THE METHOD IS THE MESSAGE: COMMUNICATING FOR INDIVIDUAL BEHAVIOR

CHANGE TOWARD DISCIPLE MULTIPLICATION

by

Jeffrey K. McDaniel

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy in Communication

School of Communication and the Arts

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this ethnographically informed, comparative embedded case study was to understand the lack of disciple-making movements for congregations at three evangelical churches representing the East Coast, Midwest, and West Coast of the United States. The theories guiding this study were Latour's actor–network theory and Bandura's social cognitive theory as they provide a theoretical framework to understand the influence of culture on the creation of meaning followed by the influence of meaning on individual behavior. The primary research question that guided this study asked, How can a church organization communicate to increase disciple multiplication? To answer this question, a qualitative approach was used with data collected through site visits to the three participating sites, a digital media review, an artifact review, and 75 personal interviews, with 25 interviews from each of the three participating churches. Data from each method were descriptively coded, inferentially coded, and then analyzed for patterns and themes. Overall results found substantial cultural influence on the organizational culture of all three churches, with a common theme of commercialism throughout all three sites. Despite unique organizational visions and rhetoric, nearly identical methodological approaches to core functions of the organizations existed between the three sites. The methodological approaches to disciple -making at all three sites failed to engage elements of social cognitive theory that are proven to influence individual behavior change. The primary recommendation from this study was to ontologically transform the organization's methodological approach to disciple making to focus most of the organizational communication through small, intimate community with a narrow message focused on mission, predicated with a tangential model of expected behavior first provided by organizational leadership.

Keywords: disciple, multiplication, movement, communication, methodological

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Dedication

The dissertation is first dedicated to my wonderful wife, and best friend, Beth. Thank you for always supporting me and dealing with my prolonged absences as I researched and wrote. Next, I would like to dedicate this work to my four amazing children: Jordan, Audrey, Joshua, and Caleb. You are the most amazing children any Dad could ever be blessed with. Thank you for being such amazing people and for understanding my absences over the years. Finally, this research and publication is dedicated to the one who made it all possible, Jesus Christ. Thank you Jesus for giving me the ideas, for giving me the strength to research the ideas you gave me, and for the wonderful mentors to make the final product a reality. May you be blessed by this work forever and may your Kingdom be expanded because of it.

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First, I would like to acknowledge the best dissertation chair with whom any student could ever be partnered, Dr. Shannon Leinen. Dr. Leinen, you were my biggest fan, my sounding board, my wisdom in times of mental blankness, and through it all, you became my friend. I cannot thank you enough for walking with me through this project, and I am pleased at the thought of all the future projects we will tackle as lifelong friends. Second, Dr. Christopher Beck represented the absolute perfect, God sent, dissertation committee member for whom I could have prayed. Tackling such a unique topic with minimal previous research meant that finding a committee member who could not only guide the process but also substantially speak wisdom into the project would be difficult, but the Lord provided you for this work almost instantly. Thank you so much for your willingness to be a part of this research and for speaking Spirit-led truth into the project. Finally, Dr. Mott, you have spent countless hours discussing this topic with me, long before I even started the dissertation. I will always cherish your willingness to take my phone calls and afford me hours of discussion with no previous notification. You will remain a model academic to whom I will always look for an exemplar of excellence as an educator.

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List of Abbreviations

Actor–Network Theory (ANT)

Disciple-Making Movement (DMM)

International Mission Board (IMB)

Johnson and Scholes Cultural Web Model (JSCW)

Kansas City Church (KC)

Self-Efficacy (SE)

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)

Virginia Church (VC)

Washington Church (WC)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The task was almost paralyzing as Ying and Grace Kai prayerfully considered how they could reach their province for Christ. Years spent earning a Master of Divinity, serving as a pastor, a hospital chaplain, and even as missionaries with the International Mission Board (IMB) did not prepare the couple to pursue the task of reaching a population of over 20 million people (Kai & Kai, 2018). Ying recognized that the most successful ministry strategies he learned in seminary would barely reach 1% of the population, but he knew God's desire was to reach them all (Towns, 2020). The insurmountable task in front of the couple forced them to go back into scripture in search of a divine ministry strategy that would be congruent with the Father's heart to reach every lost soul. By 2010, within 10 years of arriving on that mission field, Ying and Grace were responsible for 158,993 new church plants and 1,738,143 baptisms in a country that severely persecuted Christians (Smith & Kai, 2011, p. 21). Christian missions' strategists around the globe began to take pause to figure out what was driving the most fruitful revival the world had seen since the Apostle Paul and the first-century church (VergeNetwork, 2012).

The Beginning of a Movement

Ying and Grace understood that their ministry efforts alone would never be enough to accomplish the mission. From the beginning, rather than celebrating the size of their ministry, Ying and Grace were more interested in how many more lost souls existed in their province. When the province contained 20 million people, the paradigm shift to focus on the lost rather than the saved had compounding ramifications for ministry strategy. Early in their ministry, Ying and Grace realized the word *disciple* did not carry the same connotation of latent multiplication that it had in the first-century church and reasoned that the word *trainer* communicated more

clearly the expectation that each believer was to also train another believer. Ying and Grace reasoned that if they trained every Christian to become a trainer of other Christians, the burden of the insurmountable task would decrease, thus making the mission achievable. The couple quickly led a few people to faith in Jesus and, along with several people who were already Christians, gathered the new believers into a training group of 10 total participants. Ying's objective was to not only train these 10 people in the necessary spiritual disciplines to grow in their personal faith but to also train them how to train other new believers to do the same. Within 2 weeks, several of the new believers had started subsequent training groups where they were replicating the training they were receiving from Ying and Grace, training they had sometimes received only a week earlier.

Latent Potential of Every Believer

While Ying and Grace started numerous training groups, a foundational tenet they found vitally important for the growth of all new believers was experiential learning. As new Christians shared their faith and led others to Christ, they were not allowed to invite the new believers back to the training group led by Ying; instead, Ying trained his people how to train the new believers. The couple was clear that if someone led another to Christ, it was that trainer's responsibility to raise the new believer into spiritual maturity. Rather than Ying's group growing to large numbers, he quickly saw a network of closely connected groups emerge. Ying maintained a close training relationship with the leader of each new group as he experientially mentored every group into becoming an autonomous church, though he still mentored the pastor of each autonomous church. Throughout numerous years as personal friends with Ying and Grace, I have heard Ying repeatedly explain to me that he viewed every member of his training group as one of his spiritual children and he wanted to train his children how to be good parents. Though not

every member of the couple's group multiplied, most members eventually became a spiritual

parent, starting numerous subsequent training groups of 10 new believers.

Movement Vocabulary Used to Create Meaning and Action

Ying and Grace began to refer to new believers as spiritual generations. For instance,

Ying and Grace were the first generation, those in their training groups were second generations,

and the groups started by second generation trainees were called third generations. The very

words created meaning and cast vision for disciple multiplication. Though Ying and Grace did

not train the third-generation believers, they began to see fourth-generation Christians who were

being taught the exact lessons the second-generation believers were replicating. In fact, during a

personal conversation with Bill Smith, Ying's direct supervisor during their mission's work in

Asia, I was informed that by 2010, the 10th year of their ministry, the IMB conducted an audit of

the revival to understand how pervasive the movement had become, and they discovered a 27th-

generation church training the exact lessons Ying trained in the original group.

Movement Practices Replicated by Other Agencies

By 2015, missions' agencies across numerous denominational backgrounds began to

implement Ying and Grace's training strategy, amongst other successful strategies with parallel

development, with great success around the globe. In fact, as of 2021 there were at least 122

Christian disciple-making movements (DMMs) where disciples of Jesus had reproduced to at

least the fourth generation and at least 1,000 new believers had been baptized within 2 years

(Discipleship.org, 2021; Trousdale et al., 2018; Watson & Watson, 2014). Unfortunately, none

of the known DMMs in the world appear to be taking place in Western churches, with the most

notable absence in the American church, despite concerted efforts to use Ying and Grace's

training model, amongst other successful ministry models, in the numerous American church

contexts (Wilson et al., 2015). In fact, I have led numerous trainings in the American church alongside Ying and Grace, and yet, we have not witnessed a DMM in the American church context. Certainly, if the Father's heart is for every lost soul to come into a saving faith, diligent inquiry should be given to discover any impediment to the work of the Holy Spirit to reach every lost soul. Religious researchers would do well to ask why DMMs are not taking root in the soil of the American church.

Resources for Inquiry

While a limited amount of research has been conducted on the topic of disciple multiplication in the American church, a substantial amount of academic literature exists pertaining to organizational communication to effect individual behavior change (Boateng et al., 2016; Huang & Zhou, 2019; Kashian & Liu, 2020). For instance, social cognitive theory has been extensively used in healthcare research to understand how healthcare providers can better communicate to increase patient compliance (Bennett et al., 2018; Mayo-Gamble & Mouton, 2018; Portugal, 2021; Zhang et al., 2017). Additionally, researchers have used the social cognitive theory to understand how educators can better communicate with students to effect behavior toward more successful academic achievement (Elliott et al., 2019; Kolodziej, 2006). The actor–network theory has been used throughout organizational communication research to better understand how meaning is both created and shared throughout complex networks as a means of adjusting individual behaviors within the complex network (Blok et al., 2020; Chambon, 2020; Latour, 2008; Law & Hassard, 2005; Michael, 2017). It stands to reason that understanding the social science behind these theories could reveal an aspect of the power that propelled Jesus and the first-century church toward a movement that changed the world forever.

The Soil and the Seed

While the resources for learning to conduct a DMM are limited, some valuable research has been published pertaining to disciple making, disciple multiplication, and creating a discipleship culture within an American church (Addison, 2019; Allin, 2018; Anderson & Harrington, 2021; Barna Research Group, 2015; R. Bennett & Purvis, 2003; Chan & Beuving, 2012; Coleman, 1997; Comiskey, 2016; Earley & Dempsey, 2013; Gallaty & Swain, 2020; Guindon, 2020; Longest & Uecker, 2021; Putman et al., 2013). Using Jesus's parable of the four soils found in Mark 4:1–8 (*New International Bible* [NIV], 1978/1984), the entirety of discipleship resources available appears to focus on the seed, or the message of discipleship, while no attention has been paid to the soil into which that seed is planted (Pitt & Washington, 2020). Since Ying and Grace demonstrated their ability to successfully plant and grow the seed of discipleship in multiple foreign cultures but have been unsuccessful at making the same seed grow within the soil of the American church, it stands to reason that diligent inquiry into the soil of the American church is warranted. The parable in Mark 4 was specifically addressing the heart of individual people; however, individual people are behind the creation of methodological practices of daily activity and organizational cultures which inherently have unique personalities from every member yet are made up by every member (Crouch, 2008; Friedman, 2018). If a seed is to properly grow to full potential, it must be planted in the correct soil; if the soil is unhealthy, it must be altered for the seed to take root and grow.

Researching the Soil

This research sought to understand the limiting factors present within an American church with self-disclosed aspirations of igniting a DMM in the church's local context. Focus was given to epistemological organizational communication that influenced parishioner ontology

which ultimately influenced individual behavior and informed the practice of disciple making and disciple multiplication within the American church and provided new insights into organizational communication to create an organizational culture of disciple making. This vision proved to be important because discovery of organizational inhibitors to the successful establishment of a DMM in the American church will likely have strategic impact to the church, the country, and any organization wishing to alter individual behavior through organizational culture manipulation.

This chapter first discusses the philosophical assumptions I bring to the research, then the background of disciple making within the church, with a focus given to the historical, social, and theoretical contexts that give structure to a study on organizational communication to achieve disciple multiplication. Next, I explain the philosophical assumptions and personal paradigm inherent throughout my research. Following, the problem statement, the purpose statement, and an understanding of the significance of the study are provided. Finally, I articulate the guiding research questions, definitions for terms used throughout the study, and provide a summary of Chapter One.

Situation to Self

After having led a DMM in West Africa, my return to the United States was met with what seemed like a passive resistance within the American church to the practice of disciple multiplication. Certainly, the American church boasted of incredible megachurches, technologically supported worship services, robust seminaries that produced well educated pastors, entertaining and educational conferences, and unfettered access to unfathomable Christian resources such as books, podcasts, and videos. However, despite the vast richness of the church in America, research found that there were no DMMs in the American church

(Wilson, 2014). Certainly, the Christian market of $1.2 trillion annually, as of September 2021, revealed a healthy population of consumers willing to make at least some economic decisions based on faith; however, I began to wonder what was inhibiting the initiation of a DMM in a church that was so willing to expend financial resources in support of its faith (Grim, n.d.).

Philosophical Assumptions

Ontological

The first assumption brought to this study was rooted in a faith background congruent with conservative evangelical Christianity. As such, realism was prescribed based on the distinct and autonomous Word of God and His interaction with humanity, interaction that remains constant despite the beliefs or practices of human beings (Snape & Spencer, 2003). At the same time, idealism was recognized and accepted based on fallen man's free-will ability to create and transmit meaning through communication (Snape & Spencer, 2003). Therefore, the ontological assumption brought to this study was that while divine realism exists, human idealism does not always conform to that prescribed by God.

Epistemological

The epistemological assumptions brought to this study had a direct correlation with the ontological assumptions, as value was found in both positivism and interpretivism simultaneously (Snape & Spencer, 2003). For instance, the positivist assumption was rooted in man's ability to learn through both the logos (*Λόγος*, Logos) and rhema (*ῥήματος*, rhēmatos) Word of God (Thornhill, 2016; Voorst, 2001; Zodhiates et al., 2002). While humans can learn through diligent academic inquiry coupled with divine revelation from the Holy Spirit, both approaches exemplify positivism as the learning is created through a distinct, static, and autonomous source from outside the human being. However, interpretivism is simultaneously

happening when human beings create and transmit meaning through communication methods. Even inside the Church where Christians wish to gain all knowledge from God, inadvertent interpretivism can take place when meaning is generated through semiotics. While positivism should be the desired state for Christians, and often is the state to differing degrees, the only human to live a perfectly positivist existence was Jesus Christ who exemplified a perfectly surrendered life to the will of the Father (*NIV*, 1978/1984, John 5:19).

Rhetorical

As Treadwell and Davis (2020) pointed out, "Aristotle (384–322 BCE) viewed rhetoric as the discovery of the available means of persuasion in any given situation" (p. 239). The rhetorical assumption brought to this study was that the most persuasive argument for the problem at hand will be generated from those closest to the problem, the Christians in the American church. As such, an ethnographically informed comparative embedded case study looking at multiple churches through interviews, a digital media review, direct observations, artifacts and document reviews, and analysis generated the greatest amount of persuasion.

Axiological

The primary axiological assumption brought to this study was that actions must accompany true belief (*NIV*, 1978/1984, James 1:22). In essence, the assumption was that all actions stem first from a belief (Winship, 2019). For instance, before people sit in a chair, they must first believe something about the chair, about themselves, and about other people around them. Similarly, inaction also finds root in human belief. If a leader demands action, yet none of the constituents obey the demand, the inaction indicates a belief about the leader, about the inactive person, or about those around them. Therefore, this axiological assumption placed great value on action and inaction.

Research Paradigm

The paradigm that guided this study was social constructivism. While a realism ontological assumption was brought to the study, the axiological assumption logically argued that if the American church were primarily driven by obedience to the Word of God, then some degree of disciple multiplication would be the natural outcome of that obedience to God. Certainly, people can be called to multiply disciples in numerous ways and to differing degrees however, some evidence of disciple multiplication should be evident in the American church if the axiological assumption were that actions must accompany belief. Given the lack of DMM in the American church, the indication is that idealism led to the creation of meaning divergent from the Word of God and thus resulted in the inaction pertaining to disciple multiplication in America.

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Background

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The scope of this work remained within the parameters of the communication discipline with specific inquiry into the epistemology of disciple making and disciple multiplication. For this reason, the historical background of disciple making was limited to historical snapshots of the church that presented epistemologically noteworthy transitions. Then, built upon a historical background understanding, the social context in which the research took place provided a vitally important understanding of the ingredients that have mixed to create the problem that drove the investigation. In essence, the historical epistemology formed the current ontology. Additionally, a theoretical background was necessary for defining the parameters within which the formal research took place. While this background section served as a primer for contextual understanding, a more exhaustive argument for the background is presented in Chapter Two.

Historical Context

The Hellenistic Paradigm

Jesus entered a world inundated with a pervasive Jewish religious system that was doubly burdened by the oppressive rule of Augustus and his Roman government (Lea & Black, 2003; Scott, 2003). Religious leadership at the time was marked by strict observance of clearly defined rules and practices and was reserved only for the most gifted students who received a substantial formal education (Bruce, 2000; Lea & Black, 2003). By the time Jesus arrived in Israel, Hellenism was the pervasive paradigm throughout the land. With the substantial Greek influence on Jewish life, Hellenistic Jews enjoyed many of the same amenities to life as 21st-century American Christians; theaters, sports arenas, higher education, courts of law, thriving market districts, and many more opportunities for patrons to invest their time and money abounded (Lea & Black, 2003). It was within this historical context that Jesus asserted in Matthew 4:19, "Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers' of men" (*NIV*, 1978/1984).

The Method is the Message

Rather than offering a formal synagogue education similar to the Jewish leadership system, Mark 3:14 revealed that "he appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach" (*NIV*, 1978/1984). While the selection of 12 disciples clearly had symbolic purposes relative to the 12 tribes of Israel, Jesus chose 12 ordinary men and invested an inordinate amount of His time in them for a very specific ministry objective (Atkinson & Comiskey, 2014; Comiskey, 2016). Rather than offer information in a classroom-type setting, Jesus chose a more experiential form of education. Comiskey asserted, "We can also learn much from the way he taught them. He did not simply gather them once a week for a 'discipleship class.' He lived with them" (Comiskey, 2016, p. 77). Jesus provided approximately 3 years of an

experiential education to His followers before He offered the parting instructions in Matthew 28:19–20,

> Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age. (*NIV*, 1978/1984)

The Method Multiplied

The disciples understood Jesus's parting instructions well and soon after His departure, they began making disciples of all nations. In fact, the followers of Christ so diligently pursued the mission to make disciples of all nations that Paul asserted in Romans 15:23, "But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions" (*NIV*, 1978/1984). Despite immense persecution and limited technology for international communication, within one generation of Christ, the Church had multiplied disciples throughout most of the known world at the time. The first-century church was marked by "two related actions: a movement outward to reach places where Christ's name was hitherto not known and a movement inward to train hearts in learning more of Christ" (Noll, 2012, p. 1). Therefore, the ontology of the early church remained constant even with rapid expansion into diverse regions and people groups. However, "between the years AD 100 and AD 500 the Christian Church changed almost beyond recognition" (Lane, 2006, p. 4). In fact, by AD 500, Rome, the once ruthless persecutor of the Christian faith, accepted Christianity as the official religion of the state and adopted Christian leaders and practices into their bureaucracy.

A Different Method Sends a Different Message

While Roman acceptance of the Christian faith presented a blessing in the form of

eradication of systematic martyrdom and persecution of the church, the change presented new challenges as well. For instance, "in 318 Constantine's government legitimated the episcopal courts by handing over to the bishops' civil jurisdiction in cases involving Christians" (Senn, 1985, p. 221). Very quickly, non-Christian Roman citizens began to seek out episcopal courts which led to the creation of seven public halls, or basilicas, in Rome to house the popular legal benefactors (Senn, 1985). The bureaucratic Roman government found it necessary for the bishops to obtain proper titles in the State's social scale and maintain rigid protocol in the courts (Senn, 1985). Of course, with official titles and rigid protocol,

> This meant that the bishops were accorded the titles, insignia, and privileges of their new social rank. Among the insignia granted to bishops were the *pallium* (a kind of stole), the *mappula* (a kind of ceremonial napkin), the *campagi* (a special kind of footwear), and probably a golden ring. (Senn, 1985, p. 221)

This marked a significant deviation from the social context created by Jesus with the first disciples and more closely resembled that of the social context familiar with the Jewish religious leaders who maintained titles of stature, highly ritualized protocols, and ornate adornments (Lea & Black, 2003; Scott, 2003).

The Method Shapes a Paradigm

While Christianity rose in popularity within Rome, interest in the historical life of Christ became popular and pilgrims began to visit sites in Jerusalem that were related to Jesus (Senn, 1985). Subsequently, Constantine built magnificent churches at many of these locations which further drew innumerable pilgrims to Palestine (Walton, 2005). While the architectural wonders drew large crowds, the Roman leaders found it necessary to offer regular iterations of ceremonies at each location, ceremonies specifically designed to entertain the religious pilgrims

(Senn, 1985). Some of those who attended these ceremonies brought the liturgy back and began to introduce the highly ritualized practices in their local congregations (Senn, 1985). Once again, this presented a remarkable departure from the social context created by Jesus. Though very subtle to those involved in the practices, the departure moved from a context of intimate connection in a community intent on reaching the nations for Christ to a context of religious duty content to be entertained with well-intentioned sacrament observance and bureaucratic utility. Within a single generation of Constantine's implementation of his religious facilities building project, the Christian church experienced a metamorphosis that resulted in an organization led by a few, with a majority of followers who simply consumed religious content provided by the clergy.

While the sincerity of Constantine's conversion and the utility of his acceptance of Christianity as the state religion are hotly debated theological topics, "the numbers show that Constantine's efforts between AD 300 and 400 almost doubled the number of Christians, growing to 25 million" (Moran, 2015). However, one of the dangers of quantifying success simply through the number of converts is the gross misunderstanding of context. Understanding the difference between a movement and a ministry is important to fully appreciate the numbers attributed to Constantine's efforts, as Addison (2019) explained:

> A movement is a group of people committed to a common cause. A ministry is what you can achieve helped by others. The vision is limited to your sphere of control. A movement mobilizes people to act without your direct supervision. (p. 23)

Speaking about Rome's acceptance of Christianity as the state religion, Addison asserted, "Success changed Christianity. It ceased to be a missionary movement. The church lost interest in evangelizing the barbarians beyond the borders of civilization. Within the empire, coercion

replaced persuasion as the method of evangelism" (p. 27). Simply put, the dominant power ascribed to the Christian religion by the Roman state fundamentally changed the ontology of those who practiced the faith under state rule.

The Method Matters

Despite the ontological metamorphosis of Christianity in the Western church under Roman rule, the heart of the first-century church remained alive. In fact, "While the Council of Nicaea met, a former soldier named Pachomius was organizing isolated desert monks into monastic communities. The monastic movement was born and became the driving force of Christian missions for the next 1500 years" (Addison, 2019, p. 27). Numerous movements have sprouted around the globe throughout the years, demonstrating that the heart of the first-century church has remained alive. In fact, Discipleship.org (2021) reported that in 2020 there were over 1,000 DMMs in the world; however, none of those movements were in the United States and less than 5% of American churches were disciple-making churches at all. Certainly, these statistics have drawn great concern for North American missiologists and national church thought leaders who have begun to embark on further research. Christianity has continued to spread with different methods; however, as Jesus said in Matthew 7:16, "By their fruit you will recognize them" (*NIV*, 1978/1984). While different methods have been used to spread Christianity, only the method presented by Jesus produces disciples who become "fishers of men."

The problem at hand is that Jesus modeled a lifestyle that was replicated by the first-century church and resulted in the rapid expansion of the Christian faith. An ontological transformation took place with Constantine's Christendom that created a dominant religion far removed from Jesus's prescribed life as one of His disciples. Despite the metamorphosis of the main body of Christian faith, pockets of missionary-minded communities remained faithful to

the original lifestyle prescribed by Christ and have borne fruit commensurate with that choice. While many contemporary examples of DMMs exist around the world, none exist in the American church. This problem should be of clear interest to professional clergy; however, that very statement is indicative of how deep the problem runs in America. Professional clergy existed within the social context of Jesus, yet He deliberately sought to break down that barrier and model the "priesthood of all believers" (*NIV*, 1978/1984, 1 Peter 2:4–5). This is not meant as a derogatory comment toward professional clergy; this is meant as a call to action for every follower of Christ. Clergy were never meant to run the race alone but rather guide a population that runs together. Thus, the problem is of paramount interest for all believers in Jesus Christ. The problem must be of interest because Jesus communicated a lifestyle that was life-giving and resulted in rapid expansion of faith communities.

The Message of the Method

If the American church is communicating a different message that is not resulting in disciple multiplication, then every Christian is missing a metaphysical gold mine that Jesus intended every believer to possess. While research into the problem of lacking disciple multiplication in the American church has been conducted, most previous work has been limited to the theological discipline and has focused on the discipleship message rather than the methodological approach that establishes a disciple-making culture. In essence, the focus has been on the seed rather than the soil. How the church communicates the message of discipleship matters and appears to be a limiting factor associated with the lack of DMMs in the American church. This work on organizational communication within the American church represents a very limited body of research utilizing qualitative social science to understand the problem of limited disciple-making practices in the American church.

Social Context

Differences in the American Church

In an effort to understand the social context of the problem, I not only described the social context of the American church but also the American societal context that housed the church subculture. This seemed like a daunting task given that in 2019, there were nearly 205 million Christians dispersed within over 308,000 churches from nearly 200 different denominations in America (Center for the Study of Global Christianity, n.d.). Ultimately, the fact that nearly 200 different denominations existed alludes to the fact that at least 200 organizational cultures were different enough within the American church culture to formally separate and publicly proclaim distinction from the other denominations. The very existence of such denominational diversity clearly proclaimed a great deal of differences within the American church.

The Similarity in the American Church

At first glance of such denominational diversity a researcher may be tempted to isolate a church organizational culture; however, despite the plethora of differences within the American church as indicated by the number of denominations, the universal lack of disciple multiplication hints that the problem affects all American churches, and any church can serve as a microcosm for initial inquiry. Certainly, further investigation will likely yield better understanding of peculiarities unique to each organizational culture that could further hinder disciple multiplication efforts; however, this work sought to understand the social context within which the American church struggled to multiply disciples.

Contemporary American Church Context

Investigation of the problem pertaining to a lack of disciple multiplication in the

American church could not be legitimately researched devoid of the social context of the American society. The social fabric through which epistemological communication takes place certainly colors the very ontology of the people that compose the church. The ontology of the American church is painfully evident when considering, as of 2020, the American church was in a dire position, potentially teetering on the brink of nonexistence as 80% of churches in America were either plateaued or declining (Fisk, 2020; Wilson et al., 2015). A national disciple-making ministry reported that less than 5% of churches in America were even disciple-making churches (Discipleship.org, 2021).

Discipleship methods being utilized by the church in America were costly and ineffective, as noted by the "significant number of Christians today with no drive to prioritize spiritual growth" (Barna Research Group, 2015, p. 11). Of self-identified Christians in America, three quarters have fewer than 10 spiritual conversations per year; topics of faith come up less than once a month for people professing to be followers of Jesus Christ (Stone, 2018). While lacking proselytization efforts may spur thoughts of increased classes to teach evangelism techniques, theologian David Lanier suggested, "The key to effective evangelism lies not in teaching evangelism classes to masses of immature believers but in discipling the immature believers to maturity" (Lanier, 1999, p. 13). Researchers of church growth and multiplication have boldly proclaimed, "The bottom line is that our current, prevailing operating systems are not producing reproduction and multiplication as a normal outcome" (Wilson et al., 2015, p. 36). Therefore, to understand how the ontology of the American church arrived at such a bleak stage, the elements of context pertaining to the culture must be dissected.

Elements of Context

Financial Wealth. While a list of social characteristics that could be attributed to the

current American culture would be exhaustive, this work simply identified several foundational characteristics that inherently influenced the ontology of the American church in 2021. For instance, the American church enjoys an opulence unknown to the vast majority of the world, a state of economic prosperity never even seen in American history. Certainly, America maintains an impressive stable of millionaires and billionaires; however, the financial wealth that could alter the ontology of the American church is the foundational expectation for shelter, electricity, running water, and sustenance, all luxuries not enjoyed throughout many parts of the world.

Religious Freedom. Additionally, the American church enjoys religious freedom with only extraneous examples of persecution being reported on rare occasion. In general, Americans are free to believe what they want, say what they wish, and act in accordance with their religious belief without hinderance (Trousdale, 2012; Wilson, 2014). This is a particularly interesting contextual element given that the most fruitful DMMs in the world have happened in places that experience the greatest level of persecution (Trousdale, 2012; Trousdale et al., 2018; Watson & Watson, 2014). One missionary with over 50 years' experience spread across many persecuted countries asserted, "The Gospel spreads fastest through the blood of martyrs" (B. Smith, personal communication, November 3, 2021).

