PROVEN RISK YOUTH AND LIFE-COACH DYADS MAKE SENSE OF THEIR DISCIPLESHIP

A dissertation presented

by

Brian G. Minnich

to the

Graduate School of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

in the field of

Educational Leadership with a Specialization in Organizational Leadership

College of Professional Studies

Northeastern University

Boston, Massachusetts

March 2018
ABSTRACT

Proven risk youth are a vulnerable population of at-risk youth. Unless significant intervention occurs, the proven risk youth are proven to re-offend or be re-incarcerated. Discipleship is an intense and intentional form of intervention in which a life-coach and a proven risk youth engage in relational learning. This research aims to understand how proven risk and life-coach dyads make sense of their discipleship by utilizing the qualitative methodology of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis to emphasize the voice and lived-experiences of the participants. As relational learning is in view, the Zone of Proximal Development is used to examine the way in which learning occurs between a more knowledgeable life-coach and a less knowledgeable proven risk youth.

Key Words: Discipleship, Mentoring, Role-modeling, Proven Risk Youth, At-Risk Youth, Faith-based Intervention, Zone of Proximal Development, Relational Learning, Non-linear Learning, Faith Development, Spiritual Transformation, Identity Formation.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A sincere vote of thanks to my advisor, Dr. Mounira Morris. Dr. Morris provided positive leadership and guidance from start to finish. I particularly appreciated your sensitivity to my research topic and your wisdom in selecting my second reader, Dr. Karen Reiss Medwed. Dr. Reiss Mewed, I am so grateful for your expertise in handling the religious, spiritual, philosophical, and ministerial sensibilities of my research. Furthermore, your questions and deep comments allowed me to reflect on my own research journey, as well as possible directions for future research, writing and practice – Thank you! Lastly, Dr. Laurie Ross gave great insight as my external reader. I appreciate your perspective and look forward to working together within our community of practice.

My family has been amazing throughout this project and the whole of my education. A special thank-you to my wife, Glorieann, for her love, support, and understanding along the way. You are amazing! My appreciation also extends to our four children: Jared, Joel, Lauren, and Julianne. Although it was fun being in school while you are in school, I look forward to spending more time with you and supporting your dreams. I love you all!

I also want to acknowledge the support and encouragement I received from my church, friends, and extended family. I appreciate the prayers, texts, and affirmation you have given. I pray along with you that this research may be useful toward the call of Christ to “Go and Make Disciples.” And of course, this research would not be possible without willing, open, and gracious participants. My heart goes out the life-coaches and youth participants as you push through obstacles and support one another in authentic relationship - You are the best!

Finally, to you my Lord, I commit this work. May it bear fruit and bring glory to your name. You have kept me, and I give you praise.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context and Background</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal System</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipleship</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith-based Intervention</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rationale and Significance</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Problem and Research Question</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Problem</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Purpose</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Key Terminology</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Framework</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critics of ZPD Theory</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rationale for Using ZPD</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applying ZPD Theory to the Study</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual Transformation</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirituality</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformation</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipleship</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus’ Discipleship</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applied Discipleship</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proven Risk Youth</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At-risk Factors</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusion ............................................................................................................. 59

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN .................................................................. 61
Qualitative Research Approach ............................................................................. 61
Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis .......................................................... 63
Participants .......................................................................................................... 64
Procedures ........................................................................................................... 65
Data Collection ........................................................................................................ 66
Data Analysis ........................................................................................................ 67
Read and re-read .................................................................................................... 67
Make initial notations ............................................................................................ 67
Develop emergent themes ...................................................................................... 67
Search for connections across emergent themes .................................................. 67
Move to the next case ............................................................................................. 68
Look for patterns across cases .............................................................................. 68
Ethical Considerations ........................................................................................... 68
Trustworthiness ...................................................................................................... 69
Potential Research Bias ......................................................................................... 70
Limitations ............................................................................................................. 72
Conclusion ............................................................................................................. 73

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS .................................................... 74
Research Site ......................................................................................................... 74
Participants ........................................................................................................... 74
Darius .................................................................................................................... 75
Alex ....................................................................................................................... 76
Terrence ................................................................................................................ 78
Lemarcus ............................................................................................................... 79
Jamal ..................................................................................................................... 81
Adrian ................................................................................................................... 83
Jalen ....................................................................................................................... 84
David ..................................................................................................................... 86
Carlos .................................................................................................................... 88
Darnell ................................................................................................................... 90
Conclusions .......................................................................................................... 92
Superordinate Theme One: Help ........................................................................... 96
Sub-theme One: Supportive Care ................................................. 96
Sub-theme Two: Service Connections ........................................... 99
Sub-theme Three: Empowering Encouragement ................................ 101
Conclusions ............................................................................... 102

Superordinate Theme Two: Relationship ..................................... 103

Sub-theme One: Constant Contact .............................................. 104
Sub-theme Two: Committed Authenticity ....................................... 106
Sub-theme Three: Familial Bond .................................................. 108
Conclusions ............................................................................... 110

Superordinate Theme Three: Life-change ................................... 111

Sub-theme One: Faith Development ............................................. 111
Sub-theme Two: Higher Purpose .................................................. 114
Sub-theme Three: Identity Formation ............................................ 116
Conclusions ............................................................................... 119

Conclusion .................................................................................. 120

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE ....... 122

Help.................................................................................................. 124

Current Literature........................................................................... 124
Theoretical Framework .................................................................... 126

Relationship .................................................................................. 128

Current Literature........................................................................... 128
Theoretical Framework .................................................................... 131

Life-change ................................................................................... 134

Current Literature........................................................................... 134
Theoretical Framework .................................................................... 138

Conclusion ..................................................................................... 139
Recommendations for Practice ....................................................... 141
Recommendations for Future Research ......................................... 143

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A DISCIPLESHIP-ORIENTED TERMINOLOGY .................... 145
APPENDIX B  STAGES IN FAITH CONSCIOUSNESS.................................................................146

APPENDIX C  STAGES OF GROWTH ......................................................................................147

APPENDIX D  SPIRITUAL PROVISION, DISCIPLINES, AND PRACTICES FOR GROWTH .........................................................................................................................148

APPENDIX E  MAJOR THRUSTS OF MENTORING TYPES......................................................149

APPENDIX F  MENTORSHIP OF AT-RISK YOUTH: A CHRONOLOGICAL OVERVIEW OF LITERATURE .................................................................................................................................150

APPENDIX G  INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FORMS ......................................................................154

APPENDIX H  PARTICIPANT PROFILE DATA .........................................................................158

APPENDIX I  - SUPERORDINATE THEMES DERIVED FROM PARTICIPANT DATA: HELP, RELATIONSHIP, AND LIFE-CHANGE ..........................................................159

APPENDIX J – SUPERORDINATE THEME AND SUB-THEME CORRESPONDENCE: DISCIPLESHIP DYADS OF LIFE-COACHES AND YOUTH .........................................................................160

REFERENCES ..............................................................................................................................161
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

The purpose of this interpretative phenomenological analysis study is to understand proven risk youth discipleship of young men within a faith-based organization in Massachusetts. At this stage in the research, the discipleship of proven risk youth will be generally defined as the applied learning of proven risk youth that results from a relationship with a more knowledgeable person. Proven risk youth are defined as a population of urban youth between the ages of 14 and 24, whose engagement in gang leadership or violent offenses places the youth at high risk for re-offense (Campie et al., 2013; Development Services, 2015). The knowledge generated is expected to provide practitioners of proven risk youth discipleship with new information on how youth make sense of their discipleship.

This chapter provides an overview of proven risk youth discipleship research. The chapter begins by discussing the context and background of the study. Then, the rationale and significance of the research is presented, followed by an introduction of the problem statement, the purpose statement, and the main research question. After the groundwork and focus of the study is established, the final section introduces and explains the theoretical framework that serves as a lens for the study.

Context and Background

The following section introduces the context and historical background of proven risk youth discipleship by briefly addressing three streams of influence. First, the legal system is introduced as a gatekeeper of influence over the population under study. Second, a description of discipleship as a faith-based, developmental learning relationship is offered. Third, the context of proven risk youth discipleship is introduced as a faith-based intervention.
Legal System

Illinois established the first U.S. juvenile court in 1899. The new court reflected the 19th century values of welfare and benevolent intervention toward children (National Report Series, 1999). The juvenile court system grew rapidly and by 1925, all but two states had established juvenile courts or probation services to provide treatment, not just punishment, for youth. Police began mentoring relationships with juvenile offenders in the early 20th century as a means of prevention and treatment (Matz, 2014). Thus, benevolent engagement with juvenile offenders is rooted in the judicial and law enforcement systems. Later, reforms added “community engagement” to the range of accepted juvenile offender interventions. For example, the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974 required the deinstitutionalization of status offenders and non-offenders and mandated that all juveniles be removed from adult prison. These enactments gave birth to juvenile detention centers and to the rise of community-based youth programs (National Report Series, 1999), both of which impact the current proven risk youth population.

Since the 1980s, the term at-risk youth has referred to youth whose life circumstances place them at-risk of not graduating high school or at risk of delinquent behavior (Development Services, 2015; Keating, Tomishima, Foster, & Alessandri, 2002). Massachusetts builds on this concept by using the term proven risk to describe urban youth between the ages of 14 and 24, whose engagement in gang leadership or violent offenses places the youth at high risk for re-offense (Campie et al., 2013; Development Services, 2015). Such youth are “proven” by the juvenile justice system, the law enforcement system and the community to reoffend unless significant intervention occurs. The “proven risk” is evidenced by the horrifying youth homicide statistics in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. For example, from 2001 to 2010 there were
1,667 homicide victims, of whom 639 were between the ages of 14 and 24 (Campie et al., 2013). To reduce this level of violence, an engagement strategy known as the Safe and Successful Youth Initiative (SSYI) was initiated by former Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick in May 2011. SSYI defines proven risk youth as:

- perpetrators of shooting and stabbing violence
- youth who are in a leadership role of a street gang and are engaging in serious violence
- youth who have already engaged in violent behavior or are engaged in persistent anti-social behavior
- repeat juvenile offenders released from supervision by the state or county, or who are under minimal supervision, and are considered a continued risk to reoffend; and youth and young adults who are victims of violence and may retaliate (Campie et al., 2013, p. 34).

SSYI identifies proven risk youth through the legal system, including the juvenile justice system and law enforcement officers. SSYI partners with community organizations, including faith-based organizations, to provide street outreach workers and positive development supports for high-risk persons (Campie et al., 2013). As relationships are key to effective street outreach and positive developmental support, a brief background on relational discipleship ensues.

**Discipleship**

Relational intervention of juvenile delinquents and youth offenders has existed in the US for over 100 years (Matz, 2014). Proven risk youth discipleship builds upon the concept of relational intervention by providing relational learning from a more knowledgeable person to a less knowledgeable person. Discipleship, according to Wringe (2009), is a relationship between teacher, learner, and what is to be learned. There are those who may find “what is to be learned”
is rooted in faith – as faith in a word, an idea, or a person. For instance, there are those who may find “what is to be learned,” is learning to be like Christ.

To that end, the literature on discipleship offers several dimensions for consideration. First, discipleship is consistently understood as learning to be like Christ or to imitate Christ (Brock; 2014; Fleming & Cannister, 2010; Houston, 2011; Peterson, 2013). Second, a spiritual transformation or a change within the self is integral toward a disciple becoming like Christ (see Appendix A for additional discipleship-oriented terminology) and yields benefits for a disciple similar to benefits experienced by a mentee (Schnitker, Thomas, Barrett, & Emmons, 2014; Tolan, Henry, Schoeny, Lovegrove, & Nichols, 2014; Williamson & Hood, 2013). Lastly, the self-change apparent in a disciple is not the end goal. Rather, discipleship emphasizes the applied learning of the self-change as evidenced by how disciples treat other people and a disciple’s ability to pass on the learning (Kvalbein, 1988; Peterson, 2013). In short, a disciple is consistently at the side of the discipler, learning from the discipler, and sharing/applying the learning gained from the discipler (Strauss, 2014).

**Faith-based Intervention**

The context of discipleship in dyads of proven risk youth and life-coaches is to be understood as an effective faith-based intervention for proven risk youth. Recent studies demonstrate that faith-based relational intervention provides positive developmental support for incarcerated offenders, parolees, and proven risk youth (Braga, Piehl, & Hureau, 2009; Salas-Wright, Olate, & Vaughn, 2013). The value of faith-based relational intervention is further substantiated by the inclusion of faith-based organizations in Massachusetts’ state and city funding toward youth violence prevention (“Worcester Receives,” 2016; Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 2018). Furthermore, a study on youth violence in Worcester, MA lists SSYI and
community-based agencies as “assets that serve as protective factors against youth violence and gang involvement” (Ross & Foley, 2014, p. 7). According to Ross and Foley’s study, Worcester’s juvenile arrest rate declined from 2008-2013, which can be attributed to the collaborative approach of community-based organizations, including the faith-based organization focused on proven risk youth discipleship in this study.

Therefore, the context of discipleship dyads of proven risk youth and life-coaches is to be understood as a faith-based intervention applicable to at-risk youth and juvenile offenders. As discipleship provides outreach and developmental supports through personal relationships between youth and life-coaches, this study seeks to understand how discipleship dyads of proven risk youth and life-coaches make sense of their discipleship.

**Rationale and Significance**

The rationale for this study begins with the researcher’s interest in one-to-one discipleship relationships, particularly in the context of how at-risk youth relate to more mature adults. This researcher moved to the city of Worcester, MA in 1997 and discovered a significant population of at-risk youth in his church and the surrounding neighborhood. As a pastor, the researcher found that when authentic relationship was extended to this population, the response was very positive. This researcher engaged the youth through visits to juvenile detention centers, basketball camps, neighborhood outreaches, and invitations to faith-based youth meetings. Though the researcher’s heart grew for these youth and their families, the researcher observed a divided heart for these youth, as evidenced by a low number of mature adults willing to engage at-risk youth through discipleship. Although the need was present, the church community seemed ill-equipped to meet the need.
Since that time, the context of serving at-risk youth in Massachusetts has become even more challenging. Currently, Massachusetts residents, including proven risk youth and life-coaches, are living in a state of sociopolitical strain emanating from recent national immigration policies, regional policing practices, and the overarching racial tension in America. For example, recent national immigration policy regarding deportation has been met with public outcry evidenced by yard-signs, organized marches, town meetings, and proposed legislation, such as the “Safe Communities Act” (2017). In so doing, many citizens and public officials are projecting support for immigrants, ethnic diversity, neighborhood safety, and family security. As such, one might expect a certain sense of support to be felt by the proven risk youth and life-coach community. However, a recent report demonstrates that significant racial disparity exists within the law enforcement practices of Massachusetts. For instance, although African-American juveniles are four times more likely than Whites to be committed to secure placements across the nation, the ratio in Massachusetts is much higher at 8.3 to 1 (Rovner, 2016). Similarly, the ratio of Hispanic to White juvenile committals in Massachusetts is higher than the national average (Rovner, 2016). Even more damning is that both of these ratios have increased in disparity from 2003 to 2013, with a 33% increase for African-Americans to Whites, and a 45% increase for Hispanics to Whites (Rovner, 2016). Therefore, rather than feeling societal support, minority proven risk youth and life-coaches within Massachusetts perceive suspicion and threat.

Furthermore, the 2016 rate at which minorities are stopped, searched, and frisked on the streets of Boston, Massachusetts has not significantly reduced from 2011 rates (Marcelo, 2017). Although the police have reasons why such stops take place, be it “reasonable suspicion” or “probable cause,” the residents in minority communities feel uncomfortable talking with police when they feel they are being stopped unjustly (Marcelo, 2017). As such, a chasm between
residents and law enforcement exists. In spite of these challenges, some efforts are being made to build bridges in Massachusetts. For example, the city of Worcester held a series of “race dialogues” and as a result, the city reconstituted a community and police partnership held diversity training for certain city staff and increased minority staff by 18% (Moulton, 2016). However, despite these accommodations, the Worcester residents called for police profiling and racial bias to be addressed and called out media bias, as the media tends to only report negative stories from minority communities (Moulton, 2016). In light of such challenges within minority communities of Massachusetts, this researcher finds reason to research how dyads of proven risk youth and life-coaches make sense of their discipleship.

Therefore, the rationale for researching discipleship dyads of proven risk youth and life-coaches is to better inform this practitioner of discipleship’s relational effectiveness in hopes of greater discipleship participation within the church, as well as greater collaboration between the church, the community, and the law enforcement system. For instance, a greater knowledge of discipling relationships will allow this practitioner to engage and equip congregants who are well suited to provide discipleship for proven risk youth. Even more specifically, the researcher’s church has become a program site for proven risk youth to gain skill development and positive developmental support through discipleship and employment. This is particularly pertinent in that within Massachusetts, 64% of incarcerated male offenders will reoffend within five years and only 35% will find work within a year of their release (Bradley, 2014). Therefore, this research may provide employment programs, like the one operating within the researcher’s church, with new information on job training and effective skill development.

In sum, the current research will empirically provide this practitioner with greater knowledge on how relational learning operates and how discipleship dyads of proven risk youth
and life-coaches make sense of their discipleship. The new knowledge will also assist general practitioners of discipleship, as little research exists on the actual making of a disciple (Brock, 2014). Professional practitioners and life-coaches may also leverage new knowledge gained toward more effective proven risk youth intervention, more informed program design, and increased training measures. Therefore, this study broadly addresses the dearth of research on discipleship while specifically analyzing the sense-making within discipleship dyads of proven risk youth and life-coaches. According to the author’s knowledge, no empirical research has been published that focuses on how discipleship dyads of proven risk youth and life-coaches make sense of their discipleship. As the rationale for research has been established, a brief discussion of the research significance ensues.

The significance of researching proven risk youth discipleship will be discussed in three domains, namely: discipleship dyads, recidivism rates, and protective factors. First, existing and future discipleship dyads will benefit from advanced knowledge of sense-making within the discipleship dyad. The literature suggests that discipleship dyads will benefit from a greater understanding of “match” between a discipler and a disciple as measured in the following relational dimensions: care, concern, empowerment, love, faithfulness, transparency, and guidance (Lanker, 2012; Matz, 2014). An understanding of how disciples interpret their experience will also aid leaders in creating learning environments that embrace the key characteristics uncovered through the research. Research on how discipleship dyads of proven risk youth and life-coaches make sense of their own discipleship may reveal a youth’s perception of self-worth and belief in his own learning capacity; both of which correlate to the positive mentoring of at-risk youth (Rodríguez-Planas, 2012). Lastly, it is the view of this author that in addition to discipleship dyads of proven risk youth and life-coaches, the general church-based
discipleship dyad or professional mentorship dyad will benefit through transferable elements of the new knowledge generated.

Second, organizations that measure recidivism as a means of proven risk youth program effectiveness will be interested in the current study. For instance, a Massachusetts faith-based organization using discipleship reports a 10% recidivism rate in 2015, down from a 12% recidivism rate in 2014 (Kiel, 2016). The rate is derived from youth who participated in a Job Readiness Program, of whom 95% had no new convictions, and 93% had no new technical violations within six months of release. The rate of 10% is lower than the state rate of 14.5% as reported in 2011 (Massachusetts Department of Youth Services, 2015). However, as direct comparison of juvenile recidivism rates is problematic due to variables within state reporting and operational definitions, the lower recidivism rate of the faith-based organization using discipleship should be interpreted within the general juvenile recidivism performance of Massachusetts. According to the Massachusetts Department of Youth Services 2015 Juvenile Recidivism Report (2015):

Juvenile recidivism rates for Massachusetts have generally been lower in the years 1998 through 2011, as compared to the years 1993 through 1997. In an attempt to improve outcomes for youth, DYS has increased investments in clinical, educational, and gender specific services; as well as intensive case management services for violent juvenile offenders in the Metro Boston Region (Suffolk County). Those investments signaled a shift from “warehousing” youth in the 1990s (when recidivism rates were close to 50%) to a model of juvenile justice which has demonstrated positive outcomes for youth. The focus has shifted from containment to treatment. (pp. 18-19)
Therefore, the low faith-based recidivism rate correlates to the increased investments made by
the state and bolsters the accepted theme of treatment over containment. Although direct
comparison of the faith-based recidivism rate and the state recidivism rate is not feasible due to
variables of definition and varied years of reporting, the faith-based recidivism is slightly lower
than the state rate. This suggests that faith-based intervention using discipleship is positively
correlating to the generally low state recidivism rate rather than statistically working against it.

Third, the protective factors of proven risk youth discipleship are significant in keeping
juvenile offenses at a low rate. Professionals in the justice system, law enforcement officers, tax
payers and citizens should exult in the efforts of community and faith-based organizations whose
prevention and treatment of juvenile offenders have assisted in lowering juvenile crime
associated with proven risk youth. As Figure 1 demonstrates, the 2010 juvenile violent crime
index reached its lowest point since 1980 and declined by 23% since 2006.

![Figure 1. Juvenile violent crime index arrest rate 1980-2010](image)

(National Center for Juvenile Justice, Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 2014 National Report,
2014, p. 137).

As one might expect, the lower juvenile violent crime index translates into a lower number of
juvenile arrests, with 21% fewer in 2010 than in 2001 (National Center, 2014). The overall lower
rates of violent crime and subsequent lower arrests rates are significant. Collaborative approaches, such as the discipleship of proven risk youth, attribute to lower juvenile arrests rates (Ross & Foley, 2014).

A greater understanding of the discipleship of proven risk youth is significant toward maintaining low juvenile delinquency and low arrest rates, which anticipates benefits for the youth and families involved, as well as societal benefits in safety, security, and well-being. Discipleship may provide proven risk youth with stress reduction, job preparedness, and family stability, factors that lower recidivism rates and add to a healthier society (Reave, 2005; Weld & Beckwith, 2014). As the rationale and significance of research has been established, the following section specifies the research problem and identifies the research question.

**Research Problem and Research Question**

The following section specifies the research problem, clarifies the purpose of research, identifies the research question, and defines relevant terminology.

**Research Problem**

Faith-based discipleship organizations within Massachusetts are being implored to provide positive developmental supports for proven risk youth (Campie et al., 2013). Although empirical studies show that faith-based discipleship correlates with positive developmental support for offenders and proven risk youth, a lack of research on actual disciple-making exists and creates an inconsistent discipleship worldview (Braga et al., 2009; Brock, 2014; Edgell, 2007; Gushiken, 2011; Salas-Wright et al., 2013). The lack of research and inconsistencies in understanding discipleship pose a problem for Christian organizations seeking to identify effective dimensions of faith-based, relational learning within discipleship dyads. For example, Gushiken (2011) offers several dimensions that Christian organizations need to define and
understand, no matter the level complexity of their social context, namely: (a) the genuine nature of spirituality, (b) the primary purpose of the church, (c) the embodiment of union with Christ, and (d) the model of union with Christ for believers and non-believers to follow. However, despite Gushiken’s well-articulated framework, a well-known leader of a Christian organization, which specializes in the social context of proven risk youth discipleship, recently asked the question: How do we know when we have made a disciple? Therefore, the lack of knowledge and inconsistencies with a Christian discipleship worldview present a problem for discipleship practitioners.

The dearth of discipleship-oriented research and longitudinal research creates a challenge. Even though extant research confirms the efficacy of discipling and mentoring relationships between life-coaches and proven risk youth, the research demonstrates that benefits erode and become insignificant only a few months after mentoring participation is complete (Rodríguez-Planas, 2012). Therefore, a problem exists in that long-term disciple-making needs to be researched and understood if the applied learning of discipleship is to be realized. This is relevant to community organizations and churches that serve proven risk youth and train people to discipleship proven risk youth.

Lastly, a problem exists in that the effectiveness of discipleship dyads of proven risk youth and life-coaches is typically measured from outside the discipleship dyad rather than from inside. For instance, SSYI of Massachusetts considers discipleship as a positive developmental support measured by external outcomes, such as the number of people served and the percent by which violence was reduced (Campie et al., 2013). This represents a bias of participatory measures and behavioral measures over qualitative measures. For instance, studies commonly focus on the ethical act of “believing” and the ethical behavior of “doing,” rather than looking
inwardly at the disciple or examining the discipling relationship (Brock, 2014; Issler, 2009). Hence, the measurement of discipleship needs to evolve and include qualitative outcomes, not just for the youth, but also for the life-coaches. An SSYI assessment tips the hat in this direction by posing several rhetorical questions regarding worker motivation, but provides no framework for measurement. For example, the SSYI assessment asks the following questions:

- Does staff believe in the work they are being asked to do?
- Does staff feel supported to take on new responsibilities without fear of it impacting their job security?
- Are there financial or lifestyle disincentives that keep staff from “buying-in”, such as requiring work on nights or weekends? (Campie, et al., 2013, p. 28)

The lack of qualitative attention to measurement is particularly problematic because the discipleship of proven risk youth is rooted in quality relationships. Relational measures, such as time, trust, care, and concern, are essential to healthy and effective discipleship (Fleming & Cannister, 2010; Lanker, 2012). Relational effectiveness within discipling dyads is influenced by a life-coach’s personality and skill (Matz, 2014; Tolan et al., 2014). If relational dimensions are not being measured, then a discipleship practitioner may be disincentivized in his or her use of time toward relationship building; choosing, rather, to spend time on stated measures to demonstrate progress and be rewarded by superiors. Most concerning and relevant to this research is that no research or reported data exist on how discipleship dyads of proven risk youth and life-coaches make sense of their discipleship.

In short, several problems of practice exist within Massachusetts’ based discipleship of proven risk youth, including a lack of discipleship knowledge, an inconsistency within the discipleship worldview, a dearth of general discipleship research and longitudinal research, and
the measurement of participatory outcomes and behavioral outcomes over and against qualitative outcomes. The quality of discipleship is not being researched from the perspective of the dyad, and therefore, the ingredients of effective relationship are not being tracked and are not being incentivized. Lastly, although the programs and initiatives are addressing the challenges of proven risk youth, the measurements of effectiveness do not encapsulate the perspective of the youth and the life-coaches. Therefore, this research aims to understand how discipleship dyads of proven risk youth and life-coaches make sense of their discipleship.

**Research Purpose**

The purpose of this research is to understand how discipleship dyads of proven risk youth and life-coaches make sense of their discipleship by using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) research methodology. The qualitative nature and empirical procedures of IPA both describe and interpret the experiences of research participants in a context-specific setting (Ponterotto, 2005). Proven risk youth live in a particular setting of psychological distress, threat, and transition, which according to J. A. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) is a setting conducive with the IPA research methodology. In addition to focusing the setting of proven risk youth and life-coaches in Massachusetts, IPA research allowed the researcher to give voice to the participants by asking how they make sense of a particular phenomenon, which in this study is the phenomenon of discipleship. As the participants’ sense-making unfolds, the researcher simultaneously contextualizes and makes sense of what is happening to the participant (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006). This “double-hermeneutic” of IPA allows for the researcher’s sense-making to be accounted for and documented through analytic memoing so that premature conclusions, presuppositions, and biases may be accounted for (Briscoe, 2005; Groenewald, 2008; Machi & McEvoy, 2012). The double-hermeneutic is important because this particular
researcher does not share the lived experience of many proven risk youth, but will share in the lived experience of the participant interviews (Creswell, 2013; Dowling, 2007).

In short, IPA methodology is a good research fit to explore how discipleship dyads of proven risk youth and life-coaches make sense of their discipleship. The new information gained will assist practitioners in their relational understanding of discipleship and establish dimensions of effectiveness from the viewpoint of the dyad. Furthermore, the new information may allow community organizations and churches to more effectively “match” a youth with a life-coach, and maintain a quality relationship within the discipleship dyad. Lastly, the new information may also assist governmental and non-governmental agencies in setting qualitative benchmarks for measuring positive developmental supports within the discipleship of proven risk youth.

**Research Question**

To achieve the purpose of understanding how discipleship dyads of proven risk youth and life-coaches make sense of their discipleship, the following research question is asked: How do discipleship dyads of proven risk youth and life-coaches make sense of their discipleship?

**Definition of Key Terminology**

The following key terms are defined within the context of this research.

**At Risk Youth** – “Youth who come from single parent homes, who show signs of emotional or behavioral problems, and who lack the support to navigate developmental tasks successfully” (Keating et al., 2002, p. 717).

