

ENGAGING CHURCH TEAMS TO SUPPORT YOUTHS AGING OUT OF CARE

by

John A. Honeycutt

Liberty University

A Dissertation [Proposal] Presented in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Liberty University

[Month, Year]

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APPROVED BY:

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ABSTRACT

Emerging adults (EAs) in state custody face the possibility of aging out of the system without the hope of adoption. Approximately 30,000 of the oldest among 400,000 children in out-of-home care (OHC) exit each year from Child Protective Services (CPS), and an alarming 4,000 become homeless. To address this issue, I will conduct a facilitated grounded theory (GT) study with a total of 25–50 volunteer and insightful participants (VIPs). They will identify factors to enlist a volunteer church team (VCT) to provide their time, talent, and treasure to help one EA transition into independent living (IL). Participants will be at least 28 years old, representing 3–5 Protestant churches (PCs). They will have been members of their respective churches for at least two years—

The recruiting process involves enlisting approval from a pastor or clergy, who later appoints a primary point of contact (POC). The POC recruits from seven to ten VIPs and arranges coordination. The event consists of brainstorming sessions and individual ideation sessions posing four research questions: how to garner interest, commitment, and action, and division of responsibility from a VCT.

Key words: grounded theory, foster care, aging out, church team, preventing homelessness

Copyright Page

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Dedication

The page is a page in which the candidate dedicates the dissertation manuscript.

This page is optional.

Acknowledgments

This page gives the opportunity for the candidate to acknowledge individuals who influenced the completion and writing of the Dissertation.

(This page is optional.)

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Introduction

Each year, 30,000 young adults age out from OHC (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2022). They have limited experiences in navigating bureaucracy and a lack of adulting skills (Forge, 2023). They struggle for basic living such as housing, safety, food, clothing, shelter, and medical access (Font et al., 2021). Cultural expectations of young adults reaching the age of majority do not account for combinations of trauma experienced throughout their lives and circumstances (Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2019, p. 18). The public does not sufficiently understand these circumstances – including many Christian adult church members who could otherwise contribute their time, talent, and treasure to solving these difficulties (Abramyan & Alexander, 2021; Mattis et al., 2009; Schelbe et al., 2023). The protection afforded by CPS is removed upon exiting the system (Park et al., 2020).

As a cohesive team with shared norms, Christian church members may be able to mitigate EA losses of CPS protections (Spector, 2021, p. 286). The realities of EA's circumstances and the Church's ability to help others in need honor God's calling and solve a crucial need. I hope to identify how best to garner interest, commitment, and action from church members to help EAs transition into IL relying on theoretical underpinnings of industrial and organizational (I/O) psychology. Understanding EA struggles beyond their limited adulting skills requires a review of psychological theories such as attachment and age-stage development. Understanding CPS organizational dynamics is also instrumental to the full picture. I investigate these aspects within a biblical foundation.

Background

This study is critical because it sheds light on how Christian adults can support EAs who have grown up in the foster system and are transitioning to IL. Thousands of EAs age out of the foster system each year with no practical living arrangements, making them vulnerable to homelessness, poverty, and other adverse outcomes. I propose this study to explore how Christian adults in a church congregation can form a team to help these young adults transition well from OHC into IL, as it is our responsibility to build them up.

Romans instructs that "each of us should strive to please our neighbors for their good and to build them up" (*New International Version Bible*. 1978/2011. Romans 15:2). This transition from OHC to IL can be a significant challenge for EAs who have grown up in the care of CPS – more commonly known as the foster system. They often need more real-world skills and support to navigate bureaucratic processes, secure employment, and sustain themselves financially (Smith, et al., 2017; Social Security, 2018).

The study's primary stakeholders are EAs, CPS, and protestant congregations (PCs). Understanding the needs and perspectives of EAs requires an understanding of toxic and complex trauma associated with attachment, life stages, biopsychosocial influences, and responses due to neglect, violence, and other abuse. The study requires understanding the CPS organization's processes, people, and policy to theorize a future state with VCTs as a pragmatic exiting care possibility for EAs. Lastly, an earnest assessment of PCs about theology, historical contexts, and contrasts is necessary for purposefully selecting candidate volunteers.

Beyond research needed for EA circumstances, CPS as an organization, PC contrasts between denominations, and VIP selection rationale, this study also benefits from the research of supporting theory, aspects of qualitative studies, and biblical underpinnings. I draw from seminal I/O psychology theory and contemporary concepts of motivation, teaming, communication, and change management in development of the research questions.

Individual change necessary to garner interest, commitment, action, and division of responsibility is adduced from theoretical underpinnings of individual and organizational change, motivation, and leadership. I will gather data from VIPs during facilitated brainstorming sessions and individual ideation sessions, each consistent with theory associated with qualitative, grounded theory (GT) studies.

Pursuing Help for EAs

New International Version Bible (2011, 1 Peter 3:15) emphasizes the importance of respect which has sometime been lacking toward EAs throughout their lives (Disability Rights North Carolina, 2022). Stability of placement is also an issue (Dworsky et al., 2018). As young adults in transition, EAs struggle with decision-making and problem-solving, even in situations that may seem small or insignificant to others (Ahn et al., 2021).

The book of James compels us to look after orphans and widows in their distress (James 1:27). As Christian adults, we must extend a helping hand to those aging out of the foster system and into IL. Compassion toward EAs is important, but also effort to help them is scriptural. "If one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and well

fed,' but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself if it is not accompanied by action, is dead" (James 2:16–17).

A future VCT would need to be understanding of trauma often burdening an EA as well as an EA's limited adulting skills. Enlisting the interest and action of Christian adults to lift an EA will require implementing the theory discovered by this study.

Working with Child Protective Services

Working with CPS as a government authority is also scriptural. "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God" (Romans 13:1), and "Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor" (Romans 13:7). The theory resulting from this study will require an understanding of and working with the CPS organization and processes.

Working with Volunteer and Insightful Participants

Working with VIPs in the facilitated sessions is important to gain a variety of insights. This study relies on opinions, advice, and ideas from the participating VIPs. Ideally these VIPs will have a variety of secular and spiritual insights to offer during the brainstorming sessions as "He has filled them with skill to do all the work of a gem cutter; a designer; an embroiderer in blue, purple, and scarlet yarn, and fine linen; and a weaver. They can do every kind of craft and design artistic designs" (Exodus 35:35). Just as described in Exodus, participating VIPs will provide ideas formulated into this study's resulting themes. VIPs with differing backgrounds representing different denominations is instrumental to achieve rich, saturated data.

Working with Protestant Churches

Working with local PCs and honoring congregational diversity is scriptural. “For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.” (Romans 12:4–5). I will rely on the opinions and voices of VIPs of varying backgrounds and denominations. The theory resulting from this study must honor this congregational and denominational diversity.

Working with a Grounded Theory Approach

Clarifying that a GT study is an appropriate approach for this effort is called for: “let the wise listen and add to their learning” (Proverbs 1:5). The research questions are constructed from secular change and communication theory but are also scripturally sound. Data I will gather and interpret from VIPs is about a change—a building up of EAs—from difficult circumstances “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens ... a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build.” (Ecclesiastes 3:1–3).

Examining Trauma Neglect and Abuse

Young adults aging out of OHC have experienced a variety of trauma—neglect, abuse, and other toxic forms of trauma (Spinelli et al., 2021). These experiences in formative years, even beginning as infants for some, have lasting effects through adulthood (Akin et al., 2021). This affects their relationships, long-term planning skills, and critical thinking needed for problem-solving (Avery, 2011; Epel, 2020).

Foundational, major psychological theories such as attachment, affect management, age

stages, and biopsychosocial influences help explain challenges beyond the limited skill sets needed to navigate adult life (Boering et al., 2024; Lee et al., 2014).

Background Summary

Thousands of EAs age out of the foster system each year with no practical living arrangements, making them vulnerable to homelessness, and other adverse outcomes. This grounded theory study explores what would be needed to engage adult members of a church to form a team and help an EA transition into independent living. The research's justification includes an understanding of EA needs, and their trauma experiences. A review of legislation and Child Protective Services inform this study's premise. Other supporting research includes an understanding of the key stakeholders, defense of a grounded theory qualitative study, and biblical underpinnings.

Problem Statement

A tragedy repeats each year when 30,000 EAs exit OHC. Four thousand EAs become instantly homeless (Farmer et al., 2021; Font et al., 2021; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2022). The EAs exiting OHC face disquieting and sometimes dangerous futures (Forge et al., 2018; Disability Rights North Carolina, 2022; Watt et al., 2018) such as legal issues (Font et al., 2021; Spinelli et al., 2021; Yi & Wildeman, 2018), HIV risks (Yoshioka-Maxwell & Rice, 2019), hunger (Spinelli et al., 2021), illness (Collins et al., 2018), and forced transactional sex (Ahrens et al., 2012; Cain, 2023; Contreras et al., 2022; Forge, 2023). The Psalms instruct people of God to "defend the weak and fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and oppressed" (*New International Version Bible*, 2011, Psalm 82:3). At least one of these circumstances (i.e., weak, fatherless, poor, or oppressed) characterize exiting EAs' situation.

Secular services exist (Armstrong-Heimsoth et al., 2021; Avery, 2011), and all fifty states have an independent living coordinator (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2023) with helpful ideas (Children's Bureau, 2018). Still, outcomes vary (Huang et al., 2022; Schelbe et al., 2023). National Christian organizations like the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption (2023) and local organizations (e.g., 111project, 2024; Christian Family Care, 2023) help with training and adoption advocacy but with little emphasis on transition services (Leathers et al., 2020). "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him" (Romans 8:28). Despite this truth, thousands of young adults still have little to no safety net (Liu, 2020).

"Each of those in Christ has different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us" (Romans 12:6) "to serve one another humbly in love" (Galatians 5:13). A work team of Christians will serve EAs' needs best because "two are better than one" (Ecclesiastes 4:9) and "a chord of three strands is not quickly broken" (Ecclesiastes 4:12). Examples of VCT team members' strengths might include understanding of personal finance, how to maintain a car, cooking, social skills, and simply "just being there" (Bendeck & Moore, 2022; Courtney & Okpych, 2021).

A work team is a distinct type of work group. A team has (i) coordinated actions, (ii) specific roles for each member, and (iii) common goals and objectives (Spector, 2021, p. 283). With members of each team having the shared goal of transitioning an EA into independence, they will equip themselves to help EAs navigate through a broad range of struggles (Avrushin & de Haymes, 2019; Omone Bose et al., 2022; Schelbe et al., 2023).

This research explores how to garner interest, commitment, and action (Kotter & Cohen, 2002; Kotter, 2008; Lewin, 1952; Locke & Latham, 2006) from teams (Beal,

2003; Spector, 2021, p. 283) within church congregations to help EAs transition from OHC into IL (Bandura, 1977; Kübler-Ross, 1969; Latham & Baldes, 1975; Lewin, 1952; Yeara et al., 1995). My research aspires to honor Liberty University's mission to "Train Champions for Christ", preparing a foundation of help for EAs: "In the same way, faith by itself, if not accompanied by action, is dead" (James 2:17).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative grounded theory study is to find the topmost factors needed to garner interest, commitment, action, and division of responsibility in teams of Christian adults to help EAs transition from state custody into IL.

Research Questions

RQ1: What topmost factors would garner interest in Christian adults in the needs of EAs transitioning from state custody into independent living?

RQ2: What topmost factors would garner commitment in Christian adults to join a team to help EAs transition from state custody into independent living?

RQ3: What topmost factors would garner action in Christian adults as part of a team to help EAs transition from state custody into independent living?

RQ4: What division of responsibilities would be necessary within a team of Christian adults to help EAs transition from state custody into independent living?

Assumptions and Limitations of the Study

The central premise of this study is that emancipated EAs require help and that VCTs would be equipped to provide that help. I also assume that EAs would be receptive to an offer from VCT to provide help.

The study assumes that participants represent broad stakeholder groups and that participant opinions find valid ways to motivate others like themselves. The proposed method may limit the quality of the findings.

The study investigates themes across stratified participant PCs with diversity within each focus group. This approach may meet difficulty gaining interest from the variety hoped for with only three to five churches.

I may encounter challenges enlisting and collaborating with points of contact such as in recruiting a quorum for focus-group participation. Participants may drop out as a "no-show" or for other reasons. The participating churches (via the POC) may need to carve off a date and time not conflicting with another church's needs.

The recruitment strategy may limit participants' diversity. As local recruiting will be entrusted to the appointed POC of each church, a POC may have biases favoring or disregarding individuals as participants.

I assume that the results obtained from three to five churches can be generalized to other similar churches. Moreover, my analysis will assume that participants will represent a diverse range of attitudes, values, and levels of altruism found in other PCs. Data collected may not reach saturation even with five churches represented. The study limits results to Oklahoma churches. Participating churches may not accurately reflect their respective denomination. Individual participants may be hesitant to share ideas with other parishioners.

The study proposes that a qualitative GT method is the most suitable approach to discover repeatable, practical, and ecologically valid findings. However, even if this

approach is the most effective, I assume the approach can generate sufficient quality, context-specific responses.

Theoretical Foundations of the Study

For this study, it is crucial to review theoretical aspects of brainstorming, standard rules and popular techniques professional facilitators use (Ideou, 2023; Murphy et al., 2023). Also volunteers on church teams may benefit from brainstorming and ideation between their members when defining goals and responsibilities.

The key brainstorming rules promote courtesy, constructive feedback, and keeping focus on the topic. Before starting a brainstorming session, it is necessary to establish or remind participants of the session's rules. The guidelines also include deferring judgment of other ideas, embracing unexpected and unusual contributions, building off other's ideas, speaking one at a time, and aiming for quantity over quality (Murphy et al., 2023). Several techniques are commonly used in brainstorming sessions. Some of these techniques are mind mapping, the use of grids, and using word anchors.

Mind mapping involves individual reflection. Participants take a short period to write down their thoughts or draw a visual representation of their thinking. The visual diagram is a hierarchical web. After completing individual diagrams, participants share their ideas with the group (Buran & Filyukov, 2015).

Grids, 2x2s, and matrices are also used to stimulate group ideation. A grid has categories and subcategories and is associated with a y-axis (vertical) and x-axis (horizontal), like a coordinate plane. Two-by-two matrices are also prevalent in management consulting organizations. These matrices have four squares standing for the

intersection of two subcategories to stimulate participant ideas (McClelland, 1988, p. 301; Wöhler & Reinhardt, 2021).

Word anchors include acronyms, backronyms, alliterations, and portmanteau. Backronyms are particularly common. For example, SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats), is a typical business facilitation backronym (Yang, 2023).

Spector (2021, pp. 289–292) compares group brainstorming and individual ideation, concluding that both have their strengths. This study uses both methods – research questions RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3 use group brainstorming, while RQ4 uses individual ideation. Lombardo (2003, pp. 81–87) highlights that creativity is important for productive work in a group or as an individual. Finally, Chun Tie et al. (2019) show that focus groups are one of the primary sources of data collection in grounded theory studies: individual interviews, focus groups, observations (journaling), and artifacts.

Development of Research Questions from Change Models

The research questions investigate the factors necessary to activate a VCT's support of an EA's transition into IL. Figure 1 compares the research questions listed in the first two columns to well-recognized change theories and models: Kübler-Ross, Consultant-PMI, Lewin, and Kotter & Cohen.

Research Questions Compared to Kübler-Ross Model

Shown as the third column in Figure 1 and illustrated in Figure 2, the Kübler-Ross (1969) model of death and dying is a useful framework for explaining the sequence of individual emotion when facing dire, non-negotiable circumstances (York, 2020, p. 228)—in this instance, the crisis of EAs aging out into uncertain futures. The framework is also used in an I/O psychology business context to predict or explain worker emotions

when confronted with a mandatory business change or job loss (Alaimo, 2022, pp. 39–45; Chavan & Bhattacharya, 2022; Gerhardt & Puchkov, 2023).

Figure 1

Comparison of Research Questions to Established Change Theories and Models

RQs	This study	Kübler Ross	* Consultant	PMI	Lewin	Kotter & Cohen
RQ1	Garner interest	Crisis Shock/Denial Anger	<u>Awareness</u> Unaware Unaware Awareness Aware Understand Understand		Unfreeze	Create a sense of urgency Build a guiding coalition Form a strategic vision
RQ2	Garner commitment	Bargaining; Frustration; Catharsis	<u>Concern</u> Self-concern Mental tryout Believe		Change	Enlist a volunteer army
RQ3	Garner action	<u>Acceptance (or depression)</u> Experiment & Decision	<u>Involvement</u> Involvement Act Hands-on		Change	<u>Remove barriers</u> Generate short-term wins Sustain acceleration
RQ4	Divide responsibility	Integration	<u>Acceptance</u> Acceptance Go live Ownership		Freeze	Institute change

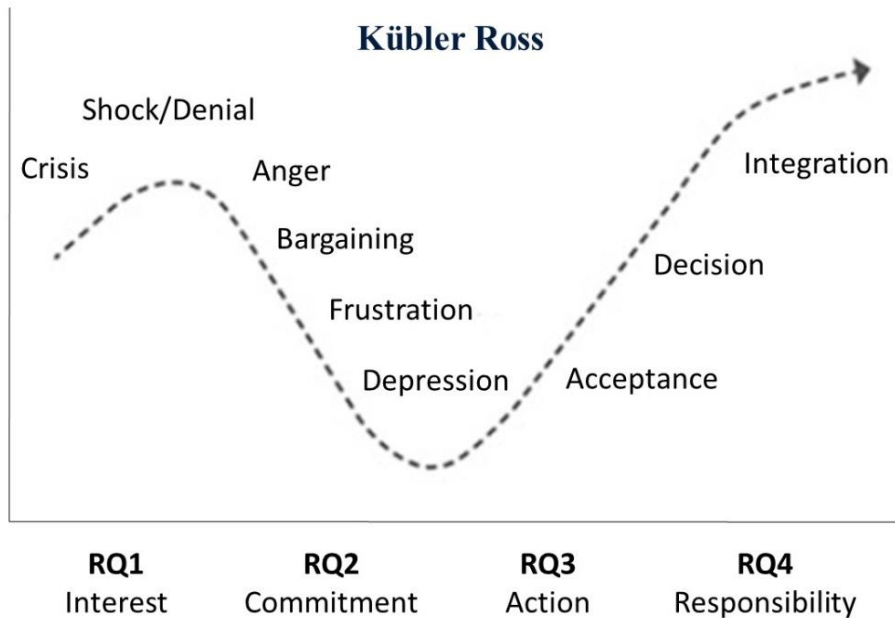
* **Consultant** change/acceptance sequence combines several management consulting sources dated 1981–2013.

The Kübler-Ross model supports three of this study's research questions. The model represents shock (RQ1), acceptance (RQ3), and integration (RQ4). The model does not correspond to or support RQ2.

The model presumes non-negotiable circumstances. It does not adequately describe the factors needed to garner negotiable change. In this case, a potential volunteer team member could choose to not take part after their initial awareness of EA struggles. Nonetheless, being a well-established model, it shows a baseline for comparison to the research questions.

Figure 2

Alignment of Research Questions and Kübler-Ross Change Curve



Research Questions Compared to Business Change Models

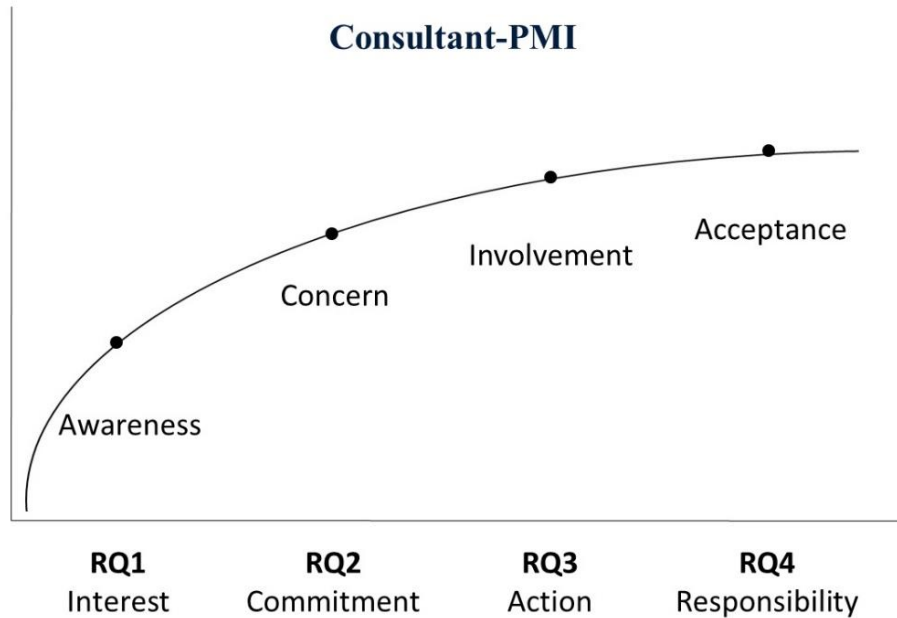
Adjacent and to the right of the Kübler-Ross column in Figure 1, the consulting and project management institute (PMI) columns depict a compilation of commercial business change methodologies used for several decades (Davidson, 2013; Dormant & Byers, 1981; Project Management Institute, 2017; and Roberts et al., 2003).

Figure 3 illustrates a composite of the various forms of awareness, self-concern, involvement, and acceptance compared to this study's research questions. The consultant and PMI models support the four research questions well, except these models are used to understand large-scale business change more than individual or small-team change. Even so, as an I/O change management tool, this composite matches with research questions

one-for-one: Awareness (RQ1), concern (RQ2), involvement (RQ3), and acceptance (RQ4).

