those girls-- a life-altering impact which gives them a new direction-- as opposed to having all ten of the girls just come and show up and get through the program... I'd say that the more successful thing would be to have an impact on the 5 girls. Some people would say "but you lost 5 girls." I know I think differently.

SO ARE YOU ANXIOUS ABOUT MEETING THEIR DEFINITION OF SUCCESS OR YOUR OWN?

Mine. If I didn't impact any of those girls, I'd feel like an incredible failure. [Laughter] If I spent an entire year developing a project that didn't work for anybody... [Laughter] ... and I wasted Mel's time, my time, the girls' time, the funder's money....

So what does this tell us about Dhaya? After all, you argue, these definitions of success could be originating in her surround. Maybe they're her professor's. Or maybe they're her first husband's. If you're thinking that, you're absolutely right! This statement, by itself, doesn't make
Dhaya 4-ish. We need to look at other units of analysis to accurately determine if these statements are 3-ish or 4-ish in origin. For instance, Dhaya goes on to say:

I had a hard time thinking of specific "strong stands" because that is just a part of my personality. That's just how I was raised. I remember going to protest marches as a child. I remember not doing the pledge of allegiance as a child because it was a bunch of crap. Having teachers call my Mom.... Taking a day off from school for Martin Luther King Day long before it was a holiday. That's just how I've lived my life, basically. I owe it to my mother.

A lot of my Mom's stuff comes from her experiences, her anger. I tap into it a little but I have enough of my own pain, my own history. I grew up in Boston. I lived through bussing. I went to school through bussing. So I have enough of my own stuff to draw from. I've been chased home. I've been called nigger. I have had rocks thrown at me. If anything, it made for a stronger bond between us. She raised us with the understanding that its all a lie. You'll go out there and you'll find that it's not a democracy, its not a fair place for women and for black people, that we're not all equal. And be prepared for that. That's how she raised us. To look at the hypocrisy.

I think for part of my life I was like her because she was my mother. I still think like she does but not because of who she is but more because of who I am, who I've been.

Dhaya takes us down the road of parent-based 3-ish-ness, but in the end, she gives it a qualitatively different twist: she is, it would seem, her own reservoir of emotion and values and history. While she recognizes her Mother's role in making her who she is, she has little problem differentiating her own "self" and her mother's "self."

Dhaya is a terrific example of a person who possesses a coherent, internal value-generator (i.e., "not because of who she is but more because of who I am") and the ability to self-
set, self-actualize, and self-evaluate goals (i.e., "my definition of success for the program may not be other people’s definition of success"). For these reasons, Dhaya is another great example of 4-ish institutionalism.

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What’s key here is that Dhaya’s relationship with the program she was designing— in so far as it was inwardly reflective and very sensitive to issues of process— was similar to other participants’ relationships to school systems (i.e., Elizabeth), city government (i.e., Tim), life’s achievements (i.e., Shampa), and children (i.e., Anders). In fact, what is strikingly common within this group is the way in which Dhaya interacted (or, more appropriately "intra-acted") with her life-history and her Mother’s life-history. Her 4-ish state of self-awareness reflects the fact that she has developed— or is developing— an internal value generator; a system that will allow her to take responsibility for her own thoughts, feelings and actions. In this way, Dhaya shares a qualitatively similar (inner) experience with the other 4-ish participants.

Summary

The qualitative differences between the 3-ish traditionalists and the 4-ish institutionalists illustrate the evolution between stage 3 and stage 4. Unlike the 3-ish group, the institutionalists shows structural signs that they
have started to gradually separate internalized points of view from their original sources in others. They have also started to make the self itself a coherent system for the generation and correlation of their values. The conclusion here is-- to use the vernacular of reflective action (Schon, 1987) -- that the 4-ish group's "espoused theory" is much closer to their "theory of use."
CHAPTER SIX: CROSS-ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

During the second stage of the project, each member of the sample was administered a stress questionnaire to determine his or her level of burnout-prone-ness. Once a questionnaire was completed, it was given an EDI score of between 1 (not depleted of energy) and 5 (very depleted of energy). These scores were then used to determine the activists' propensity to burnout (i.e., the higher the score the more the activist was at-risk of burning-out).

This chapter is devoted to the third and final stage of the project: a cross-analysis of the EDI and SOI results; an inquiry which hopes to determine if there is any correlation between how one makes meaning and one's propensity to feeling burned-out.

The Actual Numbers

The results of the cross-analysis are presented in the chart below. And, despite appearances, they actually might
validate this paper's working hypothesis.