**Christian** – A Christian is one who believes in the teachings of Jesus Christ as revealed in the Old Testament and New Testament scriptures. A Christian not only believes but also acts upon one’s belief by entrusting oneself to Jesus Christ in a personal and corporate relationship, while practicing the teachings of Jesus in word and deed (Erickson, 1988).
Dialogue – “Dialogue is rooted in and committed to furthering our common bond with one another to the extent that it affirms the finite nature of our human knowing and invites us to remain open to one another” (Barthold, n.d.).

Discipleship – A faith-based learning relationship rooted in the Christian tradition in which a less knowledgeable person learns to be like Christ from a more knowledgeable person (Brock, 2014; Fleming & Cannister, 2010; Houston, 2011; Peterson, 2013).

Dyad – “The presence of a relation in both directions establishes the minimal and defining condition for the existence of a dyad: a dyad is formed when two persons pay attention to or participate in one another’s activities” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 56).

Faith – Faith is trust and allegiance to a duty or person or God (Merriam-Webster, 2018a).

Juvenile Delinquent – A youth between the ages of 7 and 18 who has been charged with a crime. The juvenile court will hear the case and either: (a) place the case on file; (b) place the child on probation; or (c) commit the child to the Department of Youth Services (DYS) until their 18th birthday (Massachusetts Executive Office, 2018).

Juvenile Offender – A youth between the ages of 14 and 18 who has been charged with a felony and meets one of the following criteria: (a) previous commitment to the DYS; (b) charged with a crime involving the infliction or threat of serious bodily harm; or (c) charged with a crime that involves certain weapons offenses (Massachusetts Executive Office, 2016).

Life-coach – “An advisor who helps people make decisions, set and reach goals, or deal with problems” (Merriam-Webster, 2018b). A professional term used by proven risk discipleship practitioners to describe the role of a more knowledgeable person committed to a positive, developmental, supportive, learning relationship with a less knowledgeable person (Angel Guzman, personal communication, March 16, 2017).
Mentoring – A “personal relationship in which a more experienced (usually older) faculty member or professional acts as a guide, role model, teacher, and sponsor of a less experienced (usually younger) graduate student or junior professional” (Johnson, 2002, p. 88). Mentoring provides support, guidance, and counsel for a younger person who is learning to master the adult world (Kram, 1988).

Positive Youth Development – An “asset-based approach used in working with DYS youth that integrates multiple areas of growth and development – physical, cognitive, social, emotional, cultural, civic, and vocational – with education. This interdisciplinary strategy focuses on building on a youth’s strengths in order to provide opportunities for the youth to enhance their interests, skills, and abilities and strengthen the gains they make when they return to the community” (Massachusetts Department of Youth Services, 2014, p. 13).

Protective Factors – The collaborative efforts of community-based agencies, school and police that share information and work together toward protecting against youth violence and gang involvement (Ross & Foley, 2014).

Proven risk youth - A population of urban youth between the ages of 14 and 24, whose engagement in gang leadership or violent offenses places the youth at high risk for re-offense, and as such the youth becomes a participant in the SSYI (Campie et al., 2013; Development Services, 2015).

Racism - Racism is a belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race resulting in prejudgments and discriminatory thoughts and behaviors (Merriam-Webster, 2018c).

Recidivism – Recidivism is the repetition of criminal behavior (National Center, 2014).
**Spiritual Transformation** – “A fundamental change in the place of the sacred or the character of the sacred in the life of the individual” (Pargament, 2006, p. 18). Spiritual transformation may also be understood as new configurations of human strivings (Pargament, 2006).

The final section of this chapter describes and discussed the Zone of Proximal Development, which will serve as the theoretical lens for this study.

**Theoretical Framework**

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory by Russian psychologist, Lev Vygotsky, describes new knowledge formation through interaction between a learner and a *more knowledgeable other* (MKO). Cognitive constructivist, and Vygotsky’s predecessor, Jean Piaget, held that youth perceive knowledge through phases of interaction with the physical and social environment (Piaget & Duckworth, 1970). Piaget’s learning involves an active reconstruction of the learner’s existing knowledge structures that results in the construction of new knowledge (Ravitch & Riggan, 2012). Vygotsky’s ZPD builds on Piaget’s social and active learning by measuring the distance between a person’s independent problem-solving level and a person’s potential problem-solving level under guidance from a MKO (Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore, ZPD demonstrates that a youth’s independent problem-solving capability is a reflection of the developmental level or maturation of that youth thus far, rather than an indication of what a youth can achieve.

Vygotsky (1978) illustrates ZPD by offering the following example. Two students are given standardized tests and according to the results are deemed to have a mental development level of an 8-year-old. This implies that both students are expected to handle independent problem-solving up to an 8-year-old level and that both students are at the same level of mental development. As the testing of the two students continues, a higher-level problem, one that is
well beyond an 8-year-old level, is introduced. A teacher engages the students with guidance toward solving the problem, using techniques, such as initiation of the problem’s solution and then asking the students to finish solving the problem, demonstration of the problem’s solution and then asking the students to independently repeat, or the offer of leading questions and suggestions. The main point is that both of the students are offered assistance in solving higher-level problems. The results of the experiment reveal that one student can solve problems with assistance at a 12-year-old level and the other student at a 9-year-old level. Although the student’s developmental level was considered the same, their respective capabilities of learning through assistance were markedly different. The difference between levels 9 and 8, or between 12 and 8 is the ZPD.

**Critics of ZPD Theory**

The initial critique of note emanates from Vygotsky himself. Although ZPD demonstrates that externally gained knowledge through an MKO is internalized by the learner, Vygotsky (1978) recognizes that ZPD does not show “how” the externally gained knowledge becomes internalized. Valsiner and Van der Veer (1993) affirm Vygotsky’s critique by referring to ZPD as descriptive, rather than explanatory. Valsiner and Van der Veer continue their critique by commenting on the terminology used by Vygotsky. For example, the terms “development” and “proximal” are ambiguous and highly varied in meaning within contemporary psychological discourse. Furthermore, the term “zone” does not account for Kurt Lewin’s widely accepted typology of social psychology, which prefers the term “psychological environment” over “space” or “zone” (Lewin, 1939). While this may limit contemporary discourse, it should be noted that Lewin’s typology was published in 1939 and Vygotsky passed away in 1934. To Vygotsky’s
credit, he called for further research on the internal psychological and developmental processes associated with learning within the ZPD.

Beyond the nomenclature of ZPD and its lack of process explanation, critique also emanates from ZPD’s socio-psychological assumptions, namely, the insufficient attention given to the co-constitutive nature of the subjective consciousness and the collective consciousness (Roth & Radford, 2010). For Roth and Radford, the “knowledge transfer” concept of ZPD takes on a substantialist or positivist approach in which learning simply passes, without obstruction, from a more knowledgeable person to another. Roth and Radford prefer a constructivist paradigm and suggest that ZPD be thought of more as an “interaction” than as a knowledge transaction. Roth and Radford use the constructive nature of “language” to fortify their argument, but ironically quote Vygotsky to prove their point, stating, “[T]he word is a thing in our consciousness, as Ludwig Feuerbach put it, that is absolutely impossible for one person, but that becomes a reality for two” (Vygotsky in Roth & Radford, 2010, p. 300). Therefore, Roth and Radford appear to be critiquing a transactional interpretation of ZPD, not necessarily Vygotsky’s own understanding of ZPD.

Lastly, Moll (1990) provides critique of ZPD from an educator’s perspective. Specifically, Moll underscores the transactional critique of ZPD by calling for “exploratory talk” and “social mediations” to assist student learning, rather than one following “structured cues” from an adult. Moll, like Roth and Radford, highlights the role of language as means of mediating learning comprehension. However, Moll moves beyond spoken language and incorporates written language as useful in the ZPD. For example, reading comprehension is a way in which a student can learn from an author as an MKO (Moll, 1990). Language helps mediate meaning as students learn how to make sense of an author’s strategy and apply their
learning through writing (Moll, 1990). Furthermore, Moll believes in creating individual ZPDs and also argues for collective and interrelated ZPDs to be incorporated into a teaching system. Finally, Moll critiques the lack of analysis and articles written that incorporate actual classroom practices of ZPD. Despite the gaps in ZPD theory and practice, a rationale for using ZPD in this study ensues.

**Rationale for Using ZPD**

ZPD is a good theoretical fit for this study in that relational learning from an MKO is the grounds upon which discipleship operates. For example, Kemp (2010) understands ZPD in terms of social and situated learning within community and argues for more of such learning within ministry training, churches, and Christian networks. As discipleship is a social learning relationship situated in real-time life experiences, the use of ZPD in this study aligns with Kemp’s assessment. Furthermore, Estep (2002) correlates ZPD theory with greater understanding of spiritual formation as a non-linear form of development. As the literature review will demonstrate, discipleship is both relational and transformational and, therefore, aligns with the formative nature of the ZPD theory. Estep correlates Vygotsky’s use of language as a mediating growth mechanism with the role of language in spiritual formation, particularly as language is used in sharing one’s faith and in providing encouragement. Hence, ZPD theory is a good fit for discipleship research in that ZPD relates to discipleship’s social learning experience and spiritual formation orientation.

Beyond the literature on social learning and spiritual formation, the literature on education and mentoring corroborates the relevance of using ZPD to understand discipleship. For example, Garvey and Alred (2000) conceptually link ZPD to educating mentors, and Giebelhaus and Bowman (2002) apply the conceptual framework of ZPD in their quasi-experimental
research of the mentoring of undergraduate students within a teacher preparation program. Geibelhaus and Bowman found that the mentoring of prospective teachers demonstrated statistically significant differences as compared to prospective teachers who were not mentored. The main difference was that mentoring, which was understood as movement through the ZPD, provided effective and appropriate feedback and modeling, which provided the prospective teachers a framework of feedback and modeling to be used in their education of future students (Giebelhaus & Bowman, 2002). Even more relevant to the proven risk youth and life-coach population under study, the mentoring literature recognizes ZPD as a means of understanding urban at-risk youth as they transition from adolescence to adulthood (Ratio & Hall, 1999). In addition to understanding life-transition among urban youth, ZPD is applicable to understanding minority student learning in empowerment and assessment (Armstrong, 2014). Therefore, the theoretical framework of ZPD is deemed helpful by the literature to understanding learning in situated environments like those of proven risk youth. The following is a discussion of how ZPD specifically applies to this study.

**Applying ZPD Theory to the Study**

ZPD theory demonstrates how independent learning has limits that may only be overcome through relational and assisted learning. This is particularly important as one considers the challenges facing proven risk youth. Without a stable learning environment and healthy family support, proven risk youth may be obliged to develop independently. In so doing, a proven risk youth may reach his/her maximum potential only to find a life that is stressful and unsafe. However, upon the introduction of an MKO within a ZPD, a proven risk youth’s learning potential and future are revealed. According to Vygotsky (1978), ZPD “defines those functions that have not yet matured but are in process of maturation, functions that will mature tomorrow
but are currently in an embryonic state” (p. 86). As such, ZPD may serve as an analytic tool in this study by helping the researcher conceptualize the data of a disciple’s sense of actual development, alongside a life-coach’s sense of the disciple’s proximal development.

Furthermore, the application of ZPD theory to the research assists the implications and applications of findings. For instance, as the ZPD is conceptualized for a proven risk youth, it informs all stakeholders of a youth’s individual sense of development, which can then be compared to the MKO’s sense of the youth’s development. Such knowledge can help mentors, disciplers, life-coaches, parents, probation officers, caseworkers, teachers, and educators grasp the potential of a youth’s learning capacity and, thereby, develop positive supports and customized learning environments around each youth. Likewise, ZPD states that the developmental process lags behind the learning process. This provides the MKO with greater perspective and motivation to engage youth prospectively, rather than retrospectively reacting to a youth’s learning level through discipline or repetitive curriculum analysis.

Finally, as ZPD is applied to this research, a sense of hope is promoted for all proven risk discipleship stakeholders. As previously stated, ZPD is not transactional, but interactional. As the behavior of proven risk youth often vacillates between positive and negative norms, frustration and impatience may set-in on stakeholders. The good news for stakeholders is that Vygotsky (1978) sees behavioral change on a continuum of internalized change. For instance, a child will first subordinate behavior to the rule of group play and then later voluntarily self-regulate behavior as an internal function. Therefore, as proven risk youth choose to participate in the group learning of discipleship dyads, the process of internal change and voluntary behavioral self-regulation has begun. As long as a youth stays in relationship with an MKO within the ZPD, the process of learning is unfolding. A further encouragement to stakeholders is found in Piaget’s
belief that a child’s cooperation in the learning process serves as a basis for the development of a child’s moral judgment (Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore, the actual relational cooperation within a discipleship dyad signals the beginning of moral growth, which may result in internally motivated behavioral change within a proven risk youth.

In conclusion, the knowledge generated through this research is expected to provide practitioners of discipleship with new information on how discipleship dyads of proven risk youth and life-coaches make sense of their discipleship. This chapter provided an overview of discipleship of proven risk youth and life-coach dyads and provided discussion of the research in rationale and significance, problem statement, purpose statement, introduction of the main research question, definitions of key terminology, and an introduction of the theoretical framework. The following chapter is a review of discipleship literature related to proven risk youth and life-coach dyads.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

At the heart of proven risk youth discipleship is a faith-based learning relationship between a more knowledgeable person and a less knowledgeable person with spiritual transformation, in terms of Christ-likeness, as a goal. Several problems of practice exist within Massachusetts’ proven risk youth discipleship, including an inconsistency within the Christian discipleship worldview, a lack of knowledge regarding existing spiritual formation paradigms, and a dearth of qualitative research on discipleship, particularly on how proven risk youth discipleship dyads make sense of their discipleship.

As such, this literature review engages three strands of literature to address existing problems and establish a base of understanding of qualitative research on how proven risk youth discipleship dyads make sense of their discipleship. The three strands are: spiritual transformation, discipleship, and proven risk youth. The strands are derived from qualitative, quantitative, and ethnographic research as well as literature from domains, such as education, philosophy, archaeology, theology, sociology, and Christian practice. As some of the literature refers to Christian scripture as a basis of faith and practice, a brief account of the functionality of Christian scripture and sacred narrative is warranted.

First, this researcher recognizes that the New Testament and the Old Testament scriptures of Christianity have their origins in the oral tradition, were later written down, and are now captured in an English translation. As a whole, one should view orally derived texts distinctly from other literature (Culley, 1986). For instance, Martin Buber’s “Tradition Criticism” understands orally derived texts as a collective record of an earlier oral tradition, rather than a collection of disparate sources that are redacted into a single whole (Sufrin, 2013). Whiteley (2002) understands orally derived “Traditional History” to include sacred narrative, which often
metaphorically condenses a historical consciousness of the past. As such, a contemporary reader of a sacred narrative may experience a present-reality that was captured in the reality of historical consciousness. According to Buber, such inflection of the past and present is an “actualization” of the historiography (Sufrin, 2013).

Second, in accordance with Whiteley (2002), this researcher recognizes the role of human agency in understanding and interpreting Traditional Histories. Therefore, this researcher upholds dialogue, in the philosophical tradition of Heidegger, Buber, and Gadamer, as a means of hermeneutical understanding. The goal of dialogue is to come to an understanding or knowledge of an experience through discourse, through acknowledgement of presence (Dasein), and through listening (Binding & Tapp, 2008; Gordon, 2011). There are those who may find a dialogical hermeneutic useful toward the interpretation of religious texts, interaction between faith-institutions and academic thinking, and learning within spiritual education (Botha, 1993; Charlesworth, 2012; Ong, 1990; Sufrin, 2013; Wills, 2012).

In short, this researcher recognizes the oral tradition of the faith-based literature and upholds dialogue as a means of hermeneutical understanding. The following three literature strands are presented progressively beginning with the inner-change of spiritual transformation, then moving outward toward the relational aspects of discipleship, and concluding with a broad view of the proven risk context of at-risk factors and existing mentoring praxis of at-risk youth.

**Spiritual Transformation**

Jesus Christ models discipleship as the total personal and spiritual development characterized by affective, behavioral, cognitive, and instrumental formation (Davis, 2010). The transformation of a Christian disciple is so visceral and visible, terms like “new creation” and “new birth,” are used to describe the change (Larson & Tocchini, 2015; Shallis, 2006). The “new
creation” also embodies the non-visible or inner changes taking place within the disciple, including self-surrender, compunction of sin, personal call to live daily with Christ, new sense of identity and life task, and dedication to a continual process of change (Houston, 2011). These fundamental changes within the character of the sacred life of an individual reflect a spiritual transformation (Pargament, 2006). As such, the change of character within a disciple distinguishes discipleship from other forms of proven risk youth intervention that may emphasize behavioral change, such as mentoring or caseworker management. The following subsections review spiritual transformation of spiritual agency and transformation process.

**Spirituality**

Spirituality is empirically shown to be a protective factor against delinquent youth behavior and therefore warrants a deeper understanding (Salas-Wright et al., 2013). The following provides three definitions of spirituality that demonstrate spirituality as fundamental to all humans and establish a basis for Christian spirituality to be understood as a transformational relationship with the divine.

First, the essence of spirituality is a commitment to ideas or institutions that transcend the self in time and space (Lerner, Alberts, Anderson, & Dowling, 2006). Such a broad definition is able to incorporate both theistic and non-theistic ideas of spirituality. For instance, a Christian who believes in God is spiritual because she is committed to the idea that God exists beyond herself in time and space. Equally true, a philosopher may be spiritual in his commitment to the idea that knowledge exists beyond himself in time and space. The self-awareness of such transcendence is seen in the literature as a human right and a natural aspect of human development because it is biologically structured into the human species (Hay, Reich, & Utsch, 2006; Kung, 2007; Ojاهلто & Wang, 2008). In other words, to be spiritual is to be human.
Second, as part of the human experience, Pargament (2006) presents a specific view of spirituality as a search for the sacred. Pargament predicates his definition on the human quality of striving. For example, as humans strive for success, fame or wealth, they may also strive for the sacred. The sacred may be understood as the divine, the transcendent, or anything set apart from the ordinary. Pargament’s definition of spirituality separates from Lerner et al. (2006) in that Pargament argues that material items, human attributes, and social roles may take on transcendent significance but are not intrinsically transcendent. For example, trees, rocks, wine, and crucifixes can be viewed as sacred objects, just as compassion can be a sacred attribute and parenting can be a sacred role. Therefore, spirituality as a search for the sacred may be the search for the actual transcendent or may be a search for items deemed to have transcendent or sacred qualities.

Third, spirituality involves an understanding and appreciation of one’s position in the universe, of one’s soul, and of the role of God (Dent, Higgins, & Wharff, 2005). This definition, like Lerner et al. (2006) recognizes transcendence of one’s position in the universe and recognizes the sacred as God, in accord with Pargament. However, Dent et al. (2005) push their definition further by incorporating the “role” of God. This distinction is important because by it Dent et al. acknowledge that God may interact with humanity in space and time. This “interaction” is vital to a Christian understanding of discipleship, in which a discipler introduces a disciple to God, and, together, they engage in a spiritually transformative relationship with God. A brief discussion of spiritual transformation through the agency of God’s Spirit ensues.

Christian theologian Jurgen Moltmann (1992) states, “The personhood of God the Holy Spirit is the loving, self-communicating, out-fanning and out-pouring presence of the eternal divine life of the triune God” (p. 289). As such, God’s Spirit gives life and transformation to
humans while removing non-life-giving human attributes, impurities, and idolatries, even replacing hard-hearts with hearts of flesh (Gaffin, 1998; Ma, 2007). The inner-change made possible by the Spirit and may be understood theologically as, *spiritual formation* or *sanctification* (Averbeck, 2008; Jervis, 2012; Porter, 2008). Adult-adolescent discipleship demonstrates the agency of transformation as both by the Spirit, and by the Spirit’s work through humans, such that the Spirit can reach through the adult life-coach and transform the life of a youth (Fleming & Cannister, 2010). The agency is noted above in the preposition “through” as a means of describing the Spirit’s transformative work “through” a discipler to a disciple.

All three definitions of spirituality provide helpful context for understanding spiritual transformation within proven risk youth discipleship. First, spirituality is a human trait and, therefore, accessible to all. Second, spirituality recognizes a transcendent reality or a search for the sacred, which is important because proven risk youth are positively influenced by spirituality and religiosity. Last, spirituality is an understanding of one’s position in the universe, one’s soul and the role of God in relation to one’s soul. As such, Christian spirituality recognizes God’s presence and power at work within one’s soul or inner being. A discussion of how God’s Spirit transforms humans is presented in the next section.

Transformation

As a built-in feature of being human, the spiritual life can be developed or can remain undeveloped (Hay et al., 2006). This section focuses on the development of the spiritual life using “new creation” or “transformation” as the organizing principle. Whether transformation is explained in stages or as a dynamic and continuous action, the outcomes are visible – a creature is recreated into something new. The classic biological example is the transformation of a caterpillar to a butterfly, which involves four stages in the life cycle: egg, larva, pupa, and adult
(The Academy of Natural Sciences, 2017). The stages are distinct in that the creature is transformed or changes shape from one stage to the next. The transformation of the creature is also evidenced by dynamic and continual change within the stages. For instance, during the larva stage, a caterpillar will eat and grow up to 100 times its original size, from a pinhead to two inches long (The Academy of Natural Sciences, 2017). The following explores transformation by God’s Spirit first as “stage” and then, as “continual change” development.

According to Piaget’s theory of cognitive development, all humans develop through qualitatively distinct and sequential stages (Piaget, 1970). Theologian, James Fowler (1991), applies stage theory to faith development and outlines seven stages of human faith consciousness: primal, intuitive-projective, mythic-literal, synthetic-conventional, individuative-reflective, conjunctive, and universalizing faith. Appendix B summarizes Fowler’s seven stages with respect to Kohlberg’s theory of moral development and Piaget’s theory of moral development. Stage theory can also be applied to spiritual transformation with respect to the Christian theological tradition. As Appendix C details, Calhoun (2005) claims that the following four stages of awakening, purgation, illumination, and union are consistent across church history and depict spiritual transformation as initiated by the Spirit and through human cooperation with the Spirit. Stage theory broadly helps delineate and describe a person’s development and can help align curriculum and counsel within an individual’s developmental stage (Fowler & Dell, 2006).

A proper understanding of spiritual transformation is not limited to stage theory; it also considers change as dynamic and continuous (Roehlkepartain, Benson, King, & Wagener, 2006). According to Gushiken (2011), the continuous, dynamic process of change enacted by God is known as *spiritual formation*. Beyond being a life-long process, as evidenced in stage theory,
spiritual formation is a cyclical process evidenced by one’s commitment to be conformed to the image of Christ on a daily basis (Fleming & Cannister, 2010). The moments of daily life that spark spiritual formation may be proactive spiritual practices (see Appendix D), such as reading the Bible, counsel from a teacher/pastor, worship, prayer, and expression of faith through action (Gushiken, 2011). However, a proactive daily commitment to Christ is not the only means of spiritual formation. Spiritual formation also occurs in the testing and trying moments of daily life, including the risks of intimacy and alterity, the pain of psychological distress, and the need for healing and wholeness (Sandage, Jensen, & Jass, 2008; Williamson & Hood, 2013). Therefore, asking Christ for sustenance through spiritual practices in the midst of daily risk, uncertainty, and pain acknowledges the human desire for God to bring life and peace within the human context of insufficiency and instability.

Furthermore, the literature uses the term “living sacrifice” to describe the spiritual practice of worship as a willing surrender of one’s control (Larson & Tocchini, 2015). Such a surrender of control is contrary to the human tendency toward self-preservation and, therefore, becomes a vulnerable, willing, and trusting space for God to interact within a human. In effect, the surrendered human “dies to oneself” and in response, God breathes life into the human by filling the human with the Spirit. The continual filling of God’s Spirit “spiritually transforms” a human as the impact of the divine presence fills, shapes, and renews the sacred space in the human. Larson and Tocchini (2015) understand such transformation as, “a marked change in appearance, character, condition or function” (p. 18). It is through the process of spiritual transformation that God’s Spirit works within the human spirit to occupy, to empower, and to reshape the human from the inside out, producing a conformity to Christ’s image (Averbeck, 2008).
Thus, the transformative outcome of Christ-likeness may be understood as substantive change within the inner and outer man. For example, one qualitative study finds virtue development as evidence of spiritual transformation by measuring the following virtues: intellectual, theological, other-focused, and temperance (Schnitker et al., 2014). Furthermore, a review of 87 scholarly articles finds a positive correlation between spirituality and workplace productivity (Dent et al., 2005). A review of over 150 studies finds that effective leadership is clearly connected to practices associated with spiritual transformation, including self-examination and communication with God through prayer, meditation, spiritual reading and journaling that promote leader performance and resilience (Reave, 2005). Transformation by the Spirit of God produces a fundamental change within a person that is evidenced in Christ-like virtues, behaviors, and productivity.

Conclusion

Spiritual transformation is a fundamental change in the character of the sacred life of an individual (Pargament, 2006). Transformation may be shaped from both within and without religious traditions, beliefs, and practices (Benson, Roehlkepartain, & Rude, 2003). As such, the literature understands spirituality as biologically interwoven into humanity and spiritual transformation as dynamic and continuous action that may be revealed in developmental stages (Fowler, 1991; Roehlkepartain et al., 2006). The agency of spiritual transformation within Christian discipleship is attributed to the Spirit and often mediated by means of human relationship (Averbeck, 2008; Fleming & Cannister, 2010; Gushiken, 2011). The next section further unpacks the role of relationships within proven risk youth discipleship.
Discipleship

As previously defined, discipleship is a faith-based learning relationship rooted in the Christian tradition in which a less knowledgeable person learns to be like Christ from a more knowledgeable person (Brock, 2014; Fleming & Cannister, 2010; Houston, 2011; Peterson, 2013). The teaching and learning within discipleship is more than knowledge transmission; the disciple is expected to “observe” or put the teaching into practice in attitudes, values, skills, and behaviors, as a result of being transformed into the image of Christ (Huizing, 2011; St. Clair, 1985). As such, the disciple learns “to be” like Christ, rather than learning “how to be” like Christ. Furthermore, the Christian tradition distinguishes discipleship from programmatic learning by embracing an approach to observational learning that is relational, intentional, informal, outwardly focused, and accomplished within the context of community (Coleman, 1993; Huizing, 2011). As the following paragraph bears out, discipleship holds a lot in common with mentorship.

Similar to discipleship, mentorship is a learning relationship in which a more experienced person acts as a guide, role model, teacher, or sponsor to a less experienced person (Johnson, 2002; Wakeman, 2012). Mentorship is also an empowerment, in which a mentor shares a prior experience that empowers a mentee to grow through a similar life situation (Davis, 2010; Stanley & Clinton, 1992). Mentoring can occur through natural relational connections or can be fostered through deliberate pairings (Godshalk & Sosik, 2002; Lanker, 2012).

As one can see, it is difficult to clearly distinguish between mentoring and discipleship (Wakeman, 2012). Some critics argue against the term “discipleship” due to an implied dogmatic allegiance to a master whose teachings are indisputable (Sharp, 2004). However, Wringe (2009), writing from a secular perspective, argues for the use of the term “discipleship” as an expression
of commitment in which a disciple willingly believes in the authority of another and submits to the discipline. As empowerment, experienced-based advice, and spiritual transformation are more in view within discipleship, this researcher prefers the term “discipleship” over “mentorship.” The following sub-section explores Jesus’ discipleship in terms of curriculum and methodology.

**Jesus’ Discipleship**

Two monographs serve as the footing for much of the scholar-practitioner literature on Jesus’ disciple-making. The first book is, *The Training of the Twelve*, in which Bruce (1979) theologically examines discipleship by tracing its development throughout Jesus’ teaching, ministry, and relationships. Bruce reveals a nine-part lesson plan of Jesus’ teaching, namely nature of the divine kingdom, prayer, religious liberty/nature of true holiness, His own Person and claims, doctrine of the cross and the import of his death, humility and kindred virtues/right Christian temper required privately and ecclesiastically, doctrine of self-sacrifice, leaven of Phariseeism and Sadduceeism/its woes to the Jewish nation, and mission of the comforter to convince the world and to enlighten themselves. Bruce captures the breadth and depth of the content absorbed by the original 12 disciples and, by extension, outlines the learning expectations placed on all subsequent disciples. Although the literature reveals no other comprehensive lesson plans, Bruce’s categories are in view. For instance, Houston (2011) outlines aspects of spiritual formation and emphasizes “denial of self” and “self-giving,” which are concepts addressed in Bruce’s “doctrine of self-sacrifice.”