Entertainment. Another noteworthy element of the American culture was entertainment. The American culture in 2021 was inundated with opportunities for personal entertainment, with an entertainment industry reaching $724 billion in revenue (Szalai, 2021). Behind this staggering amount of money spent on personal entertainment was an even more alarming implicit investment of personal time and attention devoted to nothing more than personal enjoyment. Additionally, an important factor of the entertainment element is its pervasive nature throughout nearly every facet of American society, forming a bedrock element of American life shortly after

birth and remaining through an American's death.

Education. The American culture values the accumulation of knowledge, almost worshiping science as an infallible reposal of salvific data (Postman, 1993). Often a person was considered an expert based on the accumulation of data pertaining to a topic, particularly within the theological realm and within the American church context. In fact, many people in the American church have been guilty of quantifying a person's spiritual maturity based solely on how well they know the Bible or some other theological set of information (Bonhoeffer, 1996). Additionally, some denominations have strict educational requirements for service as professional clergy (Trousdale et al., 2018).

Consumerism. Several elements of context such as wealth, entertainment, and education converge to create the element of consumerism. At the foundational level, the American culture is one that desires consumption, whether fine dining, sports, the fine arts, television, or even simply data provided through the news. This leads to a common social context within the American church where parishioners shop for a church based on music and teaching; a situation where they stand to be entertained by pleasing music and intellectually stimulating Bible knowledge. This element of context likely had profound influence on cognition and appears to be highly addictive.

Influence of the Elements of Context

The pervasive influence of sociologic factors is complex and much further reaching than simple cause and effect. For example, Ong and Hartley (2013) explained, "Knowledge is a product of language, and that the medium in which language is communicated—by voice, writing, print—makes us think along certain path-dependent lines" (p. xiv). In fact, McLuhan (1994) made the profound argument that the medium is the message and "was continually

amazed at the reluctance, often the downright refusal, of people to pay attention to the effects of media, and at their hostility to him for what he revealed" (p. xxiii). Further, based upon the concept that communication mediums in themselves communicate, Ellul and Merton (1964) argued,

> In our technological society, technique is the totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency (for a given stage of development) in every field of human activity. Its characteristics are new; the technique of the present has no common measure with that of the past. (p. xxv)

In essence, Ellul and Merton argued that the very operating system of human thought was so influenced by the medium that the collective conscience of society was driven in unison toward ever greater realizations of *technique*. For instance, the invention of the computer, and subsequently the internet, was thought to be able to streamline human work and thus decrease the time required to complete tasks, inevitably creating more free time for people (N. G. Carr, 2011). However, while the computer certainly decreases the time required for individual tasks, a societal drive for ever greater *technique* replaces gained personal free time with additional tasks which ultimately create even more work than before the invention of the computer.

The influence of communication mediums may not always be obvious to the non-critical eye; however, the ascendancy becomes clear with even minimal cultural analysis. In fact, Postman (2006) astutely asserted,

> For Las Vegas is a city entirely devoted to the idea of entertainment, and as such proclaims the spirit of a culture in which all public discourse increasingly takes the form of entertainment. Our politics, religion, news, athletics, education and commerce have been transformed into congenial adjuncts of show business, largely without protest or

even much popular notice. The result is that we are a people on the verge of amusing

ourselves to death. (pp. 3–4)

Further, Ong and Hartley (2013) articulated an American society that was shifted from orality to

literacy with the advent of printing and makes the argument for a pending second orality with the

rise of digital media. In essence, Ong and Hartley argued that human consciousness is

determined by the technological medium most poignantly at the divide between orality and

literacy. For example, in a primarily oral society intimate social contact is foundational;

however, with the advent of printed content, intimate social contact is no longer necessary and

becomes an optional pleasantry. Inevitably, the shift from necessity to nicety influences the very

consciousness of the society members. A recent example of a resounding societal shift currently

influencing human consciousness is social media, a content platform that inherently connects

people in community with others while yet facilitating a level of anonymity, or at least

geographic or spatial anonymity. Such a relational paradigm would have been incomprehensible

even 30 years ago, yet today, groups of children will gather in a room and remain silent for hours

while they participate in a collective video game. The group of children can pass hours in silence

without even a glance of eye contact yet emerge from the experience with a much deeper level of

comradery as they engaged each other through a new communication medium. Certainly, this

medium communicates a very influential message that has changed society without the conscious

awareness of most society members (McLuhan, 1994; McLuhan et al., 2010).

Influence of the Elements of Context on the Church

Business Model. The influence of communication mediums has reached into American

church culture as well. For example, nearly every megachurch in America came into existence

since the 1980s when business CEOs were hired as consultants to design churches that could

operate as successful companies (Thumma, n.d.). While Jesus modeled a methodological approach that was countercultural even during His time, the method of investing an inordinate amount of time and resources into a few disciples in hopes they will multiply is contrary to the business model of most successful companies that usually seek to expand operations and increase profits. As such, business executives advised church leaders to grow larger, increase attendance, increase profits, and increase the overall reach of the organization (Thumma, n.d.). While a popular measure of success in the American church has been the quantity of church membership, a fundamental question through this study was the pervasiveness of negative influence that stems from this misguided perception of success. In essence, the larger the number of people who are expected to attend, consume, and be entertained, the greater the methodological message that contradicts the expectation to change behavior toward disciple multiplication.

Though starting a small business is one of the riskiest economic endeavors, the most widely accepted model of church planting mirrors the business model used by most entrepreneurs (Searcy & Thomas, 2017). For instance, emphasis is placed upon traditional business commodities such as location, budgetary constraints, marketing opportunities, and projected growth to sustain early investments (Searcy & Thomas, 2017). These are all common considerations for a modern-day church planter; however, none of these considerations were present in Jesus' strategy for disciple making and subsequently church planting. Rather than investing resources into the development of systems and structures in hopes that revenue would eventually be generated, Jesus and the first-century church focused on people and only implemented organizational structure as a necessary means of facilitating order (Acts 14:23; Acts 20:17–35; Titus 1:5–9, 1 Timothy 3:1–13; 1 Peter 5:1–4). It seems that the medium of American

business strategy and implementation has thoroughly permeated church culture to the extent that many pastoral leaders cannot fathom an operational church without a bedrock business model.

      Celebrity Pastors. Another example of medium influence in the American church can be seen in the paradigm of celebrity pastors. A recent study found a correlation between the number of radios and televisions in a country and the number of globally famous performing artists (Jara-Figueroa et al., 2019). Additionally, the same study found historically that European cities that adopted printing earlier were far more likely to be the birthplace of famous scientists or artists (Jara-Figueroa et al., 2019). Such a paradigm can be enticing for spiritual leaders to seek out the communication medium with the largest reverberation which, based on this study, only fuels the perception of expert status of the leader with the loudest voice (Jara-Figueroa et al., 2019). There are numerous books on disciple multiplication that were written by celebrity pastors who had never actually multiplied disciples, yet the authors are well known, regularly leading seminars on disciple making simply because they are perceived experts based on information in a book rather than proven experience.

Potential Application of Research in the Social Context

      The implications of this research may affect the vast majority of society in some fashion or another; however, direct implications can be seen for both the American church writ large as well as in secular organizations and businesses. To begin, the first entity to be affected by the research, the American church, may be made aware of the overwhelming influence different mediums have on the human consciousness that inherently shape decisions and organizational culture (Ong & Hartley, 2013; Postman, 1993). Through the dissection of organizational communication and the organizational culture, the modern American church is given the opportunity to compare and contrast differences between the organizational culture they have

established compared to the culture created by Jesus as presented in scripture. This exercise in contrasting undoubtedly offers organizational self-reflection on the status quo and challenges communication methods that do not bear fruit that is congruent with that promised in scripture. Additionally, secular organizations and businesses stand to be affected by the research as medium influence on human consciousness is far more pervasive than simply the American church. A similar method of enlightenment to external influence has proven highly lucrative in the business sector (Rapaille, 2007). Certainly, understanding medium influence in order to alter communication to affect individual behavior change would be a highly sought-after commodity in most sectors. Therefore, while my primary focus of the research was the American church and advancing the Kingdom of God, certainly this research stands poised to affect numerous markets that could range from banking, to service, or even airlines.

Theoretical Context

The actor–network theory (ANT) and the social cognitive theory (SCT) were used in an effort to define guiding parameters through which investigation of the communication problem was conducted. In particular, the ANT was used to better understand what American culture is communicating to the church, what meaning the church creates from cultural communication, and how the church re-communicates that meaning within its organizational culture. The SCT was used to better understand how the organizational culture of the church communicates meaning to individual parishioners, how individuals create meaning from the organizational communication, and how individual behavior is influenced based on the meaning created from organizational communication. Finally, the Johnson and Scholes cultural web model (JSCW) was used to organize structural elements of effective organizational communication throughout the research.

The Actor–Network Theory

Through the lens of the ANT, the problem of lacking DMMs in America is a communication centric problem. For instance, under the auspices that organizations are simply forms of sensemaking, when a stated desire is for individual parishioners to practice disciple-making activities yet the organization's systematic approach to regular business communicates a contrary message, the message inherent in the regular systematic approach to business is far more influential on the activities of those within the culture (Bandura, 2002). Therefore, it is important to first attempt to understand the communication inputs from American society into the church that inherently influence sensemaking. As Callon (2012) highlighted, influence is not a static situation by which today's understanding can guide tomorrow's decisions; rather, this work attempted to provide illumination on the complex network of influences to expand the consciousness of those within the church. As Terrell (2016) stated, "The problem is the problem" (p. 3); once we accurately understand the problem, we are more likely to solve it.

The Social Cognitive Theory

The SCT was used as the foundation for understanding individual behavior. The theory was founded by Bandura in 1986 but can be traced back to the roots of his research in social learning as early as the 1960s, thus boasting of a widely accepted status of accuracy in understanding human behavior (LaMorte, 2019). The theory is explained by Bandura (1995b) who offered that "human functioning is explained in terms of a model of triadic reciprocality in which behavior, cognitive and other personal factors, and environmental events all operate as interacting determinants of each other" (p. 18). Of particular interest was the SCT personal factors of knowledge, skills, self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals as well as the behavioral factors of frequency and consistency; the SCT environmental factors of social,

institutional, and physical will also be given astute attention within the context of the ANT (Maibach & Cotton, 1995). Specifically, this study sought to understand what meaning is created through the use of the ANT with a secondary consideration of how that meaning moves toward action through the lens of the SCT.

The Johnson and Scholes Cultural Web

Given the centrality of organizational culture in this study, a paradigm of reference for universal understanding of a structure for organizational culture was the JSCW model (McDonald & Foster, 2013). To be clear, a common definition of organizational culture in reference to an American church could be the following: "Culture is the commonly-held set of values and principles that shows up in the everyday behavior of the people" (Friedman, 2018, p. 19). However, Friedman (2018) pragmatically explained, "The second part of the definition suggests that the culture is rooted in behavior. Regardless of what people say they value or believe, what actually shows up in their behavior is the best indication of the true culture" (pp. 19–20). While Friedman's sentiment about behavior defining culture is absolutely true, it does not capture the totality of influence that drives the individual behaviors that ultimately define culture. As such, the six elements of the JSCW—(a) stories, (b) symbols, (c) rituals and routines, (d) power structure, (e) organizational structure, and (f) controls—must be reviewed through the lens of the ANT to determine their influence on behavior through the SCT.

Accounting for the Holy Spirit

While the results of this study have wider application in the secular market, one peculiarity to the study of communication within the American church is the role of the Holy Spirit on sensemaking and subsequent actions. A precedent for studying communication with God exists, even outside the Christian faith, as Cohen (2004) offered, "God moderates His voice,

so that it can be a medium of communication with humans" (p. 184). Additionally, Russell (2018) explained, "Prayer is about participating in the relationship God offers us" (p. 49). Describing the role of the ANT on their study of religion, Lassander and Ingman (2012) asserted, "Dismissing the notion of 'the social' as a kind of 'stuff,' ANT insists that sociology should focus on the interactional processes—the circulation of 'the social' among human and non-human actants—collectively assembling emerging states of affairs" (p. 202). Given the fact that Acts 1:8 ((*NIV*, 1978/1984) asserts, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you," any serious inquiry into DMMs must account for the role and influence of the Holy Spirit. While this study did not seek to prove or quantify communication with the divine, it did seek to measure the influence of perceived communication with the divine. Certainly, non-human actants are to be measured with the ANT tool, and subsequently, this research sought to measure the influence of perceived communication with God through the SCT. In essence, this research found that someone is more likely to multiply disciples if they perceive they have heard directly from God.

Previous Research on Disciple-Making

While this study is not the first to address the problem, it does represent the most comprehensive social science approach utilizing the ANT, SCT, and JSCW to investigate the organizational communication behind the lack of DMM in the American church. A great deal of research has been conducted utilizing the SCT and previous work has utilized the ANT to understand the influence of spiritual actors in society (Cohen, 2004; Lassander & Ingman, 2012; Russell, 2018). Research into the lack of DMM in the American church has been led by several national ministries and has produced works focused on multiplication, disciple-making organizational culture, and individual disciple-making behaviors (Galanos, 2018; Guindon, 2020;

Walkemeyer & Wilson, 2019; Wilson, 2014; Wilson et al., 2015). While previous research on the problem has produced material of value, the work has resulted primarily in prescriptive data with minimal descriptive content pertaining to the much more pervasive problem of influential communication into and from organizational cultures.

Adding to the existing body of literature not only refines the existing body of knowledge on both the ANT and SCT but also extends the research into the Christian organizational culture realm as well. Additionally, the research extends the existing body of knowledge within the communication discipline by demonstrating the congruency of the ANT and SCT as a wholistic measurement of analysis to better understand organizational communication and individual behavior. In essence, the research intended to demonstrate how ANT reveals the complexity of the communication that generates meaning while SCT reveals the individual behavior that result from the meaning generated in ANT. To date, no research into the congruency of these two theories to explain spiritual behavior has been conducted. Therefore, this research not only refined but extended the body of academic communication knowledge as a first of its kind.

The study of organizational communication toward disciple multiplication refines and extends the existing body of literature pertaining to academic inquiry in the communication discipline; however, it also represents a monumental extension of academic literature pertaining to the problem of lacking DMMs in the American church. While numerous works have been published pertaining to the problem, the works have primarily focused on the theological and practical implementation of the message rather than the contextual paradigm into which the message is transmitted; to use the parable of the soils again, previous work has focused on the seed while this work focuses on the soil. This research provides a robust background of qualitative scientific data pertaining to the creation and transmission of meaning through the

American church organizational culture that directly influences individual behavior toward disciple multiplication. No such body of literature existed prior to this work, and therefore, this work represents the seminal piece to what prayerfully will become a useful repository of research that brings glory to God on earth.

Problem Statement

As of 2021, national disciple-making and church planting thought leaders were unable to identify any DMMs within the American church (Discipleship.org, 2021; Pew Research Center, 2019; B. Smith, personal communication, November 3, 2021; Trousdale et al., 2018). First-century Christians who implemented the disciple-making practices as taught by Jesus witnessed exponential numerical and spiritual growth similar to 21st-century DMMs happening in numerous countries outside the United States, an indication that a qualitatively identifiable impediment to disciple multiplication exists within the American church context. The assumption that all action stems first from a belief and that belief, or meaning, is created and shared through communication was the foundation upon which this communication research into the creation of meaning by the American church and transmission of meaning from the American church was conducted. The research revealed the catalyst for lacking DMMs in America resides within the communication discipline. Additionally, recognizing the most influential aspects of human understanding necessary for behavioral change illuminates why current meaning created within the American church culture lacks disciple multiplication results.

Research on the topic was limited; however, McLuhan et al. (2010) focused on the creation of meaning in the church by the influence of culture and wrote, "The Church is so entirely a matter of communication that like fish that know nothing of water, Christians have no adequate awareness of communication" (p. xxi). Indeed, the topic of disciple multiplication has

been addressed theologically by several authors, but the research remains strictly within the theological discipline of study and provides little in way of academic understanding of the contextual problem (Allin, 2018; Earley & Dempsey, 2013; Galanos, 2018; Gallaty & Swain, 2020; Guindon, 2020; McDaniel, 2012; Putman et al., 2013; Smith & Kai, 2011). While a great deal of literature surrounding the use of the ANT and the SCT exists, there is a dearth of communication research data pertaining to the lack of DMMs in the United States (Bandura, 1995b, 1997; Chambon, 2020; Latour, 2008; Law & Hassard, 2005; Maibach & Parrott, 1995; Michael, 2017). Therefore, this research focused upon the creation of meaning within the church as influenced by American culture, the retransmission of that created meaning, and the application of transmitted meaning by congregants toward disciple multiplication practices within three non-denominational evangelical American churches ranging from the East Coast, the Midwest, and the West Coast of the United States through an ethnographically informed comparative embedded case study.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this ethnographically informed comparative embedded case study was to understand the lack of disciple multiplication movement for congregations at three evangelical non-denominational churches from the East Coast, the Midwest, and the West Coast of the United States. Throughout the research, the lack of DMMs was generally defined as the lack of four streams to the fourth generation with a total population of at least one thousand multiplying disciples. The theories guiding this study were the ANT (Latour, 2008) and the SCT (Bandura, 1995b) as they provided a theoretical framework to understand the influence of culture on the creation of meaning followed by the influence of meaning on individual behavior.

The discovery of American cultural influences on a church's organizational culture that

have negatively impacted disciple-making results could prove strategically vital to the sustainability of the American church. First, application of findings from this study could result in the immediate reversal of the downward trend in Christian affiliation in the United States, providing a profound source of revival for spiritual leaders. Additionally, the discovery of correlation between American culture, an organizational culture, and individual behaviors represents new data that could foundationally change the methodological approach to organizational communication for any industry wishing to persuade human behaviors. Not only could this data prove significant for the American church, but learning new methodological approaches to organizational communication to affect individual behavior change could prove monumental for online learning and institutions of higher education who wish to produce specific character traits within graduates.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this work is multifaceted with value found in both a theoretical element as well as a practical application element that could change the course of Christianity in the American church. The first significant aspect of this study is the more elaborate understanding of the influence societal culture has on the American church. Next, the study sought to provide a significant understanding of the influence an organizational culture has on individual behavior with a particular focus on discipleship practices. Certainly, understanding how to assist parishioners with changing daily behaviors to conformity with Jesus's prescribed discipleship behaviors will be significant for the American church; however, behavior that is congruent with Jesus's teachings also bears physiological benefits for the individual (Upenieks & Schieman, 2020). This study could not only assist the American church in more productively pursuing their mission but could also carry significant economic implications as a holistic

approach to human wellness. As such, this section on the significance of the study first reviews the significance of society's cultural influence on an organizational culture, then the significance of an organizational culture's influence on individual behavior, and finally, the significance of downward trending disciple-making efforts will be discussed in detail.

Significance of Societal Culture's Influence on an Organizational Culture

To begin, several cultural critics (Carr, 2011; Ellul & Merton, 1964; Ong & Hartley, 2013; Postman, 1993) have elaborated on technologies' influence over a society as Postman (1993) persuasively made the point,

> New technologies compete with old ones—for time, for attention, for money, for prestige, but mostly for dominance of their world-view. This competition is implicit once we acknowledge that a medium contains an ideological bias. And it is a fierce competition, as only ideological competitions can be. (p. 16)

Additionally, McLuhan et al. (2010) provided a cultural analysis of technologies' influence over the American church; however, though valuable, the work remained primarily descriptive and predictive in nature, void of pragmatic utility for disciple multiplication. While these authors demonstrated the significance in understanding how technology influences a societal culture, Rapaille (2007) offered,

> There is remarkable freedom gained in understanding why you act the way you do. This freedom will affect every part of your life, from the relationships you have, to your feelings about your possessions and the things you do, to the attitudes you have about America's place in the world. (p. 11)

The ANT has pursued greater understanding of how the vast networks of animate and inanimate actors influence one another, proving useful in academic inquiry pertaining to communication

influence within the religious sphere of life (Chambon, 2017, 2020; Checketts, 2017; Guggenheim, 2013; Lassander & Ingman, 2012). Therefore, as Rapaille pointed out pertaining to individual behavior, this work is significant in understanding why the American church, as an organization, acts the way it does. Additionally, this inquiry proves significant for future endeavors to alter organizational culture in an effort to drive individual behavior change that is contrary to popular culture.

Significance of an Organizational Culture's Influence on Individual Behavior

An organization's culture is created by the behavior of individual people; however, at the same time, the behavior of individual people is being influenced by the organizational culture in what can be described as a synergistic ebb and flow of sensemaking and culture creation (Friedman, 2018; Mercado & Trumbull, 2018). Understanding the components that motivate human behavior in relation to cultural influence is significant for future efforts to deliberately modify organizational communication toward a strategically identified end state (e.g., disciple-making; Crouch, 2008; Guindon, 2020). Understanding the role of Bandura's (1995b) social learning theory in behavior change, coupled with understanding outside influences on an organizational culture, prove significant for organizational leadership's efforts to deliberately design, modify, and implement a specific organizational culture to achieve a corporate mission (Crouch, 2008).

This study adds to the existing body of literature pertaining to organizational communication by holistically considering outside influence on internal communication and represents the unique work pertaining to the academic inquiry of disciple multiplication within the communication discipline. In particular, the use of ANT to deliberately analyze the mediatization coupled with other methodological influences on the creation of organizational

culture within an American church provided new literature that proves valuable in understanding sensemaking within a religious community. The use of the JSCW model provides unique literature pertaining to the creation of an organizational culture with the specified intent of directing every member of the organization's actions toward disciple multiplication. Additionally, the use of the SCT to analyze how sensemaking within an organizational culture influences individual behavior change added to an existing body of literature but represented new research focused on disciple multiplication.

Significance of Downward Trending Disciple-Making Efforts

The American church may cease to exist in any recognizable fashion as the church is declining numerically in both congregation size as well as overall established churches (Barna Research Group, 2015; Tromp et al., 2020; Vermeer & Scheepers, 2020; Wilson, 2014; Wilson et al., 2015). In fact, in a report published in late 2021, Wittberg (2021) asserted, "Close to a fifth of all American congregations now report having no young adults at all in their church, more than double the percentage that did so in 2010" (p. 467). This statistic is alarming since Wittberg also noted the following characteristics of the generation that appears to be absent from the American church: "Many actively want to talk about prayer, God, and faith and seek it in spiritual direction/accompaniment, mindfulness/meditation, scripture reading, or centering prayer" (p. 473). The indication is that while a generation has seemingly turned its back on the church, it has not turned its back on God and seems to have an active desire to pursue Him (Wittberg, 2021). The potential applications from this research prove significant for both professional clergy as well as individual congregants, as an outcome could be the rapid increase in church affiliation, disciple multiplication, and individual spiritual transformation. Such a dramatic turn of events would likely carry both physiological and spiritual implications with

significant reverberations through most sectors of society.

Physiological Significance

The church (Greek: *ekklesia*) is meant to be a group of like-minded people who are intimately connected for the purposes of advancing the will of God on the earth. Through the *ekklesia*, people receive hope and guidance from a separate and autonomous source of truth which guides practical and ethical life while also providing physiological benefits that offer a higher quality of life (Krause & Pargament, 2018; Marquine et al., 2015). Therefore, the declining *ekklesia* due to a lack of disciple multiplication in America is a possible indicator of widespread declining spiritual well-being among individuals, which may be directly related to human wellness. As a result, it is possible that a correlation exists between decreased religious affiliation and an increase in both violent crime and health concerns such as cancer and heart disease. While the connection may not be immediately visible, the problem of a declining *ekklesia* in America certainly plays a significant role in the changing soul of this country as it reveals a decline in the spiritual growth of individual people.

Spiritual Significance

This problem is significant because as the status quo of *ekklesia* membership becomes the passive receipt of information rather than active obedience to Jesus through a loving relationship, a potentially destructive organizational culture develops. An unhealthy or misguided culture within an *ekklesia* is potentially more devastating to the moral fabric of society than an absent *ekklesia.* As 2 Timothy 3:5 (*NIV,* 1978/1984) points out, some people present a form of godliness but lack any power, a situation that creates a toxic environment for those outside the church who are met with unempathetic rules rather than grace and love. Ultimately, as individual people in the *ekklesia* follow the teachings of Jesus, they assist other people in learning how to live a daily

life in pursuit of His teachings, a process known as disciple making.

A natural outcome of obedience to Jesus is a rapid transformation of society into conformity with the separate and autonomous standard of truth in the Bible and the multiplication of more pockets of *ekklesia*. Religious zealousness void of the Holy Spirit's loving transformation of the soul can result in a draconian application of strict and often violent laws such as is common with the Taliban or in Saudi Arabia (Groothuis, 2011; McQuilkin & Copan, 2014). On the other end of the spectrum, application of religious teaching without the internal instruction from the Holy Spirit can result in progressive humanism that relies upon the human intellect as the sole arbiter of ethical deliberation in life, an epistemology that inevitably becomes more embracing of debauchery since the desire of the flesh is accepted as a standard of practice (Groothuis, 2011; McQuilkin & Copan, 2014).

Significance for the Study Site

Given the significance of this study, the sites used for this ethnographically informed comparative embedded case study reaped indirect benefits even before publication. All locations used for this study have a self-proclaimed desire to implement an organizational culture of disciple making in an effort to realize an end state of a DMM within their local context. As such, the inherent goal of this study was to directly inform the strategic actions of all participant churches so as to assist church leaders in the realization of their stated goals. To engage in spiritually ethical research while also maintaining scientifically prudent discipline in the study, regular updates and spiritual mentorship were provided to church leaders to assist in disciple-making efforts without creating undue influence to skew data. Where necessary to maintain the integrity of the study, data were withheld until publication; however, the default of the study was always to assist the study participants in making more disciples without influencing the direction

of data for the study.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to investigate the creation of meaning within the church as influenced by American culture, the retransmission of that created meaning, and the application of transmitted meaning by congregants toward disciple multiplication practices. In an effort to fully analyze the problem, the following research questions (RQs) guided the investigation:

RQ1: How can a church organization communicate to increase disciple multiplication?

The first research question sought to understand the basic mechanics involved in the creation of an organizational culture that holistically communicated toward individual ontological transformation. The question inherently took into account the outside influence of societal culture on the organizational ontology as a factor in determining the pragmatic mechanics of communicating toward a disciple-making end. Of particular interest with this research question was both the medium and organizational systems through which communication occurred rather than a simple review of rhetoric. In essence, the holistic view of sensemaking was adopted for the following reason: The adage claims that a picture is worth a thousand words. However, if a picture is worth a thousand words, it stands to reason that an organizational method of communication is worth exponentially more words than a static picture. Thus, an organization's methodological approach to daily activities communicates far more than most members of the organization realize, making the method the message.

RQ2: How does a church's organizational communication influence individual disciple multiplication?

The second research question sought to understand the meaning that was created and transmitted through a church's organizational communication. Particular attention was paid to

individually described meaning with subsequent actions associated with each meaning.

Therefore, interview questions designed to answer RQ2 focused on congruency between stated

meaning and subsequent action, posing clarifying questions when a participant's stated meaning

was incongruent with his/her actions. For instance, if a participant's stated meaning was that

discipleship is important, yet subsequent actions were void of disciple-making efforts, further

investigation, while maintaining ethical practices, was made for the true meaning that has been

transmitted. While discipleship may have been important for the participant, if disciple-making

actions did not follow, then meaning had been communicated that something other than disciple-

making actions was most important.

RQ3: How can elements of the social cognitive theory be communicated to encourage

individual behavior change toward disciple multiplication?

The third research question sought to understand how elements of the SCT influence

disciple making. For instance, if self-efficacy was a common trait present in disciple-making

practices, RQ3 sought to understand how an organization can communicate with a goal to

increase disciple-making self-efficacy. Therefore, the question sought to first understand what

elements of the SCT are present in disciple-making practices and then how those elements could

be communicated to achieve the desired end state.

<center>**Definitions**</center>

Some of the terms used throughout this research are debated theological concepts that

have been the catalyst for denominational splits, church divides, and even physical violence. As

such, the intention of this work was not to provide a universal definition for theological adoption

writ large but rather, to provide a working definition for this study that brought clarity to the

research. Certainly, theologians could present remarkable arguments for different definitions for

each term; however, in an effort to move closer to an understanding of why no DMMs exist in the American church, the following working definitions for key terms were used throughout the study:

1. *Disciple* – A person who is deliberately committed to learning and growing in the ability to discern the voice of God, to obey Him, and to help others hear and obey God as well. This working definition for *disciple* is rooted in John 10:27 (*NIV*, 1978/1984) where Jesus explained, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me."

2. *Spiritual Disciplines* – Those regularly conducted exercises required for the deliberate pursuit of greater understanding and application of three categories of biblical obedience in a disciple's life: the Word, prayer, and disciple-making (McDaniel, 2012).