At first glance, there are five potential exceptions to the hypothesis that 3-ish-ness makes one more at-risk of burning-out: three are traditionalists who aren't prone (Mon, Philip, and Brook) and two are institutionalists who are prone (Shampa and Elizabeth). What follows is an exploratory explanation of the factors that might be involved in these specific cases.

**Traditionalists Who Are Not Prone**

The three most striking exceptions to our working hypothesis are Mon, Philip, and Brooke. So the initial question has to be: what, if anything, do we know about these three that makes them or their experience qualitatively different?

Upon closer inspection, we find that the three share more than just their "non-burnout-prone-3-ish" ranking. Mon and Brooke are the only Fellows who come from (and work in) RURAL settings. And Philip is the only member of the sample who is not a Fellow, but rather, a full-time MIT student.

Could this imply that the urban setting poses more fourth order demands than the rural? Maybe. But, the more likely answer lies in the kind of support that a rural environment might provide. There is a lot of evidence which shows that small towns are far more likely (than large cities) to provide both a sense of community and an extensive social support
system.22

Mon's descriptions of her Cherokee tribe, for instance, give one a sense that not only does everyone know each other, but also that every person in the tribe is connected to every other person.

Philip, too, has an extensive support system, although his tends to be more institutional. In his role as a full-time MIT student, Philip has an inordinate amount of time to reflect on his own development, and an extensive array of resources to assist in that reflection (i.e., classes, peer counselling, therapy, etc.).

If one were to think of developmental growth as resulting only when there's a right mix of challenge and support, one could view Mon and Philip's supportive contexts as reasons why they don't NEED to evolve into the fourth order. In effect, their "mix" might have too much support, and not enough challenge. An interesting side-note is that I actually went back and re-examined both Mon and Philip's stress questionnaires. And, not surprisingly, both claimed to be "very underchallenged."

The important point here is that even if they do meet lots of 4th order demands, Mon and Philip's support network of friends, family, tribe, and institution keep their heads well above water.

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22 Social scientists have been making-- and proving-- this claim as far back as Alexis DeToqueville and Ferdinand Tonnies.
The question of how many 4th order demands a rural activist really does meet in her context is intriguing and, quite honestly, one that invites further study. So too are the questions of:

1) the effects of social support systems on the need to develop into the fourth order; and
2) the effects of social support systems on the ability to develop into the fourth order.

Institutionalists Who Are Prone

There are a number of explanations for Elizabeth and Shampa, the two 4-ish members of the sample who remained burnout-prone. Upon reflection, four seem particularly relevant:

NATURE OF WORK
The two could be dealing with a greater density of work-based fourth order demands than their non-burnout-prone-4-ish peers. After all, too much is too much regardless of your developmental stage.

NON-WORK DEMANDS
The two could be over-burdened with demands in contexts other than work. For instance, they might be experiencing a particularly hard time in their roles as partners, parents, students, and/or citizens.

LEVEL OF SUPPORT
The two could have either fewer or less effective support systems than their non-burnout-prone-4-ish peers. Note that this explanation is actually a re-phrasing of the support systems question brought out in the previous section.

LEVEL OF DEVELOPMENT
Perhaps the two aren't as far along as their 4-ish companions in the evolution towards stage 4. They
therefore would be more likely to exhibit the inabilities associated with the third order.

The key here is that project data neither supports nor weakens any of these hypotheses. To clarify these issues, future research would have to

1) increase the sample size;
2) focus more on people already identified as operating in the fourth order; and
3) look closely at their whole life (i.e., their world of partnering, parenting, etc.).

It would also have to look at work-based developmental strategies that could help people acquire fourth order skills.

The Big Picture

The analyses in this chapter further validate this paper's hypothesis. Not so much because one can explain the people that don't fit but rather, because of what it means to be either "at-risk of" or "more at-risk of" something.

Given the discussion in Chapter Four of "The Demands of Front-Line Community Activism" we can say that the simple act of being a community activist already puts one "at-risk" of burning-out. And given our findings in Chapter Five, we can see how the abilities and inabilities of "traditional" activists put them "more at-risk" of burning-out.

So what do the numbers in Chapter Six prove? What do they really tell us? Simply put, they tell us how these 12 activists are dealing with their own (unique) demanding
circumstances right now. In fact, given the small size of the sample and the nature of the heuristic tools that have been employed, this project can only be about exploring possibilities for future research. Thus, a better question than "what do the numbers prove" would be: given the exploring that we have already done, what kind of further inquiry would we need to clarify the larger issues of epistemology's link to burnout? That has been the real aim of this chapter, and to be quite frank, the real goal of this thesis.
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