The second book of standing is Robert Coleman’s, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*. Although Coleman does not expound on Jesus’ teaching at the detail of Bruce (1979), Coleman distills the methodology of Jesus with great clarity through eight guiding principles of the
Master’s plan, namely selection, association, consecration, impartation, demonstration, delegation, supervision and reproduction (Coleman, 1993). The principles are not stages with stringent sequential delineation but are structures that present a progressive logic toward a goal, namely, Jesus wants his disciples to produce and reproduce his likeness in the church and through the church by the Spirit (Coleman, 1993). Therefore, the methodology of Jesus presents a goal of personal, spiritual transformation in the form of Christ-likeness that is not limited to the benefits within a relational dyad but extends reproductively from one relational dyad to the next (Chole, 2001; Kreider, 2008).

Although peer-reviewed literature does not describe the teaching and methodology of Jesus to the extent of Bruce (1979) and Coleman (1993), several authors, including Gronn (1996), Chole (2001), Godshalk and Sosik (1998), Wakeman (2012), and Davis (2010), speak to features of discipleship that are consistent with Jesus’ model. The following are a few such features found in the literature. First, followers are more likely to emulate a leader’s behavior if there is a close association and relational-proximity between them (Chole, 2001; Gronn, 1996). Empirical research finds a positive correlation between a follower’s attachment security with a leader and the mental health and performance of a follower (Davidovitz, Mikulincer, Shaver, Izsak, & Popper, 2007). Therefore, transformational leaders should be consistent in their delivery of emotional support and relational attachment. Second, a qualitative study by Godshalk and Sosik (1998) finds that protégé development occurs when mentors offer the following behaviors: trust building, individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation to promote critical thinking and protégé independence, and inspirational motivation. Third, a mentoring structure that incorporates prayer, meditation, and willingness to learn is suggested by Wakeman (2012) in the following dimensions:
1. Pray together at the beginning.

2. Have clear goals and agreed agendas.

3. Review previous session and life experience. Recount progress with goals.

4. Explore and develop (skills, knowledge/understanding, attitudes/behaviors); “seed” new insights.

5. Model the skills if possible—show and demonstrate how.

6. Check understanding.

7. Agree on action/goals.

8. Agree on agenda for next meeting, time, place, and duration.

Therefore, the literature provides details that undergird facets of Jesus’ discipleship, particularly in relational proximity, intellectual stimulation, inspiration, prayer, demonstration of skills, and accountability to implement or “observe” what is being learned. The following paragraph highlights one author who directly analyzes Jesus’ discipleship.

Davis (2010) underscores the relational commitment of Jesus’ discipleship through the term, *consociation*, defined as a personal companionship that leads to a deeper fellowship. Jesus spent time with his disciples by eating, teaching, traveling, praying, and enjoying life together. Although this level of engagement is experienced by at least 70 disciples, Jesus concentrated his relational investment to a group of 12 disciples. According to Davis, the word “disciple” is found in the Gospels around 225 times in reference to Jesus’ general relationship with his followers. However, the term “disciple” only occurs twice with direct reference to the 12 disciples. Instead, Jesus prefers terms of consociation, such as brothers, children, and friends (Davis, 2010). The intentionality of consociation is also reflected in Jesus’ selection of the 12. Jesus prays and carefully chooses his disciples, which Davis compares to a modern assessment process that an
The assessment process is not simply on the front end of the mentor-mentee relationship; it pervades throughout Jesus’ training model, including extended observation, verbal instruction, actual ministry experience, and reflective debriefing (Davis, 2010). Finally, Davis points out that Jesus did not turn his disciples into scholars or theologians but rather into reliable and Spirit-empowered witnesses. In so doing, Davis links the disciples’ capabilities directly to the Spirit, which is consistent with the aforementioned literature on spiritual transformation.

As Jesus’ discipleship has been broadly presented in teaching content and methodology, the applications of contemporary discipleship will now be discussed as natural mentoring, formal mentoring, intentional mentoring, and leadership training through mentoring. As the literature does not consistently address discipleship by using the term “discipleship,” the more frequently used term of “mentoring” is utilized in the applied discipleship sub-section.

**Applied Discipleship**

Discipleship is living with Jesus in the present and leading others into a life of learning to be like Jesus (Brock, 2014). In some cases, a person who lives with Jesus in the present provides a “natural mentoring” through the course of natural relationships in which one person positively influences another. For example, a qualitative study interviewed four groups of natural mentors in a church youth group setting, in which an adult youth leader naturally connected with an adolescent through the ministry (Lanker, 2012). The findings reveal that natural mentoring feels like friendship in which real care, real concern, consistent love and empowerment take place, along with correction, faithfulness, and transparency. The study finds that real trust is built after six months of relationship that may include various activities, such as having coffee, physical activity, texting several times per week, and face-to-face meetings in which listening, guidance,
and confession are exchanged (Lanker, 2012). Furthermore, the study recommends that adult leaders be led by God’s Spirit and utilize God’s Word (the Bible) as a guide in the conversation. Therefore, Lanker’s study supports the role of the Spirit in discipleship and introduces the Old Testament and New Testament scriptures of the Bible as an intermediary spiritual tool to guiding conversation. As natural mentoring is informal, some organizations prefer a more formal structure of mentoring, particularly to help early career professionals acclimate or achieve desired organizational outcomes (Chao, 2009). The following is a brief discussion on formal mentoring.

Formal mentoring programs are popular in university and business settings and exist in a variety of program designs. However, a few program characteristics appear to be consistent across the literature, including an attentive matching process, engagement in both career-related and psychosocial functions, shared commitment of mentor and mentee, understanding of expectation and stated goals, mentor training, and ongoing assessment of mentorship and outcomes (Chao, 2009; Hall & Maltby, 2013; Johnson, 2002). Although formal mentoring programs sometimes yield benefits, such as increased promotions, compensation, recognition, networking, and research productivity, there are no empirical studies that find formal mentoring as a superior form of mentoring over informal mentoring or natural mentoring (Chao, 2009; Johnson, 2002).

The challenge of formal mentoring is finding the right fit or mentor-to-mentee match. Chao (2009) supports this claim through her case study findings and recommends the following measures for a formal matching process to succeed: recruit a large and diverse pool of mentors who can accommodate mentee needs, collect specific information on mentor strengths and mentee needs, understand the individual priorities within the matching criteria, and allow for
participant review of potential mentoring partners. As a support to organic mentoring formation, Bozeman and Feeney (2008) stress the importance of the “match” by offering a *Goodness of Fit* model that examines social exchange through endowments, preferences, and content taken from both the mentor and mentee perspective. A good mentoring “fit” should also consider gender, race, and cultural preferences (Hall & Maltby, 2013; Johnson, 2002). The university setting, with its formal mentoring structure of doctoral students, provides a positive example of “fit” (Ripley & Yarhouse, 2012; Sharp, 2004). Therefore, it seems that matching within formal mentoring programs is possible but must be intentional and conciliatory toward “match” and “fit” as means to successful program outcomes.

Whether informal or formal, mentoring must be intentional. A formal program is clearly intentional in that an organization prescribes mentoring as a mandatory function. An informal mentoring relationship relies on intentionality in that either a prospective mentee will intentionally seek a mentor for assisted growth or a mentor will seek a mentee and choose to invest (Hall & Maltby, 2013). Kram (1983), a seminal scholar on the subject of mentoring, sees the intentionality of mentoring as occurring in four distinct phases, namely:

1. Initiation – A period of six months to a year in which the relationship gets started and begins to have importance
2. Cultivation – A period of two to five year when both career and psychosocial functions expand
3. Separation – A period of six months to two years in which a significant change in the structural role and/or emotional role of the relationship occurs
4. Redefinition – An indefinite period in which relationship has ended or takes on significantly different characteristics making it more of a peer friendship
It is important to note that Kram does not declare the influence of mentoring as having ended in the redefinition phase but, rather, the relationship may cease or redefine itself. Similarly, Stanley and Clinton (1992) understand the influence of mentoring as intensive, occasional, or passive (see Appendix E). As such, a historical mentor, even though deceased, may continue to provide mentorship passively over the course of someone’s life.

Lastly, applied discipleship involves leadership training through mentoring. As previously mentioned, universities utilize formal mentorship to train doctoral students by aligning the student with a seasoned professional who has already earned a doctoral degree to advise, train, and oversee the student’s learning. As such, all Ph.D. students are required by the academic community to submit to a level of leadership training through mentorship. Ironically, the Christian community does not require such a stringent level of leadership training through mentorship despite Jesus’ model. For example, although the Christian academy acknowledges the role of the worshipping community in formation and training for ministry, a survey of 141 theological institutions finds that only three institutions have significant emphasis on leadership development (Bell & Dudley, 2004; Kleingartner, 2001; Stache, 2014). Bell, Dudley, and Tilstra (2005) find that ministry interns felt more prepared in 100% of the categories surveyed as compared to ministers with no internship training, and, yet, the call for greater mentorship of Christian leaders is faint. Although Nzalayaimisi (2003) and Payne (2009) put forward compelling calls for mentor-based pastoral induction programs and Christian leadership training through mentoring, the bulk of Christian discipleship literature is conceptual rather than critical or call-oriented.
Conclusion

Christian discipleship is akin to mentorship and yet distinct in its orientation toward Jesus’ teaching, one’s observation of the teaching, and one’s imitation of Jesus (Bruce, 1979; Houston, 2011; Huizing, 2011). Discipleship is about an intense relationship between a “master” and a “disciple” that brings about a new way of seeing things altogether (Wringe, 2009). The “master” is ultimately Jesus but may also be one of Jesus’ followers who initiates a mentor-mentee relationship with a disciple and introduces him to a new way of life (Coleman, 1993). Although a call for discipleship is expressed by practitioners and the discipling mandate and model of Jesus are known, a lack of disciple-making exists. The dearth of disciple-making is due, in part, to the lack of initiative by ministerial gatekeepers to integrate mentorship into the formal and informal leadership training process (Bell & Dudley, 2004). The Reformation leader, Martin Luther, may serve as a disciple-making example as one who trained leaders through informal and formal learning, including eating meals with students in his home (Corwin, 1977). A “reformation” of disciple-making appears to await the contemporary Christian community.

Proven Risk Youth

The final section of this literature review utilizes two sub-sections to address the context of proven risk youth. The first sub-section addresses at-risk factors that influence and systemically shape proven risk youth. The second sub-section discusses mentoring practices being used to impact at-risk youth. As proven risk youth are a specific sub-set of at-risk youth in Massachusetts and the literature specifically pertaining to proven risk youth is extremely limited, this literature review focuses on the broader term of at-risk youth.
At-risk Factors

As discipleship is a developmental learning relationship that involves behavioral and identity formation of Christ-likeness, it is important to understand that at-risk youth are vulnerable to both negative behavior formations, such as violence, abuse, or addiction as well as negative identity formations, including feelings of disrespect, low self-esteem, cynicism, alienation, and distrust (Anderson, 1999; Rios, 2011). The following paragraph addresses behavioral and identity implications for at-risk youth by first, defining and describing the factors of risk within a societal context, and second, addressing the impact of risk factors upon the youth themselves.

Risk factors are individual or environmental exposures that make an individual susceptible to negative developmental outcomes (Thornberry, Krohn, Lizotte, Smith, & Tobin, 2003). A longitudinal study of Rochester youth and gang affiliation identifies nine factors that place youth at risk for negative developmental outcomes, namely: (a) socially disorganized neighborhoods; (b) availability of drugs and presence of gangs; (c) socioeconomic status/poverty; (d) single-parent family; (e) poor family management; (f) poor school performance; (g) adolescent association; (h) individual characteristics; and (i) prior deviance (Thornberry et al., 2003). The Rochester study understands the nine risk factors as developing over the course of one’s whole life, not just from childhood to adolescence. As such, the presence of risk factors does not inherently diminish with age, and the presence of multiple and over-lapping risk factors creates cumulative risk. Particular life transitions that occur off-age, such as high school graduation or having a baby, can create disorder and lead to developmental problems (Thornberry et al., 2003). Disorder can be created through abnormal and non-healthy life circumstances that place youth at-risk, including early childhood trauma, being the victim of
a crime, or experiencing early/adolescent arrest (Nichols, 2004; Thornberry et al., 2003).

Although early childhood risk exposure is significant, the unfolding relationships and developmental influences over a person’s life are more significant in influencing a person’s susceptibility to the nine risk factors (Thornberry et al., 2003).

To further understand the unfolding relationships and developmental influences that systemically impact at-risk youth, three ethnographies were reviewed: Anderson’s (1999), *Code of the Street*, Rios’ (2011) *Policing the Lives of Black and Latino Boys*, and Goffman’s (2014), *On the Run*. Ethnographic studies provide thick descriptions of at-risk phenomena from a sociological and personal perspective (Anderson, 1999; Geertz, 1973; Goffman, 2014; Rios, 2011). The ethnographies reveal three main categories of social typology that negatively feed the cycle of systemic risk: racism, hyper-criminalization, and risky-relationships. The following paragraphs address each social typology and its corresponding risk factors.

Racism negatively feeds the aforementioned at-risk factor of “economic status/poverty.” For example, sociologist Elijah Anderson (1999) traces racial prejudice in the job market to the post-Civil War migration, which led to the systemic exclusion of the Black community from the job market. The exclusion of Black Americans from employment resulted in the development of an underground economy of drugs and crime as means of financial survival. According to Anderson, the underground economy surrounded itself with additional risky behaviors, such as violence, drinking, robbery, and alienation. Thus, racism compounded the risk exposure for the Black community, which continues to place Black youth at risk for negative development, including a lack of hope for the future (Anderson, 1999).

In addition to the straight-forward racism of contemporary America, Anderson (1999) sees that systemic racism has transformed social behavior that presents itself in various practical
forms. For example, a White person in a social space may keep a certain distance between themselves and an anonymous Black person. As a response mechanism, many young Blacks take offense and may live their lives in direct opposition to everything a White person represents, including educational achievement by playing dumb in school, even though very smart (Anderson, 1999; Rios, 2011). Sociologist Victor Rios (2011) further explains the impact of social distance as he describes a young Black man’s positive qualifications for employment, but his reluctance to shake a White female manager’s hand after a job interview. Systemic racism socialized a young Black man to never touch a White woman, even in the respected custom of shaking hands, and in this case it cost the young Black man a job. This social distance, not only negatively impacts young Black men as they enter the job market but negatively reinforces stereotypes of Black men as criminals and sexual aggressors, which leads to prejudgments, hate crimes, and greater punitive measures against Black men (Anderson, 1999; Rios, 2011).

Although racism persists, America has made strides in Civil Rights. Some members of the Black community have overcome systemic racial pressure and a new Black middle class with considerable economic and political power has emerged (Goffman, 2014). Despite the progress, a duality of policy exists within America in that at the same time some Black Americans prosper, the United States of America is also engaged in a new and highly punitive era in regard to poor communities of color (Goffman, 2014). Rios (2011) refers to this punitive era as “hyper-criminalization” in which urban youth of color are not only labeled; they are controlled through the co-mingling of educational, criminal justice, and community institutions.

Tragically, hyper-criminalization begins at an early age as boys are introduced into the criminal system. For example, Jose of Oakland, CA, was arrested at age eight for setting a school trashcan on fire (Rios, 2011). As a consequence, Jose was labeled by teachers and friends as a
trouble-maker and flunked that year. This set up Jose for a perpetual struggle in school; feeling like police, probation officers, teachers, and school administrators were just waiting for him to screw up (Rios, 2011). Furthermore, an early arrest allows police to use the probation and parole systems as control mechanisms to keep youth in fear of being re-arrested for any infraction, including missing a court date or missing curfew (Goffman, 2014; Rios, 2011). Miss Regina, a mother in Northeast Philadelphia, sheds light on the desperation, frustration, and injustice caused by systemic hyper-criminalization in saying: “He’s going to spend two years in prison for breaking curfew? I’m not going to let them. They are taking our sons…Our young men. And it’s getting younger and younger” (Goffman, 2014, p. 59). Despite Miss Regina’s motherly instinct to protect, the system of hyper-criminalization has a stranglehold on her son.

As hyper-criminalization sets into a neighborhood, the presence of police is no longer seen as protective but, rather, as a promulgation of fear through constant police harassment, including helicopters, cameras, searches, and arrests in the street (Goffman, 2014). In some cases, hyper-criminalization spreads to police over-watch at schools, hospitals, youth-community centers, and even funerals (Goffman, 2014; Rios, 2011). Hyper-criminalization and the corresponding fear within neighborhoods seem to flourish when the at-risk factors of “socially disorganized neighborhoods” and “prior deviance” are not sincerely and systematically engaged by all the systems within a community. Fortunately for some, including Victor Rios, community members, like police officers, teachers, and youth counselors, sometimes contribute positive developmental support, even in the midst of a broken-system (Rios, 2011).

The final social typology to be discussed is that of risky-relationships, which may relate to the aforementioned at-risk factors of “availability of drugs and presence of gangs,” “single-parent family,” “poor family management,” and “adolescent association.” Specifically, gang
affiliation is a risky-relationship that is often sought by at-risk youth as a fulfillment of an existing social network or to fulfill a need for protection (Rios, 2011; Thornberry et al., 2003). The need for support and protection emanates from the street code that states, “It’s you and me,” and thus, one cannot count on the cops or the law for protection (Anderson, 1999). Unfortunately, the perceived positive relational elements of gang affiliation are thwarted by a significantly higher risk for delinquency (Thornberry et al., 2003). However, even in the midst of delinquency or incarceration, the bonds of relationship from friends, family, boyfriends and girlfriends continue to play a supportive role. For example, in Philadelphia the term riding is used to positively describe someone who stays with or supports someone during incarceration (Goffman, 2014). A person who is riding will bring necessary items to lock-up, be present for court dates, pay bail, and the like. The impact of a person riding or not-riding for someone has a systemic impact on at-risk youth in terms of relational trust and support during times of need and stress – what if expected support is not there? Several other risky-relationships impact at-risk youth, such as the care or non-care one receives from a single-mom, the example or advice one may receive from an old-head, who is an elder and positive role-model, or the disrespect and distrust one may experience as a close friend becomes an informant to save his own soul (Anderson, 1999; Goffman, 2014).

The social typology of risky-relationship is influenced by external, as well as internal factors. The literature reveals two aspects that may relate to the aforementioned at-risk factor of “individual characteristics”: one’s need for respect and the need to code-switch. The first facet to be discussed is respect. Respect is a valuable social capital on the street that provides necessary self-esteem, a sense of masculine identity, and social protection (Anderson, 1999; Rios, 2011). Respect can be achieved positively by excelling in a sport or negatively by being respected for
one’s neighborhood affiliation, gang affiliation, or record of violence (Anderson, 1999; Goffman, 2014; Hansen et al., 2014). For instance, when a Black youth named Mike was falsely accused by a shopkeeper for stealing a $0.25 bag of chips, Mike lashed out. His feelings of frustration and his deep desire to be respected exposed him to the risk of incarceration (Rios, 2011). The need to be respected by others, even by violent means, may be seen by at-risk youth as a worthwhile exchange because the risk of emotional alienation caused by “disrespect” is feared over probation (Rios, 2011).

The second facet to be discussed is that of code-switching, which is an internal relational compass used by some at-risk youth to navigate situations and maintain relationships within varying social strata (Anderson, 1999; Goffman, 2014; Rios, 2011). Code-switching compounds a youth’s risk profile in that while a youth may maintain positive behavior, his proximity to other people exhibiting negative behavior places him at risk as “guilty by association.” For example, a youth can switch between a street code and a decent code. The street code demands a distrust of others, a cynical outlook and criminal behavior, while the decent code values the authority of others, has hope in the future and shares middle-class values with the wider White society (Anderson, 1999). As code-switchers, some at-risk youth navigate both the streets and mainstream institutions and fulfill the expectations of both worlds. The interpersonal challenge for code-switchers is how to remain faithful to relationships formed by the street code, when one desires to live by the decent code. Such a youth lives in contradiction between being faithful to former relationships or abandoning them for a new relationship with the decent code, which is ironically run by a system that opposes the at-risk youth (Goffman, 2014). Therefore, the need for an at-risk youth to code-switch places stress on his individual and social identity formation.
In summary, the social typologies of racism, hyper-criminalization, and risky-relationships compound at-risk factors that make certain youth more susceptible to negative development, behavior, and identity formation. Goffman (2014) states that many in law enforcement are aware of the systemic contributing factors of unemployment, poverty, drugs, and violence but continue to arrest youth because they are equipped with hand-cuffs and jail-time, not social solutions. The literature calls for changes in social policy, including the elimination of labeling and zero-tolerance policies in schools and community centers as well as the redistribution of resources from criminal justice institutions to nurturing institutions that foster pro-social competencies, like mentoring and self-respect (Hansen et al., 2014; Jackson & Hay, 2013; Rios, 2011; Thornberry et al., 2003). Mentoring, whether from a parent, teacher, counselor, or program administrator is a primary nurturing tool as discussed in the next section.

**Mentoring**

The mentoring of at-risk youth is a means of addressing the nine aforementioned risk factors through caring, nurturing, and supportive relationships. The subsequent paragraphs describe the benefits of mentoring, provide a critique of mentoring, and offer recommendations for effective mentoring of at-risk youth (see Appendix F for an at-risk youth mentoring literature review table).

The general function of adult to youth mentorship is designed to counteract negative relationships at-risk youth may have had with parents or other caregivers (Matz, 2014). However, mentoring does not have to displace the role of parents; it may enhance existing attachment bonds that are relevant to a young person’s future success (Jackson & Hay, 2013). For example, the additional emotional support and advocacy provided by a mentor can be a critical interface during court hearings, teacher’s meetings, and behavioral expectation
fulfillment (Matz, 2014; Rodríguez-Planas, 2012; Tolan et al., 2014). In addition to enhancing relationships, youth mentoring positively correlates to bolstering student self-esteem, academic achievement, and social achievement (Grossman, Chan, Schwartz, & Rhodes, 2012; V. G. Smith, 1997; Thompson & Kelly-Vance, 2001). As a youth is supported and encouraged relationally, the view of oneself becomes more positive, which positively impacts personal choices and attitudes. For instance, natural mentorship is shown to serve as a protective factor against smoking marijuana, nonviolent delinquency, and educational attitudes among urban youth (Matz, 2014; Zimmerman, Bingenheimer, & Notaro, 2002). Therefore, adult to at-risk youth mentoring is generally seen in the literature as a beneficial engagement tool to mitigating factors of risk.

However, at-risk youth mentoring is not without critique. Early studies of at-risk youth mentorship claimed little empirical evidence of the efficacy of mentoring (Royse, 1998). Yet, it seems that later studies demonstrate both the benefits of mentoring, while clarifying the weaknesses of mentoring. For example, one quantitative study supports the positive influence of mentoring on at-risk youth (Keating et al., 2002). However, the same study questions the validity of self-reporting in the degree of honesty provided by mentoring participants (Keating et al., 2002). Another study finds weakness in the duration and permanence of mentoring benefits, citing that benefits erode to non-significance only a few months after mentoring discontinues and, therefore, calls for more longitudinal research (Rodríguez-Planas, 2012). Lastly, a challenge for all youth mentoring research exists in that the actual impact of mentoring must be distinguished from other programs and interventions youth may be receiving (Keating et al., 2002; Tolan et al., 2012). It seems that in the same way at-risk factors have a cumulatively negative impact, intervention programs and mentoring relationships may have a cumulatively positive impact. In short, the research literature demonstrates mentoring to be a beneficial
intervention for at-risk youth, while illuminating areas in which mentoring practices can be improved.

As the benefits and critiques of mentoring have been discussed, the following provides recommendations for effective mentoring of at-risk youth as gleaned from the literature. First, the mentoring relationship should be a friendship that provides intentional and intense contact for at least one year (Keating et al., 2002; Tolan et al., 2012). Second, the training of mentors should be taken seriously, as should the integrity and quality of the mentoring in terms of respect, trust, care, and support (Holsinger & Ayers, 2004; Slicker & Palmer, 1993). Third, program evaluation needs to take place at the beginning, middle, and end to ensure the integrity and consistency of treatment throughout the mentoring (Matz, 2014; Slicker & Palmer, 1993; Tolan et al., 2014). Fourth, mentoring and supportive relational interventions for at-risk youth should begin as early as possible, and for those who are incarcerated, mentoring should begin in lock-up and extend into re-entry (Braga et al., 2009; Thornberry et al., 2003). Fifth, mentoring program design should be multi-faceted to include parental training and engagement with family (Barron-McKeagney, Woody, & D’Souza, 2002; V. G. Smith, 1997). Sixth, when possible, mentors should be chosen who have overcome risk factors and delinquent behaviors, so that assistance can be given to at-risk youth who are in process of making sense of their lives and reconstructing a life-narrative apart from delinquency (Braga et al., 2009; Maruna, 2001). Lastly, faith-based mentoring matches should consider aspects of spirituality and spiritual transformation, as both serve as protective factors against delinquency (Braga et al., 2009; Flores, 2009; Salas-Wright et al., 2013).

Mentoring as a personal relationship of trust, respect, care, and support provides at-risk youth with positive developmental support. The literature demonstrates that higher academic
performance, greater social achievement, and more positive behavioral choices accompany mentorship. Furthermore, faith-based mentorship is empirically connected to lower violence and delinquency among at-risk youth. Finally, the mentoring of at-risk youth should not displace parental and familial engagement but should support and involve family whenever possible.

**Conclusion**

The three literature strands under review positively argue that discipleship, as a faith-based learning relationship, may be an effective and positive intervention for at-risk youth. At-risk youth may face up to nine risk factors that together create challenges of systemic risk, adverse social policies, and negative societal stereotypes. The literature suggests that the relational elements of trust, care, and support are positively associated with mentoring at-risk youth. Discipleship embraces the relational elements of mentoring and provides guidance in which a less knowledgeable person learns to be like Christ from a more knowledgeable person. The process of learning to be like Christ constitutes a spiritual transformation, evidenced by a fundamental change in the disciple’s character. Although discipleship on a one-to-one scale may not curb the systemic tide of risk facing at-risk youth, a youth disciple will receive positive developmental support, opportunity for personal change of one’s character, and guidance as one engages the risk environment.

In short, the literature review finds that at-risk/proven risk youth discipleship fits the larger goals of proven risk youth intervention in positive developmental support and positive behavioral change. The literature makes clear that greater qualitative measures are needed to produce effective and reproducible discipling relationships. Therefore, this qualitative research study aims to improve the understanding and awareness of effective proven risk youth discipleship by asking the question: How do discipleship dyads of proven risk youth and life-
coaches make sense of their discipleship? The following chapter specifically addresses this research question by describing the research methodology and providing a detailed guide of the research protocol.
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN

The aim of this study is to further understand how discipleship dyads of proven risk youth and life-coaches make sense of their discipleship. A greater understanding of how discipleship dyads of proven risk youth and life-coaches make sense of their relational learning may enhance relational matching within dyads as well as increase relational trust and effective learning within the dyads. To that end, the following research question will be considered: How do discipleship dyads of proven risk youth and life-coaches make sense of their discipleship?

This research question is important in that no empirical data exist on how discipleship dyads of proven risk youth and life-coaches make sense of their discipleship. The following section describes the research methodology within the broader context of qualitative research and the constructive-interpretative paradigm.

Qualitative Research Approach

Qualitative research addresses a human or social problem in which the researcher does not know all the variables and, therefore, needs to explore (Creswell, 2012, 2013). As the researcher explores a research problem qualitatively, she implores a range of empirical procedures that are designed to describe and interpret the experiences of research participants in a particular context or setting (Ponterotto, 2005). The empirical procedures designed to describe participant experiences or particular phenomena within a setting include behavior observation, document examination, and participant interviews (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research allows the researcher to utilize interpretive/theoretical frameworks to acknowledge philosophical assumptions, control for bias, and align the research methods (Creswell, 2013; Ravitch & Riggan, 2012). As the researcher’s first aim is to describe the phenomena within a context-specific setting, the researcher must understand that the participant is going to describe his
setting and any phenomena within his setting from his own perspective. Thus, the research participant is involved in the construction of reality as a fixture within the research setting. Therefore, the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm was used for this study and is detailed in the following paragraphs.