3. *Discipleship* – The deliberate and conscious training in both knowledge and actions to personally, and relationally with another, grow into the likeness of Christ, thus ushering an ontological transformation of the one committed to following Jesus (R. Bennett & Purvis, 2003).

4. *Reproduce* – The deliberate process by which a person ontologically transforms closer to the biblically prescribed image of Jesus through discipleship, the regular practice of spiritual disciplines, and the asserted desire to surrender to the will of Jesus as His disciple (R. Bennett & Purvis, 2003; Coleman, 1997; Gallaty & Swain, 2020; Walkemeyer & Wilson, 2019).

5. *Add* – Referring to the simple mathematical concept of increase, the term in this study was used to identify when spiritual reproduction occurs from a single source and the increase is not rooted in subsequent sources (Hull, 2007; Renn, 2005; Stetzer & Im, 2016; Wilson et al., 2015). In essence, the term refers to one spiritual reproducer who does not train others to equally reproduce new disciples. An example could be an evangelist who

leads thousands to Christ yet does not train those thousands to also lead people to Christ; the evangelist added thousands but did not multiply.

6. *Multiply* – Referring to the mathematical concept of increase, the term in this study was used to identify the compounding principle of latent potential inherent in every new disciple who is properly trained (Chan & Beuving, 2012; Galanos, 2018; Lanier, 1999; Renn, 2005; Wilson, 2014). An example could be an evangelist who leads three people to Christ, then subsequently trains each of those three to equally lead and train three new believers to also do the same. Through the evangelist training the new believers how to train others to also train others, the latent potential of all new believers is unleashed, and multiplication occurs.

7. *Spiritual Generation* – The relationship between a disciple and a mentor where the mentor represents a first generation and the disciple represents a second generation (Smith & Kai, 2011; Watson & Watson, 2014).

8. *Generational Stream* – A generational stream is the grouping of deliberate relationships between spiritual generations that can all be traced back to one common generation, much like a branch of a family tree (Anderson & Harrington, 2021; Smith & Kai, 2011).

9. *Disciple-Making Movement (DMM)* – For this study, a DMM is four streams of disciples, to at least the fourth generation in each stream, with at least 1,000 total disciples that came about in rapid succession, typically in less than 5 years (Addison, 2019; Gallaty & Swain, 2020; Trousdale, 2012).

10. *Church* – For this study, the term will be defined using discipleship.org's chosen definition: "A spiritual family growing in surrendered obedience to all the teachings of Jesus Christ who gather together regularly under Biblically recognized leadership for the purpose of fulfilling the Great Commission (making disciples) with a Great

Commandment heart (loving God, loving people)" (Moran, 2021, "Disciple Making Movements Defined," final paragraph).

11. *Church Planting Movement (CPM)* – Very similar to a DMM, a CPM recognizes four streams of *ekklēsia*, to at least the fourth generation in each stream, with at least 100 total *ekklēsias* that came about in rapid succession, typically in less than 10 years (Addison, 2019; Towns, 2020; Trousdale et al., 2018).

12. *Organizational Culture* – For this study, the term will be defined using Friedman's (2018) explanation: "Culture is the commonly-held set of values and principles that show up in the everyday behavior of the people" (p. 19).

13. *Organizational Communication* – While the simple definition of the term incorporates message sending from and through the organization, this study will imply the social constructionist theory as "a theoretical orientation to sociocultural processes that affect humans' basic understandings of the world" (Allen, 2005, p. 35).

Summary

Every year, hundreds of thousands of people are coming to know Jesus in some of the most persecuted countries in the world, a decision that often comes with a grave price for the new believers (Winship, 2019). I have personally witnessed the rapid spread of a DMM on multiple continents; I have personally ministered with Ying Kai, a DMM leader whom Rick Warren identified as the most fruitful laborer for Christ since the Apostle Paul; and yet, we still have no examples of a DMM in the American church (VergeNetwork, 2012). At a time when the American nation seems to be ripping at the very fabric of society, a time when chaos seems to permeate every crevice of human existence, the American church should be the vanguard of hope and peace, yet the organization seems to be sinking without an effective plan of remedy. The research has indicated that young Americans want God (Wittberg, 2021); it is now the

church's responsibility to effectively communicate in a way that ushers the God-seekers into an ontologically transformative relationship with the Divine!

The problem is that, despite pockets of congregational leaders with stated desires to see a DMM within their context, no DMMs exist within the American church (B. Andrews, personal communication, November 3, 2021; Discipleship.org, 2021; B. Smith, personal communication, November 3, 2021; E. Valenstein, personal communication, September 15, 2021; Wilson, 2014). Based upon the foundation that all action stems first from a belief, and that belief or meaning is created and shared through communication, this study utilized communication research into the creation of meaning by the American church and transmission of meaning from the American church to examine the catalyst for lacking DMMs in America. Understanding the historical, social, and theoretical contexts are important for the effective pursuit of a solution to the problem as the topic of disciple multiplication has been addressed theologically by several authors, but the research remains strictly within the theological discipline of study and provides little in way of practical understanding of the contextual problem, as is evidenced by a lack of any DMMs in the American church (Allin, 2018; Earley & Dempsey, 2013; Galanos, 2018; Gallaty & Swain, 2020; Guindon, 2020; McDaniel, 2012; Putman et al., 2013; Smith & Kai, 2011). Therefore, this research focused upon the creation of meaning within the church as influenced by American culture, the retransmission of that created meaning, and the application of transmitted meaning by congregants toward disciple multiplication practices within three non-denominational evangelical American churches in the United States through an ethnographically informed comparative embedded case study.

The purpose of this study was to understand the lack of DMMs for congregations at three evangelical non-denominational churches ranging from the East Coast, Midwest, and West Coast

of the United States. Since definitions were vitally important for this study, the lack of DMMs was defined as the lack of four streams to the fourth generation with a total population of at least 1,000 multiplying disciples. The theories guiding this study were the ANT (Latour, 2008) and the SCT (Bandura, 1995b) as they provided a theoretical framework to understand the influence of culture on the creation of meaning followed by the influence of meaning on individual behavior. With the foundation of the study presented in this chapter, the next chapter turns to existing literature in order to continue building the structure through which the inquiry was ushered forward by reviewing the problem, the theoretical construct, the methodological approach, and limitations of the study.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

While the general research on why the American church is not experiencing any disciple-making movements (DMMs) is of great interest to the American church and North American missiologists, this research is also of interest to any organizational leader who wishes to better understand outside influence on organizational culture and subsequent individual behavior. In particular, research that identifies a direct link between the epistemology communicated through the actor–network theory (ANT) coupled with the ontology of individuals who behave by the influence of the social cognitive theory (SCT) could be of great interest to the leadership of most organizations. Also, the addition of the Johnson and Scholes cultural web (JSCW) organizational culture paradigm offers a simplistic mechanism with which practitioners can begin to implement research results in a pragmatic way. However, a historical review of the cultural influences on the American church, as well as the influence of communication innovations on American culture, is necessary to support the thorough and effective research focused on the problem.

This literature review will first identify the overall problem and the severity to which the American church has experienced the problem. The review of literature then presents communication as a potential catalyst to the problem and provides an analysis of the impact of communication innovations on American culture. Additionally, several American social ingredients that may be responsible for setting the stage of a consciousness revolution are addressed, followed by a review of media ecology and the interconnected nature of the social ingredients. Once the historical communication innovation data are presented, the chapter moves to a review of the theoretical framework literature covering the ANT, the SCT, and the JSCW model. Finally, this literature review presents research pertaining to the theoretical framework

and the presented problem of lacking disciple multiplication in the American church, conflicting

research, research gaps, and methods and tools that were used in the study.

The Problem

The American church is in a dire position, potentially teetering on the brink of

nonexistence as 80% of churches in America are either plateaued or declining (Wilson et al.,

2015). Current discipleship methods being utilized by the church in America are costly and

ineffective, as noted by the "significant number of Christians today with no drive to prioritize

spiritual growth" (Barna Research Group, 2015, p. 11; see also Bok, 2020). Of self-identified

Christians in America, three quarters have fewer than 10 spiritual conversations per year; topics

of faith come up less than once a month for people professing to be followers of Jesus Christ

(Stone, 2018). While lacking proselytization efforts may spur thoughts of increased classes to

teach evangelism techniques, theologian David Lanier (1999) suggested, "The key to effective

evangelism lies not in teaching evangelism classes to masses of immature believers but in

discipling the immature believers to maturity" (p. 13). Researchers of church growth and

multiplication have boldly proclaimed, "The bottom line is that our current, prevailing operating

systems are not producing reproduction and multiplication as a normal outcome" (Wilson et al.,

2015, p. 36).

Understanding the Problem Through Functional Definitions

Many theologians struggle to provide a unified definition of a 21st-century disciple that

can serve as a pragmatic resource for parishioners wishing to obediently follow Christ's Great

Commission (*NIV,* 1978/1984, Matthew 28:19–20). While a great deal has been written about

discipleship over the past two centuries, presumably due to Jesus' command to make disciples in

Matthew 28:19–20, relatively little has been observed academically about the process of disciple

making and, thus, even the definition of *discipleship* remains contested among theologians and professional clergy (Putman et al., 2013). For example, while researching disciple making in American churches, Putman et al. (2013) inquired of clergy and church staff about discipleship and found,

> Since most of the teams have come to agree that the purpose of a church is discipleship (or something close to it), we followed up that question by asking, "What is a disciple?" In all our years of asking this question, we encountered only two churches in which the entire team of leaders agreed on the same definition. (pp. 42–43)

The lack of a working definition creates a critical flaw as Allin (2018) explained, "One of the biggest challenges associated with developing a culture of discipleship is a lack of clear, mutually-agreed-upon understanding of a disciple of Jesus" (p. 2). Allin later asserted, "A church can have a mission statement centered around making disciples, but if the nature of discipleship is unclear or there are competing visions of what it means to be a disciple, the church will never fulfill its mission" (pp. 2–3).

In the most literal sense, the Greek word used for disciple, *μαθητεύ* (mathēteuō) could be translated as a pupil or learner; however, the context of this study demands further clarification—this study is interested specifically in the pupils or followers of *Jesus Christ* (Renn, 2005). Additionally, Rayburn (2003) highlighted, "He was the teacher or master; they were his disciples (mathēteuō), a term involving too much personal attachment and commitment to be adequately rendered by 'pupil'" (p. 235). Implicit in this working definition of disciple is a metaphysical aspect that involves a transformation of heart or personal will that was captured by Jesus in Luke 6:40 (*NIV*, 1978/1984) when He instructed, "The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher." Therefore, a disciple has a deliberate

intention to experience an ontological transformation to become like Jesus.

In an effort to more clearly research online communication about Christ, Garner (2019) proposed discipleship as "our following and imaging of Christ" (p. 21) connected to a wide range of topics such as worship, morality, relationships, and a spiritual mission. Garner further defined discipleship as "answering Christ's call, following Christ no matter the cost, demonstrating love towards others, forming communities, and communicating the good news to all the corners of the earth" (p. 22). Theologian David Lanier (1999) suggested that a disciple is one who is committed to following Jesus Christ, helps others follow Christ, and has a "radical affection for the things of God" (p. 8). For this study, a disciple has been defined in the previous chapter as a person who is deliberately committed to learning and growing in the ability to discern the voice of God, to obey Him, and to help others hear and obey God as well.

Characteristics of a Disciple

Several important characteristics of a disciple can be seen in John 10:27 (*NIV*, 1978/1984), the foundational verse used for my working definition of disciple: "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me." First, the words "My sheep" imply a person has made a commitment to surrender their personal will to that of Jesus as the Lord of their life. Second, the word "listen" implies an active, present tense relationship whereby Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, provides practical and pragmatic guidance through both the logos (*Λόγος*, Logos) and rhema (*ῥήματος*, rhēmatos) Word of God (Thornhill, 2016; Voorst, 2001; Zodhiates et al., 2002). The words "to my voice" imply that a disciple pursues proper hermeneutics for the sole purpose of congruence with the will of God. Next, the words, "I know them" clearly point out that a disciple's true identity is known and given only by God. Finally, the words, "and they follow me" is implicit of the disciple's true motive of a heart that mirrors that of Jesus and

inherently produces actions in congruence with a surrendered life to Christ. One additional note must be accounted for when considering a life spent following Jesus; in Matthew 4:19 (*NIV*, 1978/1984) Jesus said, "Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." If anyone follows Jesus for the intention of becoming like Him, that person will inherently become someone, at the most basic spiritual DNA level, who desires to lead lost souls into a saving knowledge of a life surrendered to Christ.

The Problem Inside the Problem

The Great Commission in Matthew 28:19–20 (*NIV*, 1978/1984) clearly commands the followers of Jesus to make disciples of all nations; however, the methodological approach for doing so is limited in the verse to simply "teaching them to obey all I have commanded you." Lanier (1999) pointed out, "By multiplication the Great Commission becomes achievable, by addition the task is insurmountable" (p. 6). The inherent task of the Great Commission is that all followers are trained to not only be transformed into the likeness of Christ but to also help others be transformed as well. Thus, multiplication is the process of a disciple training another person to also become a disciple who is fully capable of reproducing another disciple. In essence, the primary problem of lacking disciple multiplication efforts in the American church ultimately hinges on the problem of latent potential. If a person becomes a follower of Jesus yet never helps another come to Christ, they have never unleashed their latent potential as a Christian.

Discipleship Is the Problem and the Answer

The concept of discipleship was captured by R. Bennett and Purvis (2003) as "the whole process or full spectrum of reaching the lost with the gospel, discipling people in their intimacy and walk with Christ, and equipping spiritual laborers and leaders" (p. 10). Additionally, Putman et al. (2013) added a critical component of discipleship when they instructed, "To be conformed

into Jesus' likeness is the goal (Rom. 8:29). The word for this is discipleship. The New Testament church was all about being and making disciples of Jesus" (p. 31). Additionally, Bonhoeffer (1996) added a critical metaphysical aspect when, in the context of the disciple Peter's obedient walk on water at the command of Jesus, Bonhoeffer said, "The road to faith passes through obedience to Christ's call. The step is required; otherwise, Jesus' call dissipates into nothing. Any intended discipleship without this step to which Jesus calls becomes deceptive enthusiasts' illusion" (p. 63). Therefore, while discipleship may utilize a curriculum, the term is infinitely broader than mere academic pursuit and much more resembles the process of parenting a child from infancy to mature adulthood.

Support for Definitions

While definitions for key terms used throughout the study were provided in Chapter One, additional support for those chosen definitions is prudent at this point in the study.

Spiritual Disciplines

Though spiritual disciplines certainly range in scope and depth, this study focuses primarily on the Bible, prayer, and disciple-making as critical components that inherently comprise the foundation of all disciples of Jesus. Certainly, additional spiritual exercises can constitute legitimate and valuable examples of spiritual disciplines; however, the value of simplicity must not be lost and the conscious paring to the prescribed three spiritual disciplines was conducted for the sake of reproduction. Additionally, the metaphysical value of spiritual disciplines was captured by Smith and Kai (2011), who metaphorically explained that spiritual disciplines are much like the effort expended to raise a sail in efforts to harness the power of wind. The authors asserted that ministry success relies upon the power of the Holy Spirit and regular efforts to remain consistent in spiritual disciplines are merely an effort to best position

oneself to fully realize that power, much like a sailboat that works diligently to be in the best position to enjoy the wind.

Reproduce

Much like the physical practice of reproduction, a parent gives birth to an offspring that bears resemblance yet also displays uniqueness, the spiritual practice of reproduction seeks to recreate aspects of spiritual maturity while embracing the Holy Spirit's role in developing a unique disciple of Christ.

Add

An evangelist may lead 3,000 people to Christ, yet if none of those 3,000 are trained to also lead people to Christ, the evangelist has added, and the process will likely conclude with the 3,000.

Multiply

If three disciples are trained to personally grow as a disciple and to train others to grow as disciples, and the training inherently incorporates the aspect that every follower of Jesus will train others, then the cadre of active disciple-makers exponentially grows with every new believer, and three disciples can rapidly increase to thousands of disciples.

Spiritual Generation

If a person begins to spiritually mentor another person, the mentor assumes the role of a first-generation disciple while the other person is a second generation. When the second-generation disciple begins to mentor another person, the relationship represents a second generation discipling a third generation. The term finds primary utility in simply identifying the movement of the Holy Spirit through relational networks and has limited pragmatic purpose. As R. Bennett and Purvis (2003) pointed out, the concept is biblically rooted in 2 Timothy 2:2 (*NIV*,

1978/1984): "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others."

Generational Stream

Again, with limited pragmatic utility, this term is primarily useful for identification of the Holy Spirit's work through connected relationships and allows human awareness of how and where the Gospel is spreading.

Disciple-Making Movement

Addison (2019) provided an essential aspect about a DMM when he explained,

A movement is a group of people committed to a common cause. There is a difference between a ministry and a movement. A ministry is what you can achieve helped by others. The vision is limited to your sphere of control. A movement mobilizes people to act without your direct supervision. (p. 23)

At the heart of Addison's astute observation about a movement is an observation of the human condition. Rather than mechanical aspects of a social movement, he addressed power dynamics and the human desire for control of circumstances. In a personal conversation I had with Addison in 2019, he commented that every place in a movement where people retain too much control, the movement is inherently slowed down; movements demand limited individual control for rapid expansion beyond any one person or organization.

Church

To begin, the doctrine of church is highly contested as noted by Erickson (2013): "Among the reasons for this lack of understanding is the fact that at no point in the history of Christian thought has the doctrine of the church received the direct and complete attention that other doctrines have received" (p. 951). Recognizing the vast breadth of theological

understanding behind this term, Discipleship.org's chosen definition of church was selected for biblical congruency, utility in this study, and for ease of reproducibility within disciple-making communities. Despite using a deliberately simple definition of church, the concept of a church is vital to the multiplication of disciples and the well-being of the members.

The biblical church (*ἐκκλησία, ekklēsia*) is made up of individuals who are being transformed into the behavioral image of Jesus and are also actively interested in helping others be transformed by God (*NIV*, 1978/1984, Acts 2:47, Acts 8:1). As the statistics reveal, not only are many Christians not experiencing personal spiritual transformation, but they are rarely engaging the population outside the *ekklēsia* for the deliberate purpose of discipleship (Jones, 2020; Stetzer & Bird, 2010). When a culture of loving adherence to Jesus' teachings is developed within the *ekklēsia*, the daily lives of people in the *ekklēsia* are transformed into the image of Jesus. Jesus taught the importance of obedient action over philosophical understanding in John 7:17 (*NIV*, 1978/1984) which alludes to the importance of an *ekklēsia* committed to the loving adherence to His teachings throughout the Bible, also understood as discipleship. For this reason, the stated definition of church for this study places great value upon the function of the *ekklēsia* to usher ontological transformation of those who willingly pursue membership in the body. In other words, an *ekklēsia* without demonstrated disciple multiplication at least demonstrates questionable health and ultimately risks offering a deceptive faux experience of a divine relationship.

While many well-intentioned disciples have set out to plant a church in hopes of reaching a people group, the model established throughout the New Testament church was to focus on reaching people and allowing transformed disciples to naturally form an *ekklēsia*. Of particular note, as a DMM emerges and groups of disciples begin to grow, an *ekklēsia* is often a natural by-

product (Smith & Kai, 2011). For this reason, I regularly assert that if a disciple pursues a DMM, they will usually plant churches, whereas when a disciple pursues church planting, they will rarely reach a DMM. Though this statement may seem like mere semantics, the pragmatic vision behind the two is vastly different and greatly influences the fruit.

Church Planting Movement

Given that an *ekklēsia* comes about as a natural outcome of disciple making, a CPM simply recognizes the connection between a disciple of one *ekklēsia* who engages in disciple-making practices with a subsequent spiritual generation that results in a new *ekklēsia*. The new *ekklēsia* will then be referred to as a second-generation church. When a disciple from the second-generation church engages in the disciple-making process, eventually a new group of disciples will be formed into a third-generation church. Therefore, a DMM is always an inherent aspect of a CPM whereas a CPM may not be an aspect of a DMM if disciples are gathered into preexisting bodies of believers.

Organizational Culture

A person's strongest beliefs will *always* drive their actions; the same is true with an organization (Winship, 2019). The everyday behavior of the people is a very important qualifier as a person whose actions do not match their stated values and principles is merely paying lip service and truly holds different values and principles. When an organization's daily or routine actions are incongruent with stated organizational values, the organizational culture is actually rooted in other values that are communicated subconsciously and may work contrary to strategic organizational objectives (Keyton, 2011). Additionally, the term in this study will inherently be composed of the six elements described in the JSCW model including stories, symbols, rituals

and routines, power structures, organizational structure, and controls (McDonald & Foster, 2013).

Organizational Communication

Organizations communicate far more than they are aware, and often the most influential messages communicated from the organization work directly in contrast to the strategic mission of the organization (Johnson & Scholes, 1999; Keyton, 2011). As Keyton (2011) explained, "Organizational communication is a complex and continuous process through which organizational members create, maintain, and change the organization" (p. 12). Throughout this study, the term *organizational communication* will be used within the context of sensemaking, culture formation, and implicit message sending (Crouch, 2008). In essence, the term is more concerned with the method of the message—or the message beneath the message—the communication that speaks directly to the human psyche.

Definitions for Intrinsic Spiritual Activity

The definitions for this study were chosen to help augment some significant gaps in research pertaining to communication, the relationship between religion and spirituality, and the effect on areas of human behavior (Burge, 2020; Denton & Flory, 2021; Elliott et al., 2019). Researchers have identified this as an understudied field, "often restricted to crude measures such as regularity of church attendance or denominational affiliation" (Elliott et al., 2019, p. 139). Researchers attempted to dissect spiritual activity by differentiating between two levels of spiritual commitment; one level was termed *intrinsic order* and describes people who have internalized a deep personal commitment to religious belief. The second level was termed *extrinsic order* and describes people who have a much more superficial connection to their religious belief (Clark, 2020; Elliott et al., 2019). This study is primarily concerned with the

communication and subsequent behavior of the intrinsic order.

Addressing a Religious Problem Through Social Science

While definitions of disciple and discipleship are heavily influenced by theologians, the pragmatic process of conducting effective discipleship has apparently evaded theologians based on the dismal statistics of the American church in the 21st century (Barna Research Group, 2015; Lawson & Xydias, 2020; Stone, 2018; Wilson et al., 2015). While scripture contains all the necessary resources to implement effective discipleship methods (*NIV*, 1978/1984, 2 Timothy 3:16), the unilateral discipline of theology has not adequately discovered the practical application of those methods within the American church context (Johnsrud, 2016). Researchers are calling for interdisciplinary collaboration with theologians to better understand religion in the context of human psychology and communication to more adequately unlock the divinely inspired methodological approach to disciple-making (Grom, 2015; McClure & Wilkinson, 2020). For instance, the ANT has been used to investigate sensemaking in religious cultures and was effectively used in the anthropology of Christianity in China (Chambon, 2020; Latour, 2008). Additionally, the SCT (Bandura, 1995b) has been used by researchers to investigate the beliefs and motivations of religious education teachers compared to behavior (Elliott et al., 2019). The SCT has been effectively utilized in numerous fields ranging from health care, workplace management, and nursing to better understand human endeavor and behavior change (Elliott et al., 2019). Thus, the ANT and SCT stand as viable theoretical frameworks through which to examine the communicative process of discipleship. This literature review investigates possible reasons for the lack in reproduction or multiplication of disciples from current discipleship methods utilized by the American church with an ethnographically informed, comparative embedded case study approach through the lens of the ANT, the SCT, and the JSCW model of

organizational culture.

Communication as a Contributor to the Problem

Communication as a potential catalyst for the current disciple multiplication problem in the American church should be seriously considered as Fang (2015) pointed out that innovations in communication, along with other related cultural developments, caused changes in thinking and behavior throughout the history of Western civilization (Scheitle & Corcoran, 2020). Certainly, when the presented problem involves incongruency between the stated desire to "make disciples of all nations" (*NIV*, 1978/1984, Matthew 28:19) and subsequent behavior that lacks a DMM in America, Rapaille (2007) suggested a communication breakdown at the epistemological level of society had occurred. Further, Rapaille explained, "The culture code is the unconscious meaning we apply to any given thing—a car, a type of food, a relationship, even a country—via the culture in which we are raised" (p. 5). Therefore, the culture in which a person lives has great influence on how the person makes sense of the world in which they live; subsequently, the developed ideas and beliefs gained from the culture inherently drive individual decision making and behavior (Rapaille, 2007). As such, this literature review next analyzes communication as a means of sensemaking in society.

Communication as Sensemaking

To begin, two important philosophical assumptions I bring to this research are ontological and epistemological in nature. The first assumption is rooted in a faith background congruent with conservative evangelical Christianity. As such, I prescribe to a realism based on the distinct and autonomous Word of God and God's interaction with humanity, interaction that remains constant despite the beliefs or practices of human beings (Snape & Spencer, 2003). At the same time, I recognize and accept an idealism based on fallen man's free-will ability to

create and transmit meaning through communication (Snape & Spencer, 2003). My

epistemological assumptions find value in both positivism and interpretivism simultaneously

(Snape & Spencer, 2003). For instance, my positivistic assumption is rooted in man's ability to

learn through both the logos (*Λόγος*, Logos) and rhema (*ῥήματος*, rhēmatos) Word of God

(Thornhill, 2016; Voorst, 2001; Zodhiates et al., 2002). While humans can learn through diligent

academic inquiry coupled with divine revelation from the Holy Spirit, both approaches

exemplify positivism as the learning is created through a distinct, static, and autonomous source

from outside the human being. However, interpretivism is simultaneously happening when

human beings create and transmit meaning through communication methods in their fallen

human nature. Therefore, the paradigm that communication in a culture is an act of sensemaking

will provide the boundaries for my research. In fact, Belliger and Krieger (2016) asserted,

"Organizations are not entities or systems, but forms of sensemaking that takes place in

communication" (p. 61).

Social Constructionism

A foundational theoretical element of sensemaking in society is social constructionism.

Allen (2005) explained that social constructionism is "a theoretical orientation to sociocultural

processes that affect humans' basic understandings of the world" (p. 35). Allen further

elaborated, "Social constructionists assert that meaning arises from social systems rather than

from individual members of society" (p. 35). The influence of social systems demands diligent

inquiry into the influence of organizational systems of worship and ministry in American

churches rather than simple rhetorical messages, as the methodological approach to the day-to-

day activities of an organization may be more influential to paradigm creation than most

sermons. Finally, Allen added, "Social constructionists also stress the significance of language to

construction processes, including its ramifications for identity development" (p. 35). As I present later in this literature review, media ecology and mediatization influence organizations; however, organizations, through social constructionism, influence individual identities and, subsequently, individual behaviors that eventually reshape organizational cultures. This ongoing process of ontological transformation at both the organizational and individual level is paramount to the framework of this research.

How We Think

To begin, McLuhan and Fiore (2005) offered, "Societies have always been shaped more by the nature of the media by which men communicate than by the content of the communication" (p. 8). Further, Cali (2017) explained, "Any human construction—symbols, monetary currency, cityscapes, televisions, and smartphones—can exert influence upon human consciousness" (pp. 17–18). In fact, Strate (2017) explained,

> Following the title of McLuhan's (1964) most influential work, we might regard the study of media as environments as an approach to *understanding media*, but in truth McLuhan's work was about so much more than just understanding our modes of communication and forms of technology—his real subject was, in effect, *life, the universe and everything*." (p. 61)

Strate continued, "I want to consider the study of media environments as an approach to understanding the human condition" (p. 61). As Strate (2017) recommended, I did not limit my research to such a superficial boundary as mechanical functions of rhetorical interaction but rather sought to understand the human condition within the American church through methodical inquiry within the communication discipline. The first step in understanding the current human condition within the American church is to gain perspective on the predominant psyche

operating system within society (Rapaille, 2007). Much like a computer that requires an operating system before individual applications can successfully function, the nature of media continuously influences the transformation of human operating systems through which all applications in life function. Understanding how we think, and why we think the way we think, is important as all human decisions and subsequent action can first be traced back to a personally held belief (Ramos, 2020). One of the most poignant examples of how the human operating system can be quickly altered, resulting in catastrophic behavior change, can be found in the biblical creation story.