Figure 3

Alignment of Research Questions and Consultant-PMI Business Change Curve

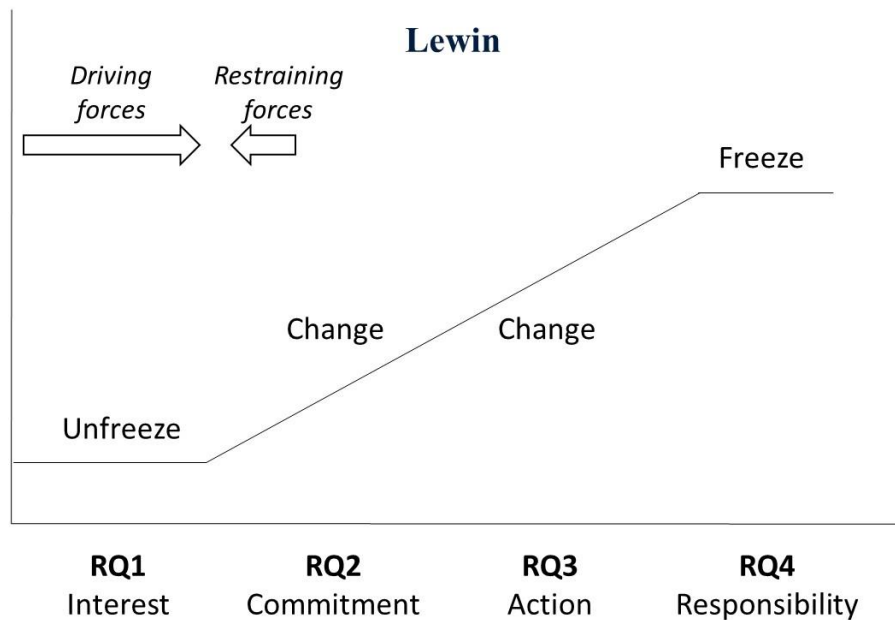


Research Questions Compared to Lewin's Change Model

Figure 4 illustrates Lewin's change stages associated with this study's research questions (Lewin, 1952). Lewin's seminal change model applies to individuals, groups, teams, and organizations. Figure 4 includes two arrows (driving forces and restraining forces). When driving forces (whether actual or perceived) are greater than restraining forces, the initial circumstances of equilibrium (i.e., the unfreezing processes) change to new circumstances of equilibrium (i.e., the freeze processes) (Cummings et al., 2016). Unfreeze corresponds to RQ1. Change corresponds to RQ2 and RQ3. Freeze corresponds to RQ4.

Figure 4

Alignment of Research Questions and Lewin's 3-Stage Model of Change Theory



Lewin's (1952) change theory informs many later models, including management consulting change methodologies (Endrejat, 2022; Roberts et al., 2003). This study's research questions are supported well by Lewin's work as a change model for individuals, churches, and their future volunteer teams.

Research Questions Compared to Kotter's 8 Steps Model

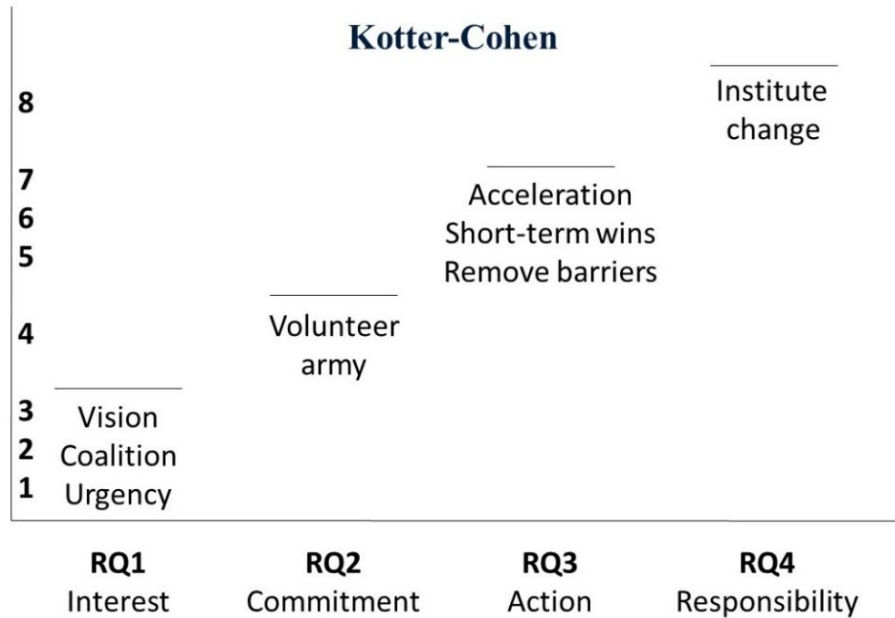
Figure 5 illustrates Kotter's 8 steps of change supporting this study's research questions. The vertical axis in Figure 5 shows the 8 steps in sequence (Kotter & Cohen, 2002) bottom to top.

Kotter's 8-Steps is a newer model (as compared to Lewin or Kübler-Ross models) and a widely accepted, I/O change model for business, education, healthcare, and other

industries (Haas et al., 2019). This change model strongly supports this study's research questions.

Figure 5

Alignment of Research Questions and Kotter-Cohen 8 Step Change Model



Summary: Development of Research Questions

This study's research questions are well supported by theory and practice. In this section, I compare seminal theoretical works and more recent change models to the research questions.

Kübler-Ross explains non-negotiable change. It supports three research questions but does not correspond well to RQ2. The Consultant-PMI model supports all four research questions but is used for organizational change and less so with personal change. At its high-level of abstraction, Lewin supports the research questions well, although it requires greater granularity to be immediately useful. Kotter directly supports all four

research questions, but like the consulting change model, the 8-steps most readily to business change. The change models presented support my aim and development of the research questions.

Definition of Terms

The following is a list of definitions of terms used in this study.

Adulting – the act or practice of attending to the ordinary tasks responsible adults need (Merriam-Webster, 2024).

Aging out – refers to the legal requirements and processes for youths to transition from CPS protections at age 18. Some states have provisions for out of home care extensions (e.g., up to 21). Aging out is synonymous with emancipation, except that in limited circumstances, state law permits emancipation by minors prior to the age of majority (Havlicek, 2014; Huang et al., 2022; National Center for Child Welfare Excellence, 2024; Schelbe et al., 2023).

Bounce – to go quickly and usually repeatedly from one place, situation, or job to another (Merriam-Webster, 2024). Here, the expression indicates that a youth in OHC goes from one living arrangement to another (i.e., a change in placement) (Dworsky et al., 2018).

Chafee – The John H. Chafee foster care program for successful transition to adulthood established a baseline of legislated care and guidelines for youth in transition (John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program 42 USC §677, 1999). State discretion has introduced variations of program implementation (Chor et al., 2018).

Child Protective Services (CPS) – over a dozen organizational and departmental names from various states are charged with managing child welfare processes such as youths’

safety and the recruitment of foster families. Here, CPS represents the most common expression used in the literature reviewed. Department of Human Services (DHS) and Child Welfare are also commonly described in the literature – although these expressions imply a state’s organizational unit is more broadly charged with youths in OHC, older persons, some adult populations, families in need of care, as well as youths uninvolved with OHC. Child Protective Services are the state’s care and maintenance of a child, including the right to direct their activities and make/contribute to decisions about the child. Nationally, state CPS organizations manage 400,000 youths in OHC (Courtney & Okpych, 2021; Merriam-Webster, 2024; Phillips et al., 2020).

Emancipation – means the release from state care of an emerging adult with full legal rights and control of their capacity (Merriam-Webster, 2024).

Emerging Adult (EA) – young people transitioning from adolescence to adulthood (typically ages 17-18) with complex histories who have recently aged out - or will soon age out of care. These youths have lived experiences of the foster system, also called OHC, state care, or state custody (Spinelli et al., 2021). Depending on state law, the age allowed to remain in care may be up to 21 years or older (National Center for Child Welfare Excellence, 2024).

Foster care – one of several forms of out-of-home care for youths temporarily or permanently removed from their biological primary caregiver. Foster families are considered caring environments supporting youths despite a youth’s adverse experiences. (Chodura et al., 2021).

Independent Living (IL) – connotes adult self-sufficiency, autonomy, and decision-making (Hokanson, 2020). Scholarly literature often measures IL regarding educational

attainment, housing, employment, access to medical care, and economic well-being (Liu, 2020; Trejos-Castillo et al., 2015).

Out of Home Care (OHC) – One of a variety of housing arrangements provided to children and teens permanently or temporarily removed from their biological parents or primary caretaker's care for reasons including abuse or neglect. Examples include temporary placements, foster placement, guardianship, relative care, group placement, and detention/incarceration facilities (Cheng, 2020; Casey Family Programs, 2017).

Permanency – This is a legal, emotional, and permanent family living arrangement providing stability and cultural continuity for youths. Permanency possibilities include reunification with the birth family, living with relatives, a guardianship relationship, or adoption. (Casey Family Services, 2004; National Center for Child Welfare Excellence, 2024)

Protestant – a Christian not of a Catholic or Eastern church characterized by the assertion of a personal relationship with God through Christ and Trinitarian in their understanding of the nature of God (FEMA, 2023d; Merriam-Webster, 2024).

Stakeholder – an individual or group who engages in or is affected by a course of action (Merriam-Webster, 2024).

Significance of the Study

Application of the results of the study may help thousands of young adults transition into independent living better by examining an innovative approach involving the formation of teams of volunteer church members.

This study also contributes to the discipline of industrial and organizational (I/O) psychology. The results of this study could be a new theory to engage adult church

members to form teams with agreed-upon responsibilities to solve community issues not explored here. Seminal and well-established change theories provide the basis for this study's research questions.

While not a focus of this study, denomination distinctions (beyond doctrine) may appear during data analysis. Also, the findings of this study might apply to secular groups engaging with volunteers.

Finally, the examination of blending pragmatism, altruism, faith, and secularism can add to our understanding of the intersection of these concepts in the workplace and beyond.

Summary

This study emphasizes the need to support young adults aging out of OHC. Christian adults, as members of a team, have the potential to improve the chances of this transition going well. A team may help a vulnerable EA learn adulting skills, grow in their confidence, and experience safety in the process.

With a GT approach, this study explores how Christian adults can form a volunteer team to help these young adults transition from OHC into IL. The study relies on the theoretical underpinnings of I/O psychology and a biblical foundation. This GT's results form the basis to fulfill the scriptural obligation to care for vulnerable people and extend a helping hand to those who need it most. This study relies on church volunteer participation to provide their opinions and ideas during brainstorming and ideation sessions. An understanding of EA trauma, the CPS organization and processes, denominational distinctions, and scriptural foundations provide the underpinning of the study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Here, I research what would be needed to engage a Protestant church (PC) to form a volunteer Christian team (VCT) and assist an EA into independent living (IL). Viewing this study through an I/O psychology lens, the literature review focuses on three core organizational and transformational change aspects – people, processes, and organizations (Spector, 2021, pp. 2–5).

People involved (stakeholders) include the youths, their biological families and other caregivers, CPS workers and leaders, and church volunteers. Processes involved include engagement with youth, engagement with caregivers, internal processes, change theory, team dynamics, and church processes. Families, CPS and its affiliated organizations, and church congregations are involved. Emphasis is placed on understanding the EA and their trauma experiences, CPS as an organization and especially its frontline workers, and biblical support for engaging churches for this endeavor.

Description of Search Strategy

The search strategy for this study includes three primary methods for scholarly material and two methods for grey literature. Biblical research relies on prior familiarity with scripture and later searches within an online *New International Version Bible* (*New International Version Bible*, 2011).

The rationale for using grey literature includes a richer picture of government-relevant statistics and existing and emerging programs for transitioning EAs and improves the comprehensiveness of the study (Kamei et al., 2021; Spagnolo & Lal,

2021). The three methods for scholarly literature primarily originate from Liberty University's Jerry Falwell online library (and with lesser emphasis using Google Scholar).

Examples of keywords searches appear in Table 1. Delimiters for most searches include (i) journal/peer-reviewed publications, (ii) 5-years or more recent, (iii) advanced search in title field or author field, or both. Search expressions are crucial words in various combinations.

Table 1

Most Frequent Literature Search Categories and Expressions

Primary Expression	Alternative Expressions
Adolescent	Child; Youth; Teen(age); Young (adult) Violence; Neglect; Trauma; Run away; Poverty
Aging out	Emerging adult; Youth in transition; Emancipation Job(s); Housing Coach; Mentor; College;
CPS	DHS; Turnover; Job(s); Organization Child protective services; Welfare; State
Foster	Group Home; Foster system; Juvenile justice Adoption; Transition; Bounce; Care(giver) Homeless; LGTBQ; Immigrant; Minority
Protestant	Church; Denomination; US Black; Black church; (Southern)Baptist; Methodist
Psychology	Change (management); Communication; Motivation Attachment; Erikson; Macia; Piaget;

Scholarly articles were discovered in three significant ways. Firstly, assignments related to earlier coursework in this doctoral program allow flexibility in selecting the topic area of interest. Whenever possible, assignments cover adolescents, fostering, CPS, and aging out subjects. These assignments require citations. An ongoing compilation of these citations and references is in an Excel spreadsheet. The previously referenced works are organized to cut duplicates and coded with tentative applicability to a dissertation section. The first Excel source list came from twenty-nine assignments with 556 references (including duplicates). After dropping duplicates and off-subject possibilities, 184 potential references remained for review. Several of this program's textbooks contribute source material.

Second, new searches specific to the dissertation's needs were performed through the Jerry Falwell Library. Last, reverse lookups using Google Scholar find more recently published works referencing dated works found in other methods.

Grey literature was discovered through Google's natural language inquiries and references of similar grey literature (or government statistics), often named by a federally funded research organization (Children's Bureau, 2018; 2020a; 2020b; 2021; and 2023).

Review of Literature

Transitions to Independent Living

For this review, I examine scholarly, and grey literature associated with characteristics, circumstances, and opportunities of aging out EAs. I review of theoretical aspects of human development beginning in infancy through adolescence, and EA trauma experiences which explains some of the struggles facing aging out young adults. The literature reveals the importance and complexity of the CPS organization and processes

related to youths in OHC. The premise of this study is that adult church members can help an EA transition into IL. Participants in the study are members of a purposeful sample of PCs. Church denominational distinctions are reviewed to honor those differences.

The study's foundation is built on the biblical principles of kindness, mercy, and faith. We are blessed when we show kindness and mercy to those in need (Proverbs 14:21; Matthew 5:7). Also, faith is shown through action (James 2:18).

This literature review describes young adults' challenges transitioning from state care to IL and explores available support options. The study examines factors needed to engage a team of Christian adults as a new, and alternative, way to help EAs make a smooth transition from CPS care into IL. (Brown, 2023; Gypen et al., 2017).

Case workers and other frontline workers in CPS face challenges such as secondary trauma, large caseloads, low pay, and administrative requirements (Bigley, 2022; Julien-Chinn et al., 2021; Kothari et al., 2021; Prost & Middleton, 2020). High worker turnover adds trauma to youths in care (Casey Family Programs, 2017; Garcia et al., 2020). A church transition team could mitigate such losses providing much-needed support to these young adults once reaching the age of majority.

How a church team connects with the CPS or an EA needing and wanting help is beyond the scope of this study. Even so, this study requires an investigation of the youths, their trauma, CPS complexities, varieties of PCs, and the nature of teams for a complete picture of the opportunities and obstacles (Brennan, 2019). This research includes a review of literature for each key area: transitioning adults and their historical trauma experiences, CPS organization, existing aging out transition options, and the Church.

Challenges of Young Adulthood

Most young adults transitioning into independence face several challenges irrespective of whether they are transitioning from OHC or otherwise. In these situations, support systems help young adults overcome obstacles.

Young adults working toward independence encounter challenges, including employment and housing, but these obstacles can be overcome with a support system. (Lowe & Arnett, 2020). One area for improvement is employment. Securing a job, keeping it, and getting to and from it presents a challenge – but it is not an insurmountable obstacle with a support system such as an encouraging family, dependable transportation, and access to skills training. Examples of support include assistance in filling out job applications and rehearsing for job interviews.

Another challenge for most young adults is securing dependable housing (Clark, 2019; Parola et al., 2023). Again, with a support system – friends, family, and secular programs – housing challenges are not insurmountable. Many other challenges are typical and achievable for young adults transitioning to independence from stable homes, loving parents, and safe communities with their high school diplomas and driver's licenses (Bornman, 2016).

Overcoming challenging circumstances to transition into independence is a common experience for many young adults. Their families may be living near or below the poverty line (NCBI, 2022), they may still need to complete their education, jobs may be challenging, and decisions about where to live present obstacles not faced by their age-peers from idealized circumstances. Still, these young adults figure it out with a

modicum of support, such as with a network of friends and their resilience (Lašáková et al., 2023).

Added Challenges From Out of Home Care

Young adults who leave OHC face added challenges due to a lack of resources, limited life skills, and the trauma they have experienced (Collins, 2020; Doucet et al., 2022a; Männistö & Pirttimaa, 2018). Youths often enter care as children and experience multiple moves, making it difficult to adjust to new caregivers and living arrangements (Armstrong-Heimsoth et al., 2021). Traumatic challenges prior to and during OHC stay negatively affect transitioned adults (Havlicek & Court, 2016; U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2022).

As a youth enters the teenage years, added pressures occur on top of earlier negative experiences (Ball et al., 2023; Devine & Cohen-Cline, 2022). Teenagers' earlier living circumstances in OHC contribute to their uncertainty and struggles when aging out of care (Ball et al., 2023; Cesar, 2018; Shook et al., 2009). Uncertainty causes constant arousal, affecting the body and brain. Those experiencing these added pressures struggle with decision-making, problem-solving, planning, and independent living because their prefrontal cortex does not develop normally (Epel, 2020; Lee et al., 2014).

Government Programs

Issues from aging out of OHC raise unintended consequences, including incarceration, long-term public aid, and multi-generational effects (Lee et al., 2023; Wrotten, 2018). The 1999 John F. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program lays out a foundation of solutions (Chor et al., 2018). Well-meaning federal, large-scale efforts set policies to protect youth but fall short (Benton, 2019; Leathers et al., 2020). Child

Welfare Information Gateway (2019) lists major federal policies directly or indirectly affecting EAs and services. Tables 2–3 list these in date order: 1974–2018. Children's Bureau (2024) identifies these and related federal legislation and policies.

Table 2

Relevant Public Law Impacting EAs, Youth, and Foster Care 2005–2018

Public Law	Bill	Date	Abbreviated Name
115-271	H.R. 6	Oct '18	Patients and Communities
115-123	H.R. 1892	Feb '18	Family First Prevention Services
114-198	S. 524	Jul '16	Addiction and Recovery
114-22	S. 178	May '15	Justice for Victims of Trafficking
113-183	H.R. 4980	Sep '14	Preventing Sex Trafficking
112-34	H.R. 2883	Sep '11	Family Services Improvement
111-320	S. 3817	Dec '10	CAPTA Reauthorization
111-148	H.R. 3590	Mar '10	Patient Protection Affordable Care
110-351	H.R. 6893	Oct '08	Increasing Adoptions
109-432	H.R. 6111	Dec '06	Tax Relief and Health Care
109-288	S. 3525	Sep '06	Family Services Improvement
109-248	H.R. 4472	Jul '06	Child Protection and Safety
109-239	H.R. 5403	Jul '06	Interstate Placement Children
109-171	S. 1932	Feb '06	Deficit Reduction
109-113	S. 1894	Nov '05	Fair Access Foster Care
108-36	S. 342	Jun '03	Keeping Children and Families Safe

Table 3*Relevant Public Law Impacting EAs, Youth, and Foster Care 1974–2004*

Public Law	Bill	Date	Abbreviated Name
107-133	H.R. 2873	Jan '02	Promoting Safe and Stable Families
106-279	H.R. 2909	Oct '00	Intercountry Adoption
106-177	H.R. 764	Mar '00	Child Abuse Prevention
106-169	H.R. 3443	Dec '99	John H. Chafee Foster Care Revision
105-89	H.R. 867	Nov '97	Adoption and Safe Families
104-235	S. 919	Oct '96	Child Abuse Prevention & Treatment
104-188	H.R. 3448	Aug '96	The Interethnic Provisions
103-382	H.R. 6	Oct '94	Multiethnic Placement
103-66	H.R. 2264	Aug '93	Family Preservation and Support
102-295	S. 838	May '92	Child Abuse, and Family Services
100-294	H.R. 1900	Apr '88	Abuse Prevention, Adoption Services
98-457	H.R. 1904	Oct '84	Child Abuse Amendments of 1984
96-272	H.R. 3434	Jun '80	Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare
95-608	S. 1214	Nov '78	Indian Child Welfare
95-266	H.R. 6693	Apr '78	Child Abuse and Adoption Reform
93-247	S. 1191	Jan '74	Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment

Table 4 lists major sections of Children’s Bureau Child Welfare Policy Manual (CWPM). The online manual contains common inquiries, questions, and detailed explanations pertaining to certain child welfare programs (Children’s Bureau, 2024).