The constructivist-interpretivist paradigm posits that reality is constructed in the mind of an individual or in the mind-set of a group and stands in contrast to the positivist paradigm, which holds to a single objective external reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Ponterotto, 2005). Constructivism-interpretivism is rooted in Kant’s 19th century philosophical position that a human perceives through one’s senses, and through an internal mental apparatus that organizes the inbound sensory impressions (Ponterotto, 2005). Twentieth century theorist, Piaget, follows Kant’s view in his concept of cognitive constructivism, which suggests that reality is progressively known for humans though experiential assimilation and through cognitive apparatus accommodation (Riegler, 2012). Humans construct reality of experiences that are interpreted through a pre-existing mental apparatus, which also changes over time as varied stimuli impact the apparatus. Thus, as an external stimulus, another person can impact the construction of reality for an individual, which is particularly relevant to research based in the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm in that researcher-participant dialogue stimulates interaction that can co-create a reality (Ponterotto, 2005).

In addition to the acknowledgement of the co-creation of reality, several other aspects of the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm fit this research study. First, the researcher explored a participant in his context-specific setting that allowed for the lived experiences of a participant to be empirically derived and described (Creswell, 2013; Schwandt, 1998). Second, the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm is idiographic and emic in nature (Ponterotto, 2005). Third,
the researcher-participant dialogue adds a layer to the co-creation of reality, in that the researcher must interpret the meaning of the phenomena as described by the participant, while accounting for his own presence and impact within the setting and within the interpretive process. There is one qualitative strategy of inquiry that strongly satisfies the descriptive and interpretative demands of the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm and the proposed goals of this research study: interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA).

**Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

IPA is a research methodology that stems from phenomenology. Whereas, phenomenology seeks to describe an internal experience of being conscious of something, IPA focuses on understanding an experience and making sense of that experience (Dowling, 2007; Larkin et al., 2006; McNabb, 2016; J. A. Smith et al., 2009). A researcher using IPA may ask questions that reach beyond how a participant describes an experience to include questions of how a participant understands an experience, how a participant finds meaning in an experience, and how a participant makes sense of an experience. As experiential understanding is a key facet to IPA research, IPA is an appropriate methodological choice to research human lived experiences, particularly in settings of psychological distress, threat, transition, and identity formation (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). As proven risk youth experience life in settings such as these, the IPA methodology allowed for the lived experiences of the proven risk youth to be heard and understood.

IPA uniquely afforded the researcher a “double-hermeneutic,” in which the participant was asked to understand and reflect on their own experiences while the researcher tried to make meaning and sense of the participant’s experiences (Larkin et al., 2006; McNabb, 2016; J. A Smith et al., 2009). As this researcher comes from a non-proven risk youth background, IPA
provided the researcher with contextual opportunity and hermeneutic accountability to make sense of the experiences within the proven risk youth and life-coach discipleship dyad. As part of the hermeneutical approach, IPA research is idiographic in nature and seeks to find the voice of the individual participant and make a detailed examination. After and only after the individual participant voice was heard did the researcher search for shared themes across various participant responses (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). As a result, IPA research recommended a small sample of participants as discussed in the following section.

Participants

This section presents the research sample selection, sample size, and site selection for the research interviews. Voluntary purposeful sampling was used to select participants who met certain criteria. The criteria for participant selection were: (a) youth participants must be of male cisgender; (b) youth participants must be ages 18-24; (c) youth participants must be active SSYI participants; (d) youth must be active participants in a life-coach relationship of discipleship; and (e) the discipling relationship must occur within the framework of a SSYI affiliated organization.

As a means of sample selection, this researcher invited a faith-based discipleship organization affiliated with SSYI to participate in this research. Once permission was granted, this researcher asked for voluntary participation from life-coaches and youth who met the aforementioned criteria. As the population under study is vulnerable and subject to distrust of outsiders, referral sampling was utilized to allow for the trust between a life-coach and a youth to serve as the basis of invitation and potential participation. The researcher clearly communicated to all potential participants that no favors or incentives would be provided for willing participation in the research. Once a sample population was identified, the researcher assigned each participant a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality.
Regarding sample size, J. A. Smith et al. (2009) broadly recommend that the number of IPA participant interviews be between 4 and 10. However, a meta-analysis of 52 IPA studies found that IPA sample sizes typically ranged from 1 to 30, with the field of psychology preferring 6 to 8 participants (Brocki & Wearden, 2006; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). A sample size of 10 participants, which included 7 youth and 3 life-coaches, was chosen for this study in an effort to create rich data from multiple perspectives. Due to the vulnerabilities of the population under study, the relatively large IPA sample size provided room to lower the sample size should life circumstances suddenly change and the number of willing and able proven risk youth participants be diminished.

Lastly, due to participant vulnerabilities and environmental sensitives due to gang affiliation, a central and consistent site for the research interviews was not selected. Rather, the site selection of the research interviews was tailored to each participant under the guidance of the life-coach at the time of the interview. This determination was based on communication with a professional regarding environmental concerns in working with proven risk youth: territorial boundaries due to gang affiliation, constant threat of violence, and sensitivity to familiar surroundings for meetings, which should be deemed “familiar” through prior meetings between the life-coaches and participants. In short, it was important that research participants felt safe and comfortable in an interview setting, so that the interview questions and conversation would flow freely to ensure thoughtful dialogue and accurate data collection.

**Procedures**

The following section describes the potential research procedures in a step-by-step fashion by addressing data collection, data analysis, ethical considerations, trustworthiness, potential research bias, and limitations of the study. Prior to any data being collected, the
researcher received approval from the institutional review board (IRB) of Northeastern University.

**Data Collection**

IPA data collection is largely associated with semi-structured interviews, which are guided by an interview schedule, and iterative in process (Brocki & Wearden, 2006; J. A. Smith et al., 2009). This researcher followed the IPA convention, and as a first step, the researcher established the interview time and location with each participant as communicated via email through the life-coach’s email account. Upon sitting down for the interview, a casual rapport was established and permission was requested to conduct and record the interview. Once verbal consent was received, a written consent was signed and the audio-recording device was activated. The interviewer followed the semi-structured interview schedule (see Appendix G), with each interview lasting from 13-45 minutes. The strength of semi-structured interviews was that rapport and trust can be built, which allowed for natural and in-depth conversation to flow within the framework of the interview schedule (Pietkiewicz & Smith; 2014; J. A. Smith et al., 2009). During the interview, the researcher took limited notes to track key words and topics and jotted-down potential follow-up questions while fully listening to what was being spoken by the participant (Groenewald, 2008; J. A. Smith et al., 2009). Upon completion of each interview, the audio-recordings were uploaded to Rev.com\(^1\) to produce a verbatim transcript for each interview. The researcher cross-checked the transcripts against the audio-recorded interview and had each participant verify the transcript to ensure accuracy.

---

\(^1\) [www.Rev.com](http://www.Rev.com) is a web-based professional transcription service that converts audio-files into written and verbatim transcripts.
Data Analysis

Once the data were collected, the researcher followed the six steps of data analysis as presented by J. A. Smith et al. (2009).

**Read and re-read.** The first step in data analysis was to immerse oneself in the data by reading and re-reading the transcript. This allowed the researcher to focus and actively listen to the lived experience of the participants (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). After the researcher read and re-read the transcript several times and re-listened to the audio interview to embrace the mood and voice inflections, the researcher moved to the next step of notation.

**Make initial notations.** The researcher used the margins of the transcript to make notes and comments about the data and used a highlighter to mark key phrases and comments related to rich descriptions and statements that helped “make sense” of the discipleship experience. J. A. Smith et al. (2009) refer to this process as free textual analysis. The next step involved creating a table and categorizing the data into descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual comments.

**Develop emergent themes.** After taking the initial notes, the researcher looked for emergent themes from the data and notes. The researcher used a column in the table he created to jot down potential themes next to the descriptions, language, and concepts formerly noted. The aim in this step was to reduce the volume of detail while maintaining the complexity and richness of the data, so that a map of the connections and patterns may be achieved (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). The researcher recognized the interpretative role he played in this process and made analytic memos to document the thoughts behind the interpretive measures (Gronewald, 2008).

**Search for connections across emergent themes.** After logging the emerging themes, the researcher searched for connections across the themes by using abstraction. Abstraction is the process of identifying patterns among themes by looking for similarities and a “superordinate”
theme to pull the similarities together under one umbrella (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). The larger themes were logged in the table and served as initial “codes” for subsequent analysis.

**Move to the next case.** Upon completion of the first four steps of analysis, the researcher moved on to the next participant and repeated the four steps until all transcripts were analyzed. The researcher anticipated the double-hermeneutic principle of IPA and recognized that subsequent transcripts were influenced by prior transcript analysis. The researcher made every effort to listen to the voice of each participant and remain open to his lived experiences and note them accordingly.

**Look for patterns across cases.** The final step of analysis was to observe all the analytical tables created from each transcript. The researcher spread the printed tables out on a large surface and read each note and each theme to look for how one theme in one case may relate to another theme in another case. Recurring themes were identified as being represented in at least half of the cases (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). As patterns and themes were identified across cases, they were logged into a new table and referenced accordingly. Lastly, after all the data were collected and analyzed, the findings were presented in a narrative account along with adequate support from the transcripts and notes to substantiate the claims.

**Ethical Considerations**

The ethical considerations of a study are important for avoiding harm to any participant in the research study (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). To that end, in addition to gaining IRB permission, this researcher took the following measures to address ethical considerations: (a) referred potential participants were sent an email and presented a hard-copy of that email at the initial meeting as a means to introduce the study, invite participation, and underscore the voluntary nature of the participation; (b) participants were asked to sign an informed consent
form prior to any research questions being asked; (c) participants were asked to verbally confirm their consent to participate in the research, which was recorded in the audio-recorded interview and subsequent transcript; (d) participant anonymity was achieved through the assignment of pseudonyms; (e) participants were invited to read their respective interview transcripts for verification purposes; (f) multi-perspectival concerns were presented to participants and additional consent was gained as warranted; (g) data that were collected were held in strict confidence; (h) all physical data were secured in the researcher’s private home-office and all digital data were password protected; and (i) upon completion of the project all audio-recordings were destroyed.

**Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness refers to the measure of data reliability and validity undertaken in the research. In general, this IPA researcher considered trustworthiness by creating an audit trail of data, notes, claims, and warranting, so that other researchers could virtually or physically follow the chain of evidence that leads to the findings and implications (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). The researcher made effort toward internal trustworthiness by cross-checking interview transcripts with audio data and cross-checking emergent themes with the data to ensure that each theme was adequately represented in the analysis (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). Lastly, following the guidelines of J. A. Smith et al. (2009), this researcher applied Yardley’s (2000) principles of assessing quality within qualitative research. Yardley’s principles are presented in the following paragraph.

First, the researcher was *sensitive to context*. Sensitivity to the proven risk youth discipleship context was provided throughout the selection of the applicable theories, review of literature, and collection and analysis of data. Furthermore, the researcher paid close attention to
each participant’s account of life-setting, voice, and meaning. Second, the researcher was *committed and rigorous* in personal researcher involvement, attention to detail, and importance of the data being collected. Illustrations were selected to bear witness to both the individual sense-making and the emergent corporate themes. Third, the researcher was *transparent and coherent* by the clearly stating the research process, claims, and warranting. Furthermore, the research maintained the phenomenological and hermeneutical claims of IPA. Lastly, the researcher offered *impact and importance* to the knowledge base and useful practices of proven risk youth discipleship. The next section further addresses trustworthiness by identifying and bracketing out research bias.

**Potential Research Bias**

The researcher’s personal attachment to the phenomenon of discipleship is strong. I have had many positive role models, mentors, and people who indirectly and directly provided discipleship in my life. Therefore, I place a high value on discipling relationships that encourage learning and growth. Although my personal interest in discipleship may provide the passion and commitment necessary for the potential research, the same interest, according to Machi and McEvoy (2012), may also lead to premature conclusions about the research. My enthusiasm for the topic comes with a set of opinions, experiences, and expectations that presented a challenge to being open-minded toward the research data. Therefore, I acknowledged the risk of defining effective discipleship in terms and style that relate to my own life. To mediate this risk, I followed the recommendations of Creswell (2012) and J. A. Smith et al. (2009) and remained personally attentive, developed proper interview protocols, maintained ethical data collection, and engaged in proper coding, organization, and transparency of the data.
Along with my passion, my ethnicity also presents bias (Briscoe, 2005). As a White male, who grew up within suburban stability and had access to higher education, it was a challenge to adequately research and represent the experiences of proven risk youth who are ethnically different from me and come from a different life setting. A secondary challenge of ethnic bias was represented in my comfort with ethnically diverse friends and colleagues. As the pastor of an ethnically diverse church, I empathize with many systemic challenges facing many of my congregants. Therefore, I needed to be aware of potential bias represented by my ethnicity and life history as well as potential biases represented by my current ethnically diverse life setting and empathies.

Another arena of bias relates to my proximity to those who are at risk. Many in my congregation fall into the categories of risk referred to in this research. My church is a host site for an at-risk youth jobs program. Although I do not have personal relationships with the potential research participants, some of the youth may have visited my church or may have participated in the jobs program located in my church facility. Therefore, it is possible that I may have provided casual greetings and may have expressed my gratitude for job services performed within the church facility. Regarding the life-coach participants, I have known two of them professionally, and one of the life-coaches is a member of our church, who I also know personally. As such, this level of relationship may have provided me with a false sense of identification. For instance, although I may feel comfortable with and feel that I understand a multi-ethnic group of at-risk youth and life-coaches, I may not be viewed by all as a member of the group. This sense of otherness may have led to stereotyping by me as researcher or stereotyping of me as a researcher (Briscoe, 2005). In order to mitigate ethnic and proximal bias,
I did not consider *otherness* as something to be overcome but rather acknowledged and accounted for it in the research questions, answers, interpretations, and analyses.

Another active aspect of bias relates to the task of deciphering language and story used in the research process. According to Briscoe (2005), language is a powerful tool for communicating social identities. My use of language in the interviews reflected my White, male, social identification and consequently needed to be recognized. I followed Creswell (2012) and mitigated my language bias through peer and expert review of my use and interpretation of language. Lastly, my religious position and training presented potential bias in the research, in that I view humanity through a lens of death, repentance, and new life. Each person in my worldview is a candidate to receive new life and experience spiritual transformation. My worldview provides hope for the future and grace for past failures, which may have caused me to ask interview questions and search for narratives that fit my worldview and to exclude narratives that do not fit. In order to buffet myself, a strident effort was made to remain open-minded to the data and to the emerging paradigms that may differ from my presuppositions and experiences.

Although my life experiences do not match many of the life experiences represented with the discipleship of proven risk youth, Briscoe (2005) supports my right as an outsider to research a population different from my own, so far as I acknowledge the power relationships and *otherness* that was present in my subjective viewpoint. As a scholar-practitioner, I recognized my place of privilege and openly acknowledged my biases in an effort toward ethical research.

**Limitations**

Several limiting factors were present in this research study. First, the theoretical framework may have limited the understanding of relational learning as represented in the relational dyads. Although the use of a theoretical framework was designed to ground the
research and to provide an anchor point of interpretation, the use of only one theoretical frame may have narrowed the options of interpretation and limited understanding gained from the study. Next, semi-structured interviews may have limited the comparative ability of multi-perspectival interviews. Whereas, fully structured interviews can provide consistency of data, the varied nature of semi-structured interviews allowed for varied data in different probes and degrees of depth within each interview. Lastly, the sample may have been a limiting factor both in its relatively small size and its transferability to like institutions, as the entire sample was from only one institution in Massachusetts. As the discipleship of proven risk youth may vary from region to region or from institution to institution, the particular facets of this sample population need to be considered in context before extrapolations can be made to other scholarly or practitioner contexts.

Conclusion

A IPA qualitative study of how discipleship dyads of proven risk youth and life-coaches make sense of their discipleship allowed this researcher to use semi-structured interviews as a means of making-sense of the participant’s lived experiences. IPA also afforded the researcher a hermeneutical lens that embraced the co-construction of reality in the data collection and analytical processes. As the particular and potential research methods, steps of data collection, and steps of data analysis were presented in this chapter, the findings of the data collection and analysis are presented in the next chapter.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The purpose of this study was to understand how discipleship dyads of proven risk youth and life-coaches make sense of their discipleship. The theoretical framework of Vygotsky’s (1978) Zone of Proximal Development situates this study. The Zone of Proximal Development theory suggests that what a youth is unable to do on his own may be obtained through interaction with a more knowledgeable person and subsequently integrated, so that the youth can independently continue to perform what is learned without the presence of the more knowledgeable person. This study, therefore, explored the discipleship between a more knowledgeable life-coach and a proven risk youth.

Research Site

This study was conducted in cooperation with an organization in Central Massachusetts specializing in discipleship of at-risk and proven risk youth. The organization works with youth on the streets (outreach) and in prisons (outreach) as well as with youth in re-entry (aftercare). The outreach engages youth where they are and develops or maintains relationship with them. As relationships are built, referrals are made by life-coaches that may move youth from outreach to aftercare. Aftercare will provide more intensive life-coaching, case management, and connection to services. The outreach and aftercare functions are not mutually exclusive but serve on a continuum of the organizational mission, which is to see Jesus Christ transform the lives of juvenile offenders.

Participants

The participants of this study are not only affiliated with the same organization, but all 10 are affiliated with the state program, SSYI. As such, names of youth who fit the SSYI criteria are generated by the state and given to the organization for the purposes of follow-up and
engagement. The youth are not mandated to contact a life-coach. Often a life-coach is already aware of the youth on the list due to prior contact, affiliation with other known youth, or direct relationship with the youth. On this basis, the researcher utilized a referral approach to identify the participants, as the life-coaches had the relational means of connecting with the youth.

This researcher conducted the first interview on October 31, 2017 with a life-coach named, Carlos. The interview went smoothly and the researcher found himself more comfortable asking follow-up questions as the interview went on. The final interview was conducted on December 8, 2017, and the final transcript was verified on December 21, 2017. The total number of participants was 10, which included 7 youth and 3 life-coaches. The demographic information for each participant can be found in Appendix H.

The following is a description of each participant’s lived experience utilizing extracts from their respective interviews. As IPA is idiographic in nature, the descriptions both introduce each participant and provide analysis, so that the individuals are first understood within their own context. The following cases are presented randomly within each participant group, with youth being presented first, followed by the life-coaches. A conclusion is offered at the end the individual analysis as a means of summarizing the initial findings of how youth and life-coaches make sense of their discipleship.

**Darius**

Darius met his life-coach, David, through an open gym invitation three years ago. Darius and David continue to play ball once a week and also have meetings at Darius’ house and drive around and talk, as a means of having “one-on-one connections” to build their relationship. Darius sees shared interests and hobbies, like video games, movies, and involvement at the boys and girls club as the basis for healthy youth and life-coach connection, “cause you can’t have a
random person coming to your house that you don’t know or, or never really connected with like that because then, they are in your house and you’re like, ‘Who’s this? Why are they in my home?’” For Darius, connection leads to trust, which means honesty and respect in the relationship, as exhibited in the following statement:

And trust is just honesty. Really. Just be upfront with everything. Even if you feel like I’m not going to like it, just tell me. ‘Cause at least it’ll show me the sign that you respect me enough to tell me the truth even if I’m not going to like it. ‘Cause not everybody wants to hear only what they want to hear. Sometimes you need constructive criticism too. So like, sometimes I’d be messing up, David’s like, “Yo, D, I don’t think that was a smart move. You know. I feel like you need to think about what you’re doing,” like all that.

In addition to unpacking a deeper meaning of connection, Darius also explained how discipleship is changing his decision-making, as he now thinks twice about everything and tries to change his environment. Although Darius’ discipleship is producing maturity in some areas, when asked about his vision for life, his answer was rather elementary, stating: “I always seeing myself on TV being rich. That’s all I see. But I don’t know. I, I honestly don’t have no idea.” Lastly, Darius is very appreciative of his life-coach’s motivation toward getting a high school diploma as well as the transportation assistance given, the access to legal advice, and the informational resources that are a great help. Although very grateful for the help his life-coach provides, Darius has not yet caught the vision for an independent life.

Alex

Alex did not make eye contact throughout the interview and held back the emotions until the recording device was stopped. The night before, he lost his living arrangements and had
spent all day trying to find where he would sleep that night. Transience and vulnerability are not new to Alex, who described himself as a drug-addicted baby given up for adoption. Despite the stress and sadness, Alex wanted his voice to be heard in the interview. When asked about how he and his life-coach spend time together, Alex said, “Uh, helping me get on the right path when I’m not doing the right thing…And…It’s just not advice. He helped out today, go down to Section 8 today and try to find me somewhere to sleep, or to live, so he’s helping me.” Alex emphasized the “help” that his life-coach gives him, saying, “It means a lot to me that, that someone has the time of the day to see someone that is struggling and sit there and talk to them and still give them good advice, instead of giving them the run around…it’s like a, like a father brother type of thing.” When asked how he has been positively pushed by his life-coach, Alex shared the following:

He pushed me to get my jobs, stop, made me stop selling drugs, he made me get a, two jobs. I got two jobs. It’s like, it’s not all about you now. It’s, it’s about your family. It’s about your kid that you have on the way, so…I changed my whole life around, and I been doing good ever since. It’s just, I had a little argument with my girlfriend, and her parents kicked me out, so…Other than that, I’m good. It’s just I don’t have a roof over my head. That’s about it.

Alex met Darnell, his life-coach through another life-coach in the research organization and is grateful for his relationship with Darnell stating: “My life has changed ‘cause of one person that help me, and I’m thankful for it.” When asked to describe how he knows that Darnell cares for him, Alex shared the counseling he received from Darnell and his subsequent realization that he does not have to have the last word.
Like, I always have to say something when somebody’s trying to argue with me and, and I’m working on that now. It’s like, when someone wants to argue just, just go with it. Just, yes, yup, no. That’s about it. Maybe I wouldn’t be in the predicament that I’m in right now. Maybe me and my girlfriend arguing, just went yup, yes, it would’ve been okay, you know?

Alex was making sense of his discipleship in real-time as he grappled with his present situation of being kicked-out of his girlfriend’s house. Although Alex received a lot of short-term help from his life-coach, which included creating a vision of family responsibility. He continues to grapple with his own attitude, communication, and commitment-load. The researcher evidenced this personally in the extreme measures it took to verify Alex’s transcript, as he repeatedly missed appointments, over-promised his arrival, and under-communicated his situation. For his life-coach, this was just another day of working with Alex.

Terrence

Terrence was very positive and engaging during the interview. He refers to his life-coach, as his “older brother,” saying, “He’s always been there, and that’s I – I’m really appreciative for our relationship.” When asked what does it mean to appreciate the relationship, Terrence responded, “I appreciate the consistency. The commitment. The – the loyalty. The honesty.” As is the case with other youth, the discipleship is helping Terrence in “consistency,” which is evidenced in his ability to hold a job and make better decisions. However, Terrence is distinct in that he is the only youth to describe discipleship from his life-coach in terms of self-worth.

He makes me see the inner me, like, he makes me…he- he- he makes me feel out the worth that I have. And the worth that was- that- that I had- that I am, because sometimes I don’t feel like I’m worth being alive or sometimes I don’t feel like I’m worth going for-
going through something, and he’ll make – he’ll bring that out and say, “Oh” – just little words. He’ll say, I count because sometimes I’m not at always up to power to tell myself that. To encourage me – to encourage myself that. And that’s something he does as a life-coach, as a brother, as a mentor.

During the interview, Terrence stated that he suffers from depression and used to suffer from suicidal thoughts. As a result of life-coach encouragement, Terrence is beginning to trust himself more and find out who he really is – an example of identity formation. Lastly, far more than any other youth interviewed, Terrence spoke freely of his faith and personal conversion to follow God after being spared in a gang-related shooting. When asked how his life-coach influences his faith, Terrence shared language of encouragement, remembrance, and guidance from his life-coach who said: “You remember what God did for you? You can’t leave God. You remember how God brought you out of some many – so much mess...Don’t give up on Him. You know what to do. You’ve got to pray and talk to God.” Terrence is the only youth to say that he is also close with the life-coach’s family, his wife, and his kids. Terrence’s affinity for his life-coach’s family is noteworthy in that Terrence grew up in the foster-care system and has little relationship with his biological family. Therefore, Terrence serves as a prime example of the relational bond, particularly a male bond necessary to see a young man mature and move from the streets to stability.

Lemarcus

Although the same age as several interviewees, Lemarcus’ demeanor indicated that he may be more mature than the other youth. Perhaps his maturity is due to the fact that he has three children and has held the same job for over one year. When asked what does your relationship with Darnell, your life-coach, mean to you, Lemarcus answered in similar fashion as other
interviewees, saying, “I value it…it means a lot to me. He- he- he guided me when I was in a dark place. He’s encouraged me when I needed. He’s part of my life.” Lemarcus then became more introspective, saying, “What, I mean, if I didn’t have Darnell, I probably wouldn’t be able to be- be here today. At all. I’d probably be back in jail, who knows? But like he always say, it’s- it’s me, but it’s the push he gave me, helped me a lot.”

Lemarcus provided the longest answers of any youth interviewee, and when asked about his life-change, Lemarcus answered with a high level of understanding identity-formation, saying, “I want to be the best form of what I can be of me, my best form of me, you know what I mean? And- and I learned the difference of that. I learned definitely that.” Later in the interview, Lemarcus spoke of Darnell sculpting his character, then rephrased it saying he, “helped me sculpt myself. Helped me, helped me become me.” Lemarcus brought forward aspects of encouragement, formation, and discipleship that are evident within the ZPD theoretical framework. Lastly, Lemarcus expressed relational accountability of an obligation to Darnell for the genuine support that he received, saying he needed to “repay” Darnell and that he “owed” Darnell. When asked to expound, Lemarcus stated:

Staying out of jail is like my mainly thing, because I know he don’t want to see me go back to jail, you know. And- and, I just feel like, I- I- I- I’m not gonna say hurt, but I feel like it will be- be bothering him. It will be a burden in the back of his brain, like, “Damn, I got to go see ‘Marcus, but I’m so busy,” you know what I mean? Like, and I don’t want to put that stress on nobody. Not somebody who cares and really wants to see me do good. For real.

Lemarcus provided a glimpse of a man who is moving forward in the ZPD, a man who now holds a job and financially cares for his family. Lemarcus understands himself and how
susceptible he is to the short-term gains of the street and appreciates the accountability he has through his relationship with Darnell. However, it is not that Darnell is hovering over Lemarcus, but rather that Lemarcus does not want to disappoint Darnell, and therefore, he holds himself accountable. Lemarcus repeatedly remarked about how much his relationship with Darnell means to him but also said, “I never really thought about it until the interview question was asked.” During the transcript verification meeting, this statement was repeated again by Lemarcus.

**Jamal**

Jamal first met his life-coach while in a Department of Youth Services detention center at age 12, but the relationship really began five years ago. After release from detention, Jamal entered a work program that put him in daily contact with Carlos, his life-coach. Jamal recognized that the regular contact with Carlos in the work environment created a comfortable relationship with Carlos, which is now a personal relationship “based off the fact that I understand the things that he was tryin’ to reach out to me now.” When the interviewer asked for an example of what Carlos was trying to explain before, but is now more clear about, Jamal responded with the following:

Um, like he was really tryin’ to get us involved in um, religion. And I just always pushed it away due to the fact that, I don’t know when I wasn’t a work or somethin’ and wasn’t around him, that’s not what other people were talkin’ about or even tryin’ to like give you examples and use examples and then have like evidence to support it. You wouldn’t believe that what he was tryin’ to show you because you either weren’t openin’ your eyes enough to see or you weren’t around it to believe it, like…It’s different now because um, I’ve been so against like, not against it, but I was…I wasn’t living my life the way he was
living his life due to religion. So now that my eyes…and it scares you, I don’t even know how, but my eyes have finally been opened to it.