The Biblical Example of False Belief

Through Genesis 1 and 2 (*NIV*, 1978/1984), God created the world and placed human beings into the world with specific instructions; the story reveals that human sensemaking was driven by the Word of God. In Genesis 3:1–4, the serpent entered dialogue with Eve and for the first time, human sensemaking occurs separate from the Word of God, with the result being a newfound challenge to the character of God in Genesis 3:5 where the serpent asserted, "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." Subsequently, in Genesis 3:7 Adam and Eve realized they were naked and for the first time humans experienced shame. In Genesis 3:8 the couple heard God and hid, demonstrating the first time humans experienced fear. In Genesis 3:11–12 the couple deflected blame for their actions, demonstrating the first time humans experienced guilt.

The short Garden of Eden story demonstrates how altered epistemology ultimately altered human ontology. Through communication as an act of sensemaking, human beings began to believe something false about God (i.e., that God did not have their best interest in mind) and acted based on this new false belief. The result was the introduction of fear, guilt, and shame into

the human condition, three foundational emotions that have continued to drive human actions throughout time (Baldwin et al., 2006; Booth-Butterfield & Reger, 2004). These negative emotions are always a result of a false belief about God, about the self, or about other people. The human condition responds to these negative emotions by either protecting the self or promoting the self (Winship, 2019). Therefore, when human epistemology is derived from outside God, the resulting human condition mandates that the person either fight to protect the self or strive endlessly to promote the self and prove to the world they are worthy.

The acceptance of a false belief by a human creates a type of spiritual cognitive dissonance whereby the soul falls out of alignment with the divinely created purpose, and the human responds with carnal efforts to rectify a spiritual problem. In fact, Ramos (2020) explained, "The epistemological dimension of an issue, the worldview, discourse, narratives at work, play a fundamental role in the production of a problem" (p. 13). Jesus provided the remedy in John 8:32 (*NIV*, 1978/1984) when He instructed, "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." Additionally, Jesus clarified in John 14:6 that He is the "truth," and He is the only way humans can escape the spiritual cognitive dissonance. As was modeled in the Garden of Eden before the fall, rectification of the human condition requires intimate communication, or sensemaking, between the human and God. While these principles that are foundational to the human condition can be dissected from the biblical creation story, they are also visible in modern life experiences.

False Belief Could Impact Disciple Making

Fear, guilt, and shame all move the human mind to the reptilian brain where decisions are made at the most basic levels of survival (Winship, 2019). For example, if a pastor becomes fearful of financial situations within the church, it is likely that creativity will be minimized and

resulting decisions will be made for survival. In this example, if the pastor were engaged in intimate communication with the Divine and were led by the Holy Spirit to conduct fiscally risky behavior, fear would likely be a highly influential determinant despite the biblical mandate in Isaiah 41:10 (*NIV*, 1978/1984), "So do not fear, for I am with you." While fear can serve a valuable humanistic function, to allow fear to supersede divine sensemaking only stands to increase spiritual cognitive dissonance. My personal evangelistic work within the marketplace has provided countless examples of spiritually paralyzed people who are burdened by fear, guilt, or shame and subsequently acknowledge that they do not pursue what they believe to be their divine purpose as a result. Rather than obey the calling they receive through communication with God, they pursue carnal attempts through self-protection or self-promotion to rectify the spiritual cognitive dissonance emanating from the false belief they accepted.

The concept of self-efficacy is more thoroughly addressed later in this chapter; however, while conducting a study on the relationship between shame, guilt, and self-efficacy, Baldwin et al. (2006) defined the term by saying it "relates to people's sense of being able to take control over their actions and outcomes" (p. 1). The researchers further offered, "In terms of behavior, Bandura (1997) proposes that self-efficacy beliefs affect which action a person will choose, amount of effort expended, endurance in the face of obstacles, thought patterns, stress level, and the level of accomplishment achieved" (pp. 8–9). Therefore, in regard to members of the American church taking action to multiply disciples, Bandura would likely argue that self-efficacy beliefs were the most important motivators required for successful movement toward a DMM. Further, Baldwin et al. (2006) explained, "Positive self-efficacy combined with positive outcome expectancy will create a situation of hope and desire to put energy into action. Negative self-efficacy and negative outcome expectancy will create a situation of resignation or apathy"

(p. 10). The lack of DMM in the American church may be an indicator of negative self-efficacy and negative outcome expectancy. However, Baldwin et al. (2006) offer a potential solution when they theorized, "If shame and self-efficacy are closely related, one could expect that treatment of either aspect of the person could positively impact the other aspect. In facilitating a client's healing from shame, self-efficacy could be raised" (p. 19). The problem becomes more complex when we understand that messages affecting shame and self-efficacy are communicated in many ways beyond simple human rhetorical engagement, highlighting limits to human language.

Limits of Language

Given the premise that communication is sensemaking, the communication aperture widens to include not only non-verbal elements but also organizational methods for conducting daily activities. In essence, the *way* an organization conducts business can communicate more to the subconscious human operating system than a simple rhetorical approach (N. G. Carr, 2011; McLuhan et al., 2010). This concept was supported when Lotman (2000) explained,

> Even the fact that both participants in the communication use one and the same natural
> language (English, Russian, Estonian, etc.) does not ensure the identity of code; for there
> has to be also a common linguistic experience, and an identical dimension of memory.
> (p. 13)

Lotman continued,

> If one then takes into account cultural traditions (the semiotic memory of culture) and the
> inevitable factor of the individual way with which this tradition is revealed to a particular
> member of a collective, then it will be obvious that the coincidence of codes between
> transmitter and transmittee is in reality possible only to a very relative extent. (p. 13)

Therefore, since rhetorical communication is a limited medium for influencing the human operating system, another method of communication is necessary for increased metacognition (Flower, 1994). Bandura (2002) asserted that one of the most influential forms of communication for influencing human behavior is modeling the very behavior one wishes to be replicated.

How God Communicated

Though Bandura (2002) did not explicitly draw a correlation between the social learning theory and scripture, his concept of a more effective method of communication for influencing and transforming human thoughts and actions at the operating system level can be seen through God's communication pertaining to the Gospel message. A rudimentary explanation of God's methodological approach to communicating the Gospel with humanity rests in the incarnational aspect of His being (*NIV*, 1978/1984, Philippians 2:5–8, Hebrews 10:5–7, 1 John 4:2, 1 Timothy 3:16). As John 1:1 identifies, Jesus is the logos (*Λόγος*, Logos), which refers to an idea or concept (Thornhill, 2016; Voorst, 2001; Zodhiates et al., 2002). Therefore, God's chosen medium of communication for the Logos was the incarnational life of Jesus. Crouch (2008) further highlighted, "Yet obviously Jesus did not simply preserve and pass on his culture's inheritance. Instead, whenever Jesus touched part of Israel's cultural inheritance, he brought something new to it" (p. 137). In essence, the Hebrew people did not fully understand the message that had been received through oral or literary tradition and required a greater metacognition that could only be achieved through the medium of the incarnational life of God. Therefore, we implicitly find an epistemological shift in God's instruction from simple literary and oral tradition to a comprehensive message transferred through the medium of Jesus's life. God seems to have found great value in communicating experientially with humanity as His methodological approach to communication appears to have ushered the ontological

transformation of His disciples.

Impact of Historical Communication Innovations

While the impact of historical communication innovations could fill volumes of exhaustive records, this work provides a cursory example of several communication innovations that continue to shape the American culture with an emphasis on the American church. Media ecology and mediatization are concerned with the effects of overall media and technology, rather than a specific message or rhetorical approach, on organizations and audiences (Littlejohn et al., 2017). Theorists from the media ecology tradition argue that the medium used to transmit communication influences the human psyche at such a foundational level that often, the medium becomes more influential in subsequent human behavior than any specific message (Littlejohn et al., 2017). This historical review of such innovations that dramatically altered the collective consciousness of humanity, and presumably continue to impact the American church's disciple-making efforts, will begin with the introduction of the written word followed by the printing press and wide-scale literary awareness. Understanding the wide reaching and complex network of actors that influence the current landscape of disciple making in America requires a fundamental understanding of how historical communication innovations shaped the human condition. As such, this historical review will commence with the shift from an oral to literate society.

Oral versus Literate Society

The shift from a majority oral society to a majority literary society had reverberating influence on the way members of the society thought and behaved, as Ong and Hartley (2013) declared, "More than any other single invention, writing has transformed human consciousness" (p. 77). Further, Postman (2006) explained, "The invention of the printing press itself is a

paradigmatic example. Typography fostered the modern idea of individuality, but it destroyed the medieval sense of community and integration" (p. 29). Ong and Hartley (2013) and Postman (1993, 2006) elaborated on the shift from orality to literacy and highlighted the societal movement from community as necessity to widespread individualism with community only as a pleasure. Ultimately, widespread literacy can be identified as a leading catalyst for the American individualist paradigm and all of the paradigm's subsequent influences on American behavior patterns (Postman, 2006). Regarding the American church and the problem of lacking disciple-making efforts, the individualist paradigm is noteworthy for incongruence with the biblical model of intense and intimate community between believers in the early church (*NIV*, 1978/1984, Acts 2:42–47).

The Printing Press

Speaking in regard to the Gutenberg printing press, Postman (1993) asserted, "New technologies compete with old ones—for time, for attention, for money, for prestige, but mostly for dominance of their worldview. This competition is implicit once we acknowledge that a medium contains an ideological bias. And it is a fierce competition, as only ideological competitions can be" (p. 16). One way the printing press altered human consciousness was through the concept of validity and what people began to recognize as foundational truth (Ong & Hartley, 2013). An oral society relied upon dialogue and rhetorical debate to arrive at truth; however, as Ong explained, "There is no way directly to refute a text. After absolutely total and devastating refutation, it says exactly the same thing as before. This is one reason why 'the book says' is popularly tantamount to 'it is true'" (p. 76). We find a lasting remnant of this collective shift in consciousness when theologians struggle with differing biblical accounts of an event. However, as Erickson (2013) explained, the biblical authors of the account wrote from an oral

society and did not intend to capture scientific data as the 21st-century Western mind would prefer. In essence, the oral tradition was less concerned with the exact number of chariots involved in a battle as they were with the fact that the battle took place and what that meant for subsequent generations. Thus, the printing press ushered in a wide-scale epistemological transformation that dictated a new standard to determine which data were valuable and which were not.

Written Word and American Culture

Postman (2006) painted an enlightening context for the nascent American culture when he explained,

> Although literacy rates are notoriously difficult to assess, there is sufficient evidence (mostly drawn from signatures) that between 1640 and 1700, the literacy rate for men in Massachusetts and Connecticut was somewhere between 89% and 95%, quite probably the highest concentration of literate males to be found anywhere in the world at that time. (p. 31)

When most of a population bears such an ideologically significant acceptance of a technological innovation, the resulting sensemaking within the culture will naturally be biased toward that innovation (Latour, 2008). Postman (2006) highlighted that a noted mark of the medium bias on the new society was that members of the society began to alter their speech patterns to mimic the style utilized in their writing. An additional aspect of the influence of the written word on American culture can be seen in the data which people find important for recording within the written account. For example, biblical data, particularly Old Testament accounts of historical events captured through a literary medium, were set within the context of a primarily oral society (Erickson, 2013). As such, accounts were less concerned with precise mathematical or scientific

data and more concerned with capturing the story and what it meant for subsequent generations (Erickson, 2013). Additionally, McLuhan (1994) provided an example of how whole-scale acceptance of the written word as the predominant communication medium in society could alter the ontology of a culture when he suggested rather than flying the "Star-Spangled Banner," one could simply print the words "American Flag" on a white piece of cloth and fly it. McLuhan then explained,

> To translate the rich visual mosaic of the stars and stripes into written form would be to deprive it of most of its qualities of corporate image and of experience, yet the abstract literal bond would remain much the same. (p. 82)

It was within this context of depleted richness that the American culture was born.

Written Word and God in America

The introduction of the printed word as the primary bias of the American culture had foundational influence over the American church as well, as Postman (2006) explained,

> It is to be understood that the Bible was the central reading matter in all households, for these people were Protestants who shared Luther's belief that printing was "God's highest and extremist act of grace, whereby the business of the gospel is driven forward." (p. 32)

Postman's comment adds substantial background to McLuhan et al.'s (2010) assertion that "the church is so entirely a matter of communication that like fish that know nothing of water, Christians have no adequate awareness of communication" (p. xxi). For example, the American and Western church appears far more interested in religious education, with a vast number of seminaries and institutions of higher education, than most of the rest of the world yet rarely considers the communication innovation bias that drives such a love affair with formal education. However, Postman (2006) explained,

> From 1650 onward almost all New England towns passed laws requiring the maintenance of a "reading and writing" school, the large communities being required to maintain a grammar school, as well. In all such laws, reference is made to Satan, whose evil designs, it was supposed, could be thwarted at every turn by education. (p. 32)

It appears that communication innovation was responsible for breeding the belief in American Christianity of a type of salvation to be found in education.

The Radio and American Society

The introduction of the radio stands as another communication innovation that altered the collective human consciousness of a society. As McLuhan (1994) noted, "The power of radio to involve people in depth is manifested in its use during homework by youngsters and by many other people who carry transistor sets in order to provide a private world for themselves amidst crowds" (p. 298). The advent of radio as a medium stood in stark contrast to the individualism ushered in through the written word: "Radio affects most people intimately, person-to-person, offering a world of unspoken communication between writer- speaker and the listener. That is the immediate aspect of radio. A private experience" (McLuhan, 1994, p. 299). This more intimate experience of person-to-person communication, though the communication is one-directional, alters the operating system level of human thinking:

> The subliminal depths of radio are charged with the resonating echoes of tribal horns and antique drums. This is inherent in the very nature of this medium, with its power to turn the psyche and society into a single echo chamber. (McLuhan, 1994, p. 299)

However, not only did radio usher in a resurgence in American tribalism (McLuhan, 1994), but it created a piecemeal reality the world had not yet known (Postman, 2006). Specifically, Postman (2006) argued,

This ensemble of electronic techniques called into being a new world—a peek-a-boo world, where now this event, now that, pops into view for a moment, then vanishes again. It is a world without much coherence or sense; a world that does not ask us, indeed, does not permit us to do anything; a world that is, like the child's game of peek-a-boo, entirely self-contained. But like peek-a-boo, it is also endlessly entertaining. (p. 77)

Television and American Society

The introduction of the television as a medium of communication innovation bias ushered in a context where American culture found difficulty with the distinguishment between reality and fiction: "The peculiar character of the TV image in its relation to the actor causes such familiar reactions as our not being able to recognize in real life a person whom we see every week on TV" (McLuhan, 1994, p. 317). McLuhan (1994) further warned, "Everybody experiences far more than he understands. Yet it is experience, rather than understanding, that influences behavior, especially in collective matters of media and technology, where the individual is almost inevitably unaware of their effect upon him" (p. 318). This statement by McLuhan is particularly poignant in light of Bandura's (2002) revelation about human behavior:

Fortunately, most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action. Because people can learn from example what to do, at least in approximate form, before performing any behavior, they are spared needless errors. (p. 22)

One final aspect of consciousness revolution brought about by the television was captured by Cali (2017):

Electronic culture—namely, television—fostered an outlook that privileges immediacy,

emotional engagement, and technological solutions with their images and sounds while

the print and oral paradigms that it began to engulf had insisted on lines of thought and

had fostered delayed gratification, rational thinking, and coherence. (p. 19)

Cali's insight into television fostering emotional engagement with the medium is particularly

relevant in light of a recent study that found a correlation between increased screen time and

reduced emotional understanding among study participants (Skalicka et al., 2019). In essence,

the indication is that the medium dulls the skill of emotional engagement due to overuse and

stimulation from prolonged exposure, thus diminishing a person's ability to emotionally engage

outside the medium of television. In regard to disciple-making efforts, such a situation of

diminished emotional skills could be detrimental to a person's desire to emotionally connect for

the purpose of assisting ontological transformation of a disciple.

Rise of the Internet and Social Media in America

Given that no technological innovation is introduced to society in isolation but rather

enters existence with the interconnected nature of all innovations that came before it (McLuhan,

1994), the internet's nascence in America was founded in an isolationist culture that had

experienced a tribal resurgence from radio (McLuhan, 1994; Postman, 2006) and an addiction to

entertainment largely fueled by television (Postman, 1993, 2006). Much of America's historic

media bias was fed, almost in what seems like a perfect storm, through the advent of the internet:

"The intellectual technologies it has pioneered promote the speedy, superficial skimming of

information and discourage any deep, prolonged engagement with a single argument, idea, or

narrative" (Carr, 2011, p. 156). In essence, the internet somewhat combined the bias of

entertainment and education where people were permitted an existential experience of learning

without the necessity for academic rigor, thus rendering a repository of data without functional

knowledge. For instance, the breadth of medical data on the internet has fueled those without medical knowledge to challenge professional opinion and make life altering decisions based upon minimally informed data.

Additionally, the internet has caused a situation that I call "connected isolation," where geospatially isolated individuals electronically connect through digital platforms. The perception of isolation due to the geospatial element, coupled with the bias for tribalism (McLuhan, 1994), seems to have fueled an environment where communication has taken a very opinionated stance, void of traditional social pleasantries or common courtesy. The current volatile political situation appears to be driven by the tribalism McLuhan spoke of where opinionated people in isolation connect with other like-minded isolationists, bonding over mutual ideologies and drawing new digital tribal lines. In essence, some relational connections made by "connected isolationists" are based primarily on ideological or political belief and have little to do with a humanistic intention of community. In essence, it is Ellul and Merton's (1964) concept of *technique* applied to relational networks. For example, even within one political party, certain ideologies cause splinters that form new tribal lines that are influenced more by literary bias than by oral tradition community (Ong & Hartley, 2013).

While this historical recounting of technological innovations that ushered sociological consciousness revolutions is abridged, it is clear to see that the social context within which the American church resides has been dramatically influenced by the outside forces of technology. Certainly, the American church has countless voices that call for the church's rejection of popular culture that often flows contrary to the holiness objectives of most religious organizations. However, the cultural influence presented in this work is far more clandestine than perverse films or pro-abortion movements, often evading the watchful eye of professional clergy

who are just as influenced as the next by the intoxication of the newest medium on the market.

For this reason, it is important for the communication researcher to understand the influence of

the medium on the cultural context within which the church resides but also to understand the

influence of social ingredients that can act as accelerants to the consciousness revolution of a

culture.

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Social Ingredients for Revolution

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While media ecology and mediatization can provide a measure of understanding for the

epistemological shift in the American church, additional social ingredients exist that have

influence over the ontology of the church. Certainly, the medium plays an inherent role in much

of the human condition; however, additional elements maintain agency in the sensemaking

process and must be accounted for when attempting to understand the problem of lacking DMMs

in the American church. For instance, American opulence, the American economic model,

entertainment, religious freedom, and higher education all influence the very operating system of

human thought, often without conscious consideration of their effect on individual human

decision making.

American Opulence

There is little question that America represents the richest nation on earth and,

potentially, the richest ever to exist. The wealth that most American citizens enjoy does not come

without paradigm-altering circumstances that differentiate them from citizens of any other

country (Cruchley-Jones, 2017). In particular, as Postman (2006) pointed out, American wealth

created the room necessary for most citizens to dedicate time and resources to extraneous

activities that most people in the world would find frivolous, such as near addiction to sporting

activities from youth throughout adulthood. It is American opulence that permits a child's

involvement in extracurricular activities nearly every night of the week, often leading to the point of familial exhaustion. Additionally, American opulence leads to diminished emotional connection in favor of fiduciary involvement. In essence, Americans find value in money and often believe finances are the solution to most problems. My personal experience serving as a diplomat within an American embassy provided an example where members of the host country were greatly insulted when American diplomats offered money rather than personal involvement in the solution of a local problem. The situation revealed an American paradigm that saw finances as the most valuable commodity, whereas the other paradigm saw human connection as the most desired commodity. This American paradigm of opulence becomes problematic for disciple making when people find more value in financially supporting missionaries to fulfill the Great Commission than in personal involvement.

America's Free Market Consumer Economy

While American opulence creates a paradigm that can negatively influence disciple-making efforts within the American church, the very economic system responsible for that opulence produces even greater influences on the operating system of human thought in America. Cruchley-Jones (2017) warned,

> At the heart of this are powerful interests that have fundamentally inverted the relationships God calls to be at the heart of life and have deliberately engineered an economic and political system that favors the few and threatens all of life. (p. 133)

In particular, four influential elements of a worldview spawned by America's free market consumer economy are scarcity, certainty, perfection, and privatization (Winship, 2019).

Scarcity

One of the most basic elements of the American economy is the principle of supply and

demand. Inherent in this principle is the necessity for a scarcity model where value is formed by the fact that some people will not be able to obtain an item. If, for instance, every member of society was offered ownership of an item, the item would have very little value since everyone could obtain it, whereas an item with limited availability would greatly increase in value based solely on the unobtainability of the item. Therefore, the driving force behind the scarcity model of economics is ultimately fear: the fear of not obtaining the items which are deemed necessary for existence (Cruchley-Jones, 2017; Winship, 2019). However, the economy of God and subsequently the worldview of God presented in Matthew 6:25–34 (*NIV*, 1978/1984) presents a model of abundance where there is enough for everyone (Winship, 2019). A scarcity model worldview is likely to introduce fear into nearly every aspect of a person's life as the model will inherently warn of not enough money, not enough time, not enough jobs, in essence, not enough of anything (Winship, 2019).

Certainty

A subsequent element of the worldview spawned by the American economic system is certainty (Winship, 2019). Likely as a result of the pervasive fear generated from scarcity, most Americans prefer logical certainty over spiritual mystery. Since most Americans value money and live in fear of a scarcity of money, they rely upon certainty to remedy the false belief of scarcity. A life of certainty can be catastrophic to a person's walk of faith where we are called to trust in the Spirit, not our own logical thoughts (*NIV*, 1978/1984, 2 Corinthians 5:7). Personal experience training people in the American church how to disciple others has illuminated this paradigm most clearly when American Christians desire a great deal of information and training before they will embark on their first step of discipling another person. Most often, they desire certainty of their success before they will embark toward obedience to the scripture.

Perfection

An element of certainty, exacerbated by Ellul and Merton's (1964) concept of technique, is the paradigm element of perfection. The American paradigm finds little room for the risk of failure, as the free-market economy is not very forgiving to missteps (Winship, 2019). Of particular interest with this element of the American worldview is how people define their standard of perfection. As will be more thoroughly addressed later in this chapter on the section pertaining to the SCT, most people develop their standard of perfection through social learning where they place the greatest value in those perceived to be experts (Bandura, 2002; Winship, 2019). Often someone is deemed an expert based solely on their ability to achieve some level of celebrity status though they may have limited technical acumen in the given field. This element of the American paradigm can be devastating for disciple-making efforts as countless authors publish books about disciple making without a proven track record of successful disciple making in the American church. Therefore, a standard of perfection is subconsciously established within the operating system of people when, in fact, the standard of perfection has not even been obtained by those deemed to be the experts.

Privatization

The final element of the American paradigm spawned by the prevailing economic system is a mentality of privatization. In essence, the paradigm dictates that all people pursue their own greatest good, whether that be for them personally, their family, their job, their team, or their country for example (Winship, 2019). No matter how large the group, the paradigm principle leads people to operate toward their own interest. At a very basic level, this principle can be seen when employees are expected to focus only on company business during paid time; it would certainly be strange for an employee of Company X to pursue the gain of Company Y if

Company X stood to gain nothing for the effort. It would be very rare for an American company to expend resources for the gain of another company without some profitability for both companies. This paradigm principle can be seen in the dismal evangelism statistics in the American church (Barna Research Group, 2018). In essence, the privatization principle inherently demands the American Christian consider the personal gain from sharing the Gospel with a stranger since the Christian has already obtained personal salvation. While American opulence and the subsequent paradigm emanating from the economic model greatly influence the operating system of many American Christians, the problem of entertainment has been fueled by American wealth and presents a spiritual cancer, likely eating away at the American church from the inside.

Entertainment

While the television medium not only subconsciously provided behavior to be modeled in reality, the entertaining medium also resulted in an ontological bias toward entertainment in nearly every aspect of society:

> Our politics, religion, news, athletics, education and commerce have been transformed into congenial adjuncts of show business, largely without protest or even much popular notice. The result is that we are a people on the verge of amusing ourselves to death.
>
> (Postman, 2006, pp. 3–4)

Certainly, the television was not the only communication innovation that ushered in a consciousness revolution toward entertainment; however, as Cali (2017) noted, the television was a primary catalyst for the societal shift toward instant gratification and emotional engagement over logical lines of thought. Instant gratification and emotional engagement stand as critical ingredients for American society's current addiction to entertainment, an addiction that

has permeated nearly every aspect of American society from education, family life, religious life, and even business life (Cali, 2017; Postman, 2006). One danger associated with an addiction to entertainment in light of disciple making is the inherent self-focus despite the biblical demand in Philippians 2:3–4 (*NIV*, 1978/1984): "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others."

Religious Freedom

The religious freedom experienced in America is one of the pillars upon which the country was founded. However, this pillar of freedom may stand as an element of the American paradigm that hinders the church's efforts to ignite a DMM. American religious freedom may be a supporting element of those previous elements addressed, as the freedom permits simple affiliation to a church without the cost of personal security or comfort. For instance, when Paul was converted to Christianity, the Lord told Ananias to go to him and explained, "I will show him how much he must suffer for my name" (*NIV*, 1978/1984, Acts 9:16). In fact, Erickson (2013) highlighted the importance of suffering throughout the Bible for the spiritual growth of God's people. It has been said by missionaries serving in highly persecuted parts of the world that the Gospel spreads fastest through the blood of martyrs. Therefore, American religious freedom seems to have created a paradigm of "cheap" faith where religious practices and affiliation can be obtained with minimal personal sacrifice, ultimately diminishing the value of the faith for the person who pays nothing for it.

Higher Education

The final social ingredient for a consciousness revolution is the American higher education system. As Postman (1993) highlighted, Americans have a near worship appreciation

of science and higher education that can place an inordinate amount of trust in the value of formal education. Postman articulated that the American educational system subconsciously communicates an equivalency between information acquisition and knowledge, thus relegating experiential learning to a substandard value compared with information acquisition gained from a book. This paradigm can be detrimental to the American church when a disciple is defined by experiential knowledge of God through a metaphysical communication process. In essence, the American higher education system creates a paradigm where learning about God can be more acceptable than experiencing God. This problem is further compounded when society honors formal education to the point that earning a seminary degree marks someone as the expert on theological issues and subsequently mandates the earning of a Master of Divinity as prerequisite for professional clergy service. Certainly, higher education provides value; however, when the education becomes the end rather than the means, a paradigm shift in human consciousness has occurred.

Media Ecology and the Interconnected Nature of Social Ingredients

The term *media ecology* was coined by Neil Postman in 1970 to capture a body of scholarship and ideas presented by Marshal McLuhan and other medium theorists (Littlejohn et al., 2017, p. 151). The concept of media ecology is that communication happens within an interconnected environment where structured and unstructured communication impact people's thoughts and actions (Littlejohn et al., 2017). A foundational claim of media ecology is the idea that "inherent predispositions, or biases, of a given medium are more important than the content of any particular message communicated through that medium" (Littlejohn et al., 2017, p. 151). This concept led McLuhan and Lapham (1994) to coin the saying, "The medium is the message," thus implying the vehicle of communication is far more influential than any rhetoric carried by

the vehicle. The interconnected nature of social ingredients with technological innovation is the reason media ecology is of importance to the church and the investigation pertaining to the lack of DMMs in the American church.

Technique

One by-product of technological innovation that has become an influence over nearly every aspect of American society, including the American church, is Ellul and Merton's (1964) concept of *technique*. Ellul and Merton explained the term as follows:

> In our technological society, technique is the totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency (for a given stage of development) in every field of human activity. Its characteristics are new; the technique of the present has no common measure with that of the past. (p. xxv)

The breakneck pace at which technological innovation has been developed in the 21st century has created an environment where many Americans expect to replace outdated phones every 2 years, computers every 3 years, televisions every 5 years, and automobiles every 5 or 6 years (N. G. Carr, 2015). The concept of modernization has permeated American culture to the point that it is no longer a task to be done but more of an ontological characteristic of the people. Speaking about the context of modernization and technique, Ellul and Merton further explained, "Technique has now become almost completely independent of the machine, which has lagged far behind its offspring" (p. 4). Within this context of modernization as an ontological characteristic, technique can become almost like a drug, where people seek the most efficient manner for all things despite the cost to humanity or personal relationships. Ellul and Merton warned of this situation: "Technique transforms everything it touches into a machine" (p. 4).