Table 4*Major Sections of Children's Bureau Child Welfare Policy Manual*

Description and Common Name	Acronym
Administration for Children & Families	ACF
Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System	AFCARS
Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act	CAPTA
Child Welfare Policy Manual	CWPM
Citizenship/Alienage Requirements	Title IV-B
Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System	CCWIS
Independent Living	IL
Interethnic Adoption Provisions	IEP
Monitoring: Child and Family and Services Review	CFSR
Multi-Ethnic Placement Act	MEPA

Several key sections of the CWPM are relevant to this study. Administration for Children & Families (AFCARS) defines data elements required for State reporting, such as relationships between State and tribal organizations, and case plans with IL as the goal. Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) clarifies guardian ad litem, among other assurances. States must train guardians ad litem adults to include childhood, child, and adolescent (including those approaching the age of majority). Multi-Ethnic Placement Act (MEPA) and Interethnic Adoption Provisions (IEAP) intend to mediate disproportionality of youth of non-majority ethnicity in OHC, which influences improvements in subpopulations disproportionality of EAs remaining in care through

emancipation. Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS) requires certain entities (private and public) to maintain reporting information. However, reporting can complicate processes for states with significant decentralized (county or region) levels of authority. Citizenship/Alienage Requirements (Title IV-B) clarify whether or not states are required to delineate the citizenship status of individuals receiving Title IV-B funding. Title IV-E Prevention Program (Title IV-E) sets limits for adoptive parents to receive continuing support payments past age 18, among other factors influencing EA's circumstances for potential late-age adoption. Each subject area (legislation, policy, or guidance) has varying requirements for states' compliance and administration. Many of these have periodic updates—requiring changes in semantics only or comparatively larger policy changes—which impact states and their ability to serve EAs approaching emancipation (Children's Bureau, 2024).

The most significant Act – John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Programs (H.R. 3443) – began in 1999 with high aspirations. The Act is the launch of the national requirements for states to find youths likely to remain in care through their 18th birthday and provide services including education, training, substance abuse awareness, and independent living skills. Also, those states receiving funding are encouraged to sponsor programs for ongoing provisions for housing, and to support young adults' efforts to achieve self-sufficiency until they are 21 (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 1999; Social Security, 2018).

Legal pursuits in North Carolina have raised awareness of lacking and disproportionate services provided to youth with disabilities and children of color (Disability Rights North Carolina, 2022; Timothy B. et al., plaintiffs, v. Kinsley, 2023).

Partially in a response granting plaintiff relief described by Blythe (2024), the state has created and set a comprehensive program to address disparities experienced by persons of color and those with disabilities (North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, 2024)—the Olmsted Plan.

With child welfare best practices frequently shared between states, programs like North Carolina's Olmsted Plan may be on the horizon in other states (Yi et al., 2023). Despite the intentions of legislation and policy, uncertainty persists, and the lack of permanency contributes to youths' anxiety and negative emotions (Farmer et al., 2021). Emancipated youth blame their insufficient life skills training and adverse life outcomes on the instability of foster home care, frequent caseworker changes, and the lack of caring adult mentors (Bendeck & Moore, 2022).

Extended State Care

Even if limited, forty-six states offer some form of extended care (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2022). The tapering off, rather than abruptly ending, support is helpful for many young adults exiting care (Courtney, 2021; Fernandes-Alcantara, 2019, p. 6; Hanratty et al., 2020; Huang et al., 2022; Social Security, 2018). The 2022 update to the CWPM, Independent Living Use of Funds (CWPM, subsection 3.3E) clarifies restrictions and allowances to states for Chafee funding (Children's Bureau, 2024; Social Security law Section 477).

State programs described in 42 USC § 677 subsection (h) are given \$140,000,000 for independent living programs and an added \$60,000,000 in vouchers for EA education and training. Federal and state attention toward the needs of EAs – including those aging out into homelessness – is clear from legislation and funding set aside (amounting to

\$6,000–\$10,000 per newly aged out EA). Table 4 lists the major chapters in the CWPM. The Independent Living chapter offers broad guidance to States.

State agency disparity introduces complexity and inconsistency (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2022; Kelly & Simmel, 2020; Webb et al., 2017). Complexities aside, extended care improves several outcomes, including high school completion—even though overall, young adults with foster care experience still have lower graduation rates than their peers (Okpych & Courtney, 2019). Other positive outcomes of extended care include improvements in employment, earnings, and savings. Extended care decreases food insecurity (Courtney & Okpych, 2021; Gypen et al., 2017). Negative outcomes are reduced, including the odds of being homeless or couch surfing, the odds of arrest, and the need for public food aid benefits (Courtney, 2021; Fernandes-Alcantara, 2019).

Secular Programs

Some programs show promise. Independent living programs and services often need to catch up to their program aims (Diaz et al., 2019). Most of these programs focus on jobs, education, and housing (Collins, 2020; Fernandes-Alcantara, 2019; Liu, 2020; Männistö & Pirttimaa, 2018). However, few interventions include soft goals such as social skills (Citrin et al., 2019; Doucet et al., 2022b) or the reduction of mental health disorders (Blythe, 2024; Jäggi et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2023).

Gunawardena and Stich (2021) find mixed results from their examination of thirty prior studies from 2008 to 2020. Twenty-three of the studies reviewed are within the United States. The success of programs aimed toward IL readiness is positive but is still mixed depending on emphasis (e.g., education, budgeting, and housing). Success varies

depending on the state(s) studied. Overly restrictive programs show limited success and the characteristics of youth themselves contribute to mixed results.

Minorities and marginalized youth face unique pressures (Manuel, 2018). Failure to recognize the needs of subpopulations worsens the issues—such as unaccompanied immigrant youth face language barriers (Avrushin & de Haymes, 2019). Federal policies overlook the unique needs of exiting EAs with behavioral disorders and disabilities (Kang-yi & Adams, 2017; Lee et al., 2023a). Non-conforming self-identity youth are more likely to become homeless and crime victims (Forge, 2023; Mountz, 2020) although tentative changes in Title IV-B programs propose fundings of services to offset these risks.

Christian Solutions

While this study's heart involves aging out EAs—young adults who have not been adopted—some of the issues are the same as adolescent years while in care. Secular, as well as faith-based groups, struggle with adoption issues. Even so, Christian organizations and their leaders have stepped forward, recognizing the need for practical solutions (DeGarmo, 2019). Through various programs and initiatives, these organizations raise awareness about adoption's challenges and offer practical support to those looking to adopt.

Mentoring for Independent Living

Nuñez et al. (2022) show that EAs benefit from strong social support and mentoring such as in accessing government aid, reconnecting with biological family, and through encouraging personal interests. Powell (2015, pp. 127–128) further describes that teaching and modeling prosocial acts can be a protective factor for youths. Mentors can

provide positive support through genuine caring and being available for advice (Avery, 2011; Farmer et al., 2021).

There are examples of support mechanisms and programs. The Journey UP Mentor Project (JUMP) is an example of positive mentorship and support. The program provides youth basic life skills, consistency, and new experiences (Bonella et al., 2020; Gunawardena & Stich, 2021). Group home workers and training providers can guide teens living in group homes, leading to positive outcomes (Akin et al., 2021; Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2019, p. 303; Longhi & Reed, 2021; Shdaimah et al., 2021). State-sponsored programs offer support, although the support varies between states. State government and tribal nation searches from their respective website home pages often do not yield obvious or consistent resources for aging out information (i.e., from searches representing all 50 states and multiple recognized tribal nations).

Mentoring includes a wide range of possibilities (Allen et al. 2020). Natural mentoring, compared to mentoring programs, appears to offer the most promising results (Thompson et al., 2016). But, still, formal mentor programs provide stability, esteem, and safety (Simmel et al., 2020). Bridging the needs of youth through mentoring – such as providing transportation to work, and school may be a crucial appeal for a volunteer team’s relationship with an EA (Gunawardena & Stich, 2021). Non-profit organizations and communities can also support at-risk youth, improving capacities for managing money, making thoughtful decisions, and improving social skills (Makanui, 2019; Sulimani-Aidan et al., 2019; Zeldin, 2018). Mentoring – whether through close, individual relationships or less frequent community-based events – is beneficial to EAs.

Mentors and peers play a crucial role in the youth's stability, esteem, and safety (Bekbolatkyzy et al., 2019; Longhi & Reed, 2021; Simmel et al., 2020). Doucet and Farmer (2021) itemize protective factors that help with improved self-perception and efficacy. Examples of protective factors include decreasing the number of bounces and decreasing the need for placement in congregate housing. Hokanson and Farmer (2020) describe building self-esteem as enhanced by applying resilience theory. Doucet (2022) further reveals teenagers' strong desire and need for more control of circumstances affecting their lives, helping to build these strengths. Access to trusted adults and friendships with prosocial peers greatly and positively help EA transition from OHC (Ball et al., 2023; Lane, 2016).

Beyond social support and bridging activities, other forms of mentoring include help with emotional, behavioral, and money management deficits (Packard, 2020; Smith, 2017). Free resources, such as tool kits for decision-making and permanency pacts for reunification and adoption offered through the National Center for Child Welfare Excellence (2024) can help a volunteer team find the highest needs of an EA. Table 5 lists examples of mentorship ideas.

Table 5

Example Opportunity Areas for Teaching, Guiding, and Mentoring Young Adults

A-C	D-H	I-S	S-Z
A phone to use	Drivers Ed	Job search	Storage
Advocacy	Emergency cash	Mechanical needs	Taxes
Babysitting	Navigating services	Medical/safety	Transportation
Choices/decisions	Housing	Someone to talk to	Voting

Aging Out to Homelessness

Homelessness and harm to transitioning EAs are alarming (Lee et al., 2023a). An estimated 4,000 instantly become homeless (Farmer et al., 2021), and further, 40% of aged-out EAs experience homelessness by age 26 (Kelly & Simmel, 2020). Those aging out of a shelter and belonging to a marginalized subpopulation are at the highest risk of homelessness (Baker, 2017; Crawford et al., 2015; Hanratty et al., 2020; Robinson, 2018).

These transitioning EAs face hunger, unwanted pregnancy, illness, substance abuse, contracting HIV, and trafficking, among their other difficulties (Ball et al., 2023; Cullen et al., 2020; Dworsky & Courtney, 2009; Forge et al., 2018; Madden et al., 2021; Rebbe et al., 2017). Even with a modicum of safe living arrangements, they must confront perfunctory challenges—such as understanding and navigating through bureaucratic processes (Armstrong-Heimsoth et al., 2021).

Young people with OHC experience and emancipating EAs have higher sexual risk-taking behaviors, contributing to lower levels of sexual well-being (Brandon-Friedman & Fortenberry, 2020), drawing a connection between Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and sexual well-being. Transactional sex and trafficking pose problematic issues. Pregnancy rates (approaching 50% by age 21) are similar between young women leaving OHC prior to emancipation and those emancipating from care (Combs et al., 2018; Kelly & Simmel, 2020).

Rape and molestation result in long-lasting effects of trauma affecting youths even once exiting the system (Ahrens et al., 2012; Forsyth, 2017). CPS professionals are time-constrained and unable to invest time in addressing past youth experiences and

histories of sexual and physical abuse and neglect (Hanratty et al., 2020; Havlicek, 2014). While this study is focused on the willingness (i.e., interest, commitment, and action) of church volunteers to help EAs transition into IL, a significant reason for pursuing the study is derived from the realities listed in this section. For He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds (*New International Version Bible*. 1978/2011. Psalms 147:3).

Summary for Transitions to Independent Living

Legislation has improved EA transitions through funding and state participation – although the intentions of government acts since the 1970s are only partially realized. Because state-sponsored programs vary – and are often difficult to access without guidance – these programs have a mix of successes. Not-for-profit organizations, even when successful, are limited in scope.

Results from this study could form the basis for a more accessible alternative solution for EAs preparing for aging out. The next section outlines trauma and its impact on an EA leading up to their age of emancipation.

Understanding Youths in Care

This study explores ways to enlist a VCT's interest, commitment, and action for helping an EA transition into IL. But the rationale of the investigation centers on youths and young adults. The earlier section emphasizes existing circumstances for EAs transitioning into IL. This section reviews the effects of trauma prior to an EA aging out.

The research questions – especially RQ2 – will collect concerns posed by participants in this study. Concerns shared during facilitated brainstorming sessions will predict probable concerns for future VCTs. Some concerns will come from participant assumptions about EAs' circumstances and life experiences (whether grounded in fact or

otherwise). This section provides the basis for an introduction to trauma presented in RQ2 brainstorming.

The definition of complex trauma varies among professionals but is recognized to involve multiple stressors within a stressed caregiving system (Blaustein and Kinniburgh, 2019; p. 5). Developmental factors and external forces can affect youths differently (Clements et al., 2020; Ferrara et al., 2023; Helton et al., 2017; Lopez, 2021). Traumatic experiences arise from a range of sources, including neglect and abuse over a long time and sometimes as a single violent or dangerous event (Scheeringa et al., 2011). These experiences of children and adolescents can negatively change their lives well into adulthood (Agaibi & Wilson, 2005) such as triggering a danger response (Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2019, p. 14).

There will be contrasts between some team member's life experiences and those of a young adult aging out of CPS. Because of these differences, a volunteer team can benefit from their rudimentary understanding of trauma and remember that those who are crushed in spirit can find comfort in the Lord (*New International Version Bible*. 1978/2011. Psalms 34:18).

Developmental Theories and Factors

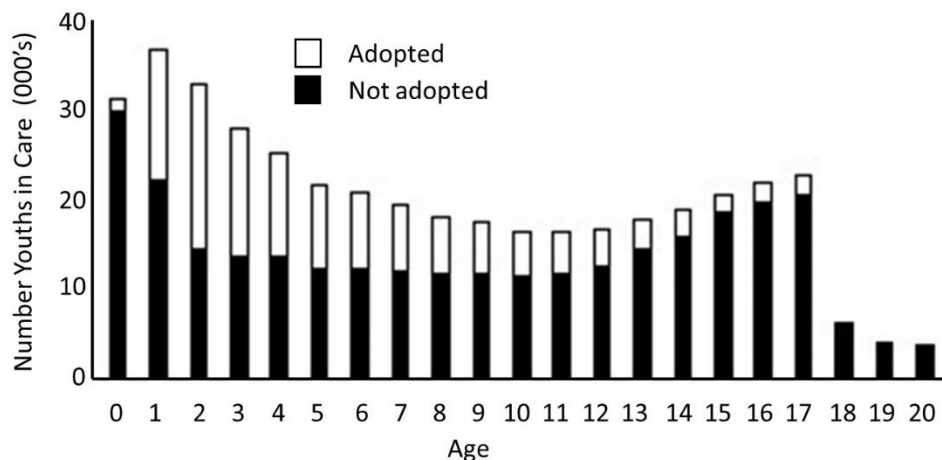
Theories presented in this section include life stages described by Erikson, Marcia, and Piaget (Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2019, p. 5; Miller, 2016, pp. 8–9; Moshman, 2011, pp. 117–120; Oldroyd et al., 2022). A review of life stages and development from infancy through adolescence is instructive to understand trauma-responses in contrast to normative development. Developmental factors can be helpful or severely disruptive (i.e., complex traumatic development factors). Complex traumatic

experiences have a significant impact resulting in non-normative brain development from persistent hypervigilance that can last into adulthood (Bowlby, 1979; Kelly et al., 2020, p. 23; Sansone et al., 2012).

Youths in care are removed from their caregivers for trauma events and circumstances such as abandonment, violence, abuse, neglect, and similar experiences. Younger children are often reunited with their caregivers once safety is proven. Others are placed in kinship care, a foster home, or adopted. Beginning in adolescence, a greater percentage of youths in OHC are wards of the state and placed in group homes. These adolescents are increasingly less likely to find an adoptive family (Figure 6).

Figure 6

Youths in Care by Age: Number Adopted Versus Not Adopted Per Year



Placement affects youths responses, including joy, sadness, rage, and fear (Powell, 2015, pp. 138–140). The type of placement, age, and development stage of a child or adolescent contribute to a sense of stability. For example, kinship placement can mitigate stressors and increase stability compared to temporary placement (Lovett & Xue, 2020). In other instances, a child might develop a healthy sense of attachment to a foster

family but then move (bounce) to a different family or living situation for any one of several reasons (Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2019, p. 58; Lee et al., 2014). Frequent bouncing can contribute to mistrust of otherwise well-meaning adults. A nurturant bond with a safe person and a long-lasting friendship are the most consistent predictors of resilience across all ages (Powell, 2015, p. 69).

Blaustein and Kinniburgh (2019) and Powell (2015) share several important themes—physiological needs, safety needs, and belongingness represent the most pronounced deficiencies in trauma-experienced youth. These needs often stay well into adulthood. A team of supportive adults can help mitigate these deficiencies. A team of volunteers will not know an EA's specific history and experiences under their guidance. However, a general understanding of what might have occurred can help with compassion and patience – as a father has compassion for his children (Psalms 103:13).

An imperfect but good enough environment is crucial in understanding trauma and its effects on children (Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2019, p. 69), as different contexts and experiences can contribute to complex trauma. This section makes the general case that trauma-experienced youth carry that trauma with themselves even into adulthood. A basic understanding of trauma's impact can help a VCT with patience, love, and compassion while helping an EA into IL. These subsections outline theory related to age stage development. A transition team's familiarity with these concepts will help with their supportiveness of an EA by recognizing historical trauma – beginning during infancy for some – influences their current responses to various perceived risks.

Trauma Factors: Up to Two Years Old

Not all EAs have trauma experiences from infancy. But some have had these experiences. Recognizing that neglect and abuse occur for some infants is instructive to begin understanding of trauma's influence through life stages.

Children's basic needs, physical and emotional safety, and stability rely primarily on their caregivers. A caregiver plays a crucial role in a child's development, including forming secure or insecure attachment styles. Maternal deprivation in infancy can have far-reaching effects on a child's development (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Bowlby, 1951, p. 53; Gillespie, 1952). Children rely on their caregivers for their basic needs, and their attachment style is decided by the resolution of Erikson's first psychosocial stage (trust versus mistrust). Maternal deprivation in infancy can have far-reaching effects on a child's development (Blaustein and Kinniburgh, 2019, pp. 97–105; Guy-Evans, 2023; Kelly et al., 2020, pp. 23–24). Neglectful attention to physiological and safety needs, forced separation, and physical abuse are examples of early childhood traumatic factors (Oldroyd et al., 2022; Powell, 2015, pp. 159–160).

Because EAs may have difficulty in trusting others originating even from the earliest years, a VCT's visible love and protection, attention to physical needs, safety, consistency, and safe exposure to the real world will be instrumental.

Trauma Factors: Ages 2–6

During ages two to six, foundational developmental factors include encouragement and exposure to simple tasks. Obstacles to normative development include discouragement, disallowing participative play, and homelessness. Complex trauma includes exposure to chaos, violence, abuse, and separation from a caregiver

(Cappella et al., 2019; Guy-Evans, 2023; Lee et al., 2014; Mathur, 2015; Miller, 2016, p. 313; Pelzer, 1997; Scheeringa et al., 2011). Residuals of neglectful or abusive circumstances during this important development period influence abilities and behaviors even into adulthood (LaCour et al., 2016). A team's recognition of this possibility can help with better understanding an EA's reaction to chaos, for example.

Trauma Factors: Ages 7–12

Erikson and Piaget describe the industry vs. inferiority stage (Miller, 2016, p. 142) and concrete operational period (Miller, 2016, p. 36) as crucial to a child's development. Opportunities for social interactions, problem-solving, and modeling of deductive reasoning by adults are important factors (Moshman, 2011, 5–6).

Educational context, bullying, and trauma can also affect a child's decision-making and sense of safety in the classroom (Guy-Evens, 2023; Lopez et al., 2021). The child's classroom feeling of safety and willingness to take part involve earlier neural pathways favoring survival (limbic system growth) due to toxic trauma, in contrast to normative prefrontal cortex growth (Epel, 2020).

Trauma Factors: Ages 13–18

During this age stage, school involvement and educational systems contribute to protective factors and added trauma (Heath et al., 2023; Mercer et al., 2018). Positive factors include high rates of praise and positive student-teacher relationships (Cook et al., 2018; Elder et al., 2018; Floress et al., 2018). Obstructive factors include bullying, deviant peers, and educator emphasis on deficit thinking (Brandmiller et al., 2020; Gomes et al., 2020; Hajovsky et al., 2020; Mercer et al., 2018; Müller et al., 2018). Community protective factors, such as community safety, contribute to normative

development with this age group (Benbenishty et al., 2018; Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2019, p. 234; Cappella et al., 2019; Miller, 2016, p. 142).

Peers have a greater influence than caregivers during this period, making it challenging for parents and foster parents (Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2019, p. 97). Teens search for identity and belongingness. They begin to think in abstractions and see social structures (e.g., school groups) (Cappella et al., 2019; Miller, 2016, p. 36).

This age group – whether in state care or not – meets new and difficult circumstances. Their trauma responses can be mistaken for deviance, resulting in discipline. Some alarming behaviors may stem from complex trauma, such as dangerous sexual activity, eating disorders, substance abuse, and sensation-seeking behaviors (López et al., 2017). Self-harm (such as cutting), and suicide ideation are other extreme examples of behavioral responses during adolescence (Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2019).

Trauma and Brain Development

This section examines trauma's impact on brain functions and mental health. While teams helping an EA do not need an in-depth understanding of trauma's impact, they will benefit from cursory understanding (Avery, 2011; Narendorf et al., 2020). For example, a team could predict struggles that go along with complex trauma. Long-term planning, producing solutions, and short-term decision-making are underdeveloped skills for trauma-experienced adolescents. Trauma can have long-lasting effects on physical and mental health, affecting young lives even through end-of-life (Lee et al., 2014).

Diminished executive functions are difficult to discern and can lead to future difficulties in advanced problem-solving, vocabulary, responsibility acceptance, and empathy with others. Emotional triggers are also difficult to discern and understand.

From early years through adulthood, triggers from traumatic experiences invoke negative beliefs about oneself. Shame, hopelessness, avoidance, aggression, and preemptive rejection stemming from trauma have long-lasting effects (Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2019).

Frequent transitions impact attachment hypervigilance among traumatized children and adolescents in OHC. Although physical isolation is observable, mental isolation is unobservable. Adolescents may isolate themselves as a protective factor from constant unsettledness. For children and adolescents in OHC, frequent transitions (bouncing) worsen difficulties in attachment with the uncertainty of a new temporary home and learning new household rules. Youths may perceive new living conditions as potentially dangerous (even if the circumstance is safe), with hypervigilance resulting. Traumatized youth have difficulty in transitions and change and find themselves chronically in self-defense mode (Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2019; Guy-Evans, 2023).