Jamal continued to describe his religious conversion experience, which occurred three days prior to the interview, in non-technical religious terms. Jamal used phrases like: “I’m more open-minded,” and “the way I feel has changed,” and “now I’m really lookin’ for exactly what Carlos’s been tryin’ to tell me the whole time.” Jamal recognized Carlos’s “positive” guidance and “the way that he lives his life,” as a long-term influence. Furthermore, Jamal brought evidence to his life change as he contrasted the positive life-coach influence to other influencers who “might support me to do somethin’ else that might have a negative outcome just due to the fact that it’s not the right things to do.”

Jamal is a leader on the streets and now understands his role differently, saying: “I know that I have a higher purpose in life just due to the fact of how I can impact other people’s life.” Jamal continued to freely talk about his life change for 30 minutes after the interview was concluded. The life change was so raw and so real, Jamal was processing and self-interpreting his life-change as a stream of consciousness. His greatest desire was to see his “brothers” experience the same life change and same positivity he was experiencing. During the post-interview transcript verification meeting, this researcher made a facial expression of surprise upon first glance at Jamal, to which Jamal responded, “I know, I’m a different person.” His appearance, countenance, and stature were completely different, and he was noticeably more at ease, provided more eye contact, and exhibited more peace.

This researcher understands Jamal’s five years of discipleship under Carlos as an example of consistency. There was a consistent relationship with a life-coach, who lived a consistent way of life and brought forward a consistent message. The message was not fully
received but was not rejected either. When the message of religion was personally experienced, a personal transformation ensued. A life was changed from the inside out. No one told Jamal to change his demeanor, change his facial expression, change his hairstyle, change his clothes, or change the way he stood, but Jamal changed nonetheless. The Terrence religion Jamal referred to understands such change as “new life,” as explained in the following passage: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”

**Adrian**

Adrian is one of the youngest interviewees and looked the least comfortable at the start of the interview. However, his body language, eye contact, and responses became more engaging throughout the interview. When asked what the relationship with his life-coach means to him, Adrian said, “Like, just an extra means of support…just someone I call to talk to, if I need anything.” Adrian is distinct in that he sees himself as reaching out to his life-coach, whereas the other respondents see the life-coach reaching toward them. Adrian also stated that it feels good to have a positive person in your life and to know that you are not alone. He appreciated his life-coach’s encouragement and help in crafting a resumé, which he hoped would enable him to be a licensed barber. Adrian not only considered his life-coach his friend but introduced his life-coach to his “real friends,” as the following states:

‘Cause, I, I was recently locked up. I came home in January, with just, um, a couple months back when I, when I actually introduced my life-coach to all the people I actually hang out with – Like my real friends. And, and it was, it threw everybody off, to see that I actually had like, a life-coach. But, once they actually sat down and just listened, like I told them, “Just listen to what he has to say,” then it like, I see like, it really changed everybody. ‘Cause now everybody wants to take, like, participate.
When asked what was it that made his “real friends” also want to participate, Adrian said it was the “positive vibe,” whereas, his leader on the street tells the guys how to make money and to do whatever you want to do, the life-coach told the guys to try a trade - to build something with their hands, “and like, my friends actually like that.”

Three weeks after the interview, Adrian was re-arrested for violation of probation and sentenced to two and half years. Therefore, Adrian’s life situation is a reminder of the vulnerabilities facing young men in the system. A single infraction, small or large, can perpetuate the cycle of abandonment, fear, and despair faced during incarceration. Thankfully, Adrian’s life-coach relationship will continue during lock-up.

**Jalen**

Jalen opened his interview with a helpful account of how he met Darnell, his life-coach. Their initial meeting was on the streets during a life-coach outreach, at which time Darnell handed Jalen a business card, and Jalen threw it on the ground. However, during a subsequent lock-up, Jalen attended Bible study and the leader handed him a business card for aftercare, once he got out. The business card was, once again, a referral to Darnell. When asked what his relationship with his life-coach means to him, Jalen said, “Means a lot, ‘cause he does a lot for me, and…the relationship and the bond that we’re connected, I feel like I take it um, I mean I take this serious…I love it.” Jalen appreciates how Darnell advocated to get him back in school, connected him with a job program and provided some peer-leader training so he can learn how to be a life-coach.

Furthermore, Jalen described a life-work balance that Darnell is modeling for him that involves the self-discipline of taking notes and setting timers, so that Jalen can wake-up on time, eat breakfast, go to work, enjoy Bible study and church, participate in physical exercise, and
keep his word. Jalen repeatedly used the phrases, “He keeps me on the right track,” and gets “my head right,” to describe the discipline he is learning. This new discipline is providing a life change that Jalen describes as moving from “gang banging” to “bout to go to job corps.”

In addition to seeing his life-coach as a positive example, Jalen is the only interviewee to also mention his dad as a positive example.

That’s why I’m actually like, he’s another inspiration for me. I’m like, my dad got back into school, and he did that, and now look at him, and he drives a Mercedes Benz now, and…so I’m like, anything, if he did it, I could do it. Darnell’s on my side telling me I could do it, so.

The fact that Jalen mentions his dad is interesting in that while Jalen feels a bond with Darnell, he did not express the bond in familial terms as other youth did but, rather, expressed a respect for his biological father and talked openly about his family. When asked if there was anything else he would like to add about his life-coach, Jalen said:

Definitely a good man. What they do is good, and it’s nice to know that there’s somebody out there that cares about us teenagers, and- and- just trying to stop us from killing each other and put us, uh, in different situations. So they’re not all about, “Oh yeah come here, preach God, and, wear God, this God, that,” they don’t do all of that. They don’t try to throw God in your face. You don’t want to go to a Bible study, that’s cool.

Prior to his research interview, Jalen had been locked up three times and each time participated in Bible study. Jalen seems to understand the possibilities of working with the life-coach and envisions a healthy life beyond his current reality. Jalen had signed up for a short-term volunteer trip to Puerto Rico to offer hurricane relief with his church; however, the transcript verification meeting revealed that Jalen got cold feet and did not make the trip. As Jalen
continues to develop, one hopes to see his verbal confidence and positive picture of his future bring about physical, emotional, academic, and professional maturity.

**David**

David has been a life-coach for two years. He provided the longest interview in which he was comfortable and passionate. When asked, “What does your relationship with the youth mean to you?” he answered,

Uh, man. I really, genuinely love these guys. I really, I really do. Um, I call them my kids, and I’ve, I’ve been to, uh, meetings where they call them participants or they call them students…we are very, um, relational, um, so I really love and genuinely care for these kids.

David expounded on the relationship by saying:

I really push them. I love them. I, I, I argue with them, I, I, um, cry with them, whatever it is. I’m always there for them. Um, sometimes, we don’t, we don’t see eye-to-eye. I actually got cursed out today (laughs) by one of them. Uh, but, he actually, five minutes later, he said, “David, I’m sorry. I was just-” He got arrested the, uh, the night before. Um, last night. So, he was just dealing with so much things. And I was like, “Hey, listen. That’s- that’s okay.” Um, so, a lot of times, you can’t be selfish. You can’t really (laughs) you can’t go, really, go based- based on your feelings, um, and, you know, at the end of the day, we’re really trying to portray who Jesus is, and we try to really be forgiving and merciful and graceful toward them.

Several times in the interview, David mentioned that the relationship is not one way; rather, the life-coach and youth are growing together, as “iron sharpening iron.” When asked for an example, David shared a recent story of how Darius wanted to learn more about the production
and engineering of rap music, but rather than David taking the responsibility to figure out the options and present the options to Darius, both he and Darius figured out the options together.

David’s story of rap-music production led to an interesting account of relational trust, one in which trust in the life-coach relationship carried life and death implications. As David and Darius collaborated on music studio training options, they agreed to use a studio that they had access to, but the location was in a gang-territory associated with Darius’ rival gang. David explained:

There are so many guys that are looking to kill him. There are so many guys that are looking to do harm to him and his family. So that was very important to me, and I was like, it doesn’t really make sense, so him actually committing to this was because he trusted me. And, and, and he said, “David, I know that you’re going to make sure that I’m going to be okay…he actually said, “If a South Side guy co- if a South Side comes in, I know you’re not going to run.” (laughs) “I know that you’re going to stay there.”

Therefore, the trust in the life-coach and youth relationship is more than emotional, spiritual, and vocational - it’s physical. Darius’ life-coach relationship is deemed safe in more ways than one.

As the research question is focused on discipleship, it was interesting to hear David utilize the term “discipleship” in the interview without being prompted to do so. David spoke about going to Darius’s house to “do some discipleship,” which involved talking about life, dreaming a little bit, and talking about family. Rarely was a hard-copy discipleship curriculum implored, but, rather, the conversation revolved around topics that appear in a curriculum entitled, “Ready4Life,” such as vision, strongholds, forgiveness, and how God is showing up in your life. Furthermore, David’s discipleship intentionally introduced his youth to other Terrence
men and pastors through basketball games, in hopes of building relationship toward more spiritual engagement through youth groups, Sunday services, or meals together.

Lastly, when the interviewer asked how David was seeing life change in the youth, he responded by saying, “What I’m really looking for is for them to really, uh, to turn away from the lifestyle that they- they- they used to live.” David went on to explain the behaviors that must be left behind, including selling drugs, robbing other drug dealers, starting trouble in the wrong neighborhood, shooting, stealing, and drive-bys. According to David, the decision to make a life change includes surrounding oneself with more positive people, “If not, you- y- you’re always gonna be pulled back into it.” David sees the relationship with the youth as a bond that goes on forever.

Carlos

Carlos has the most life-coach experience among the participants with 12 years of experience. Carlos’s presence in the interview was sincere and focused. When asked, “What does your relationship with the youth mean to you?” Carlos replied, “It means a lot to me.” He went on to describe the importance of the relationship being “built in trust,” “in consistency, and care,” as “They typically don’t have like an adult caring relationship.” Furthermore, Carlos is “intentional in the relationship,” which gives him the opportunity to provide “needed services for them,” which leads youth to open up more and “share some of the challenges that they have.” For Carlos, that level of relationship and support is “the foundation of um, everything moving forward,” including life-change.

Life change, according to Carlos, is varied because you might impact within a few months or maybe seven years down the road or you might not see any fruit. Carlos feels “compelled to…just to keep doing the work and- and not worry what’s it’s going to produce, per
se. Just meeting their needs and making that connection.” As part of the connection and meeting of needs, Carlos uses a “goals assessment” approach that asks the youth to envision their life five years from now. If a youth does not have a vision for his life, then that is a starting point of the life-coach conversation. If a youth has a vision, then the life-coach and youth can engage in conversation around steps that are needed to reach the stated goals. Carlos summarized it this way: “Just really have a conversation, ‘What do you want to do? What do you want to accomplish?’ And then, ‘How can I walk alongside you to achieve those set goals that you just talked about.”

Carlos’ longitudinal and conversational approach to life change may be a result of his 12 years of experience in which he has seen many youth stumble, stall, or fall, but many have recovered. When Carlos was asked how youth are prepared to sustain life change beyond the life-coach relationship, his following answer illustrates his sense of commitment to relationship within a youth’s development:

It's always interesting because a lot of the kids that we work with um, when they get re-arrested or something happens, well, they don't follow through, then, there- there's a sense of shame for them. But, you know, it- it- it always comes back to the relationship. You know, um, I'm able to always come back to them and say, "Listen, I'm not judging you. You know what I mean? I'm still here loving you and supporting you. You know what I mean? It's only sort of a bump in the road. How do we continue, you know, moving forward?” And that's, uh- So, to answer your question, I think a lot of them still want to keep that relationship intact, even once, you know, you don't see them or- or ... you know, our age group is 24, but we continue working with kids, you know, even 30
years old. You know, their relationship never ceases. You know what I mean? Maybe some of the services, but their relationship never ends.

Carlos’s answer substantiates his role as a caring and consistent adult and draws an important distinction between the role of services and the role of relationship. Furthermore, the longitudinal approach of Carlos provides a non-judgmental and safe person for youth to come back to and pick-up where they left off.

Darnell

Darnell has been working as a life-coach for the last 9 years but getting paid for it for two years. His interview was thoughtful and at times emotional. When asked, “What does your relationship with the youth mean to you?” Darnell responded:

Hmm…It means a lot. Um, I’m not sure how to succinctly answer that so…it, it, it’s, it’s an opportunity for me to really walk alongside, um, some young people who, for whatever reason, have experienced a…disconnect from the fullness of what love is. And my relationship with them is simply an opportunity to try to teach them how to be loved. Darnell commented further about his role as a “caring adult,” and then spoke with transparency about failure, communication, and the reciprocal nature of the relationship.

It’s an…opportunity for them to experience, uh, a commitment from a caring adult, but at the same time, it’s beneficial to me because I, when I first meet these, these guys, one of the first conversations I have with them is that, um, at some point, I’m gonna let you down. Um, it’s gonna happen. If you, if, if, if, if you’re relying on me, um, to be there for everything and, and, and, do everything that, that you need there, there gonna be opportunities and ch-, and situations where I don’t fulfill that and your expectations are not gonna be met. Um, but what I say to ‘em, but what I need you to do though, is when
that happens, I need you to let me know, because, um, the, the relationship is not a one-
way street for me.

Darnell sees that the two-way relationship helps youth grow out of distrust by emphasizing communication and accountability within the relationship.

Another aspect of life-coach communication important to Darnell is the opportunity to speak of life, positivity, and encouragement to the young men. For Darnell, the use of such language is very helpful toward identity formation in that “your circumstance does not determine your identity.” He told the story of Jalen, a gang leader, who has obvious leadership gifts that are being “played out in the wrong context.” Rather, than negatively label Jalen as a “gang leader,” Darnell spoke positively to Jalen saying, “You’re an influencer” and “You’ve got people willing to follow you,” and then adds, “Now, the context in what you’re doing it, is not the context that I’d like to see you play it out, but this something that you have, that you’re able to do.” Darnell found a positive way to express Jalen’s giftedness and potential while correcting Jalen by addressing his behavior in its current context rather than making sweeping statements and labeling Jalen by his behavior.

Darnell’s aptness for contextualization came forward when asked to what extent his relationship with the youth is producing life change. Darnell broke down the life change into contextual “moments along the path,” where one walks “alongside of them” and sees “them step into areas they would have never done before.” Examples of such moments are the filling out of a driver’s license application, completing an application for college, or creating a resumé. Darnell illustrated how these moments operate within a goals assessment approach, particularly through an exercise called, “Vision and Current Reality.” During the exercise, a youth is asked to paint the most detailed picture of his personal life dreams and then reciprocally talk about his
current reality. According to Darnell, the exercise powerfully identifies the gap between where a person wants to be and where a person actually is, which “creates a sense of despair” that “can become the motivating factor to say that I need to move from here.” Another key component of life change Darnell identified is the engagement in service to others through compassionate outreach on the streets or in shelters. In so doing, “it provides for them a sense of value,” and lets youth know that “you have ability and power to be able to do what you thought you couldn’t do.”

Lastly, Darnell distinguished his work from other programs and services by saying, “We won’t give up on you. It’s like family. Because family, family, in the, in the truest sense to me, is not…it doesn’t give up on you.” To that end, Darnell mentioned three grown men that life-coaches in his organization have stayed in relationship with for 15, 20, and even 25 years. As Darnell put it, the youth “definitely begin to branch off. They begin to do things on their, their own. They begin to make some advancements on their own, but they’re still…you built the bond. You, you, you’ve built a, like I said man, family. And so when do you cut off family?” Darnell’s commitment to the youth is both hopeful and realistic. His encouraging and supportive approach is a means of empowerment, so that each youth may take on an identity of hope and move toward the future he envisions.

Conclusions

An analysis of the 10 individual cases reveals that each individual makes sense of his discipleship as a positive, supportive, authentic, and loving relationship. When asked, “What does the relationship with your life-coach/youth mean to you?” 3 out of 10, promptly answered, “It means a lot to me,” and all 10 respondents affirmed the value of the relationship. Whereas the literature suggested that trust would be of great importance to the relationship, the researcher
understands the respondents’ mention of “trust” not as the most important aspect of the relationship but as a building block to a deeper relationship. For example, Darius said that “connection leads to trust, which means honesty and respect in the relationship.” For Darius, the deeper aspects of honesty and respect are brought forward in his life-coach relationship.

Furthermore, 3 respondents used the deeper relational term of “bond” to describe their relationship. For instance, Jalen states that his life-coach relationship “means a lot, ‘cause he does a lot for me, and…the relationship and the bond that we’re connected, I feel like I take it um, I mean I take this serious…I love it.”

Furthermore, the positive relational outlook of the youth and life-coach respondents provided opportunity for the life-coach to “push” the youth toward life change in both corrective and encouraging ways. Alex speaks directly of being pushed, saying, “He pushed me to get my jobs, stop, made me stop selling drugs,” and David bluntly states, “I really push them.” The pushing does not guarantee a life-change, but it does signal the life-coach commitment to care, cast vision, and to “walk alongside you to achieve those set goal that you just talked about.” The youth do not understand the life-coach’s commitment as part of his job but sense the commitment coming from a genuine relationship, and the youth are thankful for it.

A detailed examination of the personal lived experiences reveals a continued vulnerability among the youth as evidenced by Adrian’s arrest, Jalen’s incident, and Alex’s homelessness. Furthermore, the youth are moving away from gang relationship and illicit income streams, which makes their relational and financial state vulnerable. For instance, Darius used to sell drugs and have money in his pocket. But now that he does not sell drugs, he has no income. At present, he cannot work a legitimate job due to his commitment to watch his baby sister, so his mom can work. When he needs transportation help, even to take his baby sister to an
appointment, he can call his life-coach, who will come and help, “no problem, no questions asked.” Darius’ life-coach helps bridge the gap from vulnerability to stability.

An analysis of the transcripts found convergence not only in themes, which will be discussed in the next section but also in actual language. For example, Carlos, David, and Terrence all described the life-coach and youth relationship as a “bond,” and all 3 life-coaches spoke of their relationship with the youth as a two-way street in which they learn from the youth, share vulnerabilities with the youth, and expect the youth to hold them accountable. Another example of convergence in actual language is the repeated phrases by Darnell and Carlos of, “caring adults” and “walking alongside,” used to describe their relationship with the youth. More broadly, all 3 of the life-coaches demonstrated convergence in their stated use of the same goals assessment exercise, known as “Vision and Current Reality.” Lastly, there was one example of an actual discipleship dyad using the same language to describe their experience. Lemarcus remarked about Darnell “not giving up on him,” and Darnell spoke of “never giving up on anyone.”

Lastly, this researcher also found divergence among the cases pertaining to the role of faith and religion. For instance, two of the youth did not mention personal faith engagement at all, and two others only mentioned faith engagement in a passive way, with Lemarcus referring to receiving texted Bible passages and Alex referring to only attending church with his life-coach. Therefore, 3 youth expressed an active faith engagement. First was Jamal, who was very fresh in his faith experience and understanding. Second was Jalen, who positively affirmed his love of Bible studies, prayer, and connection with God. And third was Terrence, who seemed very satisfied with the encouragement he received from his life-coach to continue practicing his faith. As Terrence’s discipleship is the basis of the life-coach and proven risk youth relationship
under study, one may have expected more convergence in the dimensions of faith and religion. However, as expected, all 3 life-coaches professed to actively practice faith and modeled that adequately. The surprise for this researcher was how faith engagement was not pushed or forced upon the youth in any way. Jalen commented, “So they’re not all about, ‘Oh yeah come here, preach God, and, wear God, this God, that,’ they don’t do all of that. They don’t try to throw God in your face. You don’t want to go to a Bible study, that’s cool.” As Jalen is one who now loves studying the Bible, it appears that the life-coach example of faith engagement and invitation to participate is seen as constructive by the youth.

As each case has been analyzed individually, IPA subsequently allows for cross-case analysis (J. A. Smith, 2011). The following analysis identifies patterns across the cases and presents the findings in superordinate themes and subordinate themes. Appendix I provides a matrix demonstrating how superordinate themes were identified from the participant data. The three superordinate themes identified are: Help, Relationship, and Life-change. Once the superordinate themes were identified, the researcher returned to the data and identified subordinate or sub-themes that tell the story of Help, Relationship, and Life-change within the discipleship dyads of proven risk youth and their life-coaches. Appendix J demonstrates the superordinate and subordinate relationship of the themes.

The following section presents the three superordinate themes as well as three corresponding sub-themes for each superordinate theme. The detailed descriptions of each sub-theme are given a minimum of three data references per J. A. Smith’s (2011) guidelines for an IPA study with eight or more participants. A conclusion is offered at the end of each superordinate theme section as a means of interpreting the data. The interpretation will be a
double-hermeneutic in the IPA tradition in which the researcher is making sense of how the participants are making sense of their experience.

**Superordinate Theme One: Help**

The theme of help reverberated throughout all 10 interviews. The youth stated their appreciation for receiving help, and the life-coaches stated their dedication to giving help. All of the youth responded to receiving help in some form, with all 7 youth remarking that they had received help from their life-coach in the form of guidance or advice. As the theme of help was further analyzed, the following sub-themes emerged and will be addressed in the following order: Supportive Care, Service Connections, and Empowering Encouragement.

**Sub-theme One: Supportive Care**

Supportive care refers to the ongoing support and care the youth receive and appreciate from their life-coach. The following claims for supportive care, as an aspect of help, are warranted by 3 participant sources. First, for Alex supportive care came in the form of receiving transportation assistance, as well as receiving “good advice,” which often work together. “He picks me up from work, he does this, he talks to me about what I need to start doing.... He takes out his time in the day to sit down and talk to me and give me advice, so obviously some-, somebody cares, you know?” Darius also expressed the value of receiving rides from his life-coach as a form of supportive care.

So when David comes out, I ask him, last person I ask only because you know, sometimes it’s inconvenient for him. I call him and he’ll do with no problem, no questions asked, he’ll come and help me. So it’s very, you know. Helpful.

Later in the interview, Darius uses the term “inconvenient” a second time to express his valuation of David’s support in helping him research information, such as how to get his driver’s
license back. Darius states, “When it’s inconvenient for him, he makes it convenient for me.” It seems that Darius is wise enough to see the supportive care as a real benefit, but one can also see the danger of Darius taking advantage of David’s support.

Sometimes the supportive care can take the form of meeting basic needs, as Jalen mentioned, “He’ll get me some food, like a couple of groceries, buy me some milk and stuff like that.” However, Jalen does not see this help as a long-term supportive solution; rather, when asked how prepared he was to continue his life change on his own, Jalen replied:

But when I started um, when I first got my job and Darnell offered me a ride and said that he’ll give me a ride whenever, took that for granted. I was just like, oh, I got a ride, every day I’m just gonna ask him and he’s gonna give me a ride, and stuff like that, so. I was really relying on him. If I don’t got food, I come up to ask him, he’ll come whenever, but if he couldn’t, then it’s like oh he can’t come, so. I really rely on him kinda. Not at this point ‘cause now I- like I said we’re having discussions and I’m getting to this part where like, I’m knowing, get a bank account, save money, all of that, financial and stuff like that. Get right, go back to school, get a trade, and hopefully I can get a job, a better job and save more money.

As Jalen just stated, supportive care offered by a life-coach can provide the youth daily support to ensure that basic life needs are being met. Once basic life needs are met consistently, a proven risk youth has space to learn and make decisions that can move a youth beyond daily survival toward sustainable growth.

Lastly, a level of supportive care is provided by life-coaches that extends beyond the scope of daily survival, namely, the access to legal help. Darius explains in detail how he received supportive legal care from his trusted life-coach.
I had an incident over, over the weekend, and I brought it to Darnell and David’s attention…And it’s like I brought it cause I trust them, and even at that. That’s like one of the sources…Because if I don’t know one of my rights, I can ask Darnell and David and they’ll find out for me, if that’s really a right that I could say or not. Because even if I look, since I have made and I have the right um…sources, but I know that they could get the better sources because they have more access to better things that I do.

Although access to legal advice and legal advocacy did not come up in the other interviews, Darius’s statement, which came on the heels of a recent legal incident, stands out as important to the lived experience of proven risk youth. The supportive care of a life-coach is a premium value to a youth trying to gain trusted information and guidance in an environment of distrust and misguidance, as the following quote from Darius emphasizes.

Basically. More information to things that, that I didn’t know. Cause like with my license I only have pay $50 and then I could go in front of the board of committees for my license. But the whole time, instead of me paying the $50, I could have paid a lawyer, $200-$300 like me mom did, to find out the same information…Stuff like that, it’s, it’s a great help.

The supportive care of a life-coach is a big part of helping proven risk youth navigate their daily life challenges and move toward future goals. As life-coach Carlos said, “The youth that we work with…typically don’t have like an adult caring relationship. So, keep that in mind…I’m always consistent in reaching out to them and I make sure that um, what I say, I’m going to do.” The follow-through is the support that brings the care to fruition. The same life-coach also understands the intentional relationship as an opportunity to “really provide some of
the needed services for them.” The needed services are discussed in the next sub-theme entitled, service connections.

**Sub-theme Two: Service Connections**

The general role of supportive care often provides opportunity for more specific help in terms of service connections. The following service connections are discussed with reference to seven discipleship participants. The two main services in which life-coaches made connections for youth relate to jobs and education, both of which will be discussed below. Although only mentioned once, it is worth noting that Darnell helped connect Alex with housing services when he was kicked out of his girlfriend’s house. However, during a post-interview transcript verification meeting, the researcher learned that these attempts were unsuccessful and that there seems to be little help available for single men looking for housing.

The theme of help in finding a job was mentioned by 9 out of 10 respondents. The particular aspects of life-coach help toward finding a job include: coaching soft-skills, creating a resumé, purchasing job-ready clothing, and connecting youth to job programs. Several of the youth referenced working alongside their life-coach in a jobs program, including Jamal, Darius, and Jalen. Other youth, like Lemarcus, Alex, and Terrence, hold jobs at outside companies and appreciate the initial connections that their life-coaches made toward their employment as well as the ongoing encouragement toward staying employed.

Regarding education, there are several examples of life-coaches helping connect services to youth. First, Darius shared about how David and Darnell helped him get his high school diploma. Darius said, “I was struggling with my, my high school diploma because I kept getting arrested. And I’m like, I just wasn’t adding up even though I did all my work…they still helped me get my diploma when I was about to give up on it.” Darius received his high school diploma
two years ago, after which he was able to enroll in community college with the help of his life-coach, David, who connected the dots regarding the financial aid services available to him.

Second, Jalen shared about how he dropped out of school, and his life-coach advocated for him to be re-enrolled. Darnell told the story in detail during his interview that illuminated the barriers proven risk youth face and the importance of having caring life-coach support to help pull down those barriers.

Um, I remember walking into a school with a young man. We were trying to get him into school, he wanted back into school. And, um, we walk into the office, and I met with the…actually the superintendent happened to be there…And I walk in with this young man and she says, “What are you doing here?” Very similar tone to that. So I explain who I am, and you know, why we’re here, what we’d like to talk about. And her retort was, “Nope, he ain’t coming back here.” And I said, “Well maybe there’s an opportunity to transfer. This was his home school. Maybe there’s an opportunity to transfer to a different school.” And she said, “No, none of those schools want him either.” This is in the office. In front of secretaries, receptionists…other students. So I said, “Listen, can we go talk in…can we talk in a conference room, in an office about this?”

Darnell went on to explain how the young men he works with have a “folder” that tells people who they are—a folder that proceeds them in everything they do. “In so many areas, they’re constantly being reminded of who…they’re perceived to be.”

Lastly, Darnell commented on the general role of providing services, as it is often “in those areas of, like, a traditional service, like a ride or something like that, that you follow through on, that they begin to see a difference in trust, and-and-and through that, um, then they
can begin to open up to you.” According to Darnell, the consistency of providing traditional services opens up the opportunity to serve the deeper and more personal needs of a youth.

A year and a half later, this is a year and a half of working with him before he begins to tell me, “Listen, there’s abuse in my home,” um, “There’s—there’s, my father doesn’t live here, my mom’s not here, it’s just me and my little brother, um, I don’t have any food in my refrigerator.” That breaks your heart, you know? Especially for me, um, having been through some homelessness and being in that situation, and then-and not…not know who to…sorry man…Not knowing who to-who to go to; who to ask for that type of help.