The permeation of technique into the American church can be seen in several

circumstances. For example, some American churches present elaborate, professionally conducted worship services that boast of laser light shows, fog machines perfectly timed to elicit emotional responses, professional bands, and elegant charismatic speakers who present intellectually stimulating messages that are palatable to the largest audience possible. Despite the professionally choreographed worship service that clearly bears the hallmarks of technique, fellowship and interpersonal relationships amongst the congregation often take a second priority as the facility is cleared out to make room for the next worship service. Another example of the influence of technique is the vast number of professional clergy who seek a discipleship program or curriculum that can be implemented in an effort to spark a DMM within their church. The problem with technique is that the drive for more efficiency demands that the future differs from the past; as Ellul and Merton (1964) stated, "The technique of the present has no common measure with that of the past" (p. xxv). However, the model of discipleship presented by Jesus was the most effective and efficient method possible; human intellect cannot improve upon what Jesus established. While a program or curriculum could be used for effective discipleship, the concept of life-on-life investment modeled by Jesus in Mark 3:14 (*NIV*, 1978/1984) is irreplaceable.

Rise of the Industrial Age and Assembly Line Management

A modern example of how media ecology can have a deadly impact on society can be seen McChrystal et al.'s (2015) work on transforming American special operations forces to a more agile force known as a team of teams. An unacceptable mortality rate within American special operations during the Iraq and Afghanistan wars led General McChrystal to investigate the source of consternation. Much to the General's surprise, the root of underwhelming results in the war was traced back to an American cultural paradigm created by the invention of the

assembly line management system that placed the vast majority of responsibility and decision making only in the highest positions of management. The organizational structure proved too slow and cumbersome for the complex battlefield of the 21st century where the enemy was organized as autonomous but interconnected groups throughout an international web connected primarily through ideology.

Once General McChrystal recognized the influence of media ecology and technique over the way military commanders thought and operated, he explained,

> Years later as Task Force commander, I began to view effective leadership in the new environment as more akin to gardening than chess. The move-by-move control that seemed natural to military operations proved less effective than nurturing the organization—its structure, processes, and culture—to enable the subordinate components to function with "smart autonomy." (McChrystal et al., 2015, p. 225)

Understanding media ecology and ways to use the communication theory to change current thoughts and actions likely saved countless American lives in General McChrystal's example. The assembly line management style that reduced the effectiveness of American Special Operations Forces continues in many American churches where most power and decisions are relegated to only the highest levels of leadership (Kaczynski, 2019). For example, the fulcrum of most organizations is the budget; therefore, an organization operating as a McChrystal "team-of-teams" would have countless disciple-makers fully responsible for portions of the budget; however, this is likely a rare occurrence in the American church. In fact, personal experience has revealed that the idea of multiple congregation members being responsible for portions of the budget is a paradigm-breaking thought that is not entertained or developed.

Compartmented Consciousness

Another example of media ecology and the interconnected nature of social ingredients is the compartmented consciousness of the American society. The increase of technological innovation has created an environment where mass amounts of data are available, often more data than the human needs for daily existence (Postman, 2006). In an effort to present mass amounts of data that typically have nothing to do with each other, news media developed the "and now this" phrase to compartment different data sets (Postman, 2006). However, as Postman (2006) explained, "The phrase is a means of acknowledging the fact that the world as mapped by the speeded-up electronic media has no order or meaning and is not to be taken seriously" (p. 99). The "and now this" culture creates an environment where people only engage a topic on a superficial level before moving on to the next superficially engaged topic.

One outcome of compartmented consciousness is the whole-scale acceptance of certain disciplines, such as science or mathematics, without much understanding of what creates the discipline. For instance, speaking about a scientific laboratory, Latour and Woolgar (1986) explained,

> As we have mentioned, the adoption of the belief that science is well ordered has a corollary, that any study of its practice is relatively straightforward and that the content of science is beyond sociological study. However, we argue that both scientists and observers are routinely confronted by a seething mass of alternative interpretations. Despite participants' well-ordered reconstructions and rationalisations, actual scientific practice entails the confrontation and negotiation of utter confusion. (p. 36)

While American society nearly worships the trustworthiness of scientific data, Latour and Woolgar highlighted that most scientific findings are published only after intense negotiation.

Compartmented consciousness permits the American society to overlook the utter chaos required to develop scientific data and instead focus only on the finished product as near infallible information.

A second outcome of compartmented consciousness stemming from the "and now this" paradigm is the ability to engage and disengage topics throughout life as completely separate and autonomous forums. For example, many Americans have several separate networks of friends and acquaintances ranging from work colleagues, neighborhood friends, social friends, church friends, hobbies or extra activities, other parents engaged in youth activities, or similar. Often, these networks of relationships do not overlap, and the person may have a slightly different identity in each of the networks, almost like a different life in each network. The "and now this" paradigm allows American Christians to engage at church within the relational network and then disengage throughout the week. Rather than following Jesus as an ontological transformation of the entire life, the "and now this" paradigm allows a person to engage deeply only in certain compartments throughout life.

The Influence of a Model

A final example of media ecology and the interconnected nature of social ingredients is the influence of an organizational model. While social learning is discussed later in this chapter, it is relevant at this point to highlight the influence a church's methodological approach to Christianity has on individuals in the congregation. Bandura (2002) instructed, "Fortunately, most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action" (p. 22). In light of learned human behavior through modeling, Young (2019) addressed learned spiritual behavior:

Have you ever wondered how cow-worship could possibly make sense to the Israelites?

Well, both the Egyptians, whose land they were leaving, and the Canaanites, into whose

land they were entering, worshipped cows. To get ahead in business, politics, and the

neighborhood, respectable Israelites decided to just join in; when the elites

accommodated cow-worship, the masses followed suit. If everybody around you is

saying that a cow is a god, the social pressure on you to deify cows will be tremendous.

(p. 15)

When an American church model measures success by budgets, buildings, and butts-in-seats, the

social learning theory instructs that church leaders will follow models that produce results in

alignment with the culturally defined measure of success (Bandura, 2002). Though a church

leader may declare a desire for a different measure of success, such as a move from attractional

model church to a disciple multiplication model of church, the influence of communication bias

and social learning tend to lead the organization toward daily actions in line with undesired

results based on a contrary message being communicated through the organization's

methodological approach to routine business (Bandura, 1969). Subsequently, when professional

clergy enact models of church designed to fill auditoriums, perform perfectly choreographed

worship services, and build impressive structures for worship, the model of behavior

communicated to the congregation has little semblance to the rhetorical call to action delivered in

most sermons. As such, the influence of the model becomes greater than the persuasion of the

rhetorical message and most congregation members are left with an unattainable task. The more

influential model of building a large ministry with an impressive budget is clearer than the

rhetorical call to lead a lost person to Christ and raise them into ontological transformation. In

essence, the *method is the message*.

Theoretical Framework

The Cybernetic Tradition and the Actor–Network Theory

From a macro perspective, cybernetics can be defined as "the tradition of complex systems in which interacting elements influence one another" (Littlejohn et al., 2017, p. 42). The concept of "systems" is foundational to the tradition as theorists attempt to "explain how physical, biological, social, and behavioral processes work" (Littlejohn et al., 2017, p. 42). Further, Treadwell and Davis (2020) highlighted that the "tradition focuses on the flow of information; it emphasizes communication as a system of information processing and feedback" (p. 26). This tradition was deliberately selected for the systems approach to understanding communication phenomenon since the tradition can account for complex networks of both animate and inanimate actors when attempting to analyze the creation of meaning within an organization. Therefore, this study was conducted within the cybernetic tradition; however, semiotics was employed as well in an effort to discover meaning of particular signs within the complex networks of actors.

Semiotics and the Actor–Network Theory

Semiotics as described by Littlejohn et al. (2017) is the study of signs and symbols. The concept is further clarified when Ferguson and Greer (2018) explained, "Cultural codes serve as rules of conduct in a social system of accepted conventions in society and they underlie the culture in which the sign is being interpreted" (p. 129). However, simple semiotics that looks at a single sign and derives a meaning for that sign may be too simplistic to provide insight for this research as Ferguson and Greer argue "against a commonality of interpretation between individuals and systematically across all signs. Instead, people interpret signs differently based on their prior experience with the sign" (p. 129). This concept of sign interpretation based on

prior experience raises semiotics into the cybernetic realm as complex networks of actors could play a role in the interpretation of signs (Klyukanov & Sinekopova, 2019; Lothan & Eco, 2001). In fact, Eco (1979) asserted, "The activity of extra-coding (along with the interpretation of uncoded circumstances) not only impels one to select the most appropriate code or to isolate a given subcode (thereby governing the choice of connotations)" (p. 139). Eco further articulated,

It also changes the informative impact of signs: a skull on a bottle conventionally means <<poison>>, but the amount of information I receive from such a bottle grows if, instead of finding it in a bathroom cupboard, I find it among my liqueurs. (p. 139)

Brandt (2020) further highlighted the applicability of semiotics for this research:

The internal *cognitive* structure of a *thought*, the way we construe a story, an argument, a description, an evaluation, a complex emotion, *and* the way we arrange the external *expression* of such a construal, which has its own *semiotic* communicative logic. (p. 9)

The Actor–Network Theory

While both the cybernetic tradition and the semiotic tradition informed this research, the ANT represented the primary theoretical approach to making sense of the problem of lacking DMMs in the American church. The ANT proved to be the precise theoretical construct necessary for this approach because, while ANT originated in the sociological discipline,

by addressing signification and sense, ANT turns out to be a semiotics in itself. Moreover, it turns out to be a quite innovative semiotics, able to combine in a new way the two main semiotic traditions, the one derived from pragmatism, more philosophical, and the one from structuralism, more scientific. (Mattozzi, 2020, p. 93)

Thus, ANT proved to be an innovative tool for discovery situated squarely within the discipline of academic communication research, straddling both the cybernetic and semiotic traditions (Rydin & Tate, 2016).

Definition

> The ANT was defined by Callon (2012) as being

> composed of a series of heterogeneous elements, animate and inanimate, that have been linked to one another for a certain period of time . . . the entities it is composed of, whether natural or social, could at any moment redefine their identity and mutual relationships in some new way and bring new elements into the network. (pp. 90–91)

The theory was further clarified when Belliger and Krieger (2016) asserted, "Organizations are not entities or systems, but forms of sensemaking that takes place in communication" (p. 61). Of particular interest for my research into the lack of DMMs within the American church was the guiding principle that "scientific discovery and technological innovation cannot be understood as independent of outside variables" (Checketts, 2017, p. 121). The ANT provided the necessary framework to understand a complex network of influences, from both animate and inanimate objects, on the trajectory of spiritual life in the American church.

History

The ANT is a relatively recent resource for social scientists wishing to make sense of sensemaking (Latour, 2008). Though concepts that compose the ANT have marked communication scholarship for some time, Latour (2008) explained that he produced the first systematic introduction to the theory in 1996 (p. ix). However, Littlejohn et al. (2017) elaborated that the theory was, "Developed by science and technology scholars, including Michel Callon, Bruno Latour, and John Law" in an effort to "take into account not only what scientists do but

what nonhuman objects contribute to the process of scientific enterprise" (pp. 195–196). Others argue that ANT came onto the scene as a social theory school in 1979 with the publication of *Laboratory Life* by Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar, though the theory was not formally named in the work (Checketts, 2017).

Utilization in Communication Research

The identification of specific components of the ANT can be difficult as Latour (2008) explained, "Although there is no clear litmus test for ANT membership, some ad hoc and makeshift ones may be devised" (p. 10). For example, Latour identified the role of nonhuman actors and asserted they must be actors "and not simply the hapless bearers of symbolic projection" (p. 10). Second, Latour highlighted a grander paradigm than historical approaches to sensemaking and questioned, "Is the list of what is social in the end the same limited repertoire that has been used to explain (away) most of the elements?" (p. 10). Finally, Latour explained, "A third and more difficult test would be to check whether a study aims at reassembling the social or still insists on dispersion and deconstruction" (p. 11).

Why ANT Rather Than Medium Theory

While medium theory provides valuable insight into the influence of technological innovation, the problem of lacking DMMs in the American church requires insight into a much more complex network of actors that stretch beyond technology into the spiritual and metaphysical realm. Additionally, Belliger and Krieger (2016) explained, "Much discussion today of the influence of so-called 'new media' on all areas of society seems to reflect McLuhan's technological determinism" (p. 148). The ANT theorists continued, "Talk of a digital media revolution (Manovich, 2001), a second media age (Negroponte, 1995; Poster, 1995; Rheingold, 2000), or a global network society (Castells, 1996) tends to support the suspicion that

much of new media discourse is informed by technological determinism" (Belliger & Krieger, 2016, p. 148). While media ecology certainly identifies relationships of influence that are valuable for use in ANT, the assertion of technological determinism removes agency from one or more actors. This is a critical component of medium theory that determined theoretical use of ANT for this research was better suited.

Technological determinism is problematic for the inquiry into lacking DMMs in the American church for several reasons. First, Belliger and Krieger (2016) identified,

> Contrary to the age-old assumptions of Western metaphysics, the human world consists not of substances, but of mediations. Being is mediation, relation, and therefore information. ANT proposes a *relational ontology*. An actor–network is held together by, or rather, made up of information. (p. 149)

The ANT theorists went on to assert, "For this reason, ANT cannot be interpreted as a theory of technological determinism any more than it can be understood as a theory of social determinism" (Belliger & Krieger, 2016, p. 149). Therefore, since all actors in a network have agency, the human actor is able to identify the influence of technological influence and either accept or reject the influence rather than being subjected to determinism void of agency to alter the course of the future. For this reason, the ANT stood as a superior theoretical construct for use in this research.

Critiques of the ANT

While the ANT presents a unique framework to potentially provide seminal discoveries for the American church, Chambon (2020) pointed out that the theory is not without weaknesses:

> It is regularly attacked for its tendency for ontological deconstructivism where nothing exists prior to social construction (Elder-Vass, 2015; Whittle & Spicer, 2008); or for creating a flat ontology where all members of a network share a rather similar agency and

potentiality of being (Amsterdamska 1990); or for reducing material objects to their

acting potentialities only (Harman 2011). (p. 8)

Additionally, Michael (2017) highlighted that "even early on there were suspicions that ANT

tended to neglect subtler processes through which relations emerged" (p. 53). Finally, Michael

explained another critique of ANT is the trouble in accounting for hybrids. He provided the

example of a couch potato, who "as a combination of person, couch, remote control and TV, is

condemned because the human component is corrupted by its embroilment with its nonhumans,

and fails to live up to certain citizenly, economic or medical virtues" (p. 59).

Utility of the ANT in Spiritual Communication Research

The foundation of the ANT's utility in spiritual communication research is touched upon

when Stausberg (2010) explained,

Contrary to the standard procedure in the sciences—be they social or

cognitive/evolutionary, be they modernist or postmodernist—Latour does not propose yet

another explanatory substitution to account for their imaginary, believed, claimed,

proposed or negotiated agency but to build a theory on an affirmation of their agency.

(p.371)

Further, Lassander and Ingman (2012) identify the ANT's utility for spiritual communication

research:

Actor–Network Theory (ANT) is about tracing the webs of associations between myriad

actants whose collective actions produce what we call "society." Dismissing the notion of

"the social" as a kind of "stuff," ANT insists that sociology should focus on the

interactional processes—the circulation of "the social" among human and non-human

actants—collectively assembling emerging states of affairs. (p. 202)

One example of the use of the ANT in spiritual communication research is understanding the transmission of meaning through architectural structures. For instance, Guggenheim (2013) studied the transmission of meaning when religious structures were repurposed to serve as structures for nonreligious purposes, whereas Chambon (2017) studied the importance of religious structures on the spread of Christianity in China. Another example of the use of the ANT in spiritual communication research can be seen in a study by Kaufman and Idestrom (2018) where they found religious traditions embody the metaphysical nature of the Divine. Finally, a third example of the utility of the ANT in communication research can be seen in Checketts' (2017) research pertaining to Christianity and technological advances where he asserted, "It is therefore crucial for Christianity, if it is to have any significance in this 'Technological Age,' to realize that the cross and the computer are ultimately interdependent" (p. 124).

Relational Prayer Theory. The relational prayer theory was developed by E. James Baesler, "one of the few scholars in communication whose research program is devoted almost exclusively to exploring prayer as a communication phenomenon" (Littlejohn et al., 2017, p. 213). Baesler's rationale for studying prayer as a communication phenomenon was supported when Cohen (2004) explained, "God moderates His voice, so that it can be a medium of communication with humans" (p. 184). Further, Russell (2018) offered, "Prayer is about participating in the relationship God offers us" (p. 49). Russell went on to highlight the experiential aspect of communication in a relationship with family or friends: "They listen and are present to my experience. The same is true of God in prayer" (p. 49). Using the explanatory framework of the relational prayer theory, Baesler (2002) studied sensemaking and relational intimacy through communication with God in prayer and offered, "The best predictor of

intimacy with God for young adults was the prayer of thanksgiving while the prayer of adoration was the best predictor for middle aged adults" (p. 58). Despite an individual's theological stance on communication with God, Baesler's approach in the relational prayer theory is rooted scientifically in the study of effect on those who perceive communication with God through prayer, thus alleviating the necessity to prove the existence of a Divine Being.

The relational prayer theory is composed of several synthesized major forms of prayer including "talking to God, listening, dialoguing with God, meditation, contemplation, and mystical union" (Littlejohn et al., 2017, p. 214). As Littlejohn et al. (2017) pointed out, the relational prayer theory includes one-way communication, two-way communication, as well as an experiential aspect rooted in emotion when considering communication between humans and the Divine. Of particular interest for this research is the inherent aspect of ontological transformation derived from communication with God through prayer and the subsequent behavior change that can stand as a marker of the ontological change. One weakness of the relational prayer theory is the limited utility to identify causal links rather than simply correlations (Baesler, 2002). Additionally, as Baesler pointed out pertaining to a potential remedy for this weakness, "this endeavor would literally be a lifetime project" (p. 65).

The Divine as an Actor with Agency. The relational prayer theory proved valuable for the inquiry into lacking DMMs in the American church since the ANT identifies the Divine as an actor with agency. Recognizing the Divine as an actor was crucial to understanding the problem as Haskell et al. (2016) found a major contributor to the successful growth of churches was "their belief in a God who is active in the life of their members" (p. 517). Additionally, Chambon's (2017) study on the action of Christian buildings on their Chinese environment found that a building elicited different reactions based on a person's association of the building with a

separate and distinct actor. In another study, Russell (2018) asserted, "Prayer is about participating in the relationship God offers us" (p. 49). Finally, Cohen (2004) explained, "God moderates His Voice, so that it can be a medium of communication with humans" (p. 184). The concept of God interacting and communicating with human beings appears to elicit certain sensemaking thoughts that subsequently drive human behavior, a circumstance that could prove vital to further understanding the problem of lacking DMMs in the American church.

The Social Cognitive Theory

The SCT "presents a theoretical framework for analyzing human motivation, thought, and action from a social cognitive perspective" (Bandura, 1995b, p. xi). The SCT describes human behavior as being influenced by both internal personal factors as well as external factors from the environment in which a person exists (Bandura, 1995b; Maibach & Cotton, 1995). Researchers assert that SCT is a useful paradigm for not only understanding voluntary human behaviors but also for influencing them (Bao & Han, 2019). The primary argument of the SCT is that people are influenced not only by environmental factors but also by internal thought factors which can also be influenced by the external factors (Boateng et al., 2016).

While both elements are viable, some researchers, particularly in a health communication context, focus primarily on personal factors and do not attempt to manipulate environmental factors (Maibach & Cotton, 1995). While the exclusion of environmental factors may play a pragmatic role for health communicators, religious communication scholars strongly argue that serious scholarship can no longer deny the major interaction between nature and nurture for understanding spiritual development (Granqvist & Nkara, 2017). The terms nature and nurture are used by Granqvist and Nkara (2017) to identify inborn biological givens and environmental factors, leading religious researchers to the natural conclusion of importance of both personal

and environmental factors of the SCT (Granqvist & Nkara, 2017). As such, the SCT was used in this study to determine how both personal and environmental sensemaking and meaning generated in ANT influences subsequent behavior.

Definition

The SCT is described by Littlejohn et al. (2017) as a way to "illustrate why people adopt the intended behavior (and not just avoid the intended message)" (p. 352). The authors further defined the SCT by suggesting that the theory "proposes that people learn by direct experiential learning but also by vicariously observing others" (p. 352). The components of the SCT include personal, environmental, and behaviors factors. Personal factors include (a) knowledge, (b) skills, (c) self-efficacy, (d) outcome expectations, and (e) personal goals. Environmental factors include (a) social, (b) institutional, and (c) physical, while behavioral factors include (a) frequency, (b) consistency and (c) other relevant aspects (Maibach & Cotton, 1995, p. 45). According to the SCT, self-efficacy and outcome expectations are believed to be the most influential forces that guide a person's behavior (Bandura, 1997; Bao & Han, 2019).

History

Albert Bandura published the cumulative work *Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory* in 1995. The theory represented a cumulative work since different aspects of the theory began appearing in Bandura's work as early as 1969. Bandura's years of previous work began with principles of behavior modification and moved on to investigate social learning, self-efficacy, and learned aggression (Bandura, 1995a, 1995b, 1997, 2002). In 1995 Bandura compiled his research into one coherent theory of human thought and action and titled it the *social cognitive theory*.

Utilization in Communication Research

The SCT has been used in communication research for nearly four decades and spans a wide array of areas of interest (Bandura, 1969). Research utilizing the SCT has focused primarily on behavior modification through diverse organizations; however, prior to this work, the theory had not been directly utilized to research DMMs. For instance, current strategic communication research utilizes SCT to understand organizational cultures throughout the marketplace on a regular basis (Elliott et al., 2019; Hoelscher et al., 2016; Walker & Aritz, 2015). Additionally, the SCT has been utilized to understand religious education self-efficacy and could be utilized throughout nonprofit environments to better understand voluntary human actions (Elliott et al., 2019). The study conducted by Elliott et al. (2019) reveals one way the SCT could be effectively utilized to study how the self-efficacy of disciple makers reflects the reality of actions toward such an objective. Of particular interest for the utilization of the SCT is that Bao and Han (2019) explained, "The primary argument of this theory is that for an individual, his or her behavioral intention is a function of not only behavior but also of cognitive personal and environmental factors" (p. 639). Given the complex nature of interconnected actors with influence over the American church, understanding the cognitive personal and environmental factors proved critical in understanding why behavior in the American church does not support a DMM.

Critiques of the SCT

One of the primary weaknesses of the SCT is the expansive nature of interconnected influence between the components of the theory and the cumulative influence on human behavior. The elements are presented in the theory with relatively equal value of influence, though self-efficacy and outcome expectation are identified as more influential; however, the cumulative effect is not addressed. Additionally, while a great deal of research has been

produced utilizing SCT as a theoretical framework for inquiry over the past 40 years, not all of the research is congruent with other SCT studies. For instance, a study on secular volunteerism revealed a socially learned behavior in childhood was a strong predictor of adult volunteerism when coupled with an adult community that modeled the behavior (DeAngelis et al., 2016). The study further argued that religious behavior modification outside of the learned childhood religious behavior was difficult and uncommon (DeAngelis et al., 2016). A contrary study was published through which sociologist C. L. Carr (2017) asserted "great fluidity in the religious lives of U.S. Americans and significant movement of religious identification from an inheritance to a chosen status" (p. 62).

Another example of conflicting research was discovered when Maibach and Cotton (1995) undervalued the role of environmental factors and recommended their exclusion when crafting health messages. On the contrary, Bao and Han (2019) asserted, "Besides personal cognition, situational or environmental factors are also important elements in affecting user participation" (pp. 649–650). Further, as pointed out earlier, environmental factors can play a significant role in autonomously influencing a person or through supporting further self-efficacy. Ultimately, Maibach and Cotton (1995) may have excluded environmental factors for pragmatic reasons; however, the research stands in contradiction with the vast repository of data on SCT.

Finally, research utilizing SCT to predict medication compliance behavior in patients with depression produced menial results and subsequently led the researchers to question the validity of the SCT (B. Bennett et al., 2018). While the theory was not designed as a framework for all situations, it has proven highly effective in a vast range of environments (Elliott et al., 2019). Despite SCT's overwhelming success in numerous fields, researchers argued, "Social cognitive theory is almost 30 years old and since then several improvements have occurred in the

field" (B. Bennett et al., 2018, p. 5). While this disparaging perception of SCT is in the vast minority, the application of SCT in the unique environment of depressed patients may be a predictor of other ineffective application environments, though the American church focused on DMMs proved to be a conducive environment for SCT application.

Personal Factors of SCT

Knowledge. To begin, Maibach and Cotton (1995) asserted,

It takes little more than common sense to appreciate the fact that knowledge is the necessary precondition for behavior change. Before behavior change is likely to occur, people must have knowledge both about their risk factors (the behaviors or conditions that place one at risk) and the ways in which their risk factors can be reduced (the alternative behaviors). (p. 44)

Further, Bandura (1995b) explained, "Humans do not simply react to stimulus events. They interpret the events and organize the information derived from them into beliefs about what leads to what" (p. 183). This understanding of knowledge is important as studies in health communication have noted that increased knowledge only facilitates future action rather than motivating it, which relegates the function to secondary importance (Mayo-Gamble & Mouton, 2018). Knowledge in the SCT refers to experiential knowledge rather than the typical American cultural understanding of knowledge derived from higher education.

Skills. The SCT refers to skills as the set of technical acumen required to successfully conduct an action (Bandura, 1995b). Skills can range from cognitive, social, behavioral, and self-regulatory, with most situations requiring skills from multiple domains (Maibach & Cotton, 1995). The necessity for skills to usher behavior change was captured when Maibach and Cotton (1995) explained, "One reason why knowledge gains do not lead inevitably to behavior change is

the lack of skills necessary to perform the behavior" (p. 46). Of particular concern from my personal experience training disciple multiplication strategies within the American church is what appears to be an overinflation on the necessity for information transmission rather than skill acquisition. Often clergy define spiritual maturity based on a person's knowledge about the Bible rather than a person's ability to perform the functions prescribed in the Bible, functions that ultimately lead to ontological transformation.

    Self-Efficacy. Self-efficacy (SE) is "a judgement of one's ability to organize and execute given types of performances" (Bandura, 1997, p. 21). Bao and Han (2019) articulated that SE is not about the abilities a person has but rather how a person judges what they can do with the skills they possess. In essence, it is not whether a person has the ability to actually jump across a hole, it is whether the person believes they can jump across the hole that will move them to action. Studies have conclusively demonstrated that increased SE supports increased action and participation, a correlation that could provide greater understanding for discipleship in America (Bao & Han, 2019).

    Studies on SE have found that people with high SE feel competent to share their knowledge and contribute in community exchange (Zhang et al., 2017). Interestingly, other studies have also documented that sharing knowledge in community exchange, or on social networking sites, increased SE which only further motivated the person to continue sharing, thus creating a loop leading to ever greater SE (Kashian & Liu, 2020). In fact, additional research found that increased SE from social network sharing was independent of feedback or social persuasion and was primarily driven by the mere act of sharing in community (Kashian & Liu, 2020). Research certainly indicates that people are positively impacted simply by the act of sharing information and knowledge with others, an action that is inherent in the discipleship

process.

Additionally, research conducted by Sternszus et al. (2018) indicated that role modeling provided by a mentor ultimately increased the SE of those who watched. Interestingly, this study supports the discipleship methods presented by Jesus throughout scripture, as He modeled behavior that His disciples were expected to replicate. However, another study conducted by Braaten (2019) found one unique aspect pertaining to modeling that actually detracted from SE. In fact, Braaten explained, "Any reorganization of practice or appropriation of science teaching practices different from those of the mentor teacher ran a risk of being so negatively evaluated by the mentor that PSTs (pre-service teachers) did not feel safe experimenting with practice" (p. 87). Therefore, the implication is that when disciples are demanded to replicate exactly the modeled behavior without room for experimentation, creativity, or following the Holy Spirit, SE decreases and the potential for replication of the behavior diminishes. However, Bandura (2002) highlighted an alternative and more effective method of modeling when he explained, "Through a process of abstract modeling, observers derive the principles underlying specific performances for generating behavior that goes beyond what they have seen or heard" (p. 40). In fact, Arain (2018) highlighted how relational care for a mentee and safe space for trying new things facilitated increased performance.

While SE is a very influential determinant for behavior modification, Wu et al.'s (2020) study found,

> Once the set of subjective task values were entered in the regression models, self-efficacy did not explain significant unique variance for any of the achievement related behaviors. Intrinsic interest emerged as the most consistent predictor of achievement related behaviors when controlling for self-efficacy and the other four task value dimensions.