A facade of adaptation hides distress. Youths adapt their stress responses to match their environment. Stress leads to attempts to control uncertainty even at the earliest ages. Due to dysregulation in late childhood through adolescence, youth dismiss their self-agency, struggle to recognize or describe feelings, and have difficulty adapting to actual or possible future situations. VCTs may encounter EA struggles to express feelings. Lacking confidence in unfamiliar tasks may cause reluctance to try new experiences offered by the VCT (Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2019; Narendorf et al., 2020).

Marginalized Populations

Black, LGTBQ+, and disabled youths, and other marginalized populations preparing to transition out of care are overrepresented (Ahn et al., 2021; Baker, 2017;

Dworsky et al., 2018; Havlicek, 2014; Prince et al., 2024). Several root causes would ideally be addressed before the age of majority.

An example issue is that too few ethnic minority CPS professionals decreases racial matching of youths and their caseworker (LaBrenz et al., 2022). Van Bergen (2023) describes a similar need for religiously matched youths and foster families. Lee et al. (2023b) discuss difficulties in the placement of youths with disabilities, and further, Disability Rights North Carolina (2022) asserts harmful institutionalized care facilities disproportionately “warehouse” children with disabilities and ethnic minorities. To mitigate the needs, federal funding has increased to better serve LGBTQ+, and other minority youths better (Administration for Children and Families, 2024; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2024).

Summary: Understanding Youths in Care

This study involves participation by church members through brainstorming and ideation of how best to garner the engagement of peer teams to help EAs transition into independent living. The reason for conducting this study is to develop a new theory so that EAs can be lifted despite their struggles in their youth. Their struggles result in a worldview where danger can be anywhere. Their always-on state of arousal is a biopsychological response to that potential and perceived danger. This section summarizes normative and non-normative development – emphasizing the importance of mentors and trusted adults.

It is unrealistic to expect every member of a church's volunteer team to have a deep understanding of trauma and its impact. Still, it would be helpful for a team to have a cursory familiarity with traumatic circumstances and how they can affect behavior and

responses (Chodura et al., 2021; Dworsky et al., 2018). Added understanding of subpopulations and their unique challenges would be helpful (Lee et al., 2023a). Examples include building relationships with LGTBQ youth (Salazar et al., 2023). High-need areas include assisting EAs who have serious mental health issues (NeMoyer et al., 2022; Walker, 2015) and teaching about HIV-risk behavior (Yoshioka-Maxwell and Rice, 2019). A team's understanding of trauma and strengthening resiliency can make a positive difference in these young lives (Prince et al., 2024).

A VCT's awareness of trauma and its effect on young lives, even into adulthood, will be important. Like training for foster parents, which includes learning modules about trauma, a VCT will benefit from having a sense of trauma's impact. Juvenile justice experiences, connections to other adults, manner of exit type, and degree of support from state and federal agencies are aspects of CPS some EAs encounter as they approach adulthood (Font et al., 2021; Le & Barboza-Wilkes, 2024; Mercer et al., 2018).

Most aging out EAs need and want access to a trusted adult. By offering safety and mentorship, a volunteer team can mitigate some effects of trauma. Love, patience, and kindness are consistent with the wants and needs of these young adult lives, especially with the protections of CPS removed upon aging out.

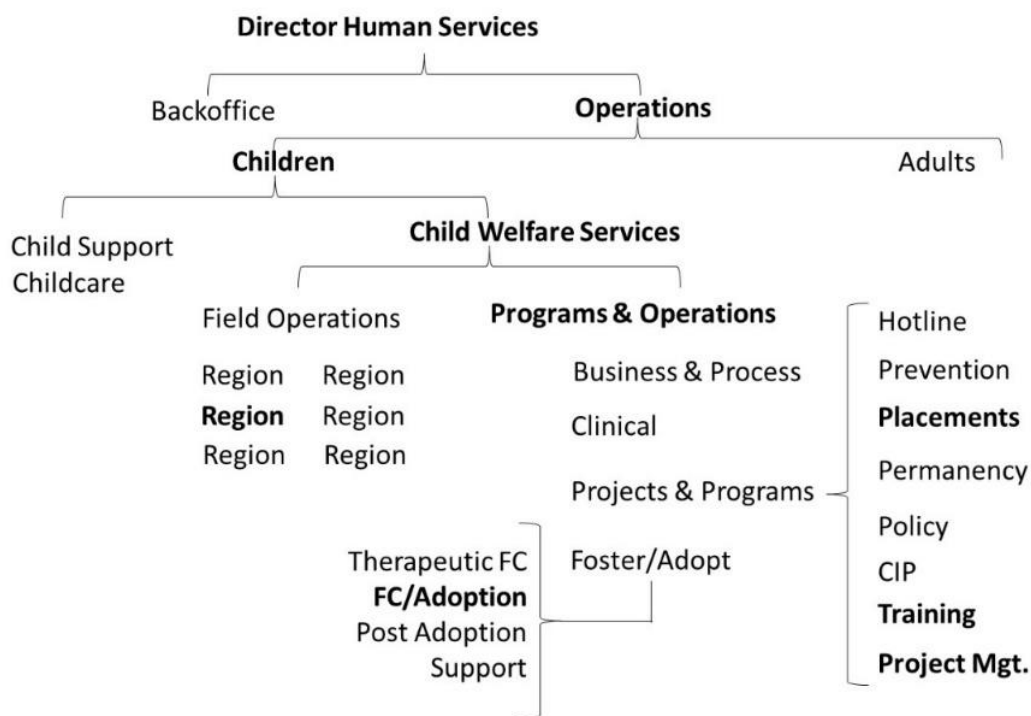
CPS Organization Processes and People

Child Protective Services provides safety to hundreds of thousands of children – infancy through adolescence and early adulthood (Figure 6). Youths experience trauma prior to removal from their home and added trauma from uncertainty while in care. Earlier sections outlined forms of complex trauma and struggles faced by EAs aging out of the system.

CPS's goal is to reunite youths with their caregivers once safety is established (Cheng & Lo, 2022; Jedwab et al., 2019). The federally funded Children's Bureau (CB) mirrors its organizational structure to reflect state departments of Human Services and CPS. CB has experts focused on data gathering and legislative matters including child abuse and neglect, child protective services, family preservation, adoption, foster care, and independent living (Children's Bureau, 2023). Figure 7 illustrates a generalized CPS organizational hierarchy, divided into various business units administering specialized services, and often arranged geographically (Figure 7).

Figure 7

Illustrative State DHS/CPS Organizational Hierarchy



The CPS organization and its processes are complex (Rushovich, et al., 2021). Complexities include balancing a youth's safety and needs, considerations of relationships between youths and their caregivers, parental rights, foster family

availability, and legislative compliance with adoption, and aging out (Figure 8). States also differ on business unit names responsible for these processes (Table 6).

Figure 8

CPS Processes Involving Multiple Stakeholders and Multiple Outcomes for EAs

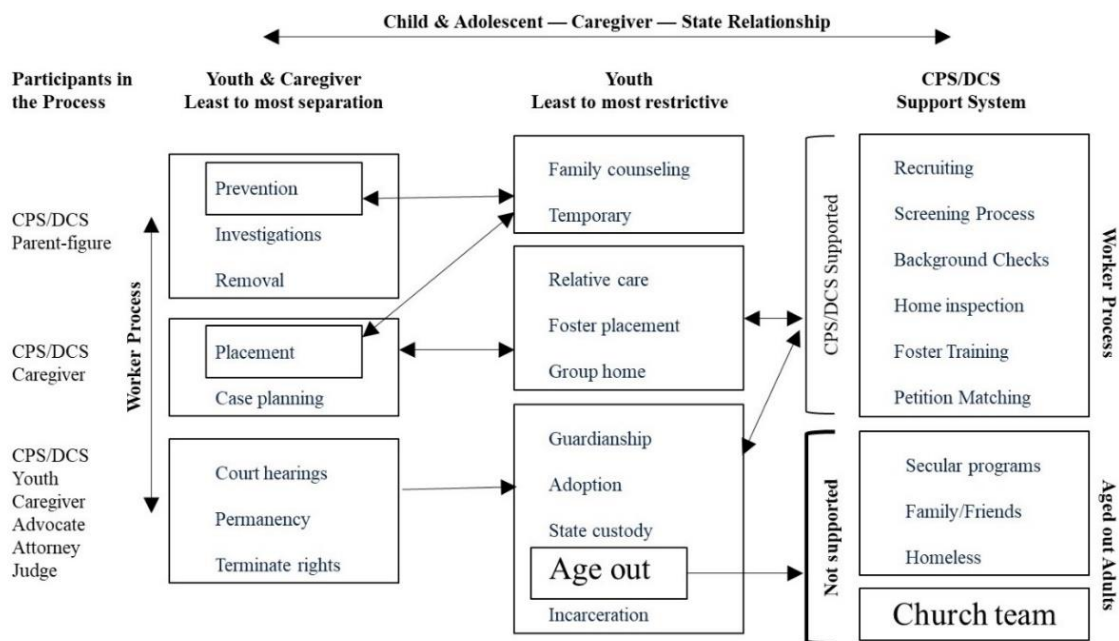


Table 6

Variations of State Business Unit Names Responsible for EA Processes

Departments of	Other Frequent Names
Dept. for Children and Families	Agency Education
Dept. of Health and Human Resources	Independent Living Program
Dept. of Human Services	Older Youth Program
Dept. of Job and Family Services	State Transitional Services
Dept. of Social Services	Youth Transition Program

The public has several misconceptions about child welfare work. The public is unaware of the emphasis CPS places on the reunification of youths and their biological caregivers. They work toward breaking the multi-generational effects of poverty and promoting family well-being. With public misconceptions, these jobs take an emotional toll on workers (Crawford et al., 2015; Child welfare training, 2024; Oklahoma Human Services, 2023; Oklahoma Human Services, 2024; Upadhyaya et al., 2021).

Figure 8 highlights in bold print the business units in CPS that may require collaboration with a voluntary church group like those imagined in this study. Jobs within the CPS sector often require a bachelor's or master's degree. O*Net (2024) described work styles for these roles as needing concern for others, dependability, stress tolerance, and integrity. Table 7 lists the variety of job titles within those business units.

Table 7

Child, Family, and School Social Workers Job Titles

A–C	D–M	N–Z
Adoption social worker	Direct care staff	Residential advisor
Care coordinator	Family advocate	Residential coordinator
Case manager	Family protection	School counselor
Caseworker	Family service worker	Social worker
Child welfare specialist	Foster care social worker	Unit coordinator
Community health worker	Home care worker	Youth advocate
Counselor	House parents	Youth care specialist
CPS social worker	Medical social worker	Youth services specialist

Emergency placement, respite foster care, reunification, relative placement, adoption, group homes, legal guardianship, and other planned permanent living arrangements are variations of OHC (Gypen et al., 2017). While similar in many aspects, each of these variations still requires unique processes, specialists, and legal considerations. Professionals charged with the placement of children face several challenges and considerations.

The bouncing of children between foster families causes new stress due to their uncertainty and concern about a caregiver's response. Finding a suitable care option complicates decision-making on behalf of a child. Frontline workers facilitating OHC placements influence a child's sense of safety and well-being – with opportunities to influence stability, decrease mental health crises, and decrease juvenile justice involvement (Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2018-2019, pp. 92–93; Fluke et al., 2016; Goodkind et al., 2013).

Child welfare and juvenile justice are separate entities but are sometimes concurrently responsible for a given young person. Collaborations include youth emancipation, running away, supervised community service/restitution, secure facility group homes, juvenile detention, and youth incarceration. Multiple agencies with differing charters often work together. Here also, the CPS system is more complicated than most imagine (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2023).

Each state has some unique features in its processes. But, legislatively, several significant milestones have also occurred influencing a great deal of similarity. As a major example, John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program 42 USC §677 (1999) includes mentoring as one of the state's permitted uses of federal funds for youth (Cornell

Law School, 2024). Among many other elements of the statute, states involve the public and private sectors in helping youth in foster care achieve independence.

When done well, permanency and placement processes mitigate issues despite complexities. The youths view CPS more simply through their caseworker. With staff turnover consistently hovering around 30%, the face of CPS becomes increasingly unpredictable and less trustworthy with each passing year with youths who are still in the system (Atkinson, 2019; Gypen et al., 2017; Lalayants et al., 2016).

Implications of Turnover

This study does not address CPS organizational matters such as high employee turnover. However, the organization, its processes, and its complexity affect EAs and their ability to age out well into independent living. An understanding of CPS is not tangential – but is fundamental to this study's aim. The organization and its staff could be instrumental in the implementation of this study's results (Armstrong-Heimsoth, 2021; Gray et al., 2013).

Risks of harm to children take place due to high staff turnover (Garcia et al., 2020; Landsman, 2007). State Departments of Human Services (DHS) as a whole—and CPS in particular—experience turnover rates hovering at 35% (Casey et al., 2017; Hokanson et al., 2020). Emancipated youth attribute their lack of social capital, loneliness, and negative mental health impacts to caseworker turnover (Bendeck & Moore, 2022).

Griffiths et al. (2020) find that low pay is an overwhelming reason cited for turnover. High workload follows in close second place. A supervisor cannot significantly change the workload, which has been partially a function of turnover when workers

resign (Griffiths et al., 2019). The balance of the work must be distributed to the remaining staff (Barth et al., 2008).

Affirming workers, commending successes with hope for future successes, and emphasizing self-care improve intention to stay (Pharris & Hellman, 2022; Rodriguez, et al., 2023). Alternative response—providing family support prior to a child’s removal from a home—benefits families and motivates staff. But these programs often conflict with metrics measured and reported (Shipe et al., 2022).

Hwang and Han (2017) show the difficulties faced by public caseworkers. They identify barriers limiting workers’ ability to provide services in the child’s best interest. The law, budget requirements, and deadlines are among the barriers CPS workers face. Conflicting priorities and difficulties involve balancing legislated job demands versus worker judgment of what is most suitable for the child (Akin et al., 2021; Steen, 2020).

Exacerbating the disconnect is found by Perez-Jolles et al. (2017), over half of the workers are unclear on the metrics and goals measuring their organization – and how their efforts fold into those goals. Staudt et al. (2015) find that caseworkers discover the metrics only after failure to meet the metrics.

Frontline Specialists

The safety of children within the child welfare system is the highest and most important duty of frontline workers (Akin et al., 2021; Farmer, 2021). Workers mitigate immediate dangers to children and minimize the likelihood of added trauma (Fluke et al., 2016). Still, uncertainty and the lack of permanency contribute to the child's anxiety and other negative emotions (Farmer et al., 2021). This uncertainty from placement

disruptions is true for the very youngest as well as teens (Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2019, p. 294–295).

Among their many hats, CPS workers serve as mentors to older youth. These trusted adults are a protective factor (Packard, 2020; Yafit, 2019). Group home workers teach skills to the youth, spending significant time interacting with them (Smith, 2017). These frontline roles protect against suicide risk, improve health, lessen the risk of sexually transmitted diseases, and reduce aggression (Casey Family Programs, 2017; Narendorf et al., 2020; Packard, 2020).

Placement Specialists

Placement specialists are crucial to the safety and well-being of children in foster care and awaiting adoption. Their work involves preparing youths for the adoption process, finding possible adoptive homes, and working closely with families to facilitate permanency planning (Phillips et al., 2020).

State-provided training helps staff stay current on agency, state, and federal foster care policies and guidelines. Training goals include soft skills and updates on current policies and other guidelines. Workshops aim to improve the services provided to foster and adoptive families such as expediting permanency planning and placements (Child Welfare Training, 2024; Phillips et al., 2020).

Caseloads include youths who are legally free for adoption. These specialists work closely with the children, conducting assessments and preparation activities to prepare them for the adoption process. They collaborate with peers to ease the children's transition into an adoptive home when a match is made between a child and a family (Liévano-Karim, 2023).

Peer roles handle identifying the possible adoptive homes for youths through case mining (an intense review of the child's file) and other methods. Placement specialists also collaborate with foster family recruiting and development professionals (Sokol et al., 2023).

Permanency Specialists

Out of home care is best known as foster care, and the foster system. While the public has best understood the major elements of the foster system, OHC encompasses more than fostering only (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2022). Children experience added traumatic stress due to uncertainty and concern about a caregiver's response while under CPS care and in OHC (Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2019, pp. 90–92). Permanency specialists focus on reductions in bouncing and minimizing youths' uncertainty.

Over 120,000 youths 13–20 make up 27% of the national CPS caseload (Fernandes-Alcantara, 2019) and frequently bounce from home to home (Children's Bureau, 2016; Font et al., 2021). Aspects of bouncing (i.e., frequent OHC changes) are measurably challenging for youth (Spinelli et al., 2021; U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2022). Teenagers assume they will eventually age out (Watt et al., 2018). Youths spend most of their adolescent years in OHC, and those who age out of care face challenges as they move to early adulthood (Fernandes-Alcantara, 2019).

High turnover of permanency specialists and other frontline staff presents a risk of harm to the children in state custody (Griffiths et al., 2020; Landsman, 2007) and cost burdens to taxpayers (Atkinson, 2023; Guzman et al., 2020; Gypen et al., 2017). Reduction in CPS turnover is an ongoing issue for over two decades (Hokanson et al.,

2020). Large programs are cumbersome and only slightly improve the turnover issue (Le & Barboza-Wilkes, 2024; Leake et al., 2020).

Comprehensive Specialists

Comprehensive Specialists receive caseloads combining aspects of other frontline roles. They investigate referrals and work with children, youth, and families (clients) to achieve permanency as part of their jobs. They collaborate with other professionals and community resources to provide services and support to their clients. These broadly qualified specialists are essential within the child welfare system to promote positive outcomes for children and families in their care (Child welfare training, 2024).

Caregivers and Safety

A VCT's members may encounter circumstances that, without their cursory understanding of trauma's effects, may trigger negative responses from the young adult they are helping (Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2019, p. 27). Volunteers' understanding of developmental stages can help with attunement, patience, and kindness (pp. 43–44). Provisions of perceived and actual safety, and caregiver relationship building, are important aspects of care, enabling transitions to IL (p. 38).

Caregiver Relationships

Irrespective of a child's age or developmental stage, his relationship with a caregiver ranks high among all factors. Functional caregivers are the most important factor for the normative development of the youngest children. Abusive, absent, neglectful, and non-loving caregivers thwart normative development by way of trauma experienced by the child (Lee et al., 2014; Nuñez et al., 2022). Trauma across a wide range of experiences influences youths' worldviews and beliefs stemming from

physiological circumstances (Miller, 2016, pp. 248–253). Not previously defined here, a caregiver might be a biological parent, a foster or adoptive parent, an extended family member, staff/employees in a group home, staff/employees in an incarceration center, or other adults (Clements et al., 2020). Especially with children in OHC, frequent bouncing limits attachment and trusting relationships with an individual caregiver (Benbenishty et al., 2018).

With traumatized youths, broadened experiences affect the brain's executive function development to the positive or negative, depending on the circumstances (Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2019, p. 260). With increasing age, developmental factors broaden to include school systems, friends, and communities (Wolff et al., 2018). Traumatic experiences from childhood continue changing biological/neurological development with increasing age (Epel, 2020; Lee et al., 2014). Blaustein and Kinniburgh (2019, pp. 260–261) describe how safety and survival arousal in the limbic system continue limiting adolescent normative brain development involving executive brain functions. Trauma from personal, serious, and long-lasting illness affects young and old alike. Similarly, illness from a loved one can be traumatic (NCBI, 2022, December 30). Because acute, toxic, and complex trauma has many forms, trauma's physiological effects on youth can be severely damaging (Omone Bose et al., 2022).

Within school systems, trauma-experienced children invoke survival skills to deal with perceived or actual danger (Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2019, p. 27). Behaviors seen by teachers (for example) can worsen realized trauma by errantly attributing disruptive or divergent behavior to deviance rather than activation of survival strategies. On the other

hand, schools and educators can provide socio-emotional support as a protective factor to these same youths (Männistö & Pirttimaa, 2018).

Within communities, a child's exposure to violence, addictions, disregard for laws, criminality, immorality, and the like are obstacles to a child's normative development (Lee et al., 2014; Powell et al., 2021). Developmental factors include non-caregiver influences from organizational policy (e.g., school districts), state and local statute, community, family tradition, cultural expectations (e.g., race, gender, and religion), and other similar institutionalized obstructions or enablers (Ahn et al., 2021; Edwards et al., 2021; Font et al., 2021).

Other dichotomous developmental factors include (i) encouragement from a caregiver vs. discouragement; (ii) failure-tolerance vs. intolerance; (iii) celebrations of successes vs. dismissal or ignoring success; (iv) exposure to child-led practice with play, pretending, decision-making, inductive reasoning, and deductive problem-solving vs limiting such exposures, and (v) safe, age-appropriate exposure to increasingly complex social situations vs unsafe, and age-inappropriate social settings (Cappella et al., 2019; Dallos and McKinsey Crittenden, 2010; Raley et al., 2021).

Foster Families Placements

A review of roles and influences related to foster families is necessary. Experiences of EAs in OHC may influence their willingness to consider being helped by a team of volunteer adults. Household and group home rules play a crucial role with youths in OHC (Konijn et al., 2020). Understanding the dynamics of foster families and group homes may prove useful to set up a team's relationship with an EA.

For example, trans-religious matching may be necessary (Van Bergen et al., 2023). In foster situations, foster parents who make clear boundaries with warmth and sensitivity enjoy the most favorable outcomes for the children (Chodura et al., 2021; Goemans et al., 2020; Mancinelli et al., 2021).