Tears began to flow down Darnell’s face as he finished his sentence and provided solemn evidence that life-coach supportive care can be personal and may flow from a place of personal pain. In sum, life-coaches provide services to youth at a variety of levels to address a variety of needs. The following sub-theme of help branches beyond human physiological needs and highlights the need for proven risk youth to receive verbal encouragement.

**Sub-theme Three: Empowering Encouragement**

This section on empowering encouragement is discussed with reference to 3 participants’ descriptions of the role and efficacy of encouragement within the discipleship dyad. First, Terrence was the only youth to plainly use the word encouragement, as in the phrase, “because he talks to me and encourages me a lot.” However, Terrence used the word, encouragement, repeatedly and did so with an empowering sense, as in the following:

He’ll— he’ll say that I am worth it, and now I mean, he— he’ll tell me that “you are somebody. You- you will be somebody. You’re going to be somebody growing up and— and it’s something, like it’s somebody I needed and my ears are telling me that you are somebody.” Because sometimes I’m not at always up to power to tell myself that. To
encourage me- to encourage myself that. And that’s something he does as a life-coach, as a brother, as a mentor.

This level of verbal help is what it means to provide empowering encouragement. It’s not just “baby” talk, said Lemarcus, “He helps me help myself…He pushed me to help myself…Really, his verbal support means a lot.” Lemarcus’ experience is congruent with his life-coach’s objective. Darnell said, “What we do is being able to empower them.” In this sense, the encouragement offered is not seen by the youth as a way to placate or coddle but to verbally push in a helpful way, so that ultimately, the youth can encourage themselves.

Finally, David mentioned the important role of encouragement in his relationship with the other life-coaches. He said, “We all speak the same language…we encourage each other…that’s the best thing…you’re going on this- on this journey, but you’re not alone.” Although the life-coaches did not speak explicitly about themselves about job-related stress or the emotional toll exacted on them as they pour out encouragement, care, and constant help, David’s comment illuminates the implicit reality that everyone needs encouragement, and thankfully the life-coaches can and do encourage one another. The following are conclusions drawn by the researcher regarding the superordinate theme of Help.

Conclusions

As the first superordinate theme concludes, it is clear that both youth and life-coaches make sense of their discipleship in terms of Help. Help was given and received in physical, emotional, spiritual, social, financial, familial, legal, and academic domains. Several interpretative conclusions can be made. First, the youth understand their life-coaches as trustworthy and reliable sources of help. As proven risk youth dwell in a high risk environment, finding a dependable person, like a life-coach, who has access to information, resources, and
connections is a huge support. Furthermore, the life-coaches prove their commitment to the youth through their consistent care, as actions speak louder than words. As a response to the committed relationship, the youth open up their lives, which allows the relationship to grow.

Second, the life-coaches understand that supportive care, continued service connections, and encouragement are the only means by which trust and commitment will grow within the discipleship dyad. The life-coaches know that as basic help is given and received, the youth will open up their lives and share deeper needs and more personal needs. However, the life-coaches are not meeting basic needs so that something else will happen in the relationship; rather, the help given by a life-coach is authentic and emanates from compassion. The compassion a life-coach feels is personal, originating from his own risk background or painful moments of life. Lastly, the faith of a life-coach serves as a driver toward helping the youth, by providing a determined optimism as well as a sense of destiny.

Help, as given from life-coaches and received by proven risk youth, is the ground upon which authenticity and trust are built in the relationship. The following section focuses on the relationship within the discipleship dyad and discusses three aspects of relationship evidenced by the proven risk youth and life-coaches under study.

**Superordinate Theme Two: Relationship**

The superordinate theme of relationship was strongly evidenced in the data, with all 10 participants placing a high value on the life-coach and youth relationship. The following account by Terrence will help introduce the sub-themes of relationship and frame the discussion. When Terrence was asked his final interview question regarding ways in which he would want his life-coach relationship to continue, he replied:
Um, I just want him to continue being that support system for me when- when I really need something or when I really need to talk, cause I realized that he do- he has other youth, and he has a family. SO, I don’t bother him as much, because of the- he has other youth and he has a family as well. So, just- just continue being that support system when I do call him and say, “I need you,” and him being there.

This answer catches one’s attention, in that Terrence is referring to a “support system,” but that is only referring to a system of one person—one relationship. Therefore, the relationship is the system by which youth see themselves being served, being encouraged, and being discipled.

The interviewer continued and asked Terrence, “So, as you continue to grow, you’d like the relationship to still be there?” Terrence replied, “Yes.” The interviewer followed up, “But you realize it might- it might change. He has other people he is working with and things like that?” to which Terrence replied, “I know, but see with me I know our relationship won’t change.” The interviewer interjected, “Okay,” and Terrence continued, “because, like I said, he’s not just my life-coach, he’s my brother as well.” Terrence was not making a biological statement, but a familial statement, in that Terrence makes sense of his life-coach relationship in familial terms, as a brother makes sense of his own brother. The following relational sub-themes help make sense of the superordinate theme of relationship and will be discussed in turn: Constant Contact, Committed Authenticity, and Familial Bond.

**Sub-theme One: Constant Contact**

The sub-theme of constant contact refers to the amount of access and continual connection the youth and life-coaches have over the course of their relationship. Six participants who referred to constant contact are referenced in this section. Before specific participant examples are provided, a general overview of constant contact is given. For instance, at a
minimum the life-coach and youth relationships under study have existed for two years, with the longest relationship among the participant having existed for five years. During that time, the youth respondents stated that they spend an average of 3.2 hours/week in communication or contact with their respective life-coaches. The life-coaches spend an average of 31.6 hours/week each in communication or contact with their respective youth. These figures were calculated based on the estimates provided by all respondents. When given a range, this researcher utilized the median number to calculate the average. When the youth were working alongside their life-coach in a jobs program environment, as in the case of Jamal, Jalen, or Darius, the number of hours/week spent together was stated as higher, but this was not factored into the average.

The respondents reported that their contact and communication comprised of texting, phone calls, social media interaction, and face-to-face meetings, which can be one-on-one or in small-group interactions. David commented about the challenge of finding a youth on social media, saying, “Some of them don’t actually have their- their real names on social media. Uh, and then after a while, they just kind of open up and let me know what that is.” Some of the interaction is planned and scheduled, and other times youth just drop by. For example, Lemarcus explained how his interaction with Darnell has diminished over time because, “I- I work and stuff now. I work- and I, and I got my kids.” However, Lemarcus continues to check in, “every couple- couple day. Every other week all most, at the very least.”

The thrust of the constant contact lies in the commitment from the life-coaches to be accessible and communicative. For example, Darnell says, “I’ll stay in contact and communication with them, um, continually. Um, there’s, there’s, there’s no, there’s no endpoint, um, to me.” Darnell’s comments are in line with Carlos’s commitment “to be consistent in that relationship and be intentional,” as well as “walk alongside them.” If a youth goes into prison,
the consistency of relationship continues, as some of the life-coaches have access to visit adult prison and youth detention centers. This access to constant communication is appreciated by Adrian who said, “If you’re having like, a bad day, you can just always call somebody, you know?” Jalen echoes Adrian’s statement, as he reflected on the ways he would want his life-coach relationship to continue.

I mean…his phone calls would definitely go a long way. His phone calls and text message and making sure I’m stil- I’m on the right track and, “How you doin’ over there, you good?” Like I said, be the whole, um, b- be somebody’s hope today and all this other stuff that he be saying like, he’s just- or he’ll send me a phrase from the bible, like all that type of stuff would definitely help in keeping me on th- the right track, so…stuff like that, couple texts here and there, couple call, that would definitely go a long way. So I’ll- that’s the way I’ll- I’ll still like to keep in contact with him.

The life-coaches’ “We won’t give up you,” commitment seems clearly evidenced in their contact and communication habits, and the youth seem eager to see that commitment played out indefinitely. Not only are the relationships committed to communication, but they are also committed to authenticity, as the next sub-theme explains.

**Sub-theme Two: Committed Authenticity**

As previously stated, the life-coach and youth relationship often begins at the level of shared interest. The life-coaches try to find a common point of engagement, such as music, video games, or playing ball. As life-coaches are the initiators of authenticity in the relationship, this section focuses on the remarks made by the 3 life-coaches. For example, according to David, once a connection is made, he builds trust in the relationship by being stable, real, and present in the moment. David goes on to describe the authenticity necessary in building that relationship:
Um, and share where God has brought you from. Um, and be relatable. Um, because if you don’t, kids will just turn you- they’re just, you know. And that- I think that’s what happens a lot. They- they try to connect with some people and- and you hear a lot, “Well, you’ve never lived my life. You have never, uh, um, you don’t have divorced parents. Y-y- you don’t know what it means to go to bed hungry. You don’t know what it means to be shot,” and all that. And some of it, I can relate to it. Some of it I can’t. You know, um. So, but at the same time, even if I can’t relate to th- what exactly they, uh, have- have gone through, I can tell ‘em that, “Okay, um, I’ve never been- I’ve never been in jail. I’ve never been, um, uh, in a gang. Uh, but my father was an addict, you know, and- and he was never there, y’ know. He gave my mom some money on Thursday and won’t come back ‘til Sunday because he had an apartment and he had a- he had- he was living a double life.” So, when comes to poverty, I understand that.

David expounded on his story and explained that “one thing we all have in common is that we’ve all have gone through hurts…and when you talk about it, when you talk about the feeling, um, that a lot of times that kind like brings everything together.” Both Darnell and Carlos shared similar accounts of authenticity in which they shared personal stories, “stories of what we’ve been through,” as a means of finding “commonality.”

The respondents, both youth and life-coaches, used various phrases to describe the authenticity they sought in the relationship, including genuineness, keeping it real, keeping 100 – which means to be honest, and truth-telling. David said it plainly, “Just be yourself. And-and-and, um, because a lot of times these guys, they can smell past the crap, you know.” Just as plainly, David warned against coming into the relationship with an agenda of “You’re gonna learn from me. [If so] you really miss out on something.” As a means of preparation, David says
a prayer, “I say, ‘God speak to me,’ um, and I- and I pray to God that we’re able to learn from something together today. And, um, just kind of go from there, build from there.” The final sub-theme speaks to David’s desire to “build from there.” What is being built is a familial bond.

Sub-theme Three: Familial Bond

Although only 3 respondents used the actual word, “bond,” the majority of life-coaches and youth used familial language to describe their relationship, including the terms: family, my kids, bond, brother, bigger brother, older brother, father, father-brother, and one reference to a husband and wife relationship that was retracted. At a minimum, the youth saw the life-coach as a mentor, friend, and role model. Only Lemarcus seemed to go to some lengths to not identify Darnell in familial terms. But, as the following indicates, he referred to Darnell’s example of being a father as a positive example.

He’s a friend, but it’s a little bit more like a role model, kind of, you know what I mean? Like it’s sort of, more of a- a- a role model. Uh, you know, when people get old, they don’t want say, “Role model,” but I’m not going to say a dad figure, you know what I mean? But I’m going to say he’s a role model. He, like with his family, how he, how he sets the example of being a father. Just thing like that. Like I already knew how to, but he showed me how to perfect my way of being who I want to be, my ideal image of me.

As a whole, the use of familial language supports the inseparable relational bond that exists in many life-coach and youth relationships. This section utilizes data from 6 different participants to substantiate the familial bond sub-theme, and incorporates all 3 life-coaches. For example, Carlos spoke of receiving a recent phone call from a former youth who now lives out of state, and now, as an adult, just wanted to check in. David shared an account of a former youth stopping by, a boxer, who is now married and working, but “he just kinda drops by once in a
blue- and just, ‘Hey,’ just kinda checks in with us.” Lastly, Darnell gave illustration to the “longevity of the relationship” as he reflected on the organization’s recent 30th anniversary in which men, now 40, and 42 years old gave testimony to their ongoing relationship and communication with members of the organization. According to Darnell, the ongoing and committed adult relationships continue to involve guidance:

It’s not every day as intense as it is in the initial, but just in the moments where they need... “Hey listen, I just need some guidance, um... I’m just not sure... um, I’m struggling with this, how can you help me, you know, I just need someone to talk to about this,” they, they, they stay connected with that... they begin to make some advancements on their own, but they’re still... you build the bond. You, you, you’ve built a, like I said man, family.

Terrence brought forward a healthy perspective of the familial bond from a youth perspective in that he sees his life-coach as a brother, which seems to make learning from his life-coach reciprocal and accessible. Terrence states:

As being colleagues and as being brothers, I can learn from him. Sometimes he learns from me, and just being that- like I said continue being my support- my support system.

Continue being that person out here to motivate me, to encourage me to continue doing better.

It seems for Terrence that being a “peer leader” alongside David and being his “brother” brings his life-coach relationship to an accountable and, yet, mutual learning relationship. Perhaps thinking of one’s life-coach as a father figure can be a stumbling block, in that some youth have not had healthy experiences with their fathers or have never even met their fathers. For example, Carlos commented that he never met his father until he was 40 years old, and Lemarcus stated,
“My own father, he never taught me nothing, you know what I mean? He ain’t never taught me anything.” The only youth or life-coach to say anything positive about his natural father was Jalen, who commented on his father going back to trade-school and now driving a Mercedes Benz, which serves as an inspiration to Jalen. The following are conclusions drawn by the researcher regarding the superordinate theme of Relationship.

Conclusions

The contact, the authenticity, and the bond necessary to deliver a system of relational support to proven risk youth is held in only one person, the life-coach. The life-coach is the driver of relationship, someone who chooses to be accessible as well as intentionally communicative. In short, the life-coach sets the tone in the relationship, which begins with genuine connection, progresses through constant contact, while growing in honesty and intimacy, such that the participants refer to one another as brother, as family. Despite the innate pressure to meet measurable goals or demonstrate progress, the life-coach is careful not to approach the relationship with an agenda. Therefore, the life-coach is like an artisan who is patient, skillful, and faithful to add the right relational ingredients and the right touch, in hopes of positive outcomes.

The youth seem to understand and appreciate the value of the life-coach relationship. The appreciation demonstrated by the proven risk youth makes sense in that the youth have grown up under systemic stereotyping, constant environmental risk, and pervasive relational vulnerability but now have access to someone reliable to talk with on a daily basis. Furthermore, the youth see the significance of learning taking place through the role modeling, guidance, and mutual accountability within the life-coach relationship. As such, each youth desired a long-term, even
life-long, relationship with their life-coach. As the superordinate themes progressed from Help to Relationship, the final theme of Life Change exemplifies the next step in discipleship.

**Superordinate Theme Three: Life-change**

Life-change in this section will be discussed largely from the perspective of the youth, as the ZPD framework focuses the life change of a less knowledgeable person being influenced by a more knowledgeable person. All 10 participants referred to the role of life-change or having a sense of higher purpose in their interviews. The following sub-themes of life-change emerged from the data and will be addressed in the following order: Faith Development, Higher Purpose, and Identity Formation.

**Sub-theme One: Faith Development**

As discipleship is a learning relationship within the faith tradition, one would expect to find faith development as a dimension of life change. As previously mentioned, the data bear witness to faith development within the youth and faith development as made available by the life-coaches. The following evidence of life-change stems from the data of 5 participants. For example, Jalen spoke of going to church and practicing his faith through service. Lemarcus received helpful text messages of scriptures from Darnell. Terrence not only gave testimony of his decision to follow God and ensuing life-change but also described how his life-coach encouraged his faith development. As the following account demonstrates, Terrence’s decision to follow Christ was a result of hearing a preacher just days after bullets whizzed by his head in a gang-related shooting; one in which he was mistaken for his brother.

Um, and he was like, "Some of you all was in a big, old huge altercation this week to where your life was about to end. It was about to take your life away, shot at," and we all, like all of us are looking at each other like, "He's talking to us." I'm like ... I started crying
and said- that was- that was a call, a wonder from God calling you to come, and “You're here today come, come, come,” and when he said I got up and I ran to the altar crying, and I was like, "That's me you was talking to." I told him the story of what happened, and I told him the story of what happened, and how everything happened that night, and he was just like, "Wow." And I've been going to church ever since then.

Terrence stated that he was raised in church by his foster parents and was also taken to church by his grandmother, but on this occasion, as a guest in a different church, Terrence made a decision to follow Christ and continues to do so today. When asked how his life-coach influenced his faith, Terrence responded, saying, “Oh yeah, he does,” and then relayed the following account.

 Cause, hmm, like I said, when I went- when I went- when there were times that I wanted to leave church, when I went off- when I wanted to leave God period, and he would be like, "Terrence, you can't." And he- he brings back the moments of like, "You remember what God did for you? You can't leave God. You remember how God brought you out of some many- so much mess, and He could have gave up on you, but He didn't. Don't give up on Him." And he will just say, "You know what to do. You've got to pray and talk to God." And like [inaudible 00:19:35], but I'll- I'll go pray and I'll talk." And that's a big part of me.

Terrence’s life-coach provided accountability and re-directed Terrence to develop his own faith through prayer, rather than through conversation. The life-coach also provided general encouragement and companionship toward attending church and keeping Terrence’s faith development alive.
Another youth under study, who demonstrated significant faith development as a part of his life-change was Jamal. As stated previously, Jamal experienced a faith-conversion just days prior to the interview and, therefore, was on the front end of the faith development. However, even though a new faith, Jamal described a recent life situation in which his developing faith informed him and influenced his response to a tense situation.

Okay. So a couple days ago it was a negative situation that I was lookin' at, goin' to jail for something I had absolutely not done anything wrong in this situation. I was just there. So automatically, me being there, I was placed under custody until they figured out the situation. And the severity of it was like it sounded like [inaudible 00:10:41]. So now I'm panickin' thinkin' like I'm about to go to jail for somethin' I didn't even do. And like I just got tired of that, you know what I mean? The negativity. So I was just basin' everything off of like if I get, I'm gonna get what I put into life. So if I look for positive things, and here's the thing. Carlos always leads me in a positive direction. If I look for positive things um, I'm gonna attract positive things in my life, and my life will turn around due to that fact. But it's just so ... that's when the change, that's when the change was like, I tried to start makin' the change.

Jamal’s move from negativity to positivity was his description of life-change. Jamal referenced his life-coach, Carlos, as his model of positivity. The next quotation illustrates Carlos’ approach to faith development.

So, for me, I always come back to the foundation. You want to build the sort of strong foundation. So, for me, my foundation is my faith, um, and then, as I share that, then they- they become intrigued. They [inaudible 00:15:03]. They- they're- they're- they really are. They're like sponges. They want to know, you know, what else could they do?
Um, so, I share, you know, my faith and where it has gotten me, um, because again, being a faith-based organization, you know, it's- it's- it's part of uh, our core beliefs. Um, and then, you know, they're intrigued by it or they'll- they ask questions, and we just engage it. Um, and then, it sort of takes sort of a- a life of its own.

Carlos approaches faith development within the youth as extension of sharing his own story of faith, and specifically how faith serves as the foundation of his life. Again, the life-coach’s faith was not pushed onto the youth but was shared as an authentic life experience. According to Carlos, as the subject of faith was introduced into conversations with you, the intrigue grows, which then leads to more conversation about faith and life. As the next sub-theme illustrates, life-change also incorporates a youth’s sense of higher purpose, which for many is articulated as moving away from one’s current reality toward career and family.

**Sub-theme Two: Higher Purpose**

As the ZPD model demonstrates, a sense of higher purpose is just that - a sense of purpose – a purpose that is in process and has not yet been fully realized. The interviews often revealed a sense of higher purpose or a “vision for life” that included a sense of career and family life, and in some cases, steps were already taken in that direction. The following evidence for higher purpose as a sub-theme of life-change is taken from 4 participant youth. For example, Terrence shared his vision of moving beyond being peer leader and having a career in working with youth, stating: “I’m going to school in January to be a youth worker. Um, but that’s my career, because I realize…that the- the youth- there’s nobody that wants to give them the chance, and I know what they’re going through.”

Adrian shared his vision of going to school to become a barber. He took steps in that direction by “talking to, to many like, the, the shops…and trying to do like, apprentice stuff, but
for now, just to do, like, sweeping, cleaning, try to earn some money so I can go to school.”

Alex’s description provides a more robust view of the how the life-coach relationship related to his development of a higher purpose.

He…He opened up my mind, just like, not…It’s not all about me. It’s not…It’s not all about me. There’s, there’s something to live for in life instead of just buying shoes and clothes and jewelry all the time. Why don’t you take your money and go and go invest it somewhere, and, to something where you’ll have money in the long run that um, will…It will be a predicament that I, will n-, never always be broke or having to ask for money. You know, that’s why I have a job and I can rely on a check now to support myself and my family.

Alex credited his life-coach relationship with opening his mind to see a higher purpose, something to live for beyond himself and materialism.

Another strand within the sub-theme was the youth’s understanding of having a “higher purpose” based solely on surviving the violence on the streets. Terrence described the violence he narrowly escaped saying, “And there is no way in possible I’m supposed to be here today, and I feel like that was God trying to get my attention, because I’m sorry, um, my, um, they- they went to start shooting, and I heard the gun- the bullet literally go past my ear.” Terrence went on to describe his higher purpose in being there for other youth, who may have experienced similar life situations to himself.

And so, I realized I had to keep making it also so I can be there for them, to be that support. Because if I give up, who’s going to be there for them? And that’s- that’s- that’s one of the things that I- stick in my head, if I give up, who’s going to be there?
Jamal also shared a compelling account of higher purpose based on watching people die so young. As the following demonstrates, Jamal wondered if their life may have been spared if someone was there to communicate a higher purpose to them.

They might of put themselves in that situation or whatever. And they passed or whatever. You just feel like it was wrong. That they were robbed of their life. But, they probly ... I don't know. It just happens like that. It might not happen like that if they had listened to somebody tellin’ ’em that they have a higher purpose in life and were listening. ‘Cuz that's how I know that, I believe that I have a higher purpose in life and that everything's right. The way in which Jamal and Terrence make sense of their life, the brevity of life, and the role of “higher purpose” is a sobering reminder of the danger these young men live through every day.

**Sub-theme Three: Identity Formation**

According to the literature, the capstone of Christian discipleship is to be formed into the image of Christ, identifying with Christ in terms of one’s values, thoughts, behavior and character demonstrates the maturity of learning from the more knowledgeable other, namely Christ. As one understands Christian discipleship as learning from another person, one expects to see life-coach example-setting and influence in the formation of the youth but still within the larger goal of becoming like Christ. However, the goal of becoming like Christ was understated in the data, with only David giving direct reference to discipleship plans that involved the Christ-like behavior of peace-making and relational restoration between gang members. Rather, as the following two prime participant examples demonstrate, the data revealed the identity formation as a process of uncovering one’s authentic personality, one’s real identity.

Lemarcus provided some helpful understanding of how he made sense of the influence of his life-coach relationship upon identity formation. For example, Lemarcus said,
I’ve matured, but he- he brought a different level of matureness out of me...I just I…Like I really didn’t have…I had stability, but my- my understanding of stability was different. And- and I guess he helped me be a civilian, to be honest. I want to say that. He helped me become a- a- an independent civilian, a man, do you know what I mean?

Lemarcus worked hard in his interview not to appear to be seen negatively, stating that he “wasn’t like a terror” or “wasn’t like a super hard thug or anything.” Lemarcus was not suffering from a negative self-image. Rather, he saw Darnell as helpful in pulling out the real Lemarcus, as the following indicates:

I was, I was, I was a regular street kid, you know what I mean? I was a ‘hood person, but I feel like he- he helped me get all my balls in a basket, you know what I mean? He helped me understand like what I, what I, what I, what I feel is idea of who to relatives, or who- who I should be, because I don’t want to follow Darnell. Like I, like I mean I don’t want to be Darnell, do you know what I mean? I want to be the best form of what I can be of me, my best form me, you know what I mean?

In this way, the identify formation revealed in the data is divergent from a traditional view of Christian discipleship. However, the divergence makes sense from a stage development perspective in which the life-coach first allows the youth to identify with himself before being concerned with helping the youth identify with Christ. As the identity formation takes place in the proven risk context, the youth must also overcome environmental dangers, societal labels, and stereotypes as well as peer pressure to conform to the street.

Carlos’s interview provided an interesting perspective on identity formation as well. Similar to Lemarcus, the first aspect he addressed related to personality, but Carlos added an understanding of the shame a youth needs to overcome in order to uncover his personality.
I think shame is really anchored on to a lack of identity. You know, when a kid doesn't know who he is, um, and what he's capable of and- and what he's called to. Um, all the doubts, a- and- and all the history and- and, you know, sort of anchor him back down to the ground and- and that- that continues to propel that- that shame, that feeling shame. "I'm not- I'm not worthy of this, and- and I'm going to continue doing this and- and my father is this and- and my mother's this or my cousin, my brothers." So, it ... you know, when they have a indac- identity, who they are, you know, they're always sort of um, sort of like Jekyll and Hyde. Today, they might be this. Tomorrow they might be that.

The interviewer asked Carlos to describe how the process of identity formation might work with the youth, and Carlos’ answer was grounded in the aforementioned, Vision and Current Reality paradigm.

You know, "Where are you at right now? And [inaudible 00:22:15] i- it's- it's- it's sad that they don't ... they're not challenged to answering that. You know, um, they're able to tell you, "You know, um, I'm a gang member. Um, I smoke weed. I- I- I- I got three kids from two different mothers. I don't have a job. You know what I mean? I have a- I have a felony and you know." So, all of that, it just comes out, comes out. So, then, you start talking about, "Okay, cool. So, this is current reality. What steps do we take to make that vision come to reality?" You know, like I had mentioned...an unprecedented future. So, from there, we start building, building, building. "Okay, let's set up some goals." And- and then, we start putting life-coaches in their lives and- and maybe pastors or mentors in their lives that support them in that. You know, so now, they have the hope. Now, they see something different.
Carlos’s answer speaks of setting goals and equipping the youth with life-coaches and support so that they have hope. Although Carlos is the only life-coach to use the word, “hope,” it seems that hope is integral to a youth’s realization that there is a life beyond their current experience; which according to Carlos, will require a new personal identification to anchor their future reality. The following are conclusion drawn by the researcher regarding the superordinate theme of Life-Change.

**Conclusions**

The proven risk youth make sense of their life-change largely in “moments.” For example, Jalen understood that his life is changing by going to church, which is a moment in his week. Terrence received encouragement from his life-coach to practice his faith and pray on his own, which is a moment in time. However, in some cases the moment takes on a larger sphere of impact for the youth. For instance, both Jamal and Terrence sensed their life-change when they realized they were on Earth for a higher purpose. Their survival of the streets provided a moment of understanding that broadened their horizon of life and opened them to a higher sense of purpose. Furthermore, Jamal’s move from negativity toward positivity created a lasting-moment of attitudinal change, which probably kept him from going to jail and currently keeps his mind occupied as he ponders the implications of his life-change toward positivity. Thus, in the same way that meeting basic physiological needs precipitated the unveiling of deeper and more personal proven risk youth needs, the moments of life-change may open up a youth to a deeper life-change as evidenced by Lemarcus. As such, life-change through connected moments is congruent with the Christian understanding of transformation.

As the most mature youth participant, Lemarcus articulated his life-change as a self-actualization, a formation of the best form of himself. Not only did Lemarcus speak of his life-
coach helping him be a man but also made clear that he was his own man, not an imitation of his life-coach. Even further, Lemarcus’ identity formation included the creation of a narrative to make sense of his life. Although Lemarcus’ narrative does not embody a sense of being like Christ, as represented in discipleship, his narrative demonstrates the potential of discipleship to provide authentic life-change within proven risk youth. Although only one youth demonstrated such an acute stage of life-change, the sense in which life-change is hoped for and appreciated was demonstrated by all the participants.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to understand how discipleship dyads of proven risk youth and life-coaches make sense of their discipleship. The research data were first analyzed by the 10 individual participant cases and secondly analyzed through a cross-case analysis. The cross-case analysis found the following three superordinate themes emerge from the data: Help, Relationships, and Life-change. Proven risk youth and life-coach discipleship dyads make sense of their discipleship in giving and receiving help, being in an authentic and bonded relationship, and experiencing moments and stages of life-change.