(p. 151)

In support of intrinsic interest for achievement related behavior, Beauchamp et al. (2019) found

that financial award provided a substantial intrinsic interest that ultimately increased SE. While

financial reward can be utilized to increase SE, Jurkiewicz and Giacalone (2016) warned, "The

research is overwhelmingly supportive of the notion that individuals behave in ways for which

they are rewarded, and that they are more likely to behave in an unethical manner if there is a

substantial benefit for doing so" (p. 3). Further, Porter et al. (2018) warned that overuse of

financial reward can ultimately have a detrimental effect on organizational culture, thus

canceling any benefit from increased SE for individuals in the culture.

Finally, Ekblad (2011) found that the perception of hearing a word from God can

increase SE. In fact, Ekblad stated,

> When the Bible is read in a community with a deliberate expectation of hearing a word of
>
> encouragement, finding relief from troubles, and knowing or experiencing God's
>
> transforming love in a more immediate way, personal and social change will follow.
>
> (p. 229)

Certainly, since the perception of hearing from God increases an individual's SE, understanding

how an organization can communicate to assist people to hear from God would be of great

interest for future research. Additionally, since hearing from God increases SE, then increased

SE is an inherent aspect of a disciple based on the definition of a disciple presented in this work.

Outcome Expectations. Outcome expectation is the perception a person holds about the

expected consequences of their actions (Bandura, 1997). Maibach and Cotton (1995) explained,

"SCT makes a clear distinction between beliefs about ability to enact the behavior (i.e., self-

efficacy) and beliefs about the outcomes that will result from the behavior" (p. 49). Expectations

can be categorized into personal physical effects, social effects, and self-evaluative effects (Bao

& Han, 2019). In essence, people are motivated to action when there is a perceived benefit for

the success of the action. This element accounts for the risk versus reward calculation a person

will conduct prior to action. However, another study revealed that motivation develops over time

(Larson et al., 2018). In fact, Larson et al.'s (2018) study found, "These results suggest that

motivation evolves over time well after the generally accepted 6 months to establish a behavioral

pattern" (p. 65). Another study conducted by Slaten et al. (2019) found that a sense of

community and belonging acted as a positive outcome expectation to drive behavior change.

Self-affirmation proved to be a positive force for outcome expectation that drove

behavior change (Falk et al., 2015). In particular, reminding participants of their core values and

ensuring subsequent actions were in alignment with stated values proved to be an adequate

outcome expectation (Falk et al., 2015). Finally, Deutschman (2005) reported on a study of heart

surgery patients who were noncompliant with surgeon directives despite the risk to their lives.

Through slight changes to the patient's outcome expectations, the study moved to a nearly 100%

compliance rate. Ultimately, the researcher reframed the situation for the participants and

concluded that joy is a more powerful tool than fear.

Personal Goals. Bandura (1995b) identified personal goals as a major source of

motivation for behavior change. In fact, Maibach and Cotton (1995) explained

> Goals provide both a direction and a reference point against which people can compare
>
> their progress. When progress is made (or when behavior is maintained at a level that
>
> meets the goal), people tend to be satisfied and have positive self-appraisals. (p. 50)

Additionally, Kashian and Liu (2020) found a correlation between accomplishment of personal

goals with the perception of mastery events that ultimately led to an increase in SE. However,

Maibach and Cotton (1995) noted the importance of the personal goals being perceived by the person setting the goal as *challenging* for the resulting increase in SE. Though challenging personal goals is important for motivation and development of SE, Bandura (1995b) pointed out that not all challenging personal goals generate motivation for behavior change. In fact, Bandura (1995b) asserted,

> The degree to which goals create incentives and guides for action is partly determined by their specificity. Clear standards regulate performance by designating the type and amount of effort required to attain them, and they foster self-satisfaction and perceived efficacy by furnishing unambiguous signs of personal accomplishments. (p. 472)

Environmental Factors of SCT

Social. The social element of the SCT argues that human beings acquire normative perspectives for thought and behavior through learned experiences within their social environment. In essence, people learn how to behave by watching other people around them. DeAngelis et al. (2016) argued, "Results drawing from both cross-sectional and panel data support the central tenets of social learning theory and suggest that parents serve as role models who can motivate prosocial behavior in both religious and secular settings" (p. 3). While the influence of a parent's example may seem intuitive, workplace coaching is the process of "challenging and supporting a person or a team in order to develop ways of thinking, ways of being and ways of learning" (Vesso & Alas, 2016, p. 306). Additional research has demonstrated that the influence of a model example is not limited to face-to-face interaction as people also accept a recorded video example as a means for learning social behavior (Huang & Zhou, 2019). Additionally, multiple studies have found that social learning through the example of other people increases the student's SE, thus increasing the potential for the student to replicate the

learned action (Doyle & McDowall, 2019; Kashian & Liu, 2020).

While a personal model of action is important for learning a social behavior, research has found that religious community and friendship ties are the predominant motivator for predicting adult religious activity (DeAngelis et al., 2016). The influence of intimate community cannot be overstated as research into both a clandestine online torrent community as well as an online orthodox Jewish community revealed behavior modification of individual community members to conform with community standards of social normalization (Diamant-Cohen & Golan, 2017; Golan & Stadler, 2016). Additional research has pointed out that people use others as a standard when evaluating themselves which means that their SE is, in part, determined by how they compare themselves to others in the group (Burke & Rains, 2019). Religious communication researcher Stephen Garner (2019) pointed out, "Being in healthy and wholesome relationships with other believers and being part of communities formed as the people of God, the body of Christ, and the temple of the Holy Spirit forms an essential part of being a disciple" (p. 26).

Since individuals are motivated to action and behavior change primarily through SE, and SE is influenced through social learning in intimate community, academic attention was rendered to the inquiry of how organizational culture impacts behavior change through SE. Hoelscher et al. (2016) proposed that "organizational identification is the perception of oneness with or belongingness to some human aggregate" (p. 482). The more a person identifies as part of the aggregate, the more the person attempts to remedy behavior to match the community. Further research has coined the term *community of practice* to describe an "aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in some common endeavor. Ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values, power relations—in short, practices—emerge in the course of their joint activity around that endeavor" (Walker & Aritz, 2015, p. 457). The theory appears to

highlight social learning through regular community involvement which increases SE pertaining to community behavior. Thus, should effective discipleship methods become the normalized community behavior, SE of the entire community should increase, resulting in corresponding individual behavior change.

Institutional. Bandura (2002) highlighted that the most influential people in social learning are those deemed to be experts. Therefore, perceived expertise is likely to motivate people to change attitudes and subsequent behaviors into conformity with the expert opinion and behavior. Unfortunately, Bandura (2002) did not explain how people come to perceive someone as an expert, an area for future inquiry that could be a catalyst for ineffective discipleship methods in America. However, Jara-Figueroa et al. (2019) conducted a causal inference technique study that revealed a correlation between European cities that adopted printing earlier and the propensity to be the birthplace of a famous scientist or artist. Thus, the research demonstrated how the medium of communication influenced the perception of expert status. In essence, those with the most pervasive message throughout society were deemed experts simply due to their celebrity status. This social learning principle is troubling in light of numerous studies that highlight how modeled behavior by a mentor is the greatest influence over subsequent behavior of the mentee (Arain et al., 2017; Gan, 2018; Lu et al., 2019). Given that there are no DMMs in the American church, yet the majority of disciple-making literature is produced by people in the American church, focused analysis of disciple-making artifacts seemed prudent in an effort to discover the modeling example being communicated by the "experts" in the American church.

The institutional factor of social learning is rooted in the concept that expert status is a highly influential element of subsequent individual behavior change (Bandura, 2002). For

instance, the formal structure of an institution can inherently create a perception of expertise that is greater than an individual (Bandura, 2002). Additionally, Johnson and Scholes (1999) highlighted how the most powerful grouping of managers in an organization is most likely to drive the paradigm narrative of the organization. In essence, despite any rhetorical message communicated from an institution, the most powerful message of modeled behavior will be the consistent actions performed by the core grouping of institutional leaders (Johnson & Scholes, 1999).

Physical. While not the most influential factor of behavior change, the physical environment can influence human behavior (Bandura, 2002). For instance, in light of disciple making, a person's self-efficacy and outcome expectation may positively influence a person toward multiplying disciples, yet a highly persecuted and ultimately dangerous environment may become more influential toward inactivity. Conversely, a person's self-efficacy and outcome expectation for disciple multiplication can far exceed even the most hostile environments that place a disciple maker in grave danger (Chambon, 2020; Smith & Kai, 2011). Additionally, physical impairment can negatively influence SE; however, goal accomplishment in spite of physical impairment can increase SE (Kashian & Liu, 2020).

Behavioral Factors of SCT

Frequency. The frequency factor of the SCT refers to how often a person performs a certain task (Bandura, 1995b). Bandura (1995b) explained that repetition of a task could increase a person's SE for accomplishing that task. In disciple making, the concept of frequency was a foundational aspect of Smith and Kai's (2011) success. In essence, Smith and Kai would train disciples in a small lesson and then immediately have each disciple reproduce the lesson multiple times until they were able to lead the lesson competently and confidently. It was only once a

disciple was able to reproduce the lesson competently and confidently for Kai that they were sent out to reproduce the lesson with other disciples (Smith & Kai, 2011).

Consistency. The consistency factor of the SCT refers to how long a person performs a certain task (Bandura, 1995b). Bandura (1995b) explained that a person's SE increased as the length of time the person consistently performed the task also increased. The concept of consistency can also be seen in disciple making where frequency may motivate a young disciple to reproduce a lesson; however, when the lesson is consistently reproduced, SE increases and the disciple further increases in competence and confidence sharing the lesson.

The Johnson and Scholes Cultural Web Model

Certainly, understanding an organizational culture by the daily actions of members inside that culture is important; however, distinct elements of organizational structure exist within the culture and influence the behaviors of individual people (Cameron & Quinn, 2011; Friedman, 2018). In fact, Keyton (2011) explained,

> Changes to culture create changes in communication. And, as a result, individual organizational members are not viewed as influential—because the culture made them behave and communicate the way they did. Their communication is an outcome of the culture. (p. 45)

Understanding the structural elements of an organizational culture are important for first understanding why people behave the way they do and subsequently understanding how to communicate differently to achieve desired behavior change (Johnson & Scholes, 1999). For instance, Guindon (2020) provided a clear description of a desired disciple-making culture; however, the work failed to provide analysis of an organizational structure that would drive paradigm change toward the desired cultural activity.

One problem with providing an organizational structure through which to study culture was addressed when McDonald and Foster (2013) explained, "The literature on organizational culture has become vast and diverse. Organizational culture has been studied using a wide range of methodological and theoretical lenses" (p. 1). However, the researchers later offered,

> The cultural web is often presented as a simplistic tool, which can give executives some
>
> purchase on the slippery notion of corporate culture. However, we contend that it is
>
> actually a sophisticated model which brings together different views of culture which are
>
> traditionally dispersed across the literature. (p. 4)

Therefore, this research utilized the JSCW model (1999) to provide the necessary organizational structure to clearly understand and subsequently analyze organizational communication that could effectively drive paradigm transformation toward a disciple-making culture in an American church.

Definition

As is commonly attributed to Peter Drucker's work, the phrase *Culture eats strategy for breakfast* drives many organizational leaders to better understand what culture is, and more importantly, how to shape it as an organizational asset (Manley & Jackson, 2019). Speaking of organizational culture, Johnson (1992) explained, "It would therefore be a mistake to conceive of the paradigm as merely a set of beliefs removed from organizational action. It lies within a cultural web which bonds it to the action of organizational life" (p. 30). Johnson and Scholes (1999) further explained that much of an organizational culture may exist in the "taken-for-grantedness" (p. 73) that is often overlooked by leaders and researchers. Therefore, the researchers defined the cultural web as "a representation of the taken-for-granted assumptions, or paradigm, of an organization and the physical manifestations of organizational culture" (p. 73).

The cultural web is composed of six elements that ultimately create the organizational paradigm; the six elements are "Stories, Symbols, Power, Organisation, Controls, as well as Rituals and Routines" (Johnson & Scholes, 1999, p. 75).

Elements of the Model

Stories. Stories are told by members of the culture to others within the culture as well as to those outside the culture. Stories are important to the makeup of an organizational culture because "they distill the essence of an organization's past, legitimize types of behavior and are devices for telling people what is important in the organization" (Johnson & Scholes, 1999, p. 76). In essence, the informal discussions held around the proverbial watercooler are highly influential to understanding and sensemaking about the organization for members of the culture. Additionally, social media presents a unique medium for the transmission of stories, which presents the opportunity for those outside the culture to influence the culture itself.

Symbols. Johnson and Scholes (1999) explained that symbols, "such as logos, offices, cars and titles, or the type of language and terminology commonly used, become a short-hand representation of the nature of the organization" (p. 77). The researchers further explained, "In long-established or conservative organizations it is likely that there will be many symbols of hierarchy or deference to do with formal office layout, differences in privileges between levels of management, the way in which people address each other and so on" (p. 77). For example, the military is a long-standing and very formal organization with members who literally wear symbols on their clothing to dictate interaction between members of the organization. Likewise, American churches can utilize different symbols on a regular basis that will communicate meaning within the organizational culture.

Rituals and Routines. Rituals and routines were explained by Johnson and Scholes

(1999) when they offered, "The routine ways that members of the organization behave towards each other, and towards those outside of the organization, make up 'the way we do things around here'" (p. 74). The researchers further noted, "Rituals of organizational life are the special events through which the organization emphasizes what is particularly important and reinforces 'the way we do things around here'" (p. 76). The researchers further asserted, "Overall, the rituals and routines are about ensuring that everyone 'knows their place'" (p. 76). One example may be regularly scheduled meetings where members of the organization sit in different locations as a reinforcement of the hierarchy. A far less formal example could be a regularly scheduled lunch date between members of the organization that further solidifies informal power structures.

Power Structures. Johnson and Scholes (1999) explained, "Power structures are also likely to be associated with the key assumptions of the paradigm. The paradigm is, in some respects, the 'formula for success,' which is taken for granted and likely to have grown up over the years" (p. 77). True power in an organization does not always align with formal authority but can be held by persons without official organizational titles or authority. Johnson and Scholes further elaborated that "the most powerful managerial groupings within the organization are likely to be closely associated with [the] core assumptions and beliefs" (p. 77). Within an American church setting, it is not uncommon for influential power in the church to be held by someone not serving as clergy or within an official organizational leadership position such as a deacon or elder.

Organizational Structure. Organizational structure is an important communication element as Johnson and Scholes (1999) explained, "Organizational structure is likely to reflect power structures and, again, delineate important relationships and emphasize what is important in the organization" (p. 78). For instance, a very hierarchical structure that withholds most

authority for senior positions is likely to communicate a lack of trust for lower-level employees and will likely create a culture marked by fear and a lack of creativity, whereas a flattened organizational structure that pushes authority to the lowest levels possible will likely generate a sense of trust and empowerment that will increase creativity and facilitate initiative toward organizational objectives.

Controls. Johnson and Scholes (1999) explained, "The control systems, measurements and reward systems emphasize what it is important to monitor in the organization, and to focus attention and activity upon" (p. 78). A commonly used phrase within the military is that a leader should only expect what they inspect, meaning that younger soldiers understand a task is important only if leadership inspects the task when complete. Additionally, reward controls can communicate an unintended message; Johnson and Scholes (1999) pointed out, "An organization with individually based bonus schemes related to volume could find it difficult to promote strategies requiring teamwork and an emphasis on quality rather than volume" (p. 78). One example for disciple multiplication in order to communicate the importance of everyone becoming a disciple maker is to track the number of unique baptizers rather than the number of baptized.

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Related Disciple-Making Concepts

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Discipleship versus Evangelism

Personal experience training American churches to implement disciple multiplication principles and strategies has resulted in the revelation that many American church clergy interchangeably utilize the terms discipleship and evangelism. While discipleship inherently maintains an element of engaging non-Christian people for the expressed purpose of leading them into an ontological transformation, similar to evangelism, discipleship is itself an ontology

rather than a ministry task to be completed. As Jesus said in Matthew 4:19 (*English Standard Bible*, 2001), "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." Fishing for men was not simply a task for Jesus but rather a state of being which the disciples would eventually become. Within a DMM, the concept of disciple making is likewise not a task to be completed but rather an aspect of the ontology of disciples.

The Method Is the Message

Much like McLuhan and Fiore's (2005) concept of the medium being the message, a foundational concept throughout Jesus's life was that the method is the message. Jesus deliberately chose a unique methodological approach to making disciples that was divergent from the traditional methods used by the Jewish rabbinical system. Jesus could have chosen to develop a formal ministry platform that utilized the Temple complex or taught throughout the synagogue network; however, He chose a different method. As such, great emphasis was placed on the analysis of methodological approaches used within each research site in an effort to better understand the message being communicated by the method.

Disciple-Making Organizational Culture

As was addressed by the cultural web, multiple factors influence the organizational culture of a church. Just because a senior pastor desires a disciple-making culture does not necessarily mean the organization will transform, particularly if the senior pastor continues to communicate a contrary message through power structures, controls, or routines. For instance, if an organization desires an increase in baptisms yet creates routines that bind staff to the office, then the importance of conversations with non-Christians outside the church is called into question, whereas if senior church leaders create a weekly routine where they model the behavior, junior staff would likely understand the importance of sharing the Gospel on a regular

basis. Ultimately, the literature presented in this chapter supports the concept that the most likely way for organizational leaders to usher change toward a desired organizational culture is to first model the desired behavior and subsequently ensure each element of the cultural web supports that desired behavior.

Research Gaps

While a great amount of research has been conducted in numerous academic disciplines using the ANT, the SCT, and the JSCW, literature pertaining to these theories within religious communication research is sparse. Additionally, a great amount of literature pertaining to spiritual growth and discipleship has been produced through the theological discipline; however, very little academic inquiry has been afforded to the study of organizational communication's impact on disciple multiplication efforts within the American church. Therefore, despite the review of literature presented in this work, numerous research gaps exist and should be addressed.

The first research gap recognized through the review of literature is the lack in study of spiritual development from an intrinsic perspective rather than merely extrinsic quantifiable metrics such as church attendance or denominational affiliation (Elliott et al., 2019). While the metaphysical nature of intrinsic spiritual growth presents a research challenge, quantifiable symbols of the metaphysical exist that can assist the astute researcher in measurement. As Elliott et al. (2019) pointed out, "The motivation, beliefs, cognition and spirituality of teachers of religious education is a field worthy of study" (p. 141). The researchers further opined that additional research may provide insight into how organizational structures may improve the SE of religious educators.

The second research gap recognized through the review of literature was the lack of

time–order and causality of SE to behavior change (Kashian & Liu, 2020). For example, posting

mastery events on social medial sites not only requires SE, it also further develops SE.

Researching the time–order and causality may provide better insight that facilitates practical

application of methods to spur quicker SE development. This gap could be researched through

the context of religious activism and discipleship.

The third research gap recognized through the review of literature was the lack of

globalized understanding of SCT's accuracy in a range of socioeconomic and geopolitical

environments (Bao & Han, 2019). While SCT has been successfully applied to a variety of

contexts over the past 40 years, the breadth of research contexts does not reach full development.

Finally, another research gap was qualitative data documenting personal motivations for

religious activity (DeAngelis et al., 2016). While research on spiritual development and

discipleship is already sparse, qualitative data on personal motivations for making disciples in

response to the command from Jesus is nearly nonexistent and in dire need of serious inquiry.

Summary

Jesus clearly commanded His followers to make disciples, yet very few Christians in

America adhere to the practice (Wilson et al., 2015). Theologian David Lanier (1999) further

articulated that multiplication of disciples by training immature believers to maturity is the only

way the world may realize the fulfillment of the Great Commission. A call for interdisciplinary

research between communication and theology presents the opportunity to better understand,

through the ANT and SCT, how human beings are moved to change behavior in support of

disciple-making efforts (Bao & Han, 2019; Grom, 2015). While the ANT is well positioned to

explore religious communication and the SCT has been utilized as a theoretical framework for

nearly 40 years, a research gap exists in understanding why the majority of American Christians

do not adhere to Jesus's command to make disciples. The Johnson and Scholes (1999) cultural web offered a model of organizational culture well suited to facilitate the communication research of American churches to figure out how a church can communicate to facilitate disciple multiplication. Further research is needed to understand how the American church can collectively increase the SE and outcome expectation of Christians for discipleship. Based on this review of literature and the following study, it is understood that the disciple-making SE of Christians who are personally discipled by someone is significantly higher and results in spiritual reproduction whereas the disciple-making SE of church-attending Christians who are not personally discipled by someone are lower and limited reproduction will occur.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The lack of disciple-making movements (DMMs) within the American church demanded concerted research to understand how an American church could communicate to multiply disciples more effectively within a unique context. Recognizing the subconscious influence of mediatization on nearly every aspect of American culture, I first needed to analyze the American church to understand the depth of influence from outside sources before I pursued understanding of organizational communication techniques that can influence individual behavior change toward disciple-making efforts (McLuhan, 1994). The level of relational intimacy needed to acquire accurate participant feedback pertaining to sensemaking and subconscious understanding by participants required me to play an active role in the study with participants. Thus, the axiology, ontology, and epistemology all pointed toward a collectivist paradigm for the research (Terrell, 2016). Therefore, I approached the problem through a constructivist paradigm to understand sensemaking within three American church organizational cultures representing the East Coast, the Midwest, and the West Coast of the United States (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Terrell, 2016).

The problem of lacking DMMs in the American church drove the study; however, the pursuit of understanding this problem was best achieved through the communication discipline, given the inherent concern within the academic discipline for understanding the very essence of the human condition within a social context (Eco, 1979; Littlejohn et al., 2017; McLuhan, 1994). Therefore, in pursuit of the problem through a communication lens, the following research questions were the guideposts that facilitated efficient and effective study:

Research Questions

RQ1: How can a church organization communicate to increase disciple multiplication?

RQ2: How does a church's organizational communication influence individual disciple multiplication?

RQ3: How can elements of the social cognitive theory be communicated to encourage individual behavior change toward disciple multiplication?

Once a problem has been identified and research questions clarified, the researcher must carefully present the research design that guided the inquiry (Keyton, 2019). Speaking about research design, Punch (2014) explained, "At the *most general level* it means all the issues involved in planning and executing a research project—from identifying the problem through to reporting and publishing the results" (p. 114). As such, the intricacies of the research design composed the skeletal structure of the study, informing every aspect of this inquiry and inherently shaping my ultimate discoveries (Treadwell & Davis, 2020). This chapter provides a detailed description of the research design used for the study through a detailed account of the research procedures for data collection, procedures for data analysis, and a discussion of ethical concerns navigated throughout the project.

Design

Qualitative Research Design

Little research has been conducted on the problem of lacking DMMs in the American church through a social science approach, and thus, the problem remains relatively unexplored through academically rigorous means. In reference to a relatively unexplored phenomenon, Creswell and Creswell (2018) explained, "If a concept or phenomenon needs to be explored and understood because little research has been done on it or because it involves an understudied

sample, then it merits a qualitative approach" (p. 19). An additional contributing factor to the selection of a qualitative study rested within the constructivist paradigm through which the study was approached as Allen (2005) explained, "Social constructionism strives to understand how humans create knowledge" (p. 36). Allen continued, "According to social constructionists, knowledge is an effect of social processes" (p. 36). Subsequently, Keyton (2019) asserted, "Qualitative research preserves the form and content of human interaction. Often in the form of text, audio, or video, these data are analyzed for their characteristics as they occur in natural settings" (p. 244). Keyton then explained, "Qualitative researchers are interested in the whole of the communication phenomenon or process, regardless of how complex or messy it gets" (p. 244).

Another factor in the decision to utilize a qualitative type of study pertained to the potentially sensitive nature of studying a failure of communication within the American church (Schwandt, 2015). The intent of the study was to dissect the epistemology and ontology of the organizational culture of the American church, which was likely to uncover foundational beliefs that were inconsistent with stated values of the organization. Highlighting inconsistencies between belief and core religious values can elicit a wide range of negative emotions, particularly in professional clergy who have built a livelihood upon traditional ecclesial practices that may ultimately prove harmful to the spiritual growth of church members. In consideration of this factor, Creswell (2016) explained,

> Qualitative research involves the study of emotionally charged topics that are hard to research. Because we talk directly to people and spend time in their settings, we may get them to talk about the 'hard issues,' the problems that typically do not surface in more conventional research. (p. 8)

Why a Case Study Is Appropriate

In an effort to clearly articulate why a case study was the most appropriate design for this research, a brief history of case study design, followed by a working definition of the design, is prudent.

History of the Case Study Design

Yin (2018) identified that case study design traced back to the Chicago school of sociology; however, "*Participant-observation* emerged as a data collection technique, effectively eliminating any further recognition of case study research" (p. 14). Additionally, Platt (1992) found numerous references of case study research up to 1950; however, references to case study research were nearly nonexistent between 1950–1980. Yin explained that "a renewed discussion of case study research began to emerge in textbooks, largely occurring from 1980 to 1989 and continuing thereafter" (p. 14). Finally, referencing case study research after 1989, Platt (1992) explained that the design became "a strategy to be preferred when circumstances and research problems are appropriate rather than an ideological commitment to be followed whatever the circumstances" (p. 46). Thus, the case study is a relatively recent methodological design focused on a problem within a given context rather than an ideological paradigm.

Definition of a Case Study

The nature of a case study being focused on a problem rather than an ideological paradigm precludes the design from a simple definition. However, Yin (2018) captured the essence of the research design in a two-part definition, with the first part focused on the *scope* of a case study when he explained, "A case study is an empirical method that: Investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the 'case') in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident" (p. 15).

Yin (2018) continued as he explained the second part of the definition was necessary because phenomenon and context are not always easily identifiable in fieldwork. Therefore, the second part of the definition for case study design explains the *features* of a case study:

> A case study copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide design, data collection, and analysis, and as another result relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion (p. 15).

Rationale for Case Study Design

Given the dynamic nature of the problem surrounding the lack of DMMs in the American church, the case study design rose as the most appropriate design to facilitate a contemporary problem within its real-world context. Additionally, the pursuit of understanding the influences of outside actors on the organizational culture of the American church inherently increased the number of variables of interest, further solidifying a case study design as the most appropriate for the inquiry. Furthermore, the necessity to bound the pursuit in time and scope in an effort to drive clarity of results, as well as manage proper stewardship of available resources, compounded the appropriateness of a case study design for this project.

Implementation of the Design

The case study design was implemented in three American churches, with one located on the East Coast, one in the Midwest, and one on the West Coast of the United States. Additionally, all three churches were selected based on an expressed desire to become a disciple-making church that ignites a DMM within their given context. The implementation of the design relied heavily upon personal interviews as a data collection method but also utilized personal

observation, artifact analysis, and social media analysis to generate relevant data.

Why an Ethnographically Informed, Comparative Embedded Case Study Was Selected

While a case study design resonated as the most appropriate design for this study, the specific approach to the case study design for this research was an ethnographically informed, comparative embedded case study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Punch, 2014; Yin, 2018). To begin, the case study was ethnographically informed because, as Punch (2014) explained, "Ethnography means describing a culture and understanding a way of life from the point of view of its participants—ethnography is the art and science of describing a group or culture" (p. 125). Additionally, MacLeod et al. (2019) asserted, "Given these principles, it is quite logical, then, that ethnography is considered the methodology of choice for actor–network theory informed researchers" (p. 179). However, as resources available for this project precluded a full ethnography of the problem, Punch (2014) recommended, "Thus elements of the ethnographic approach, or 'borrowing ethnographic techniques' [Wolcott, 1988], are used in some social science research projects, rather than producing full-scale ethnographies" (p. 129). Therefore, the case study design was informed by ethnographic principles to generate the most accurate data to understand some of the more nuanced variables affiliated with sensemaking and the constructionist paradigm.

The comparative case study design also marked the specific approach to this study in an effort to strengthen the findings of the research. As Yin (2018) highly recommended, "If you can do even a 'two-case' case study, your chances of doing a good case study will be better than using a single-case design" (p. 61). Furthermore, Yin also highlighted,

> You may have deliberately selected your two cases because they offered contrasting
>
> situations, and you were not seeking a direct replication. In this design, if the subsequent

findings support the hypothesized contrast, the results represent a strong start toward

theoretical replication—again strengthening your findings compared with those from a

single case study alone. (p. 61)

Therefore, three cases, representing three distinct geographical locations within the United

States, were selected to provide strengthened results compared to a single case design.