Some foster children are unexpectedly removed from their foster homes even after developing stable relationships. This can cause stress and grief for the youth and the foster parents (Newquist et al., 2020). Some removals are necessary such as persistent and overly disruptive behaviors. Girls are more likely to show disruptive conduct disorders than boys – and more likely to run away (Dworsky et al., 2018; Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2023).

Establishing positive relationships and facilitating normative development is crucial. For instance, foster youth commonly exhibit food insecurity – especially those having experienced homelessness or precariously housed circumstances (Lee & Lippert, 2021). But Austin et al. (2020) show that attentiveness from foster parents toward healthier eating makes a positive difference.

While foster training is mandatory, it often falls short in actual practice, needing practical, hands-on training (Adkins et al., 2022; Kaasbøll et al., 2019; Koh et al., 2023). Out-of-home caregivers need improved training to manage exceptional cases, such as children with special needs (Goemans et al., 2020). Trauma-informed training can help caregivers better understand childhood trauma, but that training alone does not alleviate anxiety or improve child behavior (Konijn et al., 2020).

Religion and belief systems can alternately strengthen or weaken relationships. Youths desire to belong and fit in. Religious differences can create added pressure for

everyone involved, while children often seek a sense of belonging (Lee et al., 2023a; Van Bergen et al., 2023). Moreover, the search for identity is a common struggle among foster children, which is ideally a consideration during the placement matching process.

Successfully managing differences in religious beliefs can be complex and challenging (Blaustein and Kinniburgh, 2019, p. 92–93).

Healthy relationships between parents and children are paramount. Understanding trauma impacts is helpful to parents but does not necessarily lessen challenging behaviors due simply to being trauma-informed. While necessary and appreciated, training must be improved in real-world scenarios and exceptional cases that do not fit the norm (Bendeck & Moore, 2022). Education management might carry forward in an aging out situation such as the present study is examining. Lastly, youths yearn for a sense of belongingness, while religion and belief systems (when matched) can add to that sense of belonging (Courtney & Okpych, 2021).

Foster families involved with the CPS system are a model of how VCTs could review their respective roles and influences with the EA they are helping. The crucial role of non-kinship placements may provide an analog for a VCT-EA relationship improving probabilities of educational aid, decrease in need for public assistance, less likely substance abuse referrals, and lower rates of adult incarceration (Lovett & Xue, 2020). Positive relationships between foster children and their parents are crucial for a child's long-term well-being. The section emphasizes the need for practical, hands-on training for foster parents (which is important for a VCT, also) to manage exceptional cases, such as children with special needs. Lastly, a VCT might be challenged with managing differences in religious beliefs.

Rather than living with foster families, many teens live in milieu systems such as residential programs (Ahn & Gil, 2021). Other milieu systems, such as school, present challenges also because any friendships developed by a child may be short-lived and subject to new placements. Involving foster youth in decision-making (e.g., their living circumstances) promotes well-being and trust toward caseworkers and other adults (Park et al., 2020).

Predictable and structured routines provide a sense of safety for youth in care. For example, even older youth, regular bedtime, and transitions between classes at school modulate rhythm for trauma-experienced youth. Disruptions in routine can cause chaos. When possible, advance notice of disruptions can minimize these effects (Blaustein and Kinniburgh, 2019, p. 91).

An improved understanding of the need and value of structure would benefit public educators, group home staff, and professionals leading other social and cultural environments, such as church youth groups. But in the instance of this study, foster parenting provides a model of how a VCT might serve an EA during their transition toward independent living. Balancing structure and setting up fair rules and expectations would serve the volunteer team and the EA well (Arneau-Savates, 2021; Dworsky et al., 2017; Travis et al., 2014).

Kinship Placements

Kinship care includes biological family members and fictive kin (i.e., those the family knows). Except for placement with a non-custodial parent, child welfare prioritizes kinship care over other alternatives whenever possible. Even so, kinship care

can cause boundary issues with biological parents (Rodriguez-JenKins et al., 2021), adding stress to the child and the caregivers.

Kinship placement provides greater stability for most children (LaBrenz et al., 2022) such as keeping siblings together (Font & Kim, 2022). But even with states' emphasis on kinship placements, these still are a minority of total placements (Lovett & Xue, 2020).

As an example, Oklahoma defines kinship in Section 1-9-106 of Title 10A of the Oklahoma Statutes (10A O.S. § 1-9-106). Kinship relationships include siblings, grandparents, aunts and uncles, nieces and nephews, and cousins. Kinship also includes relationships by marriage, by adoption of siblings, and through emotional bonds (e.g., a child's former teacher).

Contrasts of Denominations

This study's methods must honor distinctions between participating churches. Given the sensitive nature of the subject matter, staying within the heart of this study's research questions may require tact during and between facilitated sessions. In this section, I review denominational contrasts through an anthropological marketing lens (i.e., modern-day branding) while acknowledging differences in theology and doctrine.

There are differences between evangelical and mainline denominations, such as the use of the expressions "born again" and "evangelical"—that is, identification with one of the expressions, both, or neither (Smidt, 2022; Wollschleger, 2019). Another difference is whether to view scripture as literal and inerrant versus something other than literal and inerrant. But regardless of this difference, evangelical and mainline churches share a great deal in common. Both find the importance of aligning their practices with

values and commitments to embody Christ and "practice what we preach"—colloquially, to walk the talk (Chao, 2023).

Honoring Distinctions

Conducting the facilitated sessions must honor differences as much as possible. For example, the research questions do not use denomination-specific jargon. Brainstorming and individual ideation represent preferred methods (among 11 creativity techniques analyzed), minimizing risks of conflict and maximizing goal-focused idea generation (Wöhler & Reinhardt, 2021). Still, a review of denominational distinctions is called for, even with denomination jargon reduced and with the use of preferred data-gathering approaches.

Protestantism's many denominations share several vital and ecumenical aspects from the Reformation (Wolters, 2005, p. 11). Some contemporary cultural topics have no significant differences among denominations (Velez, 2020). Protestantism emphasizes a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ, the study of the Bible by laypeople, freedom of conscience, and diverse worship styles. Protestants believe in the Trinity and that Jesus is God in human form, and His life, death, and resurrection are crucial. The Holy Spirit is significant to all Protestants, but some emphasize it more (FEMA, 2023d).

For this study, and where denominational differences exist, consideration of those differences becomes important to minimize judgment on one another (*New International Version Bible*, 2011, Romans 14:13) and to honor the many parts that make up one body (1 Corinthians 12:12).

Research questions are composed of theory and intentionally avoid sensitive cultural topics such as social justice and political beliefs. I assume that participants share

apolitical core Christian values. Even so, it is important to be mindful of potential sensitivities (Belinski, 2023; Greenwood, 2020; Lyons et al., 2012). For example, during discussions, participant responses may include innuendo on race, immigration, orientation, and government support due to the subject area under study.

Theological differences between evangelical, mainline Protestants, and historically Black churches toward social justice practices, selected beliefs, and political homogeneity may raise sensitivities not intended during facilitated discussions (Anderson, 2022; Hollow, 2022; Peck-McClain, 2021; University of Arkansas et al., 2022). Other risks include unintentionally offending VIPs from statistical presentations more than from core Christian beliefs (Chan & Phoenix, 2020) (i) perceptions of racial prejudice and opinions on pathways to citizenship (e.g., immigration laws and amnesty) (Abramyan & Alexander, 2021) (ii) political leanings associated with fundamentalism and religious conservatism compared to progressivism and religious liberality (Jensen, 2023) and (iii) the disestablishment of government support for some Christian organizations (Perry & McDaniel, 2023).

With public discourse intensifying in this decade, a schism has become more visible and centered on non-conformity, orientation, and identity (Neumann, 2022). A recent splintering of the United Methodist Church (UMC) is the impetus for the formation of the Reconciling Ministries Network (RMM) with an explicit welcoming of persons of all orientations (Peck-McClain, 2021). Evangelical churches have found a middle ground that includes their beliefs in biblical inerrancy and biblical compassion (Neumann, 2022). Even so, recent evangelical stances on non-conformity could trigger

trauma even if only perceived and no actual restrictions are in place (Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2019, p. 27).

FEMA (2023a), FEMA (2023b), and FEMA (2023c) describe other distinctions in the Black Church, mega-churches, and Hispanic churches, respectively. For instance, FEMA (2023c) describes sheltering undocumented immigrants in Hispanic churches in contrast to most other churches.

Each of these examples—having the potential of a politically charged response to the research questions—cannot be fully avoided. High percentages of EAs expressing non-conforming identities, disproportionate racial representation within CPS, and the realities of unaccompanied non-citizen immigrants within the child welfare system are statistical, agnostic realities; also true is that these contemporary topics are viewed differently from among PC denominations.

Given this context, the denomination-specific examinations are based on secular sources and approaches. FEMA (2023d) describes protocols and tips for interacting with Protestant churches. A denomination's official branding, images, messaging, and positioning also provide meaningful comparisons (Falloure, 2015, p. 111-134; Henquinet, 2023; University of Arkansas et al., 2022).

Lückenbach et al. (2022) posit that branding used by social entrepreneurship, mission-focused organizations must unify their mission and enhance financial stability. The stated mission of such an organization must convey a strong ethical orientation and significant social focus. The second aspect – entrepreneurship – includes traditional for-profit branding aspects beyond the brand design to include narratives (e.g., in articles and

publications), the organization's culture, and other aspects such as consistency and authenticity.

Yen et al. (2022) describe that not-for-profit organizations (NPOs) have yielded to the importance of brand equity concepts as influential in public perception. Brands also contribute to volunteering efforts and participant donations. Much like their for-profit counterparts, NPOs face competition to attract and retain converts to their respective religious identities and franchise growth.

The section acknowledges that various politically charged topics may be raised through responses from the study's participants—even with care to avoid raising the issues within the research questions. As examples, perceptions of racial prejudice and opinions on immigration laws may be voiced and enter discussions. Doctrine is interwoven with political worldviews (Baylor University, 2017). Rather than solely examining similarities and differences theologically, the examinations here describe denominations through their organizational branding. In this sense, branding is essential to emphasize a mission and social entrepreneurship (e.g., economic sustainability, growth, and competition) (Wollschleger, 2019).

The Southern Baptist Convention Messaging

The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) is a global organization and is the largest Protestant denomination in the United States (Jones, 2020; US Religion Census, 2023). It has a rich history and a mission to fulfill the Great Commission. As the largest denomination in the United States – by inference, it should have the greatest potential to provide a transition program for EAs into IL.

Discipleship and evangelism are long-held traditions within the SBC. Churches equip their members for discipleship and spiritual growth in a Christlike manner (Botross, 2022). Approaches to teaching discipleship vary with some churches emphasizing task performance, others prioritizing reaching the unchurched through evangelism (Smidt, 2022). Regardless of the approach, though, churches use small groups and clusters for instruction – usually with 4-8 members (Botross, 2022). Its emphasis on small groups is like this study’s emphasis on volunteer teams.

Southern Baptists are often associated with Republican politics (Burge & Djupe, 2021), and have several sharp differences with popular cultural movements. Consistent with social identity theory, congregants identifying with evangelicalism have strong and positive feelings for their in-group (Smidt, 2022; Tajfel et al., 1971). Examples of cultural distinctions are SBC’s views toward gay rights and its association with the pro-life movement (Burdick, 2024; Neumann, 2022).

In 2012, the SBC adopted an informal name ("Great Commission Baptists") intended to convey the values of SBC's name and ministries and their mission—the fulfillment of the Great Commission (Southern Baptist Convention, 2023). SBC's newest tagline is "Good News for the Whole World," about the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus and as a call to reach every person in every nation.

SBC has recently updated its branding standards to convey its values, mission, and heritage, officially updated in August 2020. Southern Baptist Convention (2023) describes brand messaging as conveying SBC’s value proposition by using words. Further, SBC brand standards emphasize that its combinations of word choice and imagery should inspire people to be a part of what the SBC is doing. Shifting toward the

informal name is noticeably detached from its heritage of "Southern," which otherwise conveys a negative message to many (Greene, 2019).

Yen et al. (2022) explain that non-profit organizations need to attract and retain individual members but also to extend franchise growth with sustainable economics. Brand consistency helps with franchise growth. SBC branding incorporates the authority of scripture, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the global mission field, and SBC affiliation. SBC's sub-brand messaging supports the overarching messages. The Cooperative Program (CP) emphasizes SBC evangelism. Two more sub-brands (Baptist Press and SBC Life) have adopted forms of the core messaging, each with variant combinations from SBC brand color palettes (Southern Baptist Convention, 2023).

The Cooperative Program brand emphasizes SBC's core color palette – intended to convey a close association with SBC's brand. The Baptist Press draws from the SBC's energetic color palette to convey that the information presented is current and relatable. SBC Life's palette is intended to create the perception of dependability and approachability. For the core brand and three sub-brands, new logos accompany their color palette, typography selection, and messaging.

The SBC's size and tradition of small groups (like teams) would appear to be a good fit for this study's exploration of volunteer teams to assist young adults leaving OHC into independent living. However, with its conservative values and seeming associations with Republican politics, the SBC's distinctions from popular cultural movements may make a program difficult in less conservative areas (Kloppenber, 2023; Pettit, 2021; Sharp, 2024).

Marsh (2022) finds that racial homogeneity within the Southern Baptist churches (i.e., primarily white memberships) still influences perceptions of racial inequity within some local churches. Congregational self-segregation also exists in some churches. Cowan (2021) emphasizes a hyperbolic opinion from his book review that evangelicalism is the most dangerous faith in the world.

Even if VCTs can be easily enlisted, public perceptions about SBC churches—of having near extinct remnants of racial inequity to the other extreme of perceived danger—may negatively influence implementation of this study’s resulting theory within a local, SBC church. Mainline and historically Black churches may have fewer challenges. Both church types are examined next.

The United Methodist Church Messaging

Mainline churches in North America are characterized by their involvement in social justice issues. While these churches’ congregants are viewed as comparatively more privileged populations, awareness of poverty, for example, has enabled strides in promoting social and economic justice (Johnson, 2023). These attributes fit well with the intention of this study.

Mainline worldviews see an incongruous conundrum regarding the evangelical response to gay Christians. This perception stems from conflicting beliefs about whether original biblical texts are free of doctrinal, historical, and scientific errors (Neumann, 2022).

The United Methodist Church (UMC) is among the seven largest mainline Protestant churches (Deckman, 2022). Using UMC as an example of a mainline church and drawing from Ledinek & Razpotnik (2022) concepts, this anthropological review

examines UMC's branding, certification, and labeling. The United Methodist Church is a good reference case and a fair representation of mainline Protestants (Burge & Djupe, 2021).

UMC has a long history, starting in 1730 when the Wesley brothers started the Methodist movement. The Methodist church combined with the United Brethren in Christ Church in 1968. UMC is proud of its history and has preserved its records and artifacts in a six-mile-long shelving system and a vault (The United Methodist Church, 2024).

The United Methodist Church's attention to and celebration of its history is a key part of its brand personality – beyond theology only. Watkins & Gonzenbach (2013) posit a logo, tagline, and color choices are fundamental when combined with other branding aspects to communicate an organization's personality. Social media taglines also influence perceptions of an organization (Nam et al., 2017).

The United Methodist Church (2024) brand's promise and reference guide are easily accessible on its website. UMC describes its logo (Cross and Flame) as the most recognizable symbol of the Church. The Cross and Flame emblem followed the 1968 merger. The logo has symbological meaning as relating the Church to God through Christ (by using the cross) and the flame representing the Holy Spirit as a reminder of tongues of fire (*New International Version Bible*, 2011. Acts 2:3).

By comparing SBC's and UMC's primary logo only, FEMA's (2023d) description of churches emphasizing the Holy Spirit in varying degrees is visually evident—both feature a cross (an emphasis on Jesus and the Crucifixion). However, SBC features a bible (representing an emphasis on scripture) in contrast to the UMC's flame (representing the Holy Spirit) (Southern Baptist Convention, 2023; The United Methodist

Church, 2024). As expressed through their respective taglines, the two denominations' brand promises also illustrate differences.

UMC expresses "Open Hearts. Open Minds. Open Doors." SBC expresses " Good News for the Whole World." The taglines convey distinctions supported by scripture for open hearts (*New International Version Bible*, 1978/2011. Acts 16:14), open minds (Romans 12:2), and open doors (John 10:9), compared to evangelism as an instruction from Jesus to His followers (Mark 16:15) (Southern Baptist Convention, 2023; The United Methodist Church, 2024).

Both UMC and SBC welcome New Testament scripture. Neither would reject the Gospel according to Mark, the Gospel according to John, Acts of the Apostles, or letters of Paul to the Romans. But their respective branding draws out distinctions between the two.

Historically Black denominations and churches share many aspects with evangelical and mainline churches. But like distinctions between UMC and SBC, the Black Church can be partially understood through a secular lens of core messaging, imagery, and history.

Black Church Messaging

In the United States, the largest Black religious denominations include the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME), the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (AMEZ), the National Baptist Convention (NBC) churches, the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church (CME), and the Church of God in Christ (COGIC) (Thompson-McMillon, 2022

NBC represents the largest US denomination, headquartered in Nashville, Tennessee. NBC serves 21,000 churches with 8.4 million congregants. NBC facilitates cooperation through 64 State Baptist Conventions and 341 District Associations (The National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc., 2024). An example of a District Association affiliated with NBC is the East Zion Consolidated District Association (EZCDA) serving 47 independent Baptist churches near Oklahoma City (East Zion Consolidated District Association, 2024).

An examination of the NBC and EZCDA websites contains 18 identically worded and sequenced belief statements. A comparison of the two organization's websites reveals a great deal of consistency in their content – spiritually and organizationally. Like SBC, NBC states its mission to fulfill the Great Commission (East Zion Consolidated District Association, 2024; The National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc., 2024).

EZCDA defines an association as a “self-governing fellowship of autonomous churches” (East Zion Consolidated District Association, 2024, About Us web page). It further describes the association as grounded in harmony, faith, and practice – including fellowship, education, worship, evangelism, and cooperative ministries. With the consistencies evident between NBC and EZCDA, an independent church associated with NBC would appear representative of most others with a similar consistency – which provides greater confidence in the extensibility of findings during data gathering. The inclusion of a historically Black congregation is imperative for this study.

Wrotten (2018) cites the unpreparedness of African American males exiting from OHC into IL. Further, Zeitlin et al. (2023) describe too few CPS frontline professional workers of color within child welfare – influencing adverse outcomes. Owens (2017)

summarizes how the Black Church has historically assumed an essential role in mentoring young Black men. These findings illustrate the importance of including a historically Black church in this study (Cheng & Lo, 2022; Zeitlin et al., 2023).

With their similarities and distinctions, three groups of Protestant churches are essential to gain a spectrum of insight in this study. The SBC is large and emphasizes small groups studying together. The UMC as representative of mainline churches is comparatively more aligned with popular culture. The Black church has a history and emphasis on mentorship of young men of color – who are disproportionately represented among EAs aging out of OHC.

Biblical Foundations of the Study

Emerging adults aging out of state care deserve help from caring adults. Romans (*New International Version Bible*, 1978/2011. 12:6–3) speaks to Christian adults—to practice hospitality with those in need by sharing their gifts as one body—and humbly serve other's needs with love (Galatians 5:13). Ecclesiastes (4:9–12) reminds us that “two are better than one and a chord of three is not easily broken.” Teams of caring adults—from among the 300,000 congregations throughout the United States (Baylor University, 2017; Brauer, 2017; US Religion Census, 2023)—could directly help thousands transition into IL.

Myers (2010, p. 50) advocates a connection of faith to psychology by expressing faith-rooted values. I aim for this connection. Adedoyin et al. (2021) and Wolters (2005, p. 5) emphasize that our journey to serve God must include God-honoring standards. I also aim to include these standards. Young adults exiting care are among the 400,000 trauma-experienced children and adolescents in OHC (Children's Bureau, 2016; Font et

al., 2021). Transitioning from state care represents a new and additional traumatic moment. Despite their uncertain, and sometimes dangerous futures (Forge et al., 2018; Watt et al., 2018), little research centers on Christian churches supplying a formidable solution to transitioning EA challenges. This research, by connecting faith to psychology, could contribute to a solution for the challenges.

While navigating adult challenges with distressed youths is difficult, transition team members would store up treasure in heaven – and in a youth’s heart – lending hope (Jeremiah 29:11; Matthew 19:26) through God’s provisions (Matthew 6:31–32; Philippians 4:19). In Matthew (18:5–14), Jesus instructs a crowd that welcoming a child in his name is welcoming Him, and that the Father is not willing to lose any of these children. Psalm (127:3) expresses the care of children as a heritage from the Lord – such as entrusting a transition team and its members with this care.

Teams would glorify the Father in heaven (Matthew 5:16) by caring for an EA, earning trust, and demonstrating God’s love. Performing this difficult work demonstrates faith. While an adolescent’s lifetime of trauma is difficult to counter, Romans (8:28) reminds us that God works for the good of those who love Him.

This research connects faith to psychology. Transitioning trauma-experienced EAs into IL is challenging, but a transition team and its members would give needed hope to a young adult. The strength of a committed team would serve the EA well as they encounter new, real-world adult challenges.

This research honors God. The research explores a novel idea while filling a gap in previous research. With attention toward these young adults, the research also honors

the second greatest commandment – “to love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39).

Summary

This chapter reviews literature applicable to a qualitative, grounded theory, I/O psychology study. Research includes an examination of organizational aspects of CPS and church denominations. Literature reviewed includes theories associated with childhood and adolescent trauma. Legislation applicable to child welfare and the aging out process is reviewed at a high level. Differences between states’ application of federal guidance and funding is reviewed especially regarding extended care.