The findings are valid and trustworthy as evidenced by the following. First, the interview data were verified by each participant. Second, each participant voice was heard in each individual case that was analyzed. Third, the cross-case analysis yielded superordinate themes and sub-themes that were substantiated by the data. And lastly, the analysis and the interpretation of the data were sufficiently warranted by the data.

In short, the discipleship dyads of proven risk youth and life-coaches develop a genuine and trusted relationship that allows for help to be given and received. The help begins by life-coaches meeting the basic needs of the youth and then grows to include providing advice,
guidance, advocacy, and faith development. The relationship serves as the foundation of the learning and growth, and as such, the relationship is highly valued and seen as a life-long bond. The life-coach’s concern, care, encouragement, and knowledge definitely rubs off on the youth, and produces moments of life-change as well as sustained life-change, including identity formation, attitudinal change, and behavioral change. The proven risk youth can all see the possibility of sustaining their life-change beyond the life-coach relationship but desire to stay in the relationship with their life-coach, having experienced the value of a true friend and a family bond.

As the analysis and findings of the research have been presented, the next chapter provides further discussion of the findings with respect to the current literature and the theoretical framework. The next chapter also provides a conclusion and recommendations for future practice and future research.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The purpose of this study was to understand how discipleship dyads of proven risk youth and life-coaches make sense of their discipleship. The theoretical framework of Vygotsky’s (1978) Zone of Proximal Development was used to situate this study. According to Anfara and Mertz (2006), theory provides a framework so that the phenomena can be examined in specific ways. The ZPD theory suggests that what a youth is unable to do on his own may be obtained through interaction with a more knowledgeable person and subsequently integrated, so that a youth can independently continue to perform what is learned without the presence of the more knowledgeable person. Therefore, the theoretical framework will be used in this chapter to examine the way in which learning occurs between a more knowledgeable life-coach and a less knowledgeable proven risk youth.

The qualitative research methodology used to explore how discipleship dyads of proven risk youth and life-coaches make sense of their discipleship was Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). IPA focuses on understanding an experience and making sense of that experience and is an appropriate methodological choice to research human lived experiences, particularly in settings of psychological distress, threat, transition, and identity formation (Dowling, 2007; Larkin et al., 2006; McNabb, 2016; J. A. Smith et al., 2009). Therefore, IPA fits the settings of proven risk youth and life-coach discipleship and allowed the participants’ lived experiences to be heard through semi-structured interviews and interpreted using a double-hermeneutic in which the researcher made sense of how the participants made sense of their discipleship.

To understand discipleship among life-coaches and proven risk youth, the following research question was asked: How do discipleship dyads of proven risk youth and life-coaches make
sense of their discipleship? The research found answers to that question in three emergent superordinate themes, each of which is supported by three sub-themes:

- Help was given by life-coaches and received with appreciation by proven risk youth. The help was described and understood as:
  
  i. Supportive Care  
  ii. Service Connections  
  iii. Empowering Encouragement  

- Relationship was seen by both life-coaches and youth as the foundation of discipleship. The relationship was described and understood as:
  
  i. Constant Contact  
  ii. Committed Authenticity  
  iii. Familial Bond  

- Life-change, as a goal of discipleship and was experienced by all participants. Life-change was described and understood as:
  
  i. Faith Development  
  ii. Higher Purpose  
  iii. Identity Formation  

The following sections present and discuss the key findings, which are the three superordinate themes. Each finding is presented and discussed with respect to the current literature on proven risk youth and life-coach discipleship as well as the ZPD theoretical framework. A conclusion of the key findings will be presented, followed by sections dedicated to Recommendations for Practice, Limitations, and Recommendations for Future Research. The first finding to be presented is Help.
Help

The finding of Help will be discussed with respect to the current literature and then with respect to the theoretical framework.

Current Literature

The desire for life-coaches to give help and the acceptability of proven risk youth to receive help was clear in the research data and clear in the literature. For example, Lanker’s (2012) qualitative study found that natural mentoring feels like friendship in which real care, real concern, consistent love, and empowerment takes place. Help, as defined by the interviewees took on similar language and was described as care, support, and empowerment. Furthermore, Darius described a life-coach’s concern for him by stating, “When it’s inconvenient for him, he makes it convenient for me,” in other words, a life-coach’s care-filled concern to help a proven risk youth is sufficiently high enough to overcome obstacles of convenience.

The literature also spoke of help in terms of riding, that is, the commitment of help given by someone to a person in lock-up (Goffman, 2014). The help may be financial, for example, paying bail, or may be support through human presence, like showing up for court dates or visits while in lock-up. One of the life-coaches reported that, sadly, he may be the only visitor some of the proven risk youth receive while in lock-up. The fact that the youth see the life-coach as a helpful presence through thick and thin, even more so than a friend, girlfriend, or parent, is significant to how discipleship is understood. As one life-coach said, “The youth that we work with…typically don’t have like an adult caring relationship.” It is clear from the youth participant responses that the adult caring relationship and subsequent help received is appreciated.
An interesting contrast between the data and the literature is the type of help that was emphasized and not emphasized. For instance, the research participants repeatedly mentioned the help received from their life-coaches in basic needs, like food, rides, loaning money, service connections, and good advice. However, the literature did not emphasize the role of helping meet basic needs but, rather, focused on legal help, educational help, and job/employment help. The latter categories of help were also evidenced in the participant data but usually not spoken of first. The youth under study seemed to make sense of their discipleship in receiving help toward meeting the basic needs of life, which makes sense given Maslow’s (1943) hierarchical needs. Maslow theorized that a person’s basic needs must first be met before he or she can desire the greater needs. Maslow ordered human needs as follows, with the first mentioned being the most basic and the last mentioned being the most advanced: physiological, safety, love/belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. The findings demonstrate a participant focus on the basic needs of physiological, safety, and love/belonging; whereas, the current literature neglected the physiological need and favored the higher needs. For example, in the case of the ethnographies under review, needs of safety, social-respect, belonging, and self-esteem were largely in view (Anderson, 1999; Goffman, 2014; Rios, 2011).

Some of the help evidenced in the findings also came in the form of verbal support and encouragement. As Terrence admitted, sometimes he is not up to power to encourage himself. To combat this, Darnell clearly states that the role of the life-coach is to empower the youth. Although the literature under review does not speak directly of encouragement within discipleship, Godshalk and Sosik (2000) found that protégé development occurs when mentors offer individualized consideration and inspirational motivation. Individualized consideration and inspirational motivation seem to fit well within the role of the encouragement described by the
respondents. Empirical research found a positive correlation between a follower’s attachment security with a leader and the mental health and performance of a follower (Davidovitz et al., 2007). This implies that when proven risk youth have a healthy mental disposition, which may be influenced through encouragement, the youth feel secure in their attachment to a life-coach.

Lastly, another aspect of help through empowering encouragement relates to the spiritual encouragement youth received from their life-coaches. For example, 2 youth spoke of the positive nature of receiving texted Bible passages texted, and 2 youth spoke of the value of being encouraged to pray. The current literature suggests that spirituality and practices like, prayer and scripture reading, positively correlate to productivity, effective leadership, and leader resilience (Dent et al., 2005; Reave, 2005). This implies that youth who are helped by their life-coaches through Bible reading and prayer may positively experience productivity, effectiveness, and resilience in leadership. In the case of the youth, the increase productivity could be in their job, education, or readiness for life. Equally, the youth may experience more effectiveness in leading themselves and their families, all of which corroborates the potential of the ZPD, in that what a youth is unable to do on his own, he can now do with encouragement from a more knowledgeable life-coach.

**Theoretical Framework**

Beyond the literature, the findings regarding “Help” also correlate to the ZPD theoretical framework. For example, Lemarcus described the empowering encouragement he received from his life-coach in the following ZPD friendly language: “He helps me help myself…He pushed me to help myself…Really, his verbal support means a lot.” The ZPD conceptualizes that Lemarcus has a higher developmental level with assistance than he has on his own and that the more knowledgeable life-coach will help Lemarcus learn. In this case, help came in the form of
pushing and verbal support. Rather than the life-coach “doing” things for him, Lemarcus was pushed and encouraged to “do” for himself. According to Lemarcus, without his life-coach, he would probably be back in jail. Instead, he now holds a job and supports his girlfriend and children. Furthermore, Lemarcus received life-coach encouragement through texted Bible passages and even gifts given to his children. As ZPD theory predicted, the help/assistance that Lemarcus received pushed him to achieve more than his former developmental level allowed.

Another example of ZPD integration with the data occurred in the form of accountability. For instance, part of the life-coach’s role is to help a youth keep his commitment, which according to one life-coach is sometimes really hard because it creates tension in the relationship. Once a youth sets a developmental goal or makes a commitment, the life-coach is there to encourage and hold the youth accountable to the goal he has set. The ZPD is about receiving help from a more knowledgeable person so that one can perform at a higher level than could otherwise be achieved. Sometimes the life-coach’s role is simply to keep the youth in the learning zone by encouraging them not to give up. This requires a commitment on the part of the both the life-coach and the youth who have to live within the tension of that commitment. Therefore, it seems that as trust helps the relationship develop, it is commitment that motivates and sustains the discipleship in developmental growth.

In short, the life-coaches and youth made sense of their discipleship in giving and receiving help. However, the help was not only a giving and receiving of physiological help and service connection but also included verbal support and encouragement, which empowered youth to achieve more than they could on their own. The discipleship literature anticipated such learning as an emulation of Christ in attitudes, values, and behaviors (Huizing, 2011; St. Clair, 1985). In Lemarcus’ case, the emulation was not directly of Christ, but indirectly of Christ, as
observed in his life-coach. As the key finding of Help has been discussed, the next section will
discuss the key finding of Relationship.

**Relationship**

The finding of Relationship will be discussed with respect to the current literature and
then with respect to the theoretical framework.

**Current Literature**

The literature as well as the data strongly represented the key finding of relationship.
However, as the literature focused on the purpose of the relationship being learning, the
participants focused on aspects of the relationship that included constant contact, committed
authenticity, and having a familial bond. One may synthesize the literature with the participant
data and surmise that proven risk youth and life-coaches make sense of their discipleship as a
learning relationship with high contact that is committed to truth-sharing and honesty and feels
more like a friendship-brotherhood than a teacher-student relationship. The following paragraphs
substantiate this claim further.

The literature made clear that discipleship is a learning relationship in which a less
knowledgeable person learns to be like Christ from a more knowledgeable person (Brock, 2014;
Fleming & Cannister, 2010; Houston, 2011; Peterson, 2013). However, the data do not bear
witness “to being like Christ” as a stated goal within the relationship; the youth appreciated the
fact that religion was not pushed by life-coaches but was offered. As life-coaches highlighted,
they do not approach their youth relationships with an agenda, as this would violate the
committed authenticity. Rather, they focus on building a relationship by being genuine, being
present, and sharing stories of life—an exchange of what we have been through. Furthermore, a
reciprocal commitment to authenticity and learning exists, in that all life-coaches spoke of
openly sharing their own failures, life-struggles, and dreams with the youth while learning something from the youth they work with. However, this shared level of honesty and truth-sharing from the life-coach was not represented in the literature. Another contrast between the data and literature relates to the free-flowing style of the life-coaches who emphasized the actual relationship, not the learning goals. This was divergent from the literature that suggested a mentoring structure that included steps to be followed (Wakeman, 2012).

The indirect and informal learning within the discipleship dyads may also be connected to the literature through the terms observation, learning, and emulation. For example, the literature distinguishes discipleship from programmatic learning by embracing observational-learning that is relational, intentional, informal, outward focused, and accomplished within the context of community (Coleman, 1993; Huizing, 2011). Such a definition of discipleship is completely in sync with the data. Furthermore, Huizing (2011) and St. Clair (1985) call for disciples to “observe” or put into practice what they learn, which the data bears out in life-coach accountability within the ZPD. Lastly, indirect and informal learning is linked in the literature to emulation of a leader’s behavior on the basis of close association and relational-proximity between them (Chole, 2001; Gronn, 1996). Such a description matches the constant contact and level of committed authenticity that exist in the discipleship dyads under study.

An important aspect of dyad relationship is the stated and subtle need for both parties to simply be present. Terrence spoke of his life-coach, David, saying, “I need you,” and the reality of “him being there.” “Being there” or “being present” was a phrase used by Terrence’s life-coach, David, to describe not just being in the same vicinity but being emotionally present, socially present, and being genuine in the moment. This sense of being present was represented in the literature through the dialogical approach of Heidegger, Buber, and Gadamer, that brings
about a hermeneutical understanding through the acknowledgement of presence and listening (Binding & Tapp, 2008; Gordon, 2011). Furthermore, respect, trust, care, and support are all aspects that speak to the quality and integrity of a mentoring relationship (Holsinger & Ayers, 2004; Slicker & Palmer, 1993). Therefore, it is the genuineness of “being present” that connects the indirect and informal approach demonstrated by the discipleship dyads with the larger spiritual learning goal of discipleship referenced in the literature. For example, according to Brock (2014), discipleship is living with Jesus in the present and leading others into a life of learning to be like Jesus. As all 3 life-coaches spoke of their own faith in Jesus as foundational to their personal identity and concern for the proven risk youth, it seems that the life-coaches demonstrated great skill in being present with both Jesus and being present with the youth. This appears to be what Fleming and Cannister (2010) referred to as the agency of transformation as both by the Spirit and by the Spirit’s work through humans, such that the Spirit can reach through the adult life-coach and transform the life of a youth.

Relationship, as a key finding, was also connected to the risk factor literature. For example, Jamal spoke of wanting his friends to experience the life-change that he was experiencing, and Adrian shared his account of introducing his life-coach to his real friends, the ones he actually hangs out with. Both of these youth are referencing their gang relationships, which according to Thornberry et al. (2003) continue to place the youth at risk. Should a youth conduct himself one way around his life-coach and another way around his gang, this would be an example of “code switching” (Goffman, 2014). What seems astounding is that both Jamal and Adrian do not advocate code-switching but advocate for extending their life-coach relationship and what they have learned from their life-coach to their friends in the gang. In this sense, the
relationship within the discipleship dyad serves as a protective factor to counteract negative relationships (Matz, 2014; Zimmerman et al., 2002).

Lastly, a presentation of the key finding of relationship with respect to duration is warranted. The literature demonstrated a consistent message of recommended duration for mentoring/discipleship relationships. For example, Kram (1983) states that six months to one year is the “initiation” phase of the relationship and that career and psychosocial functions expand during years two through five in the “cultivation” phase. Lanker (2012) seems to support Kram by stating that real trust is built only after six months of relationship. Furthermore, several authors state that mentoring should be at least one year of intense and intentional contact (Keating et al., 2002; Tolan et al., 2012). Therefore, the literature suggested a minimum of one year of relationship and noted the importance of relational cultivation during years two through five. The participant experience seems to verify Kram’s understanding of the importance of years two through five. Furthermore, Kram denoted subsequent “separation” and “redefinition” phases in which a mentoring relationship continues but takes on a significantly different characteristic. These phases were also evidenced in the participant data as life-coaches remarked about the ongoing relationship with youth who are now adults; and current proven risk youth remarked about the familial bond they experience with their life-coaches, a bond which will never end.

Theoretical Framework

The ZPD related to the key finding of relationship in several ways. First, the ZPD is social and active learning under guidance (Vygotsky, 1978). The learning under guidance is seen as an interaction more than a knowledge transfer (Roth & Radford, 2010). As such, the youth and life-coaches interact within their discipleship relationship and are free to talk, share, and learn. As such, Moll (1990) sees the ZPD from an educational perspective as a means of
“exploratory talk” and “social mediations” that assist student learning rather than following structured cues from an adult. The sense of talking and spending time together within the dyad was well documented in the data and provided a safe environment for life-coaches to ask tough questions, and leading questions, which allowed youth to self-reflect on their choices. In this sense, Geibelhaus and Bowman (2002) refer to the ZPD as a framework for feedback and modeling.

As the ZPD is relational and interactive, it is not surprising that the youth referred to their life-coaches as friend and brother. Whereas, Wringe (2009) understood discipleship as an expression of commitment in which a disciple willingly believes in the authority of another, the participants never spoke of authority structures within their relationship. However, the dyads did speak of commitment to one another. This commitment to one another seems to indicate a willing cooperation within the dyad, which according to Vygotsky (1978), will eventually produce behavioral change within the youth, as the youth first subordinate to the rule of group play (in this case the dyad) and then later voluntarily self-regulate behavior as an internal function. As long as youth stay in discipleship with their life-coach, the ZPD unfolds a process of learning. Vygotsky even sees the cooperation of the youth in the learning process as a basis for the development of a youth’s moral judgment.

Second, the ZPD is integral to understanding how youth and life-coaches make sense of their discipleship, in that all of the participants under study had a long-term view of their relationship with one another and of their learning. For instance, Carlos spoke of youth who were rearrested as experiencing a “bump in the road.” ZPD predicts these “bumps in the road” by understanding that developmental process lags behind the learning process. The ZPD “defines those functions that have not yet matured but are in process of maturation” (Vygotsky, 1978, p.
Therefore, a mistake or legal infraction by a proven risk youth highlights the area of learning that is yet to mature, so that a life-coach can focus guidance, encouragement, and support upon the area of learning. This type of moment-by-moment learning also correlates to spiritual formation, as Estep (2002) sees the ZPD as a non-linear form of spiritual formation.

Third, as Valsiner and Van de Veer (1993) point out, ZPD is descriptive rather than explanatory. As one considers how proven risk youth and life-coach discipleship dyads make sense of their discipleship, one can adequately sense the high and long-lasting value that both persons place on the relationship, and one can clearly hear the commitment and authenticity represented in their language. However, one cannot mechanically explain in linear fashion exactly how the discipleship works. This may be a contributing factor to the low-level commitment of religious institutions to implementing discipleship and discipleship-training, as was evidenced in the literature (Bell & Dudley, 2004; Kleingartner, 2001; Stache, 2014; Tangenberg, 2012). However, in the view of this researcher, the results of life-change are strong enough to warrant more engagement in discipleship, not less. As the following paragraph illuminates, a formal training in discipleship may not be a stumbling block to engagement.

According to Estep (2002), ZPD theory understands language as a mediating growth mechanism within the domain of spiritual formation. Language is the means by which one provides encouragement and shares one’s faith from one person to another. As ZPD supports the social learning relationship of discipleship, one can begin to see the primary use of language in the learning relationship. For example, Adrian appreciated his life-coach’s verbal encouragement, and Jalen commented positively on the modeling his life-coach provided: “He keeps me on the right track.” In both cases, the life-coach is providing consistent verbal encouragement and example setting, which, in the ZPD, provides a non-linear learning as
language is absorbed and functional examples are followed. Perhaps discipleship is not about more knowledgeable persons being trained with more knowledge but, rather, choosing to engage in relationship with language that connects. Furthermore, the literature described the importance of “match” between a mentor and mentee in endowments, preferences, gender, race, and cultural criteria (Bozeman & Feeney, 2008; Hall & Maltby, 2013; Johnson, 2002). However, the data did not provide evidence of “match” as an obstacle. Rather, each life-coach took it upon himself to find the connection necessary to make the ZPD a relational learning reality rather than a teacher-student structured reality. The following section presents the final key finding of life-change.

**Life-change**

The finding of Life-change will be discussed with respect to the current literature and then with respect to the theoretical framework.

**Current Literature**

The key finding of life-change was represented in all three strands of literature under review. As one considers how proven risk youth and life-coach dyads make sense of their discipleship, the findings generally support discipleship as an intense relationship between a “master” and a “disciple” that brings about a new way of seeing things altogether (Wringe, 2009). As Coleman (1993) points out, the “master” in Christian discipleship is ultimately Jesus but may also be one of Jesus’ followers who initiates a mentor-mentee relationship with a “disciple” and introduces him to a new way of life. It is this “new way of life” that synergizes with the key finding of life change. The following paragraph further describes life change in terms of faith development.

Faith development, according to Fowler (1991), can be understood in stages. For example, Jamal’s new found faith is congruent with Fowler’s initial phase of Primal Faith, in
which faith is at its infancy stage and does not yet have the language to express the emotions and trust that is being experience.

Terrence’s faith matches Fowler’s third stage of Mythic-Literal Faith, in which a person does not want to disappoint God. Faith development can also occur in “moments” of specific spiritual practices (Gushiken, 2011). For instance, Jalen going to church to participate in worship, and Terrence engaging in prayer exemplify “moments” in which life-change is unfolding. Such moments of life-change do not have to be proactive spiritual engagements but can also be responses to the pain of psychological distress and the need for healing and wholeness (Sandage et al., 2008; Williamson & Hood, 2013).

Jamal provides an example of his faith development in action, an example that incorporates the current literature regarding proven risk youth. Both Rios (2011) and Goffman (2014) describe the current environment on the streets of police harassment and hyper-criminalization. Just days prior to his interview, Jamal found himself in such a situation in which he was falsely accused of a crime and placed under custody. His former reaction would have been hostile and aggressive, but as a response to his faith development and life-change, he had a change of attitude, which he described as “lookin’ for the positive.”

Another dimension of life-change is the sense of higher purpose that develops within the youth. For example, Jamal and Terrence interpreted their survival of the streets as evidence that they are here for a reason. Terrence and Adrian shared a “vision for life” that included further education. Perhaps Alex shared the most robust narrative of higher purpose, as he articulated a new vision for life that is “not all about me.” Pargament (2006) denotes the human quality of striving as including a striving for success, fame, wealth, or for the sacred. Furthermore, the search for the sacred incorporates a commitment to the transcendence, as an idea or institution
that transcends the self in time and space (Lerner et al., 2006). As Alex no longer sees life as only about him, Alex’s life change exemplifies a commitment to the transcendent - a bigger picture of life. As discipleship is a spiritual relationship, Alex’s life change may be linked to the faith development moments he has shared with his life-coach.

Alex understands higher purpose of denying oneself. Whereas Alex would normally use his money to buy shoes or jewelry for himself, his life-change now invokes a sense of purpose in saving and investing money. He now sees the detriment of being broke and having to ask for money and has a vision for supporting himself and his family. Self-surrender is linked to life-change language of seeing oneself as a “new creation,” which embodies the non-visible or inner changes taking place with a disciple (Houston, 2011). Furthermore, Larson and Tocchini (2015) speak of Christian life-change in being a “living sacrifice” in which one practices worship of God as a willing surrender of one’s control. Although Alex did not have the technical language at hand, his testimony demonstrates a strong sense of life-change by being a “living sacrifice,” not the least of which was evidenced by his commitment to hold two jobs to save money for his girlfriend and unborn child.

The final sub-theme of identity formation was strongly evidenced in the literature. First, as previously mentioned, a life-change can incorporate “a marked change in appearance, character, condition or function” (Larson & Tocchini, 2015, p. 18). Jamal’s life-change was marked by a change in clothing, hairstyle, and facial countenance, as evidenced by this researcher during Jamal’s transcript verification meeting. Regarding Christian discipleship, Averbeck (2008) understands life-change as a process of spiritual transformation in which God’s Spirit works within the human spirit to occupy, empower, and reshape the human from the inside out, producing a conformity to Christ’s image. Jamal’s change in appearance is a reflection of
the inner change he experienced, which may ultimately reflect a conformity to Christ’s image as consistent with the overall goal of Christian discipleship (Brock, 2014; Fleming & Cannister, 2010; Houston, 2011; Peterson, 2013). Not only was Jamal’s physical appearance different, his life-change was cognitive as well. For example, Jamal said, “But now that I’m new…It’s just, I’m realizin’ certain things now that I don’t even know how I’m getting’ into it. So I know certain things that Carlos’ tellin’ me is true.” The five years of truth-telling from his life-coach now makes sense to Jamal, and his sense of being “new” demonstrates the essence of identity formation as life change within discipleship.

Another example of life-change relates to the growth of virtue within Jalen who reported identity formation as life-change within discipleship. Jalen used to see himself as the class clown and liked the attention that being the funny kid drew. The attention seeking eventually led him to gang life and expulsion from school. Jalen said, “I just grew seeing that wasn’t benefiting me, so I just- I had to ch-change.” Darnell, his life-coach, got Jalen’s head in the right place, connected him with God and with other programs, which allowed Jalen to sit down and talk with other people and “seeing which things they do to help theirself and…just doing exchanging.”

According to the current literature, virtue development is evidence of spiritual transformation as measured the following virtues: intellectual, theological, other-focused, and temperance (Schnitker et al., 2014). As Jalen grew in these four domains of virtue, his life underwent spiritual transformation resulting in an identity change, as Jalen no longer sees himself as a class clown or attention seeking from others; but is now more theological, more temperate in his relationships, and focused on others. As the findings of life-change have been discussed in relation with the current literature, the following sections provide discussion of life-change with regard to theoretical framework.
Theoretical Framework

The mentoring literature generally recognized ZPD as a means of understanding urban at-risk youth as they transition from adolescence to adulthood (Ratio & Hall, 1999). From the life-coach perspective, the literature also stated that mentoring in an educational environment provides effective feedback and modeling as mentors and mentees move through the ZPD (Geibelhaus & Bowman, 2002). The life-coach and proven risk youth dyads appear to move through the ZPD in their discipleship as a “walking alongside” and utilization of “moments.” For instance, Darnell used ZPD language when he stated,

The work that we’re doing is not something that can be measured in a…short term. But there…there, there are moment along the path, moments along, walking alongside of them where you see them step into area they would have never done before.

Darnell went on to describe the challenges of measurement, in that external sources measure the youth by their achieving certain societal milestones, like a high school diploma or paycheck from a steady job. According to Darnell, such milestones are good, valuable, and necessary; however, the milestones do not speak to “all the transformational aspects that are happening for these young men.” Darnell gave an example of a youth who identified a vision for his life, which was to become a police officer, as a “moment” of life-change.

Darnell’s understanding of the lived discipleship experience touched another aspect of the ZPD, namely the sense of walking alongside someone within the learning relationship. The at-risk youth mentoring literature suggests that whenever possible, the mentor who walks alongside should be someone who has overcome risk factors and delinquency. This allows experiential assistance to be given to the youth who are in process of making sense of their lives and reconstructing a life-narrative apart from delinquency (Braga et al., 2009; Maruna, 2001).
Darnell’s description also struck a chord with ZPD in his sense of “moments” within the learning relationship. As Kemp (2010) understands ZPD as social and situated learning and Estep (2002) correlates ZPD with non-linear development, moments of learning may be seen as achievements along the path to societal milestones. However, one should recognize the non-linear trajectory of the proven risk youth path and allow for any measurement of achievement to vacillate within the ZPD. This is due to Vygotsky’s (1978) understanding of the ZPD affording a continuum of internalized change, which leads to behavioral change but not with respect to time. The ZPD does not predict the time it takes and duration of relationship for internalized change to manifest as behavioral change within a disciple. The following section provides concluding comment on the key findings with respect to the research question, current literature, and the theoretical framework.

**Conclusion**

The following research question was asked: How do proven risk youth and life-coach discipleship dyads make sense of their discipleship? The research found three dimensions as answers to the research question. The proven risk youth and life-coach discipleship dyads make sense of their discipleship in Help, Relationship, and Life-change. The discipleship findings may be synthesized in the following way. A genuine connection between a life-coach and a proven risk youth opens the door for help to be given and received. As help is given and received consistently, an authentic, brotherly, relational bond is formed, which results in life-change for both the proven risk youth and the life-coach. Therefore, proven risk youth and life-coach discipleship dyads make sense of their discipleship as a helpful relationship that fosters life-change.
As one considers the role of ZDP in discipleship, it seems that there is something special about a more knowledgeable person committing to being present that brings confidence to the less knowledgeable learner. The confidence allows the less knowledgeable person to try, to fail, and to dialogue within a safe relational space. As failure is seen as only a “bump in the road” and not the end of the road, the road of relational learning can continue toward a life-long bond within the dyad. As life-coaches commit to authenticity, they model authenticity for the youth, which results in an intense and intentional relationship. The relational tension within discipleship is characterized by trust, love, and mutual accountability that foster life-change within both the youth, and the life-coaches.

Although discipleship is defined as a learning relationship in which the less knowledgeable learns to be the Christ, the research revealed that learning to be like Christ can be informal and indirect. The encouragement, faith development, and life-change experienced by the discipleship dyad is learning in the moment more than learning in a structured environment. The sense in which a disciple learns to be like Christ may be experienced indirectly from a respective life-coach who is emulating Christlikeness rather than directly teaching and communicating Christ. Therefore, this research supports discipleship as a learning relationship that produces life-change in values, virtues, and behaviors, which may be imbedded in Christ but do not have to be overtly religious.