Finally, an embedded design was also chosen for this project because, as Yin (2018)

pointed out, analysis within a case may be conducted on a subunit or subunits. For instance, in

the case of sensemaking within an organizational culture of an American church, communication

within the subunit of professional clergy, was believed to be different from that of lay leaders

compared to the non-leadership laity of the organization. For this reason, each of the three cases

were embedded with a subgroup for professional clergy and church staff, lay leadership, and

non-leadership laity. Therefore, given the ethnographically informed nature of the study, a

collective approach was used through multiple instruments including open-ended interviews,

researcher observation, artifact analysis, and social media analysis.

Site Selection Process

In an effort to ethically protect the identities of both organizations and individuals,

pseudonyms were used throughout this study. Deliberate selection of three sites was made based

on criteria to strengthen the results of the research. Criteria for site selection included the

necessity to be a Christian church located within the continental United States, maintain a

congregation membership greater than 1,000, and have an expressed interest in initiating a DMM

with supporting activity toward such an end. As such, all selected sites demonstrated a desire to

initiate a DMM within their context, represented numerical criteria fulfillment and also similar

organizational size and structure to each other, and adhered to theologically conservative beliefs

congruent with an evangelical Christian faith. Additionally, all sites expressed interest in participating in a research project focused on learning to more effectively multiply disciples.

Site 1: Virginia Church

Site 1 was represented by a church in northern Virginia that maintained a consistent membership of approximately 1,500 members. The Virginia Church (VC) had been in existence for over 20 years, utilized an attractional model of church focused on reaching the lost with contemporary worship services, and supported multiple worship services through three campuses. The VC had a demonstrated track record of church planting and represented one of the nation's most prolific church planting churches, noting responsibility for planting over 300 churches in the last 10 years. The VC purchased a large facility with recreational opportunities as a deliberate methodology for reaching unchurched people in their context; approximately 100,000 people pass through their doors on an annual basis.

The VC was specifically selected as a site for this research based on the organization's expressed desire to implement a culture of discipleship that would lead to a DMM within the northern Virginia and Washington DC areas. The expressed desire to start a DMM coupled with the organization's demonstrated success as a church planting church offered a site where organizational communication associated with individual behavior change could be partitioned from extraneous variables such as a leadership lack of desire to conduct disciple making. Therefore, given their desire and demonstrated access to resources, the problem of lacking a DMM in the VC isolated the problem to the communication discipline and the human condition.

The VC was led by a senior pastor who was closely supported by an executive pastor. The VC maintained a staff of approximately 10 people, which included campus pastors and support staff. The organizational structure of the VC was hierarchical with an intimately

involved leadership team that maintained regular staff meetings. Additionally, the VC

maintained spiritual leadership over several national church planting ministries, several regional

ministries, and a local outreach ministry. The VC had previously received approximately 3 years

of detailed disciple multiplication training from numerous practitioners. Despite an expressed

desire to initiate a DMM and technical training to accomplish their DMM desire, the VC had not

realized their disciple-making goal at the time of this research.

Site 2: Kansas City Church

Site 2 was represented by a church in Kansas City, Missouri, that maintained a consistent

membership of approximately 1,500 members. The Kansas City Church (KC) had been in

existence for over 20 years, utilized an attractional model of church focused on reaching the lost

with contemporary worship services, and supported multiple worship services through one

campus. The KC was led by a senior pastor who had approximately 3 years of deliberate, one-

on-one discipleship training and had demonstrated success at multiplying disciples to the fourth

generation. The senior pastor of the KC had been in the position for less than 1 year; however, he

was hired for the primary purpose of helping the KC realize their stated desire to implement a

DMM through a house church network.

The KC was specifically selected as a site for this research based on the organization's

expressed desire to implement a culture of discipleship that would lead to a DMM within the

Kansas City area. The KC had implemented disciple-making curriculum for approximately 5

years; however, the church saw minimal growth and documented no more than two spiritual

generations at the time of this research. The expressed desire to start a DMM coupled with the

organization's demonstrated attempts to implement a DMM offered a site where organizational

communication through methodological approaches associated with individual behavior change

could be isolated. Therefore, given their desire and demonstrated willingness to pursue a DMM, the problem of lacking disciple generations in the KC isolated the problem to the communication discipline and the sensemaking within the organizational culture.

The KC maintained a staff of approximately 10 people which included the senior pastor and support staff. The organizational structure of the KC was hierarchical with an involved leadership team that maintained regular staff meetings; however, the lack of longevity with the senior pastor may have attributed to organizational power structures that influenced the culture in unproductive ways. Despite an expressed desire to initiate a DMM and nearly 5 years of discipleship training and curriculum to accomplish their DMM desire, the KC had not realized their disciple-making goal at the time of this research and represented a quality site for this study.

Site 3: Washington Church

Site 3 was represented by a church in Washington State that maintained a consistent membership of approximately 6,500 members. The Washington Church (WC) had been in existence for well over 20 years, utilized an attractional model of church focused on reaching the lost with contemporary worship services, and supported multiple worship services through six campuses. The WC had a demonstrated track record of church planting and represented one of the nation's largest churches. The WC had an expressed desire to initiate a DMM in their context with a specific goal of reaching 1% (nearly 35,000 people) in their city through a DMM.

The WC was specifically selected as a site for this research based on the organization's expressed desire to implement a DMM within their area of Washington state. As a measure of moving toward the realization of their stated DMM goal, the WC named a pastor of Disciple Multiplication Efforts. The WC's pastor of Disciple Multiplication Efforts had a personal track

record of disciple multiplication and at the time of this research led a network of approximately

75 people, dispersed throughout three spiritual generations. The expressed desire to start a DMM

coupled with the organization's demonstrated action in support of their mission also offered a

site where organizational communication associated with individual behavior change could be

partitioned. Therefore, similar to the first two sites, given their desire and demonstrated access to

resources in support of their mission, the problem of lacking a DMM in the WC also isolated the

problem to the communication discipline and the human condition.

The WC was led by a senior pastor who was supported by a large staff comprised of well

over 10 people; however, interviews of staff at Site 3 were limited to nine in support of

uniformity between sites. The organizational structure of the WC was hierarchical with an

intimately involved leadership team that maintained regular staff meetings. Additionally, the WC

maintained spiritual leadership over several regional and local ministries. Despite an expressed

desire to initiate a DMM and technical training to accomplish their DMM desire, the WC had not

realized their disciple-making goal at the time of this research and therefore represented a

valuable site for this study.

<div align="center">**Participants**</div>

Sample Size

Data for this study were generated using a nonprobabilistic, purposive sampling pool of

25 participants for each of the three sites for a total of 75 participants (Terrell, 2016, p. 74). To

satisfy the embedded aspect of the research design, each site included nine staff participants,

eight lay leader participants, and eight non-leader laity participants, thus relying upon

convenience sampling procedures to allow church leadership from each site to identify potential

participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 186). While diversity in age, ethnicity, and gender

were sought at every opportunity, staff and lay leader positions left minimal room for research involvement in determination of the diversity of participants as the population of each embedded group was already determined at the onset of the study. Additionally, participants were selected based on an expressed desire to participate in the study with a clear disclosure that the study was inquiring about effective discipleship multiplication practices and the subsequent lack of DMMs in the American church.

Participant Selection Process

As all three lead pastors expressed interest in partnering on this research and following Internal Review Board (IRB) approval, I relied upon church leadership to recruit individual participants from each embedded subgroup to the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Additionally, to assist church leadership in the recruitment of individuals, I offered to either preach or teach on discipleship multiplication at each site to generate interest in the topic of disciple multiplication and, subsequently, the study. Data were collected from personal observations during worship services, through published materials and artifacts, and through social media accounts (Yin, 2018). Since the study was working with human participants primarily through interviews, researcher training was conducted in order to secure approval from the IRB and to ensure ethical conduct of research. Additionally, all institutions and participants were made fully aware of the research and were provided consent and permission request forms.

Procedures

Initial Steps

In this ethnographically informed, comparative embedded case study, the first step of procedure was the defense of the proposal to conduct the research. With committee approval, the second step of procedure was to secure institutional approval through the IRB process. Once

committee and institutional approval were obtained, each point of contact pastor from the three churches was notified of the initiation of data collection, informed of the criteria for each embedded subgroup, and a date for my site visit was established. Additionally, an email account and zoom account were established for use strictly in this research. The email address was provided to each point of contact pastor for provision to selected participants from their respective churches. Within the new email account, nine folders were created to organize participant correspondence into appropriate site subgroups.

Conducting Interviews

As selected participants made contact, or as I made contact with the points of contact at each site, consent and permission request forms were provided and interview date and times were scheduled for each participant. Interviews were conducted online through the Zoom platform in order to facilitate recording of the interview. Interviews commenced as soon as possible following IRB approval so as to remain within the bounded timeline of the study. Additionally, some site visits occurred after some interviews and before others. To maintain the integrity of the study and to facilitate the recording of the interviews, no interviews were conducted in person during site visits; however, study participants were observed within their respective contexts.

Site Visits

During site visits, I recorded personal notes pertaining to the environment and context of the organizational culture (Cali, 2017). In particular, aspects of the architectural makeup, the natural flow of action associated with the building, and methodological approaches to services and organizational communication were analyzed through the lens of the actor–network theory (Cali, 2017; Chambon, 2020; McLuhan et al., 2010). For instance, the commercialization of any

aspect of the worship service was noted and any element of communication or sensemaking that was predominant was identified. Additionally, any specific call to action communicated by the organization was specifically documented and analyzed pertaining to subsequent action taken by individuals. During site visits, I also looked for rhetorical messages inherent throughout the church and collected any artifacts readily available during my visit. Any specific discipleship material or curriculum was gathered and analyzed.

Capturing Data as Text and Analysis

All interviews recorded through Zoom were transcribed by a contracted professional transcriptionist and subsequently analyzed for coding. Specific procedures for transmitting data between the transcriptionist and myself were arranged following IRB approval and included the use of a Google Drive account shared only between the transcriptionist and me. Personal notes were digitally recorded following site visits and coded in accordance with the procedures used for coding interviews. Also, analyzed artifacts were coded and pertinent data from each artifact was digitally recorded. Additionally, interview questions were reviewed by communication experts, and following IRB approval, were piloted with a small sample outside of my study to ensure clarity of questions and wording.

<div align="center">

The Researcher's Role

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The researcher's role as the "human instrument" in this study inherently required the ethnographically informed dimension of the design. I had an ongoing relationship with the VC for approximately 4 years and was known within the community as a disciple multiplication practitioner and expert. However, despite our preexisting relationship, my interactions were limited to a few select staff members; no undue influence was present, and the site remained a viable option for the study. While I had an existing relationship with the senior pastor of the MC,

the KC community was unaware of my role or credentials as a disciple multiplication practitioner. The KC senior pastor had aggressively trained the KC staff and congregation on discipleship multiplication principles; however, he had not seen fruit from his labors at the time of this research. Similarly, I had an existing relationship with the WC pastor for approximately 2 years; however, outside of a select number of the pastor's disciples, the WC community was unaware of my role or credentials as a disciple multiplication practitioner. Thus, interviews with all three sites remained unbiased and productive for accurate data collection.

Finally, given my experience as a disciple multiplication practitioner for over 20 years, with successful examples of DMM on multiple continents, I brought some bias and assumptions to the study. For instance, one assumption was that the methodological approach an organization utilizes for routine activities inherently communicates meaning to those involved in the procedures. For instance, if a group of people is forced to walk in a rigid single-file line rather than permitted to freely walk as they wish, the organization requiring the rigid line has communicated meaning. This is an effective communication technique utilized frequently in basic training for Army recruits. Another assumption I bring to the study is that the commercialization of something changes the ontology of that thing and subsequently alters the communicated meaning. For instance, there is a clear difference between a residential structure and a commercial structure; the two carry very different ontological messages. Due in part to the vast majority of my disciple multiplication experience residing outside the established American church, one bias I bring to the study is that the ontological shift to commercialization of spiritual matters is negative. While this bias may have merit, every effort was made through this study to account for the bias and conduct data analysis from an amoral perspective on commercialization of spiritual matters.

Given my role at each site, the ethnographically informed, comparative embedded case study remained the most appropriate design. Despite my training of some of the participants at the VC site in discipleship multiplication practices, the previous or current relationship with the site did not negatively influence the data given the lack of DMM at the site. In fact, the relationship may have provided additional insights into the epistemology of the site and highlighted the influence of organizational culture. Additionally, MacLeod et al. (2019) explained, "While researchers will undoubtedly influence the activities taking place, the primary ontological principle here is that a scenario exists independently of the researcher" (p. 180). The researchers further articulated,

> The work of actor–network theory informed ethnography is to unravel an assemblage perpetually evolving and emerging in everyday life. The ethnographer him/herself is therefore part of the assemblage under study. This means that a situation is only brought about through intermingling of particular social and material elements, of which the researcher is a productive part. (p. 180)

The assumptions and bias I brought to the study were certainly mitigated through the data analysis. However, MacLeod et al. (2019) explained,

> Data analysis is inherently messy within any ethnographic approach. The real work of actor–network theory informed data analysis lies in attempting to construct an account reflective of our ontological and epistemological foundations while documenting the complexity encountered in the field. (p. 184)

To assist in presenting the least biased results while capturing the complexity of the context, coded data were presented to two outside parties for independent analysis in an effort to better identify my bias in the research.

Data Collection

The chosen design for this research, the case study, presented unique strengths through data collection methods as Yin (2018) explained, "The case study's unique strength is its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence—documents, artifacts, interviews, and direct observations, as well as participant-observation" (p. 12). Further, Punch (2014) offered, "The interview is the most prominent data collection tool in qualitative research. It is a very good way of assessing people's perceptions, meanings, definitions of situations and constructions of reality" (p. 144). Punch went on pertaining to interviewing as a data collection method to assert, "It is also one of the most powerful ways we have of understanding others" (p. 144). As such, my primary data collection method was semi-structured interviews, followed chronologically by order of collection with a social and digital media review and analysis, then direct observation, and finally with document and artifact review and analysis.

Interviews

The foundational data collection method for this study was informant interviews conducted electronically through Zoom. As Treadwell and Davis (2020) highlighted, "Essentially, an interview is a question–answer session between a researcher and informants, individuals selected because they can talk about others as well as themselves, or respondents, individuals who are regarded as speaking only for themselves" (p. 262). Additionally, Creswell and Creswell (2018) explained, "These interviews involve unstructured and generally open-ended questions that are few in number and intended to elicit views and opinions from the participants" (p. 187). Creswell (2016) warned that the opening of an interview is important and instructed that "an important first step in an interview is to set the interviewee at ease. I typically begin with an icebreaker type of question" (p. 130). Creswell (2016) further explained, "People

like talking about themselves, and this open-ended question should be framed to set a relaxed atmosphere" (p. 130).

Prior to commencement of an interview, participants were provided with an institutionally approved study disclaimer, consent and permission request forms, and a demographic data collection form, all which were completed and returned prior to each interview or at the commencement of an interview. Each interview included four sections of questions focused first on opening questions, then a section for each of the three research questions that guided the research. As such, the interview questions were as follows:

Standardized Open-Ended Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. Please introduce yourself to me, as if we just met one another.

2. What is one of your fondest memories pertaining to your church?

3. Please describe your spiritual life for me.

4. What is the most formative spiritual experience in your life and why?

5. Please define or describe a disciple of Jesus.

6. If you were instructed to multiply disciples, what would you need from your church to be successful?

7. Describe your disciple-making efforts over the last 6 months.

8. What are the most significant things you've learned from your church?

9. How has your church specifically influenced your behavior?

10. What is the purpose of your church in your life?

11. How confident are you in your ability to multiply disciples right now?

12. What benefit, if any, would you get from multiplying disciples?

13. What are three spiritual goals you have for the next 5 years?

14. Please describe your communication with God.

15. How would it change your behavior if you personally heard God instruct you to do something?

16. How many family, friends, or acquaintances do you know who multiply disciples and what does that look like to you?

17. What could your church change to better help you multiply disciples?

Questions 1–3 were opening questions (Creswell, 2016) and were designed to create a relaxed atmosphere and develop initial rapport between the participant and the researcher. These questions were intended to be straightforward yet open-ended enough to potentially elicit valuable data pertaining to the sensemaking of the participant. While the questions were designed to build rapport and create a relaxed atmosphere, any intriguing data that arose pertaining to the research were addressed with probing and follow up questions (Creswell, 2016).

Questions 4–7 and Question 17 were designed to provide data in support of answering Research Question(RQ) 1. Additionally, Question 6 informed the social cognitive theory (SCT) element of skills (Bandura, 1995b; Maibach & Cotton, 1995). In essence, while RQ1 was concerned with how an organizational culture *can* communicate, Interview Questions 4–7 sought to develop a baseline understanding of how the organizational culture *had* communicated thus far. However, Question 17 was directly focused on the informant's perspective of how the organizational culture *could* communicate in the future. While these questions were well positioned to generate valuable data pertaining to the research question, I expected the necessity for probe and follow up questions to generate adequate information to understand the participant's sensemaking and paradigm pertaining to the organizational culture.

Questions 8–10 were intended to answer RQ2. While these questions directly requested

the informant to generate data pertaining to the organizational culture's influence over their thoughts and behavior, often people were unaware of the true influence a culture had on them (McLuhan, 1994; Ong & Hartley, 2013; Postman, 2006; Winship, 2019). As such, follow up questions were utilized to assist the participant in fully discussing the ontological motivators behind their behavior (Creswell, 2016). Of particular note, follow up questions deliberately pursued the influence generated from organizational communication emanating from medium and/or methodological actors (Callon, 2012; N. G. Carr, 2015; Chambon, 2017, 2020).

Questions 11–16 were designed to answer RQ3. Once again, while the research question was interested in how an organizational culture *can* communicate elements of the SCT, these interview questions sought to develop a base understanding of how an organizational culture *had* communicated elements of the SCT (Bandura, 1995b; Maibach & Cotton, 1995). The basis for first establishing an understanding of how elements have been communicated was established by Hall et al. (2015), who created an instrument to measure elements of the SCT. The instrument was subsequently utilized by Elliott et al. (2019) to successfully evaluate the self-efficacy of religious education teachers. While the instrument was not utilized in its purest form through this study, the instrument certainly informed the development of interview questions and the establishment of a historical basis pertaining to previous communication from an organizational culture to influence individuals as a means of understanding how the organization can better communicate in the future.

Question 11 specifically intended to investigate the self-efficacy of the participant toward disciple-making behavior. As Maibach and Cotton (1995) explained, "Self-efficacy refers to people's belief in their capability to organize and execute the course of action required to perform a given behavior successfully" (p. 47). As such, Question 11 directly asked the

participant to reveal their level of self-efficacy. Since most participants provided a limited response to this question, probing questions were necessary to develop a fuller understanding of their true self-efficacy toward disciple multiplication behaviors.

Question 12 specifically intended to investigate the outcome expectation of the participant pertaining to disciple-making behaviors undertaken within the American church. In particular, the question did not specify disciple-making behaviors in the American church, which was designed to reveal the participant's paradigm through their response. For example, if the participant's answer was void of an organizational nexus, it may reveal a spiritual ontology that can operate autonomously from an organizational culture. However, if the response was rooted in a personal connection to the organization, it may reveal a paradigm of greater reliance upon the organizational culture. In essence, if outcome expectation for disciple-making behavior was present, follow up questions sought to understand if the outcome expectation was intrinsically developed or extrinsically developed by the organizational culture (Elliott et al., 2019).

Question 13 specifically intended to investigate the goal setting of the participant pertaining to spiritual matters as well as specifically for disciple making. Maibach and Cotton (1995) explained, "The process of setting challenging personal goals has consistently been shown to enhance motivation across a variety of behavioral domains, populations, and time spans" (p. 50). Therefore, the presence or absence of personal goals was telling and revealed pertinent information pertaining to individual behavior. Additionally, absence of personal goals due to previous failure to accomplish goals was valuable as well. Maibach and Cotton (1995) noted, "When people fail to progress toward their goals, they tend to be dissatisfied and have negative self-appraisals" (p. 50). Such a situation was an important indicator of other deficient elements of the SCT influencing the individual's behavior.

Questions 14 and 15 specifically intended to investigate the participant's ontology pertaining to the definition of disciple as presented in this study. In particular, the question sought to understand the participant's paradigm pertaining to communication with God, and subsequently, the personal behavior that emanates from that belief (Winship, 2019). Additionally, Question 15 directly questioned the participant's perception of how their personal self-efficacy would be influenced by their perception of hearing directly from God. An important data point discovered through probing or follow up questions was whether the participant had a personal example of hearing from God that resulted in ontological transformation and subsequent behavior change.

Finally, Question 16 specifically intended to investigate the influence of social learning on the participant's ontology and individual behavior (Arain, 2018; Bandura, 1995b, 2002). In particular, emphasis was placed on gaining a detailed description of the participant's perception of spiritually modeled behavior by those with a close personal relationship and by those deemed to be experts (Jara-Figueroa et al., 2019). Subsequently, follow up questions sought to gain an understanding of replicated behavior and divergent behavior based on the participant's description of modeled behavior. Additionally, I remained attuned to language that identified socially created standards of behavior and utilized probing questions to further investigate the participant's understanding of the social influence on their epistemology.

Social Media/Digital Media Review

Mayr and Weller (2017) point out that "social media research so far is not a defined discipline" (p. 107). However, the they recommended that the first step in conducting social media research is to determine which social media platforms are most relevant to the research question. As such, Facebook was the sole platform used in this study for data collection that

assisted in developing a fuller appreciation for communication that influences the cultural paradigm of the organization. Data collection through social and digital media review was conducted simultaneously with interviews, given the duration of time required for completion of interviews.

Observations

Observation took place through scheduled site visits where I was a participant in both a worship service as well as additional discipleship training. Observation occurred during site visits to each site for a duration of approximately 4 days per site. Specific observation protocol included elements of environmental context as well as relational context (see Appendix H); I maintained a protocol with the malleability to account for unexpected actors as well (Hargie & Tourish, 2009). Observation protocol was distinguished by both descriptive notes focused on directly observed actors as well as reflective notes used to capture perceived elements of actors and sensemaking.

Document Analysis

Documents were collected during site visits and priority was given to materials related to the organization's efforts to initiate a DMM. However, a full range of documents was collected to better understand the organizational culture and the degree to which the organization had implemented commercial standards of practice. For instance, managerial correspondence, meeting notes, or technical documents pertaining to service execution were informative in the execution of an organizational culture analysis. Additionally, internal facing documents as well as external facing documents were captured to better assess different aspects of the organizational culture.

Data Analysis

Given the four streams of data collection employed in this study, the data analysis

procedures needed to be congruent to facilitate ultimate triangulation of all forms of data

collection (Creswell, 2016; Patton, 2009). For example, Creswell (2016) recommended,

> The first step in analysis is to have the text database available. This means transcribing
>
> the interview and developing a database; it also means taking your field notes from
>
> observations and creating a text file of them, or scanning a document file and creating a
>
> digital copy of the document. (p. 153)

Therefore, the digitization of interviews, observations, and documents into a text database was

the first step in triangulating three streams of data collection.

To analyze the fourth stream of data, a social and digital media analytic technique

recommended by Sloan and Quan-Haase (2017) was utilized: theme detection, an analytic

procedure that can produce results similar to text coding (p. 530). Therefore, my social and

digital media analytics fused notetaking procedures from observations with digital media review

in order to create text that captured themes evident through the organization's digital

communication. While text presented on Facebook was captured as it was presented, visual

aspects of the social media platform, as well as those on owned media, were analyzed for themes

and recorded as reflective notes.

Once all four methods of data collection had been translated into textual data, coding

commenced by hand utilizing colored pencils. In particular, contextual themes related to the

research questions were identified to form an understanding of organizational culture (MacLeod

et al., 2019). Additionally, themes of individual behavior were identified with subsequent

analysis conducted pertaining to themes of organizational culture compared to individual

behavior. Themes generated through fieldnotes from observation were overlaid with organizational culture and subsequent individual behavior in an effort to analyze influence from a complex network of actors. Ultimately, direct observation, documents and artifacts, as well as digital communication all formed the basis of understanding the organizational culture and communication. Interviews and direct observation then informed understanding of the influence the organizational culture and communication had on individual behavior.

Trustworthiness

While the overall design and data collection procedures were paramount to an effective study, the procedures were created to be able to withstand outside scrutiny, maintain validity, and ultimately be found trustworthy (Golafshani, 2003). Speaking of validity, Creswell (2016) explained, "In short, it means that the findings are accurate (or are plausible). You can assess this accuracy through the eyes of the researcher, through the views of participants, and by readers and reviewers of studies" (p. 191). In an effort to maintain the highest level of trustworthiness, I made deliberate decisions through the research design to increase validity whenever possible. As such, this section discusses the credibility, dependability and confirmability, and the transferability of this study.

Credibility

The topic of credibility is addressed when Keyton (2019) explained, "Qualitative researchers focus on the issue of credibility to assess the quality of their interpretations" (p. 250). Certainly, the presentation of quality data that bear the highest level of credibility is important and is achievable:

Researchers use triangulation, or the use of several kinds of methods or data, to bring credibility to their findings. If the analysis of two or more methods of data collection or

two or more investigators point toward the same conclusion then validation is enhanced.

(Keyton, 2019, p. 250)

In addition to triangulation, I increased credibility with member validation as well (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Keyton (2019) explained member validation as "the process of taking the research findings back to individuals from whom data were collected or were observed. Research participants can comment on, even edit, the preliminary research report" (p. 251).

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability and confirmability are very similar to reliability in a quantitative study and simply refer to the potential for another researcher to replicate the study (Morse et al., 2002). Speaking of qualitative reliability, Yin (2018) instructed, "The objective is to be sure that, if a later researcher follows the same procedures as described by an earlier researcher and conducts the same study over again, the later investigator will arrive at the same findings and conclusions" (p. 46). However, Yin also explained, "In reality, opportunities for repeating a case study rarely occur. However, you should still position your work to reflect a concern over reliability, if only in principle" (p. 46). Therefore, to increase the dependability and confirmability of this study, I have provided detailed documentation of all steps to ensure subsequent researchers can replicate the case study should the opportunity arise.

Transferability

The universality of the problem throughout the American church inherently lends to the ultimate transferability of aspects of the study. Recognizing that each site rests within a unique context, the utility of three sites ranging across the country also increased the transferability of the study. While the case study approach inherently draws concerns of transferability, the research questions were ultimately interested in the human condition and influence from

organizational culture influence, a topic that is highly transferable. Therefore, attention was invested to ensure the study maintained proper transferability and any context specific data that presented limited transferability were identified and appropriately documented.

Ethical Considerations

Once potential participants were identified, each participant was informed of the scope of the research along with expectations of their involvement in the study. Upon agreement with the terms of participation in the study, each participant was required to sign a document indicating informed consent (Terrell, 2016, p. 189). Particular attention was paid to avoid pressuring participants to sign the consent form should they reconsider involvement once fully aware of the expectations (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 89). Each participant was explicitly informed of their right to privacy as well as their right to withdraw from the study at any point (Terrell, 2016, p. 189).

While demographic data were collected and represented sensitive personally identifying information, the data were stored on a single memory device with password protection. Any subsequent reproduction of data pertaining to participants or sites employed the use of pseudonyms to enhance privacy and confidentiality. Any printed material or physical notes were stored in a locked filing cabinet in my office. No personal interviews were conducted during site visits to enhance participant confidentiality. Additionally, extreme caution was employed through personal interviews with particular concern when addressing areas where a participant's paradigm did not match personal behavior. Recognizing a revelation of incongruence between religious value and personal behavior could create substantial cognitive dissonance, I planned to report any example of inordinate discomfort to my dissertation chair as well as site clergy with the participant's approval. However, no such instances occurred during this study.

Summary

The lack of any DMMs within the American church demand concerted research to understand how an American church can communicate to multiply disciples more effectively within a unique context. Mediatization has subconscious influence on nearly every aspect of American culture, and as such, the American church first needs to be analyzed to understand the depth of influence from outside sources (McLuhan, 1994). Additionally, the church is influenced by numerous external actors that ultimately inform methodological approaches to routine actions and communication by the church, which ultimately develops the organizational culture (Latour, 2008). To pursue understanding of organizational communication techniques that can influence individual behavior change toward disciple-making efforts, I needed to conduct a deliberate investigation to understand how the church is influenced and what the organizational culture is communicating to individual members.

The level of relational intimacy needed to acquire accurate participant feedback pertaining to sensemaking and subconscious understanding required me to play an active role in the study with participants. Thus, this project approached the problem through a constructivist paradigm using an ethnographically informed, comparative embedded case study design in an effort to understand sensemaking within three American church organizational cultures (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Terrell, 2016). This chapter provided a detailed description of the research design, the research procedures for data collection, procedures for data analysis, and a discussion of ethical concerns pertaining to the project.