This literature review emphasizes the struggles – and danger – young adults face when aging out of care. Example programs with varying degrees of success are reviewed. Along with basic needs of food, housing, and safety, mentorship and access to trusted adults rise to the top of the most important needs.

The literature review identifies characteristics, issues, and opportunities associated with the primary stakeholder groups: aging out EAs, CPS, and PCs. The study's foundation is built on seminal theory and on the biblical principles of kindness, mercy, and faith. The methodology is built with consideration of Protestant church denominational distinctions with a prayer to honor all parts of the Body.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHOD

Overview

This stratified, qualitative grounded theory (GT) research involves facilitated group brainstorming and individual ideation sessions with adult Protestant church (PC) members. Twenty to fifty of these volunteer insightful participants (VIPs) will be members of one of three to five PCs selected for study. Creswell and Poth (2018, pp. 66–67) describe high-level contrasts between five qualitative approaches. Of the five approaches, GT fits the aim of this study best – to develop a theory grounded in data from the field (pp. 83–91).

The stratified criteria for PC selection are denomination, membership size, and location. The process of selecting VIPs involves purposive snowball sampling. This approach entails collaboration with church clergy and their designated point of contact (POC) to recruit VIPs to participate in the study (McGeorge et al., 2021).

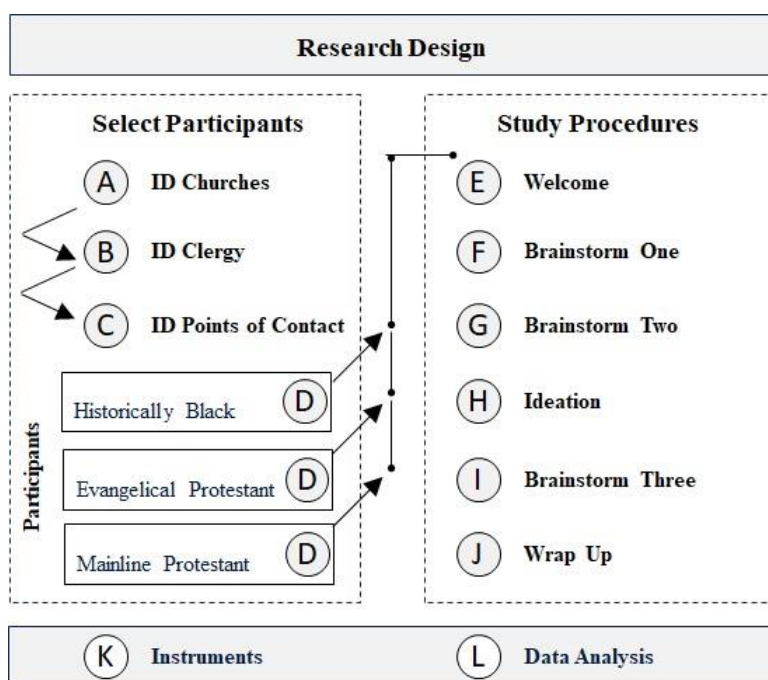
Each data gathering event (DGE) will last approximately three hours. POCs will determine the date, time, location, and other relevant planning for their church's DGE. VIPs will be 28 years or older and members of their church for two years or more. Four research questions (RQs) will be explored. RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3 will be investigated through group brainstorming and RQ4 will be investigated through individual ideation (Spector, 2021, pp. 289–292).

The themes emerging from this study will provide the topmost ways to garner interest, commitment, action, and division of responsibility in volunteer church teams (VCTs) to help emerging adults (EAs) transition from out of home care (OHC) into independent living (IL) (Chun Tie et al., 2019).

Figure 9 illustrates the sequence and relationship of key steps proposed for this study. Each major step is clarified in the Appendices. Appendices A–D include details associated with VIP selection. Appendices E–J describe procedure details. Appendix K describes the instruments required, and Appendix L describes the proposed data analysis methods.

Figure 9

Research Design Overview With Corresponding Appendices Identifier



Research Questions

RQ1: What topmost factors would garner interest in Christian adults in the needs of EAs transitioning from state custody into independent living?

RQ2: What topmost factors would garner commitment in Christian adults to join a team to help EAs transition from state custody into independent living?

RQ3: What topmost factors would garner action in Christian adults as part of a team to help EAs transition from state custody into independent living?

RQ4: What division of responsibilities would be necessary within a team of Christian adults to help EAs transition from state custody into independent living?

Research Design

I will investigate factors of a change program that are needed to motivate and organize a VCT to aid an EA in transitioning from OHC into IL. The study's research questions draw from change theory and motivation models (Kotter & Cohen, 2002; Kübler & Ross, 1969; Lewin, 1952; Project Management Institute, 2017). The GT techniques will develop a new theory framed within biblical teachings.

This study's aim poses questions framed as "what" the study can identify as the factors needed to garner interest, commitment, and action. A purposive GT approach fits the aim of this study. This approach is among five forms of qualitative study types: narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case studies (Creswell & Poth, 2018, pp. 103–106; Finn et al., 2022; Mwita, 2022). The study uses purposive sampling (Campbell et al., 2020; Ralph et al., 2015) rather than theoretical sampling due to cost, time, and resource constraints (Conlon et al., 2020).

The decision for a qualitative rather than a quantitative or mixed-method approach rests partially on the assumptions of a social construction epistemology (Mulisa, 2022). This study seeks practical and objective ways to engage with VCTs in everyday types of interactions. By querying VIPs – peers stakeholders to VCTs – the study is designed to be contextualized to a situation (Birks et al., 2019). VIP church members will convey their opinions of "what will" and "how-to" engage like-minded VCT members elsewhere.

The study seeks plausibility as opposed to certainty in the results. The study will reach saturation, defined as not uncovering any new and substantive insights (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 318).

I will organize and interpret participant responses through a coding series to reveal themes. The themes produce a context-specific theory with ecological validity (Chun Tie et al., 2019). Early work by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss informs this proposed work to collect non-numeric, interpretation-based, and descriptive data from interviews, discussions, and paper-based artifacts (Bailey, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Loubser, 1968; Ralph et al., 2015). Strauss and Corbin (1998, p. 218) stress the importance of memos – as theoretical notes about the data connections between categories. They stress that memo writing is prioritized at the core of generating theory. Birks et al. (2019) recommend writing memos and sketching diagrams.

Consistent with GT studies, I do not propose a hypothesis before collecting data. In this way, the resulting theory will be grounded in the data rather than using data to test whether a hypothesis might be true (Wolf, 2007). By way of VIPs, I aim to understand how best to engage VCTs through their opinions and ideas (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Ralph et al., 2015).

The proposed approach and process for this study fulfill the purpose of finding the topmost factors needed to garner interest, commitment, action, and division of responsibility in teams of Christian adults to help EAs transition from state custody into IL based on seminal theory and scripturally supported guidance.

Participants Selection

Grounded theory has met its share of criticism (Loubser, 1968; Mulisa, 2022; Mwita, 2022). For example, GT researchers may have difficulty in maximizing sample variations while keeping the data manageable (Birks et al., 2019). My proposed study is for seven to ten VIP adults for each of three to five DGEs (Mwita, 2022), consistent with Creswell & Poth's (2018, p. 105) recommendation of 20–60 total participants. Inclusion criteria are active church members, 28 years or older. Candidate participants in each focus group will include clergy, elders, and church members.

Selection and recruitment of VIP participants begins with identifying candidate churches. Once candidate churches are identified, the clergy will be contacted to describe the study's purpose, intention, and approach.

The use of purposive snowball sampling is an effective method for identifying participants for the study of this type (McGeorge et al., 2021). The first step in participant selection for this study is to identify candidate churches.

Identify Churches

Church denomination diversity will include at least (i) one Southern Baptist Convention or United Methodist Church, (ii) one historically Black denomination (e.g., African Methodist Episcopal Church), and (iii) one church with theology differing from other selected churches (e.g., Pentecostal, or Presbyterian). Ideally, participating churches will be small, medium, and large memberships (size) and urban, suburban, and rural (location). Size and location stratification are subordinate to denomination and will be set aside if necessary (Appendix A).

I will find at least forty candidate churches from internet searches and enter key data in an Excel spreadsheet. Columns headings will be church name, denomination,

estimated size, location type (rural, urban, suburban, unknown), and contact information. I will use the initial stratified list to sort and prioritize candidate churches to maximize diversity in denomination, size, and location.

Contact Clergy

I will contact the clergy of the shortlisted candidate churches. Depending on circumstances, a clergy member may designate themselves as the point of contact.

I will use traditional mail, email, and phone calls to initially reach out (Appendix B). My research web site will provide a video with information provided as if I were in person. The URL of OnwardNow.org will be included with initial communication.

Collaborate with POC

I will collaborate with a POC as designated by clergy. A POC's primary role is to provide local recruiting and location planning.

POC Description

The Point of Contact (POC) is the person who acts as a liaison for recruiting VIPs and scheduling the date, time, and location for the facilitated brainstorming sessions at a church. Depending on the denomination, the POC might be the lead pastor or an equivalent position. Alternatively, the pastor may appoint another leader to perform this role on their behalf. It is recommended to set up contact with the clergy first as they can introduce the POC. Below are the progressive steps to engage with the POC.

Initial Contact

I will describe key aspects of the study with each POC through combinations of video introductions, phone calls, email, Zoom calls, or in-person (Appendix C). The POC will then recruit participants with diverse characteristics (e.g., gender, age, and role

within the church). The POC and I will agree on a date, time, and location for a brainstorming session. The POC may be present but may choose not to be a participant. This process will continue until three to five churches fulfill the stratified criteria.

Recruit VIPs

The POC's primary role is for local recruiting and planning. Each POC will recruit seven to ten participants (Mwita, 2022) for the DGE conducted with their church. This will result in a total minimum of 20 participants to a maximum of 60 participants consistent with Creswell & Poth's (2018, p. 105) recommendation.

Candidate participants in each focus group will include combinations of clergy, elders, and church members. I will encourage the POC to recruit participants using material appearing in Appendix D.

Study Procedures

Figure 9 illustrates the study procedures sequence that follow participant recruitment. The DGE materials are described in detail (Appendices E–J) along with data gathering tools required (Appendix K) and subsequent data analysis (Appendix L).

Each DGE will last about three hours. The POC and I will greet each participant at the entryway with session materials. Materials provided to participants include the agenda, a consent form, and CPS information. Once VIPs are seated, I will read a scripted welcoming statement inviting one or more participants to lead prayer. Scripted introductions and PowerPoint presentations will precede, and guide brainstorming/ideation sessions.

The sequence of sessions will be brainstorming RQ1, brainstorming RQ2, individual ideation RQ4, and closing with brainstorming RQ3. Rational for placing RQ4

ahead of RQ3 is two-fold. Firstly, providing individual ideation will lessen frustration and provide a reprieve for participants preferring to work alone. Also, imagining RQ4 implications will elicit deeper participant insights for RQ3 brainstorming (Spector, 2021, p. 291).

Ethical Guidelines

I will adhere to and communicate ethical guidelines with Clergy, POCs, and VIPs. Guiding principles for the sessions include that VIPs may choose to not respond or choose to not participate at any time. I will maintain confidentiality and anonymity of participant's identity and contributions unless a VIP communicates otherwise. I will institute a procedure of name substitution during the sessions to help with this confidentiality.

I will offer clarification of the consent form, including reading the form aloud if required. I will obtain evident consent of participation before beginning the RQ1 brainstorm. I will enlist the assistance of POCs to correct me on misunderstandings I might have pertaining to church and cultural protocol. I will discourage nonparticipant observation of the focus sessions and enlist the advice of the POC in those instances.

I will communicate that I am a mandated reporter. This is especially important given the subject area being covered. I will maintain a Christian decorum with humility and gratitude.

Brainstorming with Focus Groups

Brainstorming participation and dynamics can be helped or hindered by the participant mix. I will encourage courtesy and participation rules/guidelines of creative brainstorming to include refraining from judgment toward other's ideas.

I will emphasize the research question for each brainstorm session and answer VIP questions, if any, before beginning. I will request a volunteer as timekeeper or perform that duty myself if no one is willing. I will honor the time established for each session and encourage participation from each VIP. I will make use of my three decades of management consulting facilitation skills in business and parachurch environments to maintain pace, energy, and presentations. Associated processes appear in parentheses alongside each item.

Encouraging Creativity with Ideation

I will introduce individual ideation as a creative process, but I will also provide thought-starter ideas for those who may be less-comfortable with a blank page only. I will call out times in intervals so that participants make continual progress. I will allow for individuals, pairs, or small groups to collaborate, as well as use of technology such as web searches.

Instruments and Measurements

Appendix K organizes all items required for a DGE: Room and space, signs and labels, printed material and handouts, facilitator items, participant items, technology, and presentations. The primary instruments required during data gather are facilitator items, technology, and presentations shown in Appendix K applicable to each RQ session.

For each of the four research questions, I developed thought-starter prompts from theory to assist participants in getting started with their ideas, if needed. The thought starter prompts will improve the reliability and validity of data collected from different DGEs by using consistent prompts.

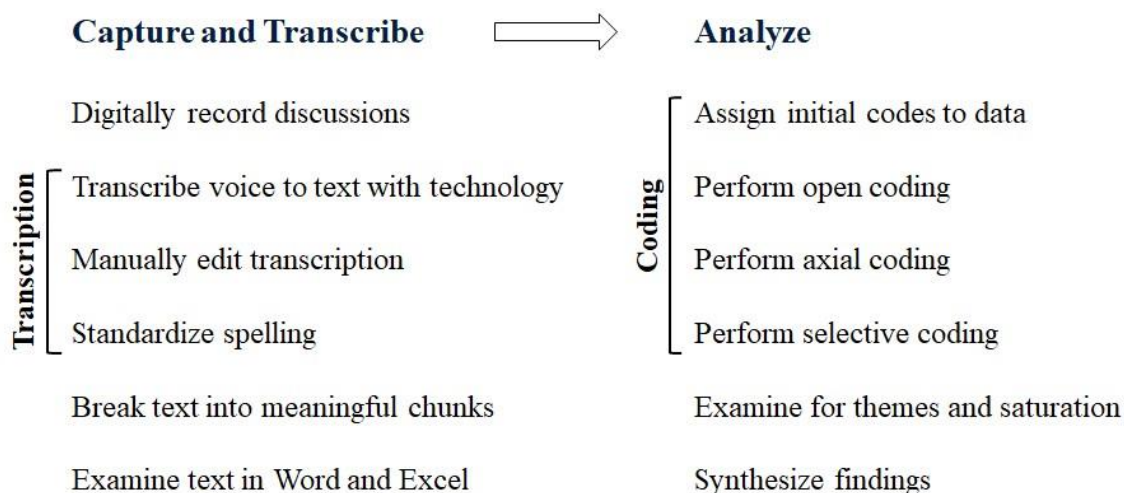
Focus group thought-starter prompts are derived from Kotter and Cohen (2008), Meyer and Allen (1997), and McClelland (1988, pp. 223–267) for RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3, respectively. The RQ4 (individual ideation) prompts are drawn from Vroom and Yetton's (1973) leadership/decision tree model and Galbraith's (2014) organizational design types.

The data gathered will be assumed to be credible and dependable given the purposeful approach to participant selection and the presumed integrity of the participants. Data confirmability will be established through careful transcription of recordings and comparisons to field notes. Also, because multiple DGEs will be conducted, recurring themes are anticipated which contributes to a degree of confirmability.

Data Analysis

Appendices K and L describe instrumentation and data analysis processes, respectively. Importantly, data will be secured physically and technologically. Artifacts collected will be inventoried and indexed in an Excel spreadsheet. Raw journal entries will then be summarized along with descriptive statistics for later combination with emerging themes.

Appendix L provides details for converting audio data to text, initial, open, axial, and selective coding (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 99). An iterative theme and subtheme development process will be used to confirm saturation. Anomalies, such as off-topic comments, will be evaluated for elimination from the results. Some anomalies could be recommended for further study or as evidence of insufficient saturation.

Figure 10*Data Capture, Transcription, and Analysis Processes*

Each DGE will be digitally audio recorded with participant permission. I will write summarized participant responses in bullet-form on a white board or large sheets of facilitator paper. I will take still photographs of these notes and collect artifacts (such as brochures), if any, for evaluation. Recordings will be transcribed by audio-to-text technology and stored on a secured external hard drive. Text will initially be transcribed and edited verbatim then parsed into manageable chunks. Excel will be used for coding, sorting, and grouping.

Initial coding of data will be a DGE identifier. A code book will be maintained as more granular and thematic analysis occurs during analysis.

Finally, a synthesis of all data, including themes, subthemes, journal summaries, and artifacts, will be combined to present the study results. Contrasts and distinctions of congregational composition, such as denomination, membership size, and community type, will also be considered to contribute to the results.

Delimitations Assumptions and Limitations

Delimitations

This proposed study includes Protestant churches excluding Catholic and Greek Orthodox Christian churches and non-Christian faiths and secular groups. Each of these church and group exclusions may warrant investigation in a future study. But, even within Protestantism, a great variety of denominations exist.

Also, the study will involve Oklahoma churches only, excluding other states and regions for cost containment. Adults 28 and over are included, excluding potential participants 27 and younger. Church members with two years or more affiliation with their local church are included, excluding non-member attendees and members with less than two years of affiliation with their church.

Assumptions

The proposed study assumes clergy will be willing to allow this study to take place with their congregants. Further, the snowballing recruitment strategy assumes that clergy will appoint a helpful POC or serve as my POC themselves. Also, I assume that a quorum of participants will be willing and able to appear and actively engage in the brainstorming and individual ideation sessions.

I assume that a GT approach will yield a plausible theory that will inform a future program making use of the study's findings. I assume that participants will honor brainstorming courtesy to other participants and provide substantive opinions without judgment.

I assume that the date, time, location, and forum for the DGEs will offer sufficient convenience to minimize no-show participants or excessively late participants. I also assume a quorum of participants will be willing to read and agree with the release form.

Limitations

The nature of GT studies limits data gathering to dozens of participants rather than hundreds or even thousands of participants that are possible in quantitative studies. The finite reach of this proposed study may not yield results sufficiently extensible to differing denominations or other states and regions. The data gathered may not reach saturation with the proposed maximum of five churches resulting in an elongated time required to include additional congregations.

The primary limitations for this proposed study are time and cost.

Summary

This proposed study investigates how to generate interest, commitment, and action from a group of Christian adults to help EAs transition from state custody into IL. The study involves facilitated brainstorming and individual ideation sessions with adult members of three to five Protestant congregations in Oklahoma. The themes emerging from the study will provide insights on how to engage members of diverse church bodies to help transition EAs into IL.

My prayer and belief are that the Church can help the EAs in ways previously not imagined or pursued. Most adults have very few insights regarding the tragedy occurring with aging out EAs. Findings from this study can contribute toward decreasing that knowledge gap and help thousands of young adults age into IL.

This study examines a novel approach to help EAs transition into IL. No research has examined church members voluntarily forming a team for this aim. Notable differences may emerge between denominations, informing future research unrelated to the aging out needs but involving differences among faith-based groups.

The findings of this study will apply to secular volunteerism (e.g., community engagement), especially in informing corporate volunteerism literature. Another unique aspect of this study is an examination blending pragmatism, altruism, faith, and secularism (being in the world but not of the world).

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Overview

[This chapter and this section begin with a restatement of the study's purpose and brief overview of the data collection process and research questions that guided the study. This section provides an overview of the chapter.]

Descriptive Results

[In this section, all descriptive results are presented. The demographics of the sample, as well as any relevant means to questionnaires, are presented. Any relevant descriptive results are outlined in this section.]

Study Findings

[This section is organized by research question and presents the research findings. For qualitative studies, the analytical process should be briefly described again, followed by all relevant codes that organized the data and then all themes presented by the research question. For quantitative studies, all relevant statistics, tables, and statistical comparisons should be presented.]

Summary

[This section concludes Chapter 4. This section should be 1-2 paragraphs in length and summarize the key results. Each chapter should have a summary to conclude the information presented in the present chapter and to transition to the next chapter.]

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Overview

[This chapter and this section begin with a restatement of the study's purpose and brief introduction to the chapter.]

Summary of Findings

[This section briefly summarizes all key findings from the study.]

Discussion of Findings

[This section discusses what the findings mean and how they compare to the research literature reviewed in Chapter 2. Furthermore, a discussion of how this study contributes to our understanding of the theory of your constructs and how it fits into the biblical foundations laid in Chapter 2 is presented. This section focuses on what we should take away from the findings of this study.]

Implications

[This section discusses the implications of the findings for theory and practice. How these findings can be used, and their impact in the scientific community, psychological practice/consulting, and church or other organizations should be presented.]

Limitations

[This section summarizes all relevant limitations of the study. Those previously stated should be restated, as well as any new limitations discovered in the completion of the study.]

Recommendations for Future Research

[This section discusses recommendations for future research that emerge from the findings of the current study.]

Summary

[This section concludes Chapter 5 and the dissertation. This section should be 1-2 paragraphs long and summarize the study's key results and implications. This section concludes the dissertation.]

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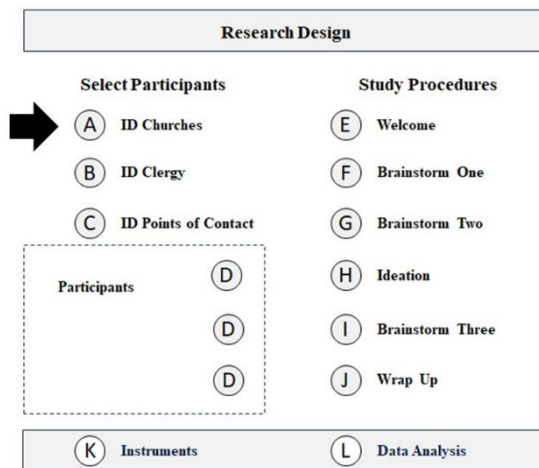
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APPENDIX A

Identify Churches

Selection and recruitment of VIP participants begins with identifying candidate churches. Once candidate churches are identified, the clergy will be contacted to describe the study’s purpose, intention, and approach.