The following section describes the implications of the findings as recommendations for the practice of discipleship. The recommendations are listed with the most global recommendation first and the more specific recommendations last.
Recommendations for Practice

The following are recommendations for the practice of discipleship within proven risk youth and life-coach dyads. The recommendations are numbered beginning with the broadest sense of practice for national or regional stakeholders and moves toward the more specific stakeholders of proven risk youth and life-coaches.

1. Maintain or increase national and state level funding for non-profit organizations to provide mentorship of proven risk and at-risk youth for intentional and intense discipleship. Such mentoring has proven reliable in producing life-change within the youth, which can reduce recidivism and violent offense.

2. Develop qualitative markers of measurement for proven risk youth developmental achievement, which may lead to the norms of societal achievement. This can be accomplished by denoting life-change in relational engagement within the ZPD and tracking virtue formation. As measurements are broken down into smaller increments, funding and programs can be calibrated more effectively to reaching and celebrating the discipleship achievements within the dyad that will eventually lead to larger societal goals.

3. Expand the funding for nonprofit programs to provide mentoring to family and friends. The influence of natural relationships, including gang members, friends, and family is very prominent, but not impenetrable. Sustainable change for at-risk and proven risk youth seems possible as help, relationship, and life-change move through a discipleship dyad and extend throughout a dyad’s social system.

4. Funding and program planning should move away from a 6-month to a 12-month model to a two-year to five-year discipleship model. Furthermore, consideration
should be given to ways to leverage and incorporate the long-term sense of “bond” in the dyad and build on this value by encouraging former proven risk youth to become mentors, capturing and re-telling the life-change stories of former proven risk youth, and celebrating milestones of life together through reunions and ongoing social media connections.

5. Funding and programming should anticipate the intense and intentional nature of discipleship and provide a proper life-coach to youth caseload ratio, so that life-coaches do not burn-out and discipleship relationships can grow to their fullest potential.

6. Mentoring and discipleship programs should adjust the training of life-coaches to include “being present” in the relationship, meeting the immediate and basic needs of the proven risk youth, and engaging in a long-term, high contact, relationship that anticipates life-change through ongoing support, encouragement, and mutual accountability.

7. Mentoring and discipleship programs that incorporate faith should embrace an informal and indirect model that allows faith to develop upon invitation and emulation, not compulsion or forced interaction.

8. Mentoring and discipleship programs are under-utilizing the church and other human-resource pools and should engage such institutions with a fresh understanding of what is means to “walk alongside” in relationship and to “be present.” Although former at-risk youth are preferred life-coaches from an experiential point of view, the life-coaches testified to the transferability of sharing life-stories of pain, abandonment, need, and the like. Therefore, the recruitment and training of life-coaches should be
re-examined and made more available, as every adult can relate to hardship in some capacity.

9. Life-coaches should prepare mentally, emotionally, and physically for a long-term relationship in which many “bumps in the road” will occur. Should the “bumps” involve incarceration and reoccurring offenses, the life-coach should remain engaged relationally by “being present” through care and encouragement. This is not the end of the road.

10. Proven risk youth should consider the role of the life-coach and provide value to the relationship through verbal appreciation and intentionality of effort. The discipleship was described by participants as a two-way learning relationship, and the life-coach also needs encouragement, feedback, and a sense of value within the relationship. If the proven risk youth are not yet capable of such engagement, the sponsoring program should take responsibility.

As this study endeavored to understanding how proven risk youth and life-coach dyads make sense of their discipleship, the following recommendations for future research will help build on the knowledge gained through this study.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The following are recommendations for further research on proven risk youth and life-coach discipleship.

1. Replicate this study several times in different regions and look for convergence and divergence.

2. Conduct a similar study among female proven risk youth and life-coach discipleship dyads, looking for similarities and dis-similarities.
3. Conduct a similar study but increase the sample population to include a larger number of proven risk youth to verify the consistency of the findings.

4. Conduct a similar study but broaden the sample population to include the more general category of at-risk youth and look for similarities and dis-similarities in findings.

5. The case-managers, upper-managers, program-directors, organizational-executives, local/state gatekeepers, educators, community-service providers, judicial system representatives, and law enforcement officers have not been heard in this study. Therefore, this researcher recommends that a case study be conducted to obtain a more robust view of proven risk youth and life-coach discipleship within the same organization, but with a 360-degree view.

6. Further research on best-practices across the at-risk youth spectrum would be helpful to creating a picture of what has been done, and what is being done, and what is producing positive results. Therefore, this researcher recommends that a robust meta-data study be conducted on at-risk youth/proven risk youth mentoring and discipleship practices.

7. Lastly, a longitudinal study of the 10 participants in this study is recommended to track the relationship and learning over time. The participants will report helpful data as time passes of personal reflection of individual growth as well as tracking the progression of growth through the ZPD toward independence.
## APPENDIX A

### DISCIPLESHIP-ORIENTED TERMINOLOGY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discipleship</td>
<td>Discipleship is a “relationship between a teacher, a learner, and what is to be learned”.</td>
<td>Wringe, 2009, p. 239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipleship</td>
<td>Discipleship is learning how to follow Christ. Behind discipleship is the “Greek <em>paidētā</em> education, of having a mentor, in whose steps the student followed and modeled in character.”</td>
<td>Houston, 2011, p. 131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipleship</td>
<td>Discipleship is living with Jesus in the present and leading others into such a life of learning to be like him.</td>
<td>Brock, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual Formation</td>
<td>Spiritual formation is “about a commitment to be conformed to the likeness of Christ in daily life.”</td>
<td>Fleming &amp; Cannister, 2010, p. 59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual Formation</td>
<td>Spiritual formation is dynamic, continuous, an act of God and involves painful moments.</td>
<td>Gushiken, 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual Transformation</td>
<td>“Spiritual transformation may be defined by three elements. It is (1) a change in spirituality that is (2) recognized as distinctive by the individual and whereby (3) there is a reprioritization of spiritual goals.”</td>
<td>Schnitker et al., 2014, p. 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual Transformation</td>
<td>Spiritual transformation “can involve a sick or divided self that seems burdened by a sense of wrongness in life; in this troubled state, the self surrenders to a mystical encounter with a higher consciousness, described as the More, that brings wholeness and happiness.”</td>
<td>Williamson &amp; Hood, 2013, p. 890</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual Transformation</td>
<td>“Transformation is understood as emerging through an intensification of relational anxiety.”</td>
<td>Sandage, Jensen, &amp; Jass, 2008, p. 182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Youth Development and Spiritual Development</td>
<td>“Within the field of positive youth development, spiritual development is proposed as a ‘look inward to create and recreate a link between “my life” and “all life” ...a constant, active, and ongoing process to create and re-create harmony between the “discoveries” about the self and the “discoveries” about the nature of life-writ-large.”</td>
<td>Tirri &amp; Quinn, 2010, p. 202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual Development</td>
<td>According to the United Nations 1989 article 27[1]: “Spiritual development is seen as a positive right distinct from religious or spiritual freedom.”</td>
<td>Ojalehto &amp; Wang, 2008, p. 130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual Development</td>
<td>“In developmental theory and practice, it is widely argued that human development includes spirituality as a distinct and irreducible empirical component of well-being.”</td>
<td>Ojalehto &amp; Wang, 2008, p. 130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentorship</td>
<td>Mentorship is a “one-on-one relationship between a provider (mentor) and a recipient (mentee) for the potential of benefit for the mentee.”</td>
<td>Tolan, Schoeny, Lovegrove &amp; Nichols, 2014, p. 180</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## APPENDIX B

### STAGES IN FAITH CONSCIOUSNESS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moral Realism – Presence of oral absolutes, only one right and one wrong answer</td>
<td>Socially accepted norms influence behavior - Obedience or punishment</td>
<td>Primal Faith – Pre-language/infant, total emotional orientation of trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conformity to societal rules for personal reward</td>
<td>Intuitive-Projective Faith – Language acquired; stories and symbols form lasting emotional faith images</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morality of Reciprocity – Rules formed through negotiation</td>
<td>Desire to gain approval of others motivates behavior.</td>
<td>Mythic-Literal Faith – Logical thinking emerges, apprehension over disappointing God or others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Abide by law/duty as citizen, avoid censure and guilt</td>
<td>Synthetic-Conventional Faith – Abstract ideas/concepts help make sense of the world; identity, beliefs, values and commitments form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mature Adult Thinking – moral issues addressed through decision making, ethics of cooperation and complexity are in view</td>
<td>Understanding social welfare and genuine interest in other people</td>
<td>Individuative-Reflective Faith – Question, examine and reconstitute beliefs; and take charge of one’s life in terms of responsibility and choice in the belonging communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Respect for a universal principle which requires guidance from one’s own conscience</td>
<td>Conjunctive Faith – Embrace and integrate the polarities and opposites of our lives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Universalizing Faith – Grounded in oneness with God or the power of being; seeing value through God rather than the self</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Sources: Fowler, 1991; Piaget’s Moral Development Power-point, 2017)
### STAGES OF GROWTH

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Awakening</td>
<td>Humans encounter God and themselves. The encounter can be gradual or radical, occurring in a moment or over a long journey.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purgation</td>
<td>Humans encounter an awareness of sin, blindness and evidence of the false self. Trust and obedience to the Holy Spirit develop as willful disobedience, denial, blame, addiction, and compulsion are renounced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illumination</td>
<td>Human encounter with God’s love generates a desire to live in light of God’s glory regarding the self and society. Reflection and prayer give attendance to the presence of God’s Spirit in the human life, both in pain and sorrow, as well as joy and peace.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union</td>
<td>Human encounter with God’s presence, will, and agenda are embraced. The closeness with God crowds out the need for human approval and human definitions of success. This stage is characterized by total surrender to Christ and abandonment to grace.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Calhoun, 2005)
### APPENDIX D

**SPIRITUAL PROVISION, DISCIPLINES, AND PRACTICES FOR GROWTH**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do not grieve the Spirit</td>
<td>Worship</td>
<td>Meditation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not quench the Spirit</td>
<td>Open myself to God</td>
<td>Fasting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walk by the Spirit</td>
<td>Relinquish the false self</td>
<td>Prayer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miracle of prayer</td>
<td>Share my life with others</td>
<td>Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treasury of God’s word</td>
<td>Hear God’s word</td>
<td>Simplicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miracle of fellowship</td>
<td>Incarnate the love of Christ</td>
<td>Solitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outreach of faith</td>
<td>Pray</td>
<td>Submission</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Worship
- Meditation
- Fasting
- Prayer
- Study
- Simplicity
- Solitude
- Submission
- Service
- Confession
- Worship
- Guidance
- Celebration
## APPENDIX E

### MAJOR THRUSTS OF MENTORING TYPES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mentoring Type/ Functions</th>
<th>Central Thrust of Empowerment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intensive</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Discipler</td>
<td>Enablement in basics of following Christ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Spiritual Guide</td>
<td>Accountability, direction, and insight for questions, commitment, and decision affecting spirituality and maturity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Coach</td>
<td>Motivation, skills, and application needed to meet a task, challenge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Occasional</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Counselor</td>
<td>Timely advice and correct perspectives on viewing self, others, circumstances, and ministry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Teacher</td>
<td>Knowledge and understanding of a particular subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Sponsor</td>
<td>Career guidance and protection as leaders moves within an organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Passive</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Model</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Contemporary</em></td>
<td>A living, personal model for life, ministry, or profession who is not only an example but also inspires emulation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Historical</em></td>
<td>A past life that teaches dynamic principles and values for life, ministry, and/or profession.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Stanley & Clinton, 1992, p. 42)
## APPENDIX F

**MENTORSHIP OF AT-RISK YOUTH: A CHRONOLOGICAL OVERVIEW OF LITERATURE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author and Date</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Slicker &amp; Palmer, 1993</td>
<td>Mentoring At-Risk High School Students: Evaluation of a School-Based Program</td>
<td>Quantitative study. 32 mentors selected for 32 most at-risk 10th graders in large suburban Texas school district. Measurements taken before and after six months.</td>
<td>The mentors received one hour of training and were required to log their activities, which were prescribed. Mentoring did not reduce drop-out, nor improve self-concept; but did show significance in raised GPA, among those effectively mentored versus those ineffectively mentored.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. G. Smith, 1997</td>
<td>Caring: Motivation for African American Male Youth to Succeed</td>
<td>Qualitative Case Study. Sample size is 3 young men enrolled in African American Achievers Youth Corps, Inc.</td>
<td>The presence of caring and supportive African-American males positively impacts the social and academic performance of at-risk male youth in terms of higher self-esteem, standardized test scores and school grades.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Royse, 1998</td>
<td>Mentoring High-Risk Minority Youth: Evaluation of the Brothers Project</td>
<td>Quantitative. African-American 14- to 16-year-olds from Lexington, KY, living in a female head of household, below grade equivalency and at or below poverty guidelines</td>
<td>Randomly assigned control and test groups. 24 mentoring dyads completed the three data collection points over 6 months. Found no statistical significance in self-esteem, GPA, school absences or disciplinary actions. Asks the question: When are children most receptive to learning?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maruna, 2001</td>
<td>Making Good: How Ex-convicts Reform and Rebuild Their Lives</td>
<td>Qualitative investigation of desistance of British ex-convicts through field observation, casual and in-depth interviews from 1996-1998.</td>
<td>Argues that criminal behavior naturally decreases with age and that those who desist do so through new identity formation reconciling their former life through a new narrative in which one’s former life was accidental and the new identity is the basic reality. This creates a new sense of order and deals with the former disorder.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thompson &amp; Kelly-Vance, 2001</td>
<td>The Impact of Mentoring on Academic Achievement of At-risk Youth</td>
<td>Quantitative study of 12 boys in treatment group and 13 boys in control group, tested pre and post over a nine-month period, from Big Brother and Big Sisters of the Midlands.</td>
<td>The mentors and youth were screened and assigned matches, but no discussion of match criteria. Boys all exhibited at-risk factors and met with mentor for 2-4 hours/week for 1 year with results showing that having a mentor positively impacted academic achievement. Limitations include: Non-random assignment and all Caucasian boys.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barron-McKeagney, Woody, &amp; D'Souza, 2002</td>
<td>Mentoring At-Risk Latino Children and Their Parents: Analysis of the Parent-Child Relationship and Family Strength</td>
<td>Quantitative Study. 24 children and 34 mothers from Omaha, NE participated. Pre and post testing, and at least 6 hours of mentor training and mentored for an average of 25 hours during test period.</td>
<td>The results suggest that parents of at-risk children can benefit from youth development programs which include both mentoring and focused parent involvement. Researchers recommend having dedicated, multi-cultural competent staff and resources to handle mentoring, not volunteers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keating, Tomishima, Foster, &amp; Alessandri, 2002</td>
<td>The Effects of a Mentoring Program on At-Risk Youth</td>
<td>Quantitative Study. 34 youth ages 10-17 were in intervention group and 34 in non-intervention group for 6 months. Pre and post testing offered.</td>
<td>Significant improvement of problematic behavior and hopelessness realized for the intervention group. African-American youth were not as responsive to the mentoring as were the Caucasian and Latino youth, however, the sample size was small.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zimmerman, Bingenheimer, &amp; Notaro, 2002</td>
<td>Natural Mentors and Adolescent Resiliency: A Study with Urban Youth</td>
<td>Mixed-method study. 770 adolescents from a large Midwestern city. Structured face to face interviews, with participants completing a self-administered questionnaire</td>
<td>53.8% of respondents reported having a natural mentor (e.g. grandparent, coach, teacher, minister) and subsequently reported lower levels of marijuana use and nonviolent delinquency, as well as higher levels of school attachment and efficacy. No relationship was found between having a natural mentor and anxiety or depression.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thornberry, Krohn, Lizotte, Smith, &amp; Tobin, 2003</td>
<td>Gangs and Delinquency in Developmental Perspective</td>
<td>Longitudinal Rochester youth development study of 1,000 adolescents and 1,000 parents. Mixed methods with multiple interviews, self-administered questionnaires and standardized test scores.</td>
<td>Gang membership increases the several negative behaviors, including: Delinquency, violence, drug use, drug selling, gun carrying and gun use. In addition, stable gang members are more likely to drop out of school, leave home, become a teenage mother/father, have unstable employment and generally struggle with life transitions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holsinger &amp; Ayers, 2004</td>
<td>Mentoring Girls in Juvenile Facilities: Connecting College Students with Incarcerated Girls</td>
<td>Analytic Reflection based on student papers of college students who were assigned to mentor incarcerated girls for 8 weeks over the summer for a minimum of 5 hours per week.</td>
<td>The incarcerated girl picked their mentor after organized group ice-breakers and free time to interact one-on-one. Student papers revealed mentoring as a two-way learning relationship rooted in mutual respect, trust and open-sharing. Acting as a “muse” was often a large part of the relationship. The transient nature of the girls in the system was noted as a barrier to lasting mentoring.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author(s)</td>
<td>Study Title</td>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>Findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Braga, Piehl, &amp; Hureau, 2009</td>
<td>Controlling Violent Offenders Released to the Community: An Evaluation of the Boston Reentry Initiative</td>
<td>Quasi-experimental design and survival analyses to evaluate the effects the Boston reentry initiative program participants against a control group.</td>
<td>The program participants interacted with community based and sometimes faith-based mentoring, social service assistance and vocational development within 45 days of incarceration and up to 18 months after release. Study finds a significant reduction, on the order of 30%, in the overall and violent arrest failure rates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grossman, Chan, Schwartz, &amp; Rhodes, 2012</td>
<td>The Test of Time in School-Based Mentoring: The Role of Relationship Duration and Re-Matching on Academic Outcomes</td>
<td>Quantitative Study of 1,139 youth in Big Brothers and Big Sisters program. Randomized control group of half selected and half received mentorship over 1 school year. Self-administered surveys pre and post for youth and teachers.</td>
<td>It is not just a dose of mentoring that matters, but it is the integrity and longevity of the match. College student matches are most likely to terminate, and conversely matches with experienced mentors are more likely to last. Also, matches endure more when rooted in programs that focused heavily on school work. Interestingly, youth who were reportedly overreact to rejection or criticism were more likely to maintain their matches, perhaps to avoid rejection or criticism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rodríguez-Planas, 2012</td>
<td>Mentoring, Educational Services, and Incentives to Learn: What do We Know About Them?</td>
<td>Analytical literature review of 20 experiments or quasi-experimental studies all with control groups were reviewed.</td>
<td>The interactions of between programs and wrap-around services strengthens the effects of mentoring. Extra-familial adults, like mentors, bolsters resiliency among at-risk youth. Mentoring facilitates an adolescent’s capacity to benefit from parental and program support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salas-Wright, Olate, &amp; Vaughn, 2013</td>
<td>Results Among High-Risk and Gang-Involved Salvadoran Youth</td>
<td>Quantitative study of 290 high-risk and gang involved youth, ages 11-25 years old from San Salvador using self-administered surveys.</td>
<td>Spirituality indirectly impacts minor and severe delinquent behaviors, such as a decreased likelihood of carrying a weapon, destroying property or disturbing the public. Religious coping was found to deter theft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matz, 2014</td>
<td>COMMENTARY: Do Youth Mentoring Programs Work? A Review of the Empirical Literature</td>
<td>A literature review of empirical studies on youth mentoring.</td>
<td>Youth mentoring seems to work well towards improving mentee attitudes towards school, general behavior and social relationship with peers and other. Although there is some support for mentoring programs decreasing drug and alcohol use, there is limited support that mentoring decreases delinquency or justice related outcomes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tolan, Henry, Schoeny, Lovegrove, &amp; Nichols, 2014</td>
<td>Mentoring Programs to Affect Delinquency and Associated Outcomes of Youth at Risk: A Comprehensive Meta-Analytic Review</td>
<td>Meta-analytic review of 46 studies ranging from 1970-2011, regarding mentoring interventions for youth at risk of delinquency and associated with outcomes of aggression, drug-use and academic functioning.</td>
<td>Significant improvements were found when advocacy and emotional supporter were emphasized; and when mentoring was motivated by participants desiring career advancement. A mentoring program should include: A personal relationship, advocacy and emotional support. Attention should be given to program design, including modeling and training, as well as evaluation of interventions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX G
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FORMS

YOUTH DISCIPLE

Institution: Northeastern University

Interviewee: Youth Disciple “X”

Interviewer: Brian Minnich

RESEARCH QUESTION: How do discipleship dyads of proven risk youth and life-coaches make sense of their discipleship?

Part I: Introductory Protocol (5 min)
Objective: Build rapport, describe the study, and answer any questions.

Your life-coach, [insert life-coach’s name], recommended you for this research interview, and I thank you for your participation. My research seeks to understand how youth and their life-coaches make sense of their relationship and their learning. Hopefully, an understanding of your experience will help us find ways we can grow. Because your responses are important and I want to make sure to confidentially capture everything you say, I would like to record our conversation today. Do I have your permission to record this interview? If yes, please read and sign this informed consent form.

[If yes, present the informed consent form for signature, thank the participant, let them know the question of consent will be asked again at the start of the recording, and then turn on the recording equipment].

I will also be taking written notes. I can assure you that all responses will be confidential and only a pseudonym will be used when quoting from the transcripts. I will be the only one privy to the recording that will be eventually destroyed after your interview is transcribed. Do you have any questions about the interview process or how your data will be used? This interview should last about 45 minutes. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to push ahead and complete this line of questioning. Do you have any questions at this time?

Part II: Interviewee Background (5 minutes)
Objective: To establish rapport and obtain the general story of participant’s relationship with the research topic. This section is brief as it is not the focus of the study.

1. How long has your relationship with [insert life-coach’s name] been going on?
2. How do you normally spend your time with [insert life-coach’s name]?
3. How often do you connect with [insert life-coach’s name] during a typical day, week, or month? (include details of face-to-face, phone, text, or other forms of communication and contact)

Part III: Interview Questions (45 min)

Objective: To address the research question through seven open-ended interview questions. Follow-up questions may be asked by the interviewer as the need/opportunity arises.

As I mentioned, I am interested is understanding how you see your relationship with [insert life-coach’s name]. I am particularly interested in understanding how your relationship with [insert life-coach’s name] may be helping you learn and grow as a person. I have prepared several questions to help us, the first is:

1. What does your relationship with your life-coach mean to you?
2. How does the relationship with your life-coach help support you and help you grow?
3. How would you describe your life-change since your relationship with [insert life-coach’s name] began?
4. How much of your life-change is happening because of your relationship with your life-coach as compared to learning through programs, curriculum, or other people?
5. In what ways do you feel prepared to continue your life-change on your own, and in what ways do you want your life-coach relationship to continue?

Ask participant if there is anything else they would like to add. Ask participant if they have any questions. Thank participant.

Life-coach

Institution: Northeastern University

Interviewee: Life-coach “X”

Interviewer: Brian Minnich

RESEARCH QUESTION: How do discipleship dyads of proven risk youth and life-coaches make sense of their discipleship?
Part I: Introductory Protocol (5 min)
Objective: Build rapport, describe the study, and answer any questions.

Thank you for your participation in this research study. My research seeks to understand how youth and their life-coaches make sense of their relationship and their learning. Hopefully, a better understanding of your experience will allow us to identify ways we can build relationships and learning toward transformative-change. Because your responses are important and I want to make sure to confidentially capture everything you say, I would like to record our conversation today. Do I have your permission to record this interview? If yes, please read and sign this informed consent form.

[If yes, present the informed consent form for signature, thank the participant, let them know the question of consent will be asked again at the start of the recording, and then turn on the recording equipment].

I will also be taking written notes. I can assure you that all responses will be confidential and only a pseudonym will be used when quoting from the transcripts. I will be the only one privy to the recording that will be eventually destroyed after your interview is transcribed. Do you have any questions about the interview process or how your data will be used? This interview should last about 45 minutes. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to push ahead and complete this line of questioning. Do you have any questions at this time?

Part II: Interviewee Background (5 minutes)
Objective: To establish rapport and obtain the general story of participant’s relationship with the research topic. This section is brief as it is not the focus of the study.

1. How long have you been working as a life-coach?
2. How do you normally spend your time with the youth you are discipling?
3. How often do you connect with the youth during a typical day, week, or month? (For example, include details of face-to-face, phone, text, or other forms of communication and contact with one particular youth)

Part III: Interview Questions (45 min)
Objective: To address the research question through seven open-ended interview questions. Follow-up questions make asked by the interviewer as the need/opportunity arises.

As I mentioned, I am interested is understanding how you see your relationship with the youth. I am particularly interested in understanding how your relationship with the youth is helping them learn, change, and transform. I have prepared several questions to help us, the first is:

1. What does your relationship with the youth mean to you?
2. **How does your relationship with the youth provide them support and help them grow personally?**

3. **To what extent is your relationship producing life-change in the youth?**

4. **To what extent are the life-changes in the youth attributed to your relationship as compared to learning through programs, curriculum, or other people?**

5. **In what ways do you think the youth feel prepared to continue their life-change on their own, and in what ways do you think they want the life-coach relationship to continue?**

Ask participant if there is anything else they would like to add. Ask participant if they have any questions. Thank participant.
# APPENDIX H

## PARTICIPANT PROFILE DATA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Role in Relationship</th>
<th>Length of Life-coach Relationship or Life-coach Service</th>
<th>Communication and Contact</th>
<th>Case load</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jalen</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>Over 3 years</td>
<td>4-7 hrs./wk.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adrian</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Puerto Rican and Korean</td>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>2-3 hrs./wk.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Jamaican and Italian</td>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>12-15 hrs./wk.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lemarcus</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>2.5 years</td>
<td>1-2 hrs./wk.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrence</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>3-4 years</td>
<td>2-3 hrs./wk.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darius</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Puerto Rican, Black and Native American</td>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>2-3 years</td>
<td>8 hrs./wk.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamal</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>1x/day</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Puerto Rican</td>
<td>Life-Coach</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>50+ hrs./wk.</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darnell</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Life-Coach</td>
<td>9 years</td>
<td>25 hrs./wk.</td>
<td>5; but 200-260 in some capacity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>Life-Coach</td>
<td>12 years</td>
<td>20 hrs./wk.</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## APPENDIX I

**SUPERORDINATE THEMES DERIVED FROM PARTICIPANT DATA: HELP, RELATIONSHIP, AND LIFE-CHANGE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Help - Services</th>
<th>Help - Advice</th>
<th>Help - Advocacy</th>
<th>Help - Work</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Relationship with One Another</th>
<th>Natural Family Relation</th>
<th>No Relationship with Dad</th>
<th>Gang or Prison</th>
<th>Faith or Religion</th>
<th>Purpose, Life-change</th>
<th>Continue Life-change</th>
<th>Pass on learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Darius</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrence</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lemarcus</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamal</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adrian</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jalen</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darnell</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## APPENDIX J

### SUPERORDINATE THEME AND SUB-THEME CORRESPONDENCE:
**DISCIPLESHIP DYADS OF LIFE-COACHES AND YOUTH**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Superordinate Theme</th>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
<th>Correspondence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Help</td>
<td>Supportive Care</td>
<td>• Basic needs of transportation, food, housing, and legal help are provided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Terms like support and care used by all respondents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Service Connections</td>
<td>• Help extended to ongoing services - Education, job-readiness and employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Empowering Encouragement</td>
<td>• Beyond physical help, the life-coaches provide emotional help through</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>encourage, and empowering language and opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td>Constant Contact</td>
<td>• High volume of communication and access to relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Committed Authenticity</td>
<td>• Genuine, real and reciprocal relationship is shared through transparent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>personal stories and shared vulnerabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Familial Bond</td>
<td>• Familial and close-bond language described the discipleship relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life-change</td>
<td>Faith Development</td>
<td>• Faith development is offered and received by some along with testimony of life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Higher Purpose</td>
<td>• Vision for gang life gave way to vision for career, family, and leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identity Formation</td>
<td>• Youth see themselves differently, and trust themselves more</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
REFERENCES


Brock, B. (2014). Discipleship as living with God, or wayfinding and scripture. *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care, 7*(1), 22-34.