Finally, the problem of lacking DMMs in the American church may lead to the nonexistence of the American church as we know it. Research has indicated that the American church continues to decline at an alarming rate with no end in sight (Wittberg, 2021). Media

ecologists and actor–network theorists have identified the complex nature of the myriad of influences that clandestinely shape the very psyche of organizations. Given that numerous DMM practitioners who have successfully launched movements around the world have trained American churches in the same principles yet have not witnessed the same results means the problem needed to be researched from the communication discipline to understand the problem at an ontological level, taking into account the sensemaking that takes place in an organizational culture. The research design presented in this chapter approached the problem from this very perspective and sought to understand the epistemology from society to the organizational culture of the church and subsequently, how the organizational culture can then communicate to individuals to alter their disciple-making behavior.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

During a site visit, one participant desperately explained, "I long to make disciples who can multiply more disciples, but I just don't know how." Staff members spoke of a deep longing in their souls to make disciples, the very reason they entered full-time ministry, but then explained how church work kept them far too busy to actually make disciples. While the overall research problem identified a lack of any disciple-making movements (DMMs) in the American church, the data collection process highlighted an intimate ownership of the problem at the grass-roots level of the three selected sites for this study. Additionally, the data collection procedures revealed that all three sites were filled with people who genuinely loved Jesus and wholeheartedly wanted to be a part of His work in making disciples through their churches.

Chapter Four presents findings that developed from a social and digital media review, personal observations during site visits, an artifact review, and personal interviews that were transcribed and coded. The multiple research procedure strategy, using four separate vectors to garner qualitative data, produced valuable insights for understanding the overall purpose of the study, which was knowing how an American church organizational culture can better communicate to effect individual behavior change toward disciple multiplication. The chapter introduces and describes themes produced through each research procedure and highlights those themes that traverse multiple procedures. The organization of the chapter will be structured to first provide an understanding of the study participants, then each research procedure, the data collected from each procedure, and themes discovered in each procedure. Next, the chapter structure presents the three research questions that guided the study and pertinent collected data answering each question. Photographs from site visits, artifact examples, and direct quotes from

interviews are included to better illustrate the discovered themes in support of each research question.

Participants

Sites

I chose three American churches representing the East Coast, Midwest, and West Coast of the United States for voluntary participation in this study. While all three churches represented a rather homogenous cluster of evangelical Christianity, the three sites offered distinct organizational cultures that provided valuable data pertaining to the overall study on how an organizational culture can better communicate to effect individual behavior change. Selection criteria for site participation were determined to generate enough similarity between organizations that themes would likely result, yet different enough that themes would be noteworthy due to transferability across geographical and social boundaries, thus strengthening the overall results of the research. Criteria for site selection included the necessity to be a Christian church located within the continental United States, maintenance of a congregation membership greater than 1,000 people and have an expressed interest in initiating a DMM with historic supporting activity toward such an end. As such, all selected sites demonstrated a desire to initiate a DMM within their context, represented numerical criteria fulfillment of at least 1,000 members, and adhered to theologically conservative beliefs congruent with an evangelical Christian faith. A noteworthy addition was that all three sites maintained a similar organizational size and structure which further supports the validity of congruent findings across the sites. Additionally, all sites expressed interest in participating in a research project focused on learning how to multiply disciples more effectively.

Site 1: Virginia Church (VC)

Site one was represented by a church in northern Virginia (VC) that maintained a consistent membership of approximately 1,500 members. The VC was specifically selected as a site for this research based on the organization's expressed desire to implement a culture of discipleship that would lead to a DMM within the northern Virginia and Washington DC areas. The expressed desire to start a DMM coupled with the organization's demonstrated success as a church planting church offered a site where organizational communication associated with individual behavior change could be partitioned from extraneous variables such as a leader's lack of desire to conduct disciple making. The VC had previously received approximately 3 years of detailed disciple multiplication training from numerous practitioners. Despite an expressed desire to initiate a DMM and technical training to accomplish their DMM desire, the VC had not realized their disciple-making goal at the time of this research.

Site 2: Kansas City Church (KC)

Site 2 was represented by a church in Kansas City (KC), Missouri, that maintained a consistent membership of approximately 1,500 members. The KC was specifically selected as a site for this research based on the organization's expressed desire to implement a culture of discipleship that would lead to a DMM within the Kansas City area. The KC had implemented disciple-making curriculum for approximately 5 years; however, the church saw minimal growth and documented no more than two spiritual generations at the time of this research. Despite an expressed desire to initiate a DMM and nearly 5 years of discipleship training and curriculum to accomplish their DMM desire, the KC had not realized their disciple-making goal at the time of this research and represented a quality site for this study.

Site 3: Washington Church (WC)

Site 3 was represented by church in Washington state (WC) that maintained a consistent membership of approximately 6,500 members. The WC was specifically selected as a site for this research based on the organization's expressed desire to implement a DMM within their area. As a measure of moving toward the realization of their stated DMM goal, the WC named a pastor of Disciple Multiplication Efforts. The WC's pastor of Disciple Multiplication Efforts had a personal track record of disciple multiplication and at the time of this research, led a network of approximately 75 people, dispersed throughout three spiritual generations. Despite an expressed desire to initiate a DMM and technical training to accomplish their DMM desire, the WC had not realized their disciple-making goal at the time of this research and therefore represented a valuable site for this study.

Interview Volunteers

While four data collection procedures were utilized to discover the data presented in this chapter, the personal interview procedure represents the most resource-intensive investment as well as the most fruitful procedure to produce qualitative data in this study. In total, 75 interviews were conducted from the three sites, with 25 interviews coming from each organization. Within each site, interview volunteers represented three categories of organizational members; each church provided nine volunteers from the church staff, eight volunteers who were lay leaders, and eight volunteers who were lay members. Though diversity is a sought-after characteristic in such a study focused on organizational communication designed to influence individual behavior change, study participants were limited to the pool of qualified volunteers at the time of the study within each organization. For instance, the requirement to interview nine staff members from an organization meant that nearly 100% of a

participating church's staff needed to be interviewed, leaving minimal room for participant

selection based on demographic diversity. As such, the following is an explanation of the

demographical composition of each site and the subcategories at each church.

Site 1 Volunteers

The VC provided 25 volunteer study participants who acknowledged holding a Christian

faith and membership in the VC, as can be seen in Table 1. The overall VC participant pool

provided 15 males and 10 females ranging in age from 22 to 80 with an average age of 46. The

average age of males from the VC was 51, and the average age of females from the VC was 39.

All participants either signed a consent form prior to the interview or verbally consented to

recording at the beginning of the interview.

Table 1

Participant Demographics for Site 1: Virginia Church

Name	Position	Age	Gender
Staff			
VC-Staff-1	Clergy	53	M
VC-Staff-2	Clergy	57	M
VC-Staff-3	Staff	51	F
VC-Staff-4	Staff	45	F
VC-Staff-5	Staff	22	F
VC-Staff-6	Staff	49	M
VC-Staff-7	Staff	36	M
VC-Staff-8	Staff	25	F
VC-Staff-9	Clergy	35	M
Lay Leaders			
VC-Leader-1	Leader	46	M
VC-Leader-2	Leader	64	M
VC-Leader-3	Leader	43	F

Name	Position	Age	Gender
VC-Leader-4	Leader	57	M
VC-Leader-5	Leader	45	M
VC-Leader-6	Leader	35	F
VC-Leader-7	Leader	39	M
VC-Leader-8	Leader	80	M
Lay Members			
VC-Member-1	Member	53	F
VC-Member-2	Member	42	M
VC-Member-3	Member	39	F
VC-Member-4	Member	41	M
VC-Member-5	Member	27	F
VC-Member-6	Member	66	M
VC-Member-7	Member	51	F
VC-Member-8	Member	57	M

Staff. The VC staff participant pool included the senior pastor, church clergy, and support staff. The staff participant pool was comprised of five males with an average age of 46, and 4 females with an average age of 36. The staff subunit of the VC had an overall average age of 41.44 with a median age of 45. No anomalies were noticed within the demographics of this subunit at Site 1, with all participants representing expected and traditionally accepted demographics for this subunit in an American Christian church.

Lay Leaders. The VC lay leader participant pool included church elders, small group leaders, and non-paid ministry leaders. The lay leader participant pool was comprised of six males with an average age of 55, and two females with an average age of 39. The lay leader subunit of the VC had an overall average age of 51 with a median age of 45.5. No anomalies were noticed within the demographics of this subunit at Site 1, with all participants representing expected and traditionally accepted demographics for this subunit in an American Christian

church.

Lay Members. The VC lay member participant pool included church members from a variety of church ministries to include young adults, seniors, singles, and discipleship ministries. The lay member participant pool was comprised of four males with an average age of 51.5, and four females with an average age of 42.5. The lay member subunit of the VC had an overall average age of 47 with a median age of 46.5. No anomalies were noticed within the demographics of this subunit at Site 1, with all participants representing expected and traditionally accepted demographics for this subunit in an American Christian church.

Site 2 Volunteers

The KC provided 25 volunteer study participants who acknowledged holding a Christian faith and membership in the KC, as seen in Table 2. The overall KC participant pool provided 19 males and six females ranging in age from 25 to 67 with an average age of 47. The average age of males from the KC was 46, and the average age of females from the KC was 49. All participants either signed a consent form prior to the interview or verbally consented to recording at the beginning of the interview.

Table 2

Participant Demographics for Site 2: Kansas City Church

Name	Position	Age	Gender
Staff			
KC-Staff-1	Clergy	41	M
KC-Staff-2	Clergy	54	M
KC-Staff-3	Clergy	48	M
KC-Staff-4	Clergy	54	M
KC-Staff-5	Clergy	58	F
KC-Staff-6	Staff	50	F
KC-Staff-7	Staff	37	M
KC-Staff-8	Staff	42	F
KC-Staff-9	Clergy	27	M
Lay Leaders			
KC-Leader-1	Elder	58	M
KC-Leader-2	Elder	50	M
KC-Leader-3	Leader	49	M
KC-Leader-4	Leader	48	F
KC-Leader-5	Elder	67	M
KC-Leader-6	Leader	39	M
KC-Leader-7	Leader	57	M
KC-Leader-8	Leader	38	M
Lay Members			
KC-Member-1	Member	53	F
KC-Member-2	Member	25	M
KC-Member-3	Member	62	M
KC-Member-4	Member	56	M
KC-Member-5	Member	39	M
KC-Member-6	Member	31	M
KC-Member-7	Member	41	M
KC-Member-8	Member	42	F

Staff. The KC staff participant pool included the senior pastor, church clergy, and support staff. The staff participant pool was comprised of six males with an average age of 43.5, and three females with an average age of 50. The staff subunit of the KC had an overall average age of 46 with a median age of 48. No anomalies were noticed within the demographics of this subunit at Site 2, with all participants representing expected and traditionally accepted demographics for this subunit in an American Christian church.

Lay Leaders. The KC lay leader participant pool included church elders, small group leaders, and non-paid ministry leaders. The lay leader participant pool was comprised of seven males with an average age of 51, and one female aged 48. The lay leader subunit of the KC had an overall average age of 51 with a median age of 49.5. No anomalies were noticed within the demographics of this subunit at Site 2, with all participants representing expected and traditionally accepted demographics for this subunit in an American Christian church.

Lay Members. The KC lay member participant pool included church members from a variety of church ministries to include young adults, seniors, singles, and discipleship ministries. The lay member participant pool was comprised of six males with an average age of 42, and two females with an average age of 47.5. The lay member subunit of the KC had an overall average age of 44 with a median age of 41.5. No anomalies were noticed within the demographics of this subunit at Site 2, with all participants representing expected and traditionally accepted demographics for this subunit in an American Christian church.

Site 3 Volunteers

The WC provided 25 volunteer study participants who acknowledged holding a Christian faith and membership in the WC, as can be seen in Table 3. The overall WC participant pool included 18 males and seven females ranging in age from 21 to 76 with an average age of 46.

The average age of males from the WC was 47, and the average age of females from the WC was

45. All participants either signed a consent form prior to the interview or verbally consented to

recording at the beginning of the interview.

Table 3

Participant Demographics for Site 3: Washington Church

Name	Position	Age	Gender
Staff			
WC-Staff-1	Clergy	46	M
WC-Staff-2	Clergy	44	M
WC-Staff-3	Clergy	43	M
WC-Staff-4	Clergy	45	F
WC-Staff-5	Clergy	55	F
WC-Staff-6	Staff	22	M
WC-Staff-7	Clergy	64	M
WC-Staff-8	Staff	21	M
WC-Staff-9	Staff	26	M
Lay Leaders			
WC-Leader-1	Elder	70	M
WC-Leader-2	Elder	60	M
WC-Leader-3	Leader	51	F
WC-Leader-4	Elder	76	M
WC-Leader-5	Leader	37	M
WC-Leader-6	Leader	38	F
WC-Leader-7	Leader	38	M
WC-Leader-8	Elder	67	M
Lay Members			
WC-Member-1	Member	33	F
WC-Member-2	Member	29	M
WC-Member-3	Member	46	M
WC-Member-4	Member	39	M

Name	Position	Age	Gender
WC-Member-5	Member	57	M
WC-Member-6	Member	65	M
WC-Member-7	Member	66	F
WC-Member-8	Member	24	F

Staff. The WC staff participant pool included the senior pastor, church clergy, and support staff. The staff participant pool was comprised of seven males with an average age of 38, and two females with an average age of 50. The staff subunit of the WC had an overall average age of 41 with a median age of 44. No anomalies were noticed within the demographics of this subunit at Site 3, with all participants representing expected and traditionally accepted demographics for this subunit in an American Christian church.

Lay Leaders. The WC lay leader participant pool included church elders, small group leaders, and non-paid ministry leaders. The lay leader participant pool was comprised of six males with an average age of 58, and two females with an average age of 44.5. The lay leader subunit of the WC had an overall average age of 55 with a median age of 55.5. No anomalies were noticed within the demographics of this subunit at Site 3, with all participants representing expected and traditionally accepted demographics for this subunit in an American Christian church.

Lay Members. The WC lay member participant pool included church members from a variety of church ministries to include young adults, seniors, singles, and discipleship ministries. The lay member participant pool was comprised of five males with an average age of 47 and three females with an average age of 41. The lay member subunit of the WC had an overall average age of 45 with a median age of 42. No anomalies were noticed within the demographics of this subunit at Site 3, with all participants representing expected and traditionally accepted

demographics for this subunit in an American Christian church.

Research Procedure Results

This study used social and digital media reviews, site visits, artifact reviews, and 75 personal interviews as four separate procedures to triangulate data in pursuit of the overall study objective. Coding was used as the mechanism through which data from one procedure could be understood in comparison to data from the other procedures, ultimately aiding in the understanding of the holistic context through which communication takes place through the organizational culture of an American church. Punch (2014) explained, "Codes are tags, names or labels, and coding is therefore the process of putting tags, names or labels against pieces of the data" (p. 173). Further, Punch explained that coding is both descriptive and inferential, noting that "early labels may be descriptive codes, requiring little or no inference beyond the piece of data itself" (p. 173).

Descriptive codes were particularly useful with the preliminary data in this study as simply sorting the early results with labels allowed the study to take shape and facilitate the more advanced analysis that was facilitated through inferential coding or pattern codes. Punch (2014) explained, "A pattern code is more inferential, a sort of 'meta-code.' Pattern codes pull together material into a smaller number of more meaningful units" (p. 174). In particular, descriptive codes allowed me to see surface themes in this study while inferential codes allowed me to understand how themes influenced or affected each other, ultimately generating valuable insights that represent novel research and potential solutions to the foundational problem of the study. Therefore, this section will present the data from each research procedure in the form of both descriptive and inferential codes.

Social and Digital Media Review

Data

The data collected through the social and digital media review procedure included analysis of the written word, visual communication, and the methodological approach to communication through the digital medium. While descriptive codes focused on understanding the communication through each of these analysis focus areas, the inferential codes sought to understand the digital media communication within the holistic context of the organization's attempt to communicate for individual behavior change toward disciple multiplication. In essence, the organization's written communication on its website may have clearly stated that discipleship was a priority for the organization (a descriptive code); however, the overall methodological approach to communicating that priority may not have been aligned to holistically communicate that same priority (an inferential code). Therefore, both the descriptive codes and inferential codes for the website and Facebook page of each study participant site are presented, and overall themes for all sites are identified.

Site 1 (VC) Website

Descriptive Codes. The VC offered a professionally designed, built, and managed website that primarily offered one-directional information for consumers, such as worship service times and locations, activities, and recorded sermons for private consumption. Several codes discovered through the written word on the website were priority importance placed upon the Sunday morning worship service and entertainment type activities. For instance, the Sunday worship service was the primary written word focus on the landing page. Outreach events designed to provide entertainment as a means of motivating nonmembers to participate in organizational activities was a clear priority through the written word of the landing page. Of

note pertaining to the written word on the VC website was the absence of a disciple

multiplication vision or the value of community coupled with a simple way of finding

community. Visual codes also stood out on the website as the landing page presented a

background image of the church's commercial front sign and the four-lane highway that runs in

front of the building. The primary descriptive code from a review of visual data and the written

digital word was an importance placed upon the church building coupled with corporate Sunday

morning worship.

Inferential Codes. Several inferential codes emerged from my review of the VC's

website and highlighted the communication of what is of importance to the organization and,

subsequently, what should be most valued by organizational members. First, the Sunday morning

worship service and more importantly the sermon were communicated as of primary importance

for the organization. The website's wording and functionality primarily drove visitors toward

listening to a live sermon or a smorgasbord of recorded sermons. Additionally, the website

appeared to deliberately present a busy theme with numerous activities with which a visitor

could choose to engage, almost like a menu of activities to be consumed. The inferential code

throughout the website was passive consumption of material and entertainment by a site visitor.

Site 1 (VC) Facebook

Descriptive Codes. The VC offered a regularly updated Facebook page with over 11,000

followers; however, the Facebook page primarily offered one-directional information for

consumers, with the vast majority of posts providing a link to the Sunday morning worship

service. Several codes discovered through the written word on the Facebook page reinforced the

written word on their website and emphasized priority importance of the Sunday morning

worship service. Similar to the VC's website, the written word on the VC Facebook page was

void of a disciple multiplication vision or a simple way of engaging in disciple multiplication. Additionally, the Facebook page offered little in the way of community engagement through comments or conversation and almost exclusively posted one-directional ads for worship service or upcoming events in the comments sections.

Visual codes also stood out on the website as the profile photo was the professional VC logo. Additionally, the background photo for the profile was an impersonal black background with the church's logo, name, and tagline. Nearly all posts were a professional stock photo or a live feed to the Sunday morning worship service. The primary descriptive code from a review of visual data on the Facebook page was an overwhelming importance of corporate Sunday morning worship, the consumption of entertainment, and the organizational brand.

Inferential Codes. The methodological approach to the VC's Facebook communication indicated that moving a visitor to a place to receive the sermon was the singular most important action. The preponderance of posts centered around a link to the sermon help to drive this point home; however, the visual design of the posts, with dark back lighting, neon lights, background fog, and professional technical support inferentially communicate the sermon is primarily for consumption and entertainment. Such a created ambiance is most closely resembled by a theater that employs similar techniques to generate an emotional experience while people are entertained by the actors. Additionally, the lack of visitor engagement through comments or conversation further supports that the message being received by visitors is one of consumption and entertainment versus interaction and application of a message. Overall, both the website and Facebook platforms for the VC communicate a message of passive consumption of material and entertainment by a site visitor. The apparent organizational goal of their digital media was the amassing of a large consumerist crowd, both online or in person, for Sunday morning worship.

Site 2 (KC) Website

Descriptive Codes. The KC offered a professionally designed, built, and managed website that primarily offered one-directional information for consumers, such as worship service times and locations, activities, and recorded sermons for private consumption. Several descriptive codes discovered through the written word on the website were priority importance placed upon the Sunday morning worship service and entertainment activities. Of note, pertaining to the written word on the KC website, was the phrase, "We saturate [the community] with the Gospel" just under the main landing page of the site; however, the phrase lacked explanation or further opportunity to engage. The KC website noticeably had an absence of a disciple multiplication vision, or the value of community coupled with a simple way of finding community. Small groups were listed within one click from the main page; however, the groups were secondary priority to the Sunday worship service.

Visual codes also stood out on the website as the landing page presented a background image of the church's Sunday morning corporate worship service. The primary descriptive code from a review of visual data was an importance placed upon the corporate Sunday morning worship service and the professional pastor. Additionally, four buttons linked to the KC's discipleship program were located at the bottom of the main landing page; however, the buttons lacked clear explanation of how they related to a visitor's need for connection to a disciple multiplication relationship or how a visitor could quickly connect in such a relationship. However, discipleship was a descriptive code found on the landing page of the KC.

Inferential Codes. Interestingly, the KC website was vastly different from the VC website in appearance; however, the inferential codes and overall message through the sites were nearly identical. Several inferential codes emerged from the review of the KC's website and

highlighted the communication of what is important to the organization and, subsequently, what should be most valued by organizational members. First, the Sunday morning worship service and more importantly the sermon were communicated as being of primary importance for the organization. The website's wording and functionality primarily drove visitors toward listening to a live sermon or a smorgasbord of recorded sermons. Additionally, the website offered a link for "Right Now Media" and boasted over 20,000 discipleship videos, clearly communicating an inferential code of consumption of professional material. The inferential code throughout the website was passive consumption of material and entertainment by a site visitor. More specifically, the inferential code through the methodological approach of the website was that successful spiritual growth was to be found in the amassing of information through education.

Site 2 (KC) Facebook

Descriptive Codes. The KC offered a regularly updated Facebook page with over 2,100 followers. Similar to the VC Facebook page, the KC page primarily offered one-directional information for consumers, with the vast majority of posts providing a link to the Sunday morning worship service. Several descriptive codes discovered through the written word on the Facebook page reinforced the written word on their website and emphasized priority importance of the Sunday morning worship service. However, the KC made numerous posts pertaining to Vacation Bible School in which individual participants were highlighted and a fun, community environment was communicated. Similar to their website, the written word on the KC Facebook page was devoid of a disciple multiplication vision or a simple way of engaging in disciple multiplication. Additionally, the Facebook page offered little in the way of community engagement through comments or conversation and almost exclusively posted one-directional ads for worship service, upcoming events, or previous engagements in the comments section of

their posts.

Visual codes also stood out on the website as the profile photo was the professional KC logo. The background photo for the profile was a professional and edgy photo of the Sunday morning worship service. Approximately half the posts were professional stock photos or a live feed to the Sunday morning worship service with the remaining half being photos taken during church events that highlighted the communal nature of the organization. The primary code from a review of visual data on the Facebook page was an overwhelming importance of corporate Sunday morning worship and the consumption of entertainment with a secondary code being community. The secondary code of community was limited to official, organizationally sanctioned events and did not offer visual codes of informal life-on-life interactions.

Inferential Codes. The methodological approach to the KC's Facebook communication indicates that moving a visitor to receive the sermon was the singular most important action. The majority of posts centered around a link to the sermon, thus driving this point home. The visual design of the posts, with edgy and hip musicians, professional speakers, background fog, and professional technical support inferentially communicated the worship service and sermon were primarily for consumption and entertainment. Additionally, the lack of visitor engagement through comments or conversation further supported that the message being received by visitors was one of consumption and entertainment versus interaction and application of a message. Overall, both the website and Facebook platforms for the KC communicated a message of passive consumption of material and entertainment by a site visitor, with an apparent organizational end goal being the amassing of a large consumerist crowd, both online or in person, for Sunday morning worship.

Site 3 (WC) Website

Descriptive Codes. The Washington church offered a professionally designed, built, and managed website that primarily offered one-directional information for consumers, such as worship service times and locations, activities, Bible reading plans, podcasts, and recorded sermons for private consumption. Several descriptive codes discovered through the written word on the website dealt with the importance of congregational outreach toward unchurched people, known as the 3630 and the priority importance placed upon the Sunday morning worship service and entertainment-type activities. The WC site noticeably had an emphasis on their disciple multiplication vision as the primary landing page had action background videos of congregation members holding up signs stating how they planned to reach people toward the church's stated goal of 3,630 people reached for Christ. Additionally, the primary written word over the visual communication of the landing page was "Life Transformed," a clearly articulated explanation of what the organization was communicating through the background video. However, despite this clear written and visual communication, the site placed a button over the video background linking the visitor to the Sunday morning sermon, once again highlighting the primary importance of the Sunday sermon.

As I mentioned, visual codes clearly stood out on the website as the landing page presented a live action background with congregation members actively engaging with the Church's disciple multiplication vision. The primary descriptive codes from a review of the visual data on the website demonstrated an importance placed upon community, family, and outreach. Unfortunately, the visual data did not communicate more than the written word and certainly not more than the inferential codes.

Inferential Codes. While the WC website presented with many similarities to the KC

website in appearance, the inferential codes were very different; however, the overall message through the sites ended up being similar. Several inferential codes emerged through the review of the WC's website and highlighted the communication of what is important to the organization and, subsequently, what should be most valued by organizational members. First, the WC's disciple multiplication vision of 3,630 was clearly communicated from the primary landing page and certainly highlighted the primacy of the mission. Unfortunately, the clearly communicated importance of the mission on the main landing page was not supported through subsequent communication and the visitor was left without a simple next step to engage with the message. However, the Sunday morning worship service, and more importantly the sermon, was communicated as of primary importance for the organization as a methodological approach was offered through the site for a visitor to easily find and consume sermons. The website's functionality primarily drove visitors toward listening to a live sermon or a recorded sermon. Overall, while numerous descriptive codes highlighted the WC's disciple-multiplying mission, the inferential code throughout the website was passive consumption of material and entertainment by a site visitor.

Site 3 (WC) Facebook

Descriptive Codes. The WC offered a regularly updated Facebook page with 321 followers. Similar to their website, the WC Facebook page primarily offered one-directional information for consumers, with a great deal of posts providing a link to the Sunday morning worship service. Several codes discovered through the written word on the Facebook page reinforced the written word on their website and emphasized priority importance of the 3630-outreach campaign. Perhaps the dismal display of community connection through the Facebook page, with only 321 followers, accounts for the page offering little in the way of community

engagement through comments or conversation. The WC almost exclusively posted one-directional ads for worship service, upcoming events, or previous engagements.

Visual codes also stood out on the website as the profile photo was the professional WC logo. The background photo for the profile was a well-crafted photo that reinforced the 3630 campaign, sending a clear message from the moment a person landed on the Facebook page that the organization was committed to their disciple multiplication mission. However, more than half the posts were a professional stock photo or a live feed to the Sunday morning worship service with none of the posts revolving around the 3630 mission. The primary code from a review of visual data on the Facebook page was the overwhelming importance of corporate Sunday morning worship and the consumption of entertainment.

Inferential Codes. The methodological approach to the WC's Facebook communication indicates that moving a visitor to receive the sermon was the singular most important action, despite the clear descriptive code associated with the 3630 background profile picture. The majority of posts centered around a link to the sermon, thus further supporting this point. Similar to the KC's Facebook page, the visual design of the posts, with edgy and hip musicians, professional speakers, background fog, and professional technical support inferentially communicated the sermon was primarily for consumption and entertainment. Additionally, the lack of page followers or engagement through comments further supported that the message being received by visitors was one of consumption and entertainment versus interaction and application. Overall, both the website and Facebook platforms for the WC communicated a message of passive consumption of material and entertainment by a site visitor, with an apparent organizational goal being the amassing of a large consumerist crowd, both online or in person, for Sunday morning worship.

Themes

The primary theme throughout the digital media review for all three sites was the passive consumption of sermons, entertaining activities, and Sunday morning worship services. All three sites maintained a similar organizational culture that elevated a professional Sunday morning service through the inordinate investment of organizational resources to the weekly production of a service and the near singular message throughout all digital media that consumption of the Sunday sermon held primacy. Though the three churches had differing descriptive codes, with some clearly articulating their desire for a disciple multiplication effort, the methodological approach to communication for all three sites was nearly identical in that all communication in-roads to the organization moved a visitor effortlessly toward the Sunday morning worship service and particularly toward the sermon. Additionally, though presented in three different ways, all three sites offered a smorgasbord of activities through which a visitor could become involved with the organization. Of important note is that the activities were presented as a consumerist opportunity rather than a service opportunity, as the church ministry opportunities were listed separately and more inconspicuously than the entertaining activities.

Site Visits/Direct Observation

Data

Throughout this study, numerous day long site visits were made to each participant church. Visits included participation in Sunday morning worship, discipleship training, small groups, staff meetings, elder meetings, Bible study, and informal disciple multiplication encounters. I provided discipleship multiplication training and mentorship as part of the ethnographically informed aspect of