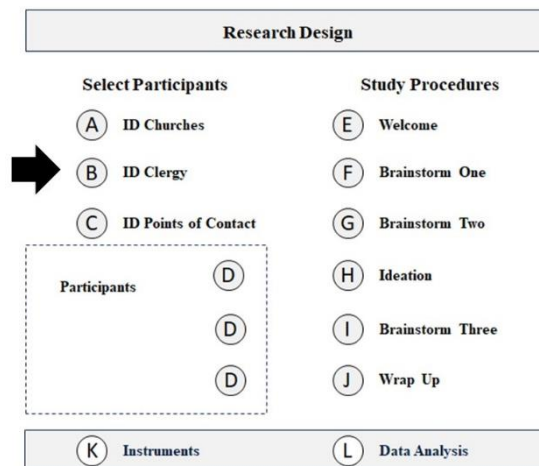
Initial denominations will be coded in the following categories derived from several journal articles (Anderson, 2022; Bacon, 2019; Chao, 2023; Frazier-Crawford & Perkins, 2011; Johnson, 2023; McGeorge et al., 2021; Melkonian-Hoover & Kellstedt, 2019; Monk-Turner, 2020; Ruth, 2022; Smidt, 2022; Wollschleger, 2019).

African Methodist Episcopal Church	Evangelical Restorationist
African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church	Mainline Anabaptist
Christian Methodist Episcopal Church	Mainline Anglican/Episcopalian
Church of God in Christ	Mainline Congregational
Evangelical Adventist	Mainline Friends
Evangelical Anabaptist	Mainline Holiness historically Black
Evangelical Baptist	Mainline Lutheran
Evangelical Congregational	Mainline Methodist
Evangelical Episcopalian	Mainline Methodist historically Black
Evangelical Holiness	Mainline Nondenominational
Evangelical Lutheran	Mainline Pentecostal historically Black
Evangelical Methodist	Mainline Presbyterian
Evangelical Nondenominational	Mainline Reformed
Evangelical Pentecostal	Mainline Restorationist
Evangelical Pietist	National Baptist Convention
Evangelical Presbyterian	Nondenominational historically Black
Evangelical Reformed	

APPENDIX B

Identify Clergy

This appendix has scripts, letters, and outreach information to share with clergy.



Video Script, by Phone or In Person

Hello Pastor

As a graduate student in the School of Behavioral Sciences at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to discover how to encourage church members to form a team and help an emerging adult exit from foster care into independent living. I am seeking ideas from focus group sessions and an individual ideation session. The questions are how to garner interest, commitment, and action from a volunteer church team. And I am seeking ideas how that team should be organized.

If some of your congregants meet my participant criteria and are interested, I would like to invite you and them to join my study.

Participants must be 28 years or older and be a church member for two or more years.

Participants, if willing, will be asked to give their opinions as how best to garner interest, garner commitment and action from a volunteer team to help an emerging adult transition from foster care into independent living. These opinions will be in a focus group format. I will also request participants to complete a form asking their opinion on how such a team should be organized.

Each focus group session and the individual ideation should take about 30 minutes each. The total time is estimated at three hours or less. I will provide a consent form before beginning the first focus group session.

Participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be collected. Participants will use an anonymity pseudonym rather than their actual name.

Would you like your congregants to participate? If “Yes” – Great! Could I get the the best way to contact you so that we can set up a time for planning the next steps? If not, I understand. Thank you for your time.

A consent document will be provided prior to beginning the first focus group session. After participants have read the consent form, they will place their form in a slotted box. Doing so will indicate that they have read the consent information and would like to take part in the study.

Participants who participate in all three focus group sessions and the individual ideation session will receive a \$25 VISA gift card. Those that begin participating but withdraw for any reason will receive a \$10 VISA gift card.

I hope to hear from you and thank you for your time. Do you have any questions? You may contact me through email at jahoneycutt@liberty.edu.

Introduction Letter or Email

Dear Pastor,

As a graduate student in the School of Behavioral Sciences at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to discover how to encourage church members to form a team and help an emerging adult exit from foster care into independent living. I am writing to invite you and a few of your congregants to join my study.

Participants must be 28 years or older, and a church member for two or more years. Participants will be asked to give their opinions on how best to garner interest, garner commitment and action from a volunteer team to help an emerging adult transition from foster care into independent living.

Participant opinions will be in a focus group format. I will also request participants to complete a form asking their opinion on how such a team should be organized. I will audio record the focus group sessions. I will collect the individual ideation forms in a slotted box.

First, I will facilitate two focus group sessions of about 30 minutes each followed by a fifteen minute break, or as needed. An individual ideation session of about 30 minutes will follow with a third and final facilitated focus group session. In total, I expect the event to take three hours or less.

Participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be collected. Participants will use an anonymity pseudonym rather than their actual name.

A consent document will be provided prior to the sessions beginning. Because participation is anonymous, they will not need to sign the consent document unless they would prefer to do so. After they have read the consent form, I will ask that they place it in a slotted box to indicate that they have read the consent information and would like to take part in the study.

Participants who participate in all three focus group sessions and the individual ideation session will receive a \$25 VISA gift card. Those that begin participating but withdraw for any reason will receive a \$10 VISA gift card.

Snacks, soft drinks, and water will be provided and available throughout the sessions.

Would you like your congregants to participate? If “Yes” – Great! Can set up a time for planning the next steps? If not, I understand. Thank you for your time.

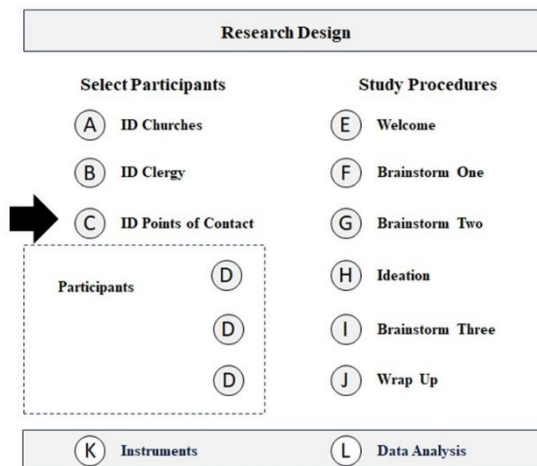
Sincerely,

John Honeycutt
Doctoral Candidate
jahoneycut@liberty.edu

APPENDIX C

Collaborate with POCs.

This appendix describes communication with POCs as an introduction letter, and in-person script (via., pre-recorded video, Zoom call, phone call, or in-person).



POC Introduction Letter

Dear [Title, Name],

As a graduate student in the School of Behavioral Sciences at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to discover how to encourage church members to form a team and help an emerging adult exit from foster care into independent living. I am writing to invite you and a few of your congregants to join my study.

Participants must be 28 years or older, and a church member for two or more years. Participants will be asked to give their opinions on how best to garner interest, garner commitment and action from a volunteer team to help an emerging adult transition from foster care into independent living.

Participant opinions will be in a focus group format. I will also request participants to complete a form asking their opinion on how such a team should be organized. I will audio record the focus group sessions. I will collect the individual ideation forms in a slotted box.

First, I will facilitate two focus group sessions of about 30 minutes each followed by a fifteen minute break, or as needed. An individual ideation session of about 30 minutes will follow with a third and final facilitated focus group session. In total, I expect the event to take three hours or less.

Participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be collected. Participants will use an anonymity pseudonym rather than their actual name. A consent document will be provided prior to beginning the first focus group session.

Because participation is anonymous, they will not need to sign the consent document unless they would prefer to do so. After they have read the consent form, I will ask that they place it in a slotted box to indicate that they have read the consent information and would like to take part in the study.

Participants who participate in all three focus group sessions and the individual ideation session will receive a \$25 VISA gift card. Those that begin participating but withdraw for any reason will receive a \$10 VISA gift card.

Snacks, soft drinks, and water will be provided and available throughout the sessions.

Would you be willing to recruit participants from your church congregation? If “Yes” – Great! Could I get the best way to contact you so that we can set up a time for planning the next steps? If not, I understand. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

John Honeycutt
Doctoral Candidate
jahoneycut@liberty.edu

Zoom, Phone, Video Script, or In Person

Hello [Title, Name]

As a graduate student in the School of Behavioral Sciences at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to discover how to encourage church members to form a team and help an emerging adult exit from foster care into independent living. I am seeking ideas from focus group sessions and an individual ideation session. The questions are how to garner interest, commitment, and action from a volunteer church team. And I am seeking ideas how that team should be organized.

If you and some of your fellow congregants meet my participant criteria and are interested, I would like to invite you and them to join my study.

Participants must be 28 years or older and be a church member for two or more years.

You and other participants, if willing, will be asked to give your opinions as how best to garner interest, garner commitment and action from a volunteer team to help an emerging adult transition from foster care into independent living. These opinions will be in a focus group format. I will also request participants to complete a form asking their opinion on how such a team should be organized.

Each focus group session and the individual ideation should take about 30 minutes each. The total time is estimated at three hours or less. I will provide a consent form before beginning the first focus group session.

Participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be collected. Participants will use an anonymity pseudonym rather than their actual name.

Would you be willing to help recruit up to ten of your church members to participate? If “Yes” – Great! Could I get the best way to contact you so that we can set up a time for planning the next steps? If not, I understand. Thank you for your time.

A consent document will be provided prior to beginning the first focus group session. Because participation is anonymous, they will not need to sign the consent document unless they would prefer to do so. After participants have read the consent form, they will place their form in a slotted box. Doing so will indicate that they have read the consent information and would like to take part in the study.

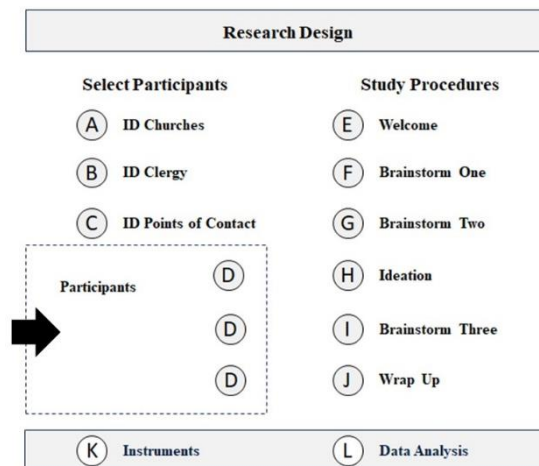
Participants who participate in all three focus group sessions and the individual ideation session will receive a \$25 VISA gift card. Those that begin participating but withdraw for any reason will receive a \$10 VISA gift card.

Thank you for your time. Do you have any questions? You may contact me through email at jahoneycutt@liberty.edu.

APPENDIX D

Enlist Participants

This step may be performed independently by the POC or in collaboration with my assistance depending on the POC's advice. The POC will be responsible for providing the date, time, location, and other planning information for recruitment.



Video Script

Hello

As a graduate student in the School of Behavioral Sciences at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to discover how to encourage church members to form a team and help an emerging adult exit from foster care into independent living. I am seeking ideas from focus group sessions. The questions are how to garner interest, commitment, and action from a volunteer church team. A short form will collect participant ideas how that team should be organized.

If you meet my participant criteria and your pastor has agreed to allowing it, I would like to invite you to join my study.

I am seeking from seven to ten participants from each church I research. Participants must be 28 years or older and be a church member for two or more years.

You and other participants, if willing, will be asked to give your opinions as how best to garner interest, commitment, and action from a volunteer team to help an emerging adult transition from foster care into independent living. These opinions will be in a focus group format. I will also request participants to complete a form asking their opinion on how such a team should be organized.

Each focus group session and the individual ideation should take about 30 minutes each. The total time is estimated at three hours or less. I will provide a consent form before beginning the first focus group session and it is posted on my website OnwardNow.org.

Participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be collected. Participants will use an anonymity pseudonym rather than their actual name.

Because participation is anonymous, you will not need to sign the consent document unless you would prefer to do so. Prior to beginning the focus group brainstorming you would read it and then place it in a slotted box. Doing so will indicate you have read the consent information and would like to take part in the study.

Would you be willing be of of the seven to ten participants from your church? If “Yes” – Great! Please communicate your interest to your pastor or their designated coordinator.

Participants who participate in all three focus group sessions and the individual ideation session will receive a \$25 VISA gift card. Those that begin participating but withdraw for any reason will receive a \$10 VISA gift card.

Thank you for your time. Do you have any questions? You may contact me through email at jahoneycutt@liberty.edu.

General Consent

Consent

Title of the Project: Engaging church teams to support youths aging out of care.

Principal Investigator: John Honeycutt, Doctoral Candidate School of Behavioral Science, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to take part in a research study. You must be 28 or older and a church member for two or more years to take part. Taking part in this research project is voluntary. Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The study is being done to discover how to encourage church members to form a team and help one young adult exiting from foster care into independent living.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. Participate in an initial focus group session with all participants. The session will last about 30 minutes. I will audio record the session and take notes.
2. Participate in a second focus group session with all participants. The session will last about 30 minutes, followed by a 15 minute break, or as needed. I will audio record the session and take notes.
3. Write your ideas on an anonymous form and place it in a slotted cardboard box. This individual ideation session will last about 30 minutes.
4. Participate in a final focus group session with all participants. The session will last about 30 minutes. I will audio record the session and take notes.

If permission is given, I will collect relevant artifacts such as a church bulletin or brochure and I will photograph my notes written on a whiteboard or presentation pad.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. Benefits to society include that some youths aging out of the foster care system might transition into independent living more safely, confident, and with support (such as mentoring).

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

It is important to acknowledge that any study comes with its risks. In this case, while the chances are unlikely, participants may be affected by the statistics presented or triggered by the information provided during the event. Additionally, some may feel that their ideas and opinions won't be helpful or valuable, which can be discouraging. To minimize these risks, I have taken several steps.

Firstly, before beginning, your pastor or one of the other participants will lead us in prayer. Secondly, during my introduction, I will present the "rules of brainstorming" to ensure everyone feels comfortable sharing their ideas. Thirdly, I will remind the group that they can stop taking part, listen, or leave if needed.

Your pastor or other clergy will be present to offer comfort if needed. Lastly, we will stop a session altogether and pray if needed. These measures will help create a safe and supportive environment for all participants. Lastly, I will remind you and describe Oklahoma's 988 mental health lifeline should it be needed after the session.

I am a mandatory reporter. During this study, if I receive information about child abuse, child neglect, elder abuse, or intent to harm self or others, I will be required to report it to the appropriate authorities.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher and members of his doctoral committee will have access to the records.

- Participant written responses will be anonymous and placed in a slotted box.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.
- Voice recording data will be stored on an external hard drive locked in a lockbox behind a closed door in my home when not in use. Transcriptions of voice-to-text documents and pdf versions of individual ideation forms will be stored on the same external hard drive. Password protected, transcribed text will be formatted into a Word document and Excel for analysis. Those files will also be saved on the external drive. Only after high-level themes are established will the summarized results be placed in the dissertation document
- After three years, all electronic records will be deleted, and hardcopy records will be shredded.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will be compensated for participating in this study. At the conclusion of the the focus group discussions and individual ideation session participants will receive a \$25 Visa gift card.

Any participant who chooses to withdraw from the study after beginning but before completing all study procedures will receive a \$10 Visa gift card.

Snacks, soft drinks, and water will be available to participants throughout the focus group sessions and individual ideation session.

I receive no financial benefit from conducting this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your participation will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to take part, you are free not to answer any questions or withdraw at any time.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please inform the researcher that you wish to discontinue your participation, and do not submit your individual ideation materials. Your responses will not be recorded or included in the study.

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you apart from focus group data will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is John Honeycutt. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at 918-315-2205 and/or jahoneycutt@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Professor McMillan, at wmcmillan7@liberty.edu.

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

Recruit Handout

Christian Adult Participants Needed

ENGAGING CHURCH TEAMS TO SUPPORT YOUTH AGING OUT OF CARE

Two years. Have you been a member of your church for 2 years?

Three hours. Are you willing to donate 3 hours of your time?

28 or older. Are you 28 or older?

If you answered **YES** to these questions, you may be eligible to participate in a research study.

**The study gathers your opinions in a brainstorming event.
7–10 people from three churches will participate.**

Participants will be asked to voice their opinions as a focus group for 3 questions. Brainstorming for each question will take about 30 minutes. Participants will also give their written opinion about a 4th question. A consent document will be given to you at the focus group event.



Participants will receive a \$25 Visa gift card.†

Learn more @ OnwardNow.org



3 hours: facilitated
brainstorming



I would like to listen to your ideas and opinions, please

I'm John Honeycutt, 62, a doctoral candidate in the School of Behavior Sciences at Liberty University. I want to help young adults aging out of the foster system transition into independent living well. I want to **listen to you & hear your ideas**. For more information reach me at (918) 315-2205 or jahoneycutt@liberty.edu. Or visit my web site. Blessings! *John*

Social Media Recruiting

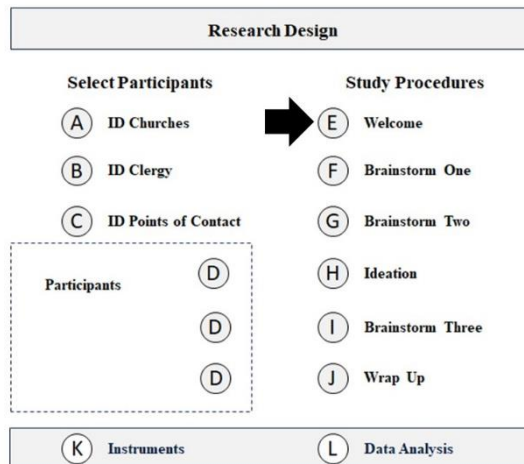
ATTENTION Oklahoma church members: I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctorate at Liberty University. The purpose of my research is to engage Christian adults to help young adults in foster care transition to independent living. To take part, you must be 28 years or older and a member of your church for two years. Participants will be asked to take part in a brainstorming session with several other people and give their opinions and ideas, which should take about three hours or less to complete. If you would like to take part and meet the study criteria, please help me connect with your pastor to discuss holding the brainstorm with your church and a few other congregants who attend with you. Contact me at jahoneycutt614@gmail.com for more information or go to OnwardNow.org.

A consent document is posted on the website, which will be provided at the start of a brainstorming session. Participants will receive a \$25 gift certificate following the brainstorming event.

APPENDIX E

Welcome Participants

This is the first step for a DGE. This precedes any brainstorming. It includes introductions, confirming participants have agreed to the consent form, agenda, expectations, guidance for protocol, and a prayer.



Before beginning brainstorming activities, participants will receive a simple welcome letter and a unique identifier rather than their name.

Entry Welcome Note

I am John Honeycutt, a doctoral student with Liberty University Online.

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this session. I will describe the research more momentarily once others arrive and are seated. This is a research project where I am seeking your opinions and guidance. Unless you choose otherwise, I will not ask for your name. Participant identities will not be included in the study I am conducting.

While waiting, you may want to watch and listen to some short videos on my website if your phone has connections here. Go to OnwardNow.org and from the menu select the Congregant menu.

Today's session will last approximately three hours including breaks. Please help yourself to any refreshments at any time. Also, at the completion of our time, please accept a \$25 VISA debit card as my appreciation to you. If you need to leave early before all the sessions have completed, please accept a \$10 VISA debit card for your willingness to be here for part of the time.

Blessings,

John

Welcome Script

“Welcome! If you do not yet have the printouts from the table, please raise your hand.”

“I expect this will take about three hours in total. At the end, each of you will receive a token \$25 gift card to express my gratitude. If you need to leave early at any time after we have begun, please accept a \$10 gift card for your willingness to be here. Also, I want to thank Pastor [name] and [name of POC] for arranging this brainstorming session.” (Thank others if needed). I will review the agenda and other important parts of this event following prayer.”

The Pastor or other volunteer will pray. Four historically important prayers are printed to select and read one of them.

Table Material

A Table provided by the facility holds participant handouts. A small sign saying “Welcome. Please take one of each.” will be placed prominently on the table. Paper printouts will be laid out prior to the event. The print outs are the agenda, release forms, information about CPS, and brainstorm support.

Prayer

The senior-most clergy or other clergy is asked to pray over the event. When no clergy are present, a card stock, laminated prayer suggestions (option) are provided to a prayer volunteer. If there is no volunteer the facilitator reads one of four choices: The Lord’s prayer, “Lord, Lord, Open Unto Me” (Howard Thurman), A “Prayer for America” (Billy Graham), or Blessings for Children (Micah Maddox).

The Lord’s Prayer

“This, then, is how you should pray:

‘Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.’
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.’”

(*New International Version Bible*, 1978/2011. Matthew 6:9–13)

Lord, Lord, Open Unto Me

Open unto me, light for my darkness
 Open unto me, courage for my fear
 Open unto me, hope for my despair.
 Open unto me, peace for my turmoil
 Open unto me, joy for my sorrow
 Open unto me, strength for my weakness
 Open unto me, wisdom for my confusion
 Open unto me, forgiveness for my sins
 Open unto me, tenderness for my toughness
 Open unto me, love for my hates
 Open unto me, Thy Self for myself
 Lord, Lord, open unto me!

By Howard Thurman, author, and civil rights leader born in segregated South

1899 (Tysons Interfaith, 2023).

Blessings to Pray over Youth

Lord, while the world adolescents and young adults need to rise, be seen, noticed, and succeed, help me teach them you receive them just as they are. May youths know you accept the least and are always ready to forgive and love and be merciful.

Lord, please let children in need never lose hope. With so many giving up and giving in, believing there is nothing left for them here in this world, please pierce their hearts with your hope. I know you are their only hope that will last.

Adapted from Micha Maddox (June 24, 2022).

Prayer for America

Our Father and Our God,

We praise You for Your goodness to our nation, giving us blessings far beyond what we deserve. Yet we know all is not right with America. We deeply need moral and spiritual renewal to help us meet the many problems we face.

Convict us of sin. Help us to turn to You in repentance and faith. Set our feet on the path of Your righteousness and peace. We pray today for our nation's leaders. Give them the wisdom to know what is right, and the courage to do it.

You have said, "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord." May this be a new era for America, as we humble ourselves and acknowledge You alone as our Savior and Lord.

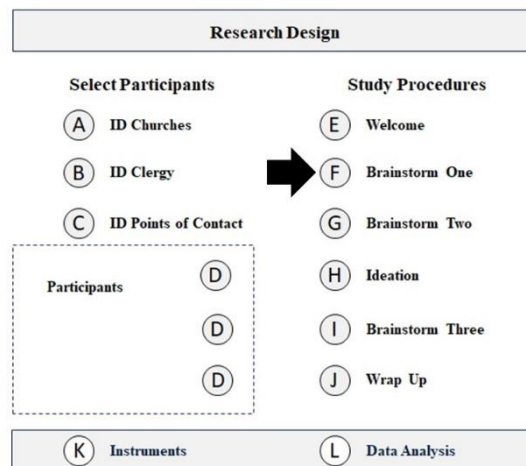
This we pray in Your holy name, Amen.

- Billy Graham

APPENDIX F

Conduct Brainstorm RQ1

This appendix describes the process for conducting the first brainstorming session. Here, some general statistics and facts from research are presented to establish the topic. Brainstorming protocol guidelines will be restated.



PowerPoint Presentation

A PowerPoint presentation will briefly cover national and Oklahoma-specific foster care statistics and associated facts.

The written agenda will emphasize the interim goal of each part of the session, I will describe the purpose of the study, privacy protocol, and description/purpose of the recording device(s). I will respectfully ask that participants be watchful of talking over each other during brainstorming and some basic courtesies associated with brainstorming (e.g., to postpone judgment of ideas, encourage wild ideas, aim for quantity over quality, build consecutively on ideas, and value every idea).

Slide Sequence

Welcome with the university, presenter name, study title.

Brainstorming courtesy reminders encouraging participants to talk one-at-a-time and acknowledge/honor the opinions of others even if their personal opinions differ.

Agenda with time estimates.

High-level statistics of OHC and aging out.

Summarized state-specific information (from field notes).

Display of RQ1.

Definition of commitment.

Definition of obligation.

Definition of team.

Compare contrast team from group.

Definition of values and commitment.

Distinction between commitment and action.

Definition of concerns, obligations, obstacles.

This research question explores values and obligations relevant to a future team's commitment to serving on a team.

Break suggested break length, directions for snacks.

Open Ended Prompts

I will capture/summarize participant responses on a white board to confirm that their input is sufficiently understood. Thought-starter questions for RQ1 are drawn from Kotter and Cohen's (2008) first three steps of their eight steps of change shown in parenthesis:

1.1. What would the result be if this issue were solved? How might that be accomplished? (Strategic Vision)

1.2. How can a sense of urgency be communicated to congregants? How would one know that the messages were received? (Urgency)

1.3. How might an initial group be formed to explore possibilities? What is something that might get in the way? (Coalition)

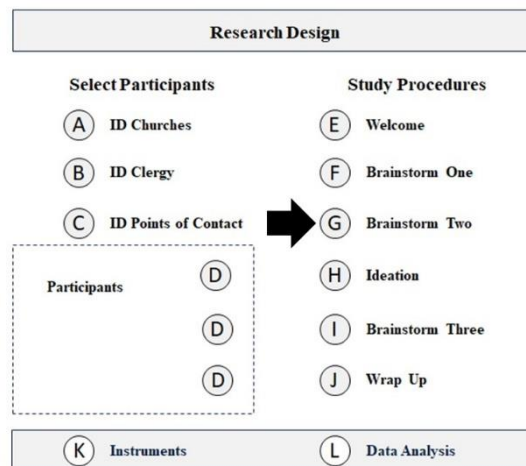
1.4. What else could be done to bring attention to this issue garnering interest?

Q/A and Unprompted Discussion

This unstructured discussion will allow participants to write down their questions if they choose to, and without facilitation, discuss the topic among themselves.

APPENDIX G

This appendix describes the process for conducting the second brainstorming session. Here, some additional facts from research (trauma) are presented to establish the topic. Gratitude for the first session will be given along with restated brainstorming protocol.



PowerPoint Presentation

Transition teams might serve a transitioning EA best when they have a modicum of understanding of developmental theory and complex traumatic development factors. In this study, VIPS in brainstorming sessions will be briefly introduced to high-level descriptions of developmental theory before beginning the RQ2. The information presented will include a few external and internal factors and their impact on an individual's development. Emphasis will be on the significance of complex traumatic experiences and how they can result in non-normative brain development and persistence, hypervigilance, or arousal, which can carry into adulthood.

Slide Sequence

Welcome with the university, presenter name, study title.

Agenda with time estimates.

Acknowledgement that some content in this session may be triggering.

Definition of acute and complex trauma.

General statistics of national neglect and abuse.

Description of bouncing, OHC, and group homes.

Brief age-stage trauma explanation

Display of RQ2

A thank you slide with a suggested 5-minute discussion of RQ2 with a friend, small group, or among themselves followed by a scheduled break with food or snacks.

Open Ended Prompts

I will remind participants not to talk over each other and to acknowledge/honor the opinions of others, even if their personal opinions differ. I will capture/summarize participant responses on a white board to confirm that I understand their ideas. Thought-starter prompts for RQ2 are drawn from Meyer and Allen's (1993, 1997) commitment model through personal values and felt obligations shown in parenthesis:

2.1. What would a person need before considering becoming involved? (Values).

2.2. What personal values might help garner commitment? (Values).

2.3. Why would people choose to not get involved? (Obligation).

2.4. How would people rationalize staying distant from the needs? (Obligation).

2.5 What major questions would need to be answered before committing to be involved with a solution? (Obligation).

Q/A and Unprompted Discussion

This brief unstructured discussion will allow participants to write down their questions if they choose to, and without facilitation, discuss the topic among themselves.

“Thank you for your help on this difficult topic. Please find a friend or as a smaller group and talk through what you have learned, discovered, or feel about the first

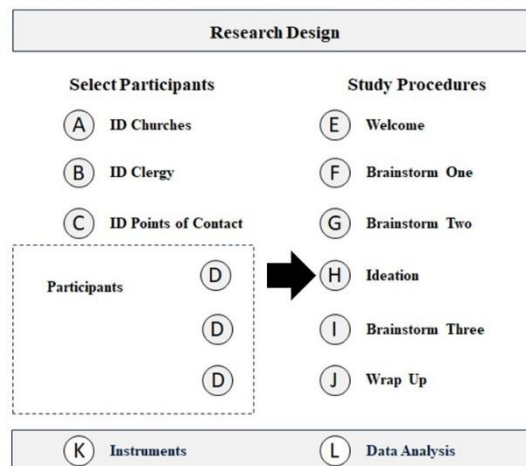
two topics. I will not record or capture these discussions – they are for you. In a few minutes I will recap this topic and we will take a break before starting the next topic.”

Confirm, Recap and Break

I will summarize the participants’ ideas. We will adjourn for a break.

APPENDIX H

This appendix describes the process for conducting the only individual ideation session. This session explores RQ4. A few examples of team structures and leadership approaches are described as illustrative only. Participants receive blank paper and a semi-structured form to use.



They may use either or both. This session can be conducted as individuals only, or in pairs or however participants prefer.

- Display Ecclesiastes 4:9–4:12
- Include graphics from example organization designs.
- Describe differing leadership styles

The Form's Prompts

4.1 After considering differences autocratic, consultative, and group-based

decisions, which form of decision-making would serve a team best?

4.2 After considering possibilities in dividing responsibilities, how do you think

responsibilities should be divided?

4.3 Please draw an illustration with a description of your idea of a team for this

need.

Discussion

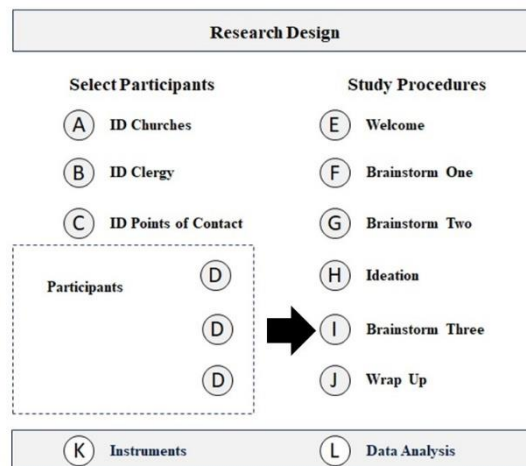
A timer will be set for 15 minutes and 20 minutes following the introduction of the ideation session. At about the 20-minute mark each participant may briefly explain their ideation verbally (if they are willing). All participants will be asked to place their form in a box.

(H-30) Recap Collect

I will restate (at a high level) what the participants have said and drawn.

APPENDIX I

This appendix describes the process for conducting the final session. Ideation from individual thinking for RQ4 will inform this group brainstorm. A brief recap on where the DGE began and has led to will set up the discussion for this final brainstorm.



Brainstorm Three for Action

“Committed and potential transition team members might uncommit themselves for any variety of reasons. Beyond commitment though, team formation with an agreed protocol will be necessary to begin action.”

James “faith without action is dead.”

Display ... Ephesians 4:23–24. These young adults are leaving behind their old selves to embrace a new one, whether with the help of a VCT or not. The team members, who are mature in their faith, can show righteousness and holiness in their everyday lives.

PowerPoint

Welcome with the university, presenter name, study title.

Agenda with time estimates.

Display James 2:14

Introduce concepts of time, talent, and treasure

Display several skills, knowledge, and competencies needed

Display reminder of trauma and trauma responses

Display of RQ3

A thank you and conclusion slide with reminder of token gift certification care.

Open Ended Prompts

I will extend gratitude and remind participants to help themselves to refreshments and to receive their gift card at the completion of this session. I will capture/summarize participant responses on a whiteboard.

Transition teams might serve a transitioning EA with a mixture or blend of people with different talents (display many parts of the body slide).

Welcome with the university, presenter name, study title.

Agenda with time estimates.

Thought-starter prompts for RQ3 are drawn from McClelland's (1988, pp. 587-608) commitment model and concepts of action/inaction shown in parenthesis:

3.1. What form of approval from others would encourage a team member?

(Approval)

3.2. What kind of service would be fulfilling to a team member? (To serve/compassion)

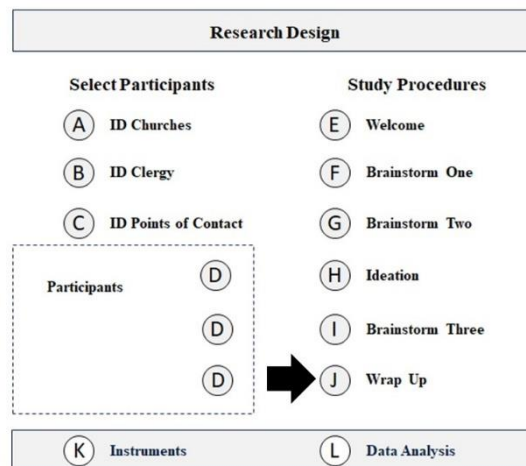
3.3. How might a team member show generosity? (Generativity)

3.4. What would prevent a team member from initiating action? (Consequences)

APPENDIX J

Wrap Up

This process provides for less formal discussions if a participant wants to share after adjournment of the scheduled time.



Suggestions for Improvement

What are some improvements I could make in this brainstorming event for the next church? Please use the feedback card and place your card in the box.

Gratitude

I will give a reminder about the gift card and request to complete a feedback card.

I will read a closing in prayer from Micha Maddox. or the pastor or congregant will close in prayer.

Collect Artifacts

Collect any brochures or other items permitted pertaining to the discussions.

Photograph whiteboards or other relevant documentation. Write impressions and journal entries as soon as possible once adjourned and packed up. Collect and secure ideation forms.

Clean Up

Assist with any cleanup or equipment breakdown required. Confirm personal equipment is loaded and packed.

APPENDIX K

This appendix lists and itemizes all handouts and support material required for a DGE (e.g., all the items required for processes E–J). This appendix repeats some information described within individual appendices that describe a process. But summarizes the information into one list.

Research Design	
Select Participants	Study Procedures
(A) ID Churches	(E) Welcome
(B) ID Clergy	(F) Brainstorm One
(C) ID Points of Contact	(G) Brainstorm Two
Participants (D)	(H) Ideation
(D)	(I) Brainstorm Three
(D)	(J) Wrap Up
(K) Instruments	(L) Data Analysis

Room and Space

- Large table for material (E)
- Table or location for drinks and snacks (E)
- Twelve or more chairs/seating (E)
- Projector screen or wall (E–I)
- Whiteboard or paper easel (E–I)

Signs and Labels

- CPS contact information (E)
- Entry “Welcome” sign (E)
- Table “Take One of Each” for materials (E)
- Labeled box to return RQ4 forms (H)

Printed Material and Handouts

- Laminated prayers (E) x 1
- Welcome introductory note (E) x 20

- Consent forms (E) x 20
- B/W presentations (F, G, H, I) in six-slide format x 20
- Individual ideation form (H) x 20
- VISA \$25 gift card (J) x 20
- VISA \$10 gift card (J) x 20

Facilitator Items

- Egg timer x 1
- Multiple color erasable marker set (for white board) x 1
- Multiple color permanent marker set (for easel paper) x 1
- Post-it sticky easel pad and easel x 1

Participant Items

- Feedback card x 20 (J)
- Motivational stress balls x 20 (E)
- Name tents x 20 (E)
- Pens x 20 (E)

Technology and Presentations (F–I)

- Camera/microphone x 1
- Flash drive loaded with PPT and PDF versions x 1
- Laptop/desktop x 1
- License for voice to text transcription x 1
- MS Office Suite x 1
- OBS software for recording
- Projector for displaying presentations x 1

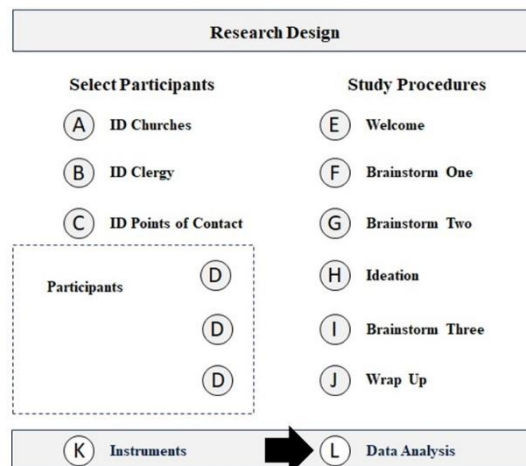
- Smartphone camera x 1

Snacks and Drinks (E)

- Bowl small chocolate treats x 1
- Bowl whole grain crackers x 1
- Fruit and vegetable tray x 1
- Variety pack individual chips x 1
- Bottled water x 20
- Granola or healthy individual wrap bars x 20
- Soda variety in cans x 20

APPENDIX L

This appendix describes the process for analyzing data collected during the DGEs. Care will be taken to preserve original recordings and transcriptions until analysis is completed. Personal identifying information will be removed from raw data before coding begins.

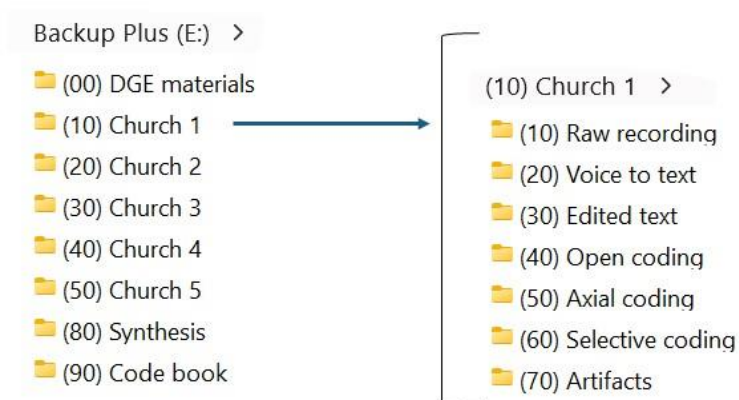


Source Data and Versions

Data Sources and File Names

An external/removable hard drive will maintain source data and iterative versions of analyzed data. Periodic backups to a companion external drive will also be maintained. This approach lessens potential data breach through the Internet.

A meaningful file structure (directory/subdirectory/filename) and naming taxonomy will help with organized and efficient data analysis. Initially, the directory structure will appear as shown.



Recording Capture

Open Broadcast System (OBS) will be used to capture audio of the facilitated sessions. Source recordings will be in .MKV file format and remuxed into .MP4 format.

Voice to Text Transcription

A technology enabled voice-to-text application will initially transcribe MP4 files into text. Files will be stored as .TXT and .CSV format with an appropriate file naming convention. Initially, the otter.ai transcription for business will be used for this purpose.

Journal and Field Notes

Field observations may take the form of self-recordings, written notes, photographs, type-written notes, and diagrams. Journal entries and the like will be documented as soon as possible following observations or informal discussions.

White Board and Easel Pad Notes

Photographs of white board and/or easel pad notes and drawings will be typed into a field note format and stored as .JPG files if the image is not conveniently stored as a Word document.

Backup and Storage

A primary external hard drive will maintain source files and work-in-progress files. Each week, or more frequently the drive will be copied to a backup external drive.

Initial Coding/Open Coding

Initial coding will identify the church DGE, the session (RQ number), and the facilitative prompts.

Axial Coding

A code book will be maintained in Excel. A single Excel file will be made for each church, initially. In this step I will begin to organize the codes I initialized in open coding work.

This work abstracts concepts from the underlying source data (with open code indicators). Preliminary categories will be identified iteratively – not in final form – and crudely following each DGE. High level reconciliation processes will occur with each successive DGE (similar and contrasting initial categories and codes).

Selective Coding

This step involves an additional level of abstraction to evaluate and combine axial coded data into core categories. These abstractions will form the basis of this study's new theory.

Themes Subthemes

These images illustrates how participant comments may be organized into categories, core concepts, and themes.

	A	B	C	D	E	
1	ID	Agree	Six Groups	Descriptor	Sub Category	Comment
2	1	Yes	Identity	Childhood	Parenting	Growing up, my dad told

A	B	C	D	E	F	G
ID	Agree	Six Groups	Descriptor	Sub Category	Comment	
1	Yes	Identity	Childhood	Parenting	Growing up, my dad told my sister and me too many times that we were special and destined for greatness. It had more to do with the fact that we were the only children in our family.	
2					Nice video. Any tips to explain to my parents that I don't like the way they treat me? They always respond with: "We are doing our best for you."	
3					In my opinion, this video is interesting because it alerts parents. I think it is important to know the consequences that can come from not listening to your children.	
4					I am a Boomer, and I am impressed with your summation. It appears these particular children you're speaking to agree with you.	
5					It's not how they were raised. It's now that they're in this world it's harder to accomplish things than it used to be, and I think that's the problem.	
6				Upbringing	Obviously love both of them and am completely proud of them, but I cannot help but think we mollycoddled the millennials.	
7					This is so true. We have 2 that suffer from anxiety and low self-esteem. It's hard to get them to change, but they will be if we can help them.	
8					I read a book called "Capitalist Realism" by Mark Fisher, and that book reflects the points made here, the idea that we are living in a world where it's impossible to imagine a better world.	
9			Adulthood	Healing	When he talks about friends canceling if a better opportunity comes up really hit me.	
10					He just cured my depression. I promise.	
11					Life is amazing even though I'm depressed - The video spoke about my life in one line.	
12					I haven't cried in the last 6 or 7 years, but I almost teared up at what he said at 11:20. I am 23, and I tried to commit suicide.	
13					I felt I had no support, so I went to video games. Today I recovered after 5-6 years of gaming abuse and low social intelligence.	
14					I grew up with a depressed mother and a stressed-out father who played a lot of games. My big brother, another brother, and I were the only children in our family.	
15					I thought this was going to be a millennial bashing, but he made it clear that it wasn't the millennials' fault for being born in the 1980s.	
16					It's full of wisdom, and it's really life-changing talk. Thank you, sir Simon, for sharing your wisdom.	
17					This guy's right on the money. I'm Gen Z (just barely by a year or so), but this also speaks to me. I wish I knew how to explain this to my parents.	
18					Thanks for your explanation. Now I am going to be mentally hardworking, acknowledge what is their strength, become a better person, and be a better parent.	
19					We were raised when divorce rates had reached new heights. Therefore many of our emotional needs were never met.	
20					My biggest issue (with myself, in relation to this video) is that my mind tends to constantly go. I'm usually the quiet guy.	
21					Literally started tearing up when he talked about the worst-case scenarios... It's all true.	
22					This is the most phenomenal thing I have encountered in this horrible year. I totally understand this case scenario. I just don't know how to explain it.	
23					So that's the life that people like me, born after 1984, will have to live. So, wherever we find meaning in our lives, it has to be found in our own way.	
24			Reflection		The next about dawn, meaningful relationships and people realize as soon as something better comes along hit hard.	

Identify Anomalies

One-of-a-kind, or few-of-a-kind comments and categories will be evaluated (iteratively) with each DGE to determine if the concept deserves additional investigation.

These will additionally inform the next DGE to explore if deemed necessary.

Synthesize Findings

I will use combined DGEs data (with their respective categories and core ideas to derive and document a new theory grounded in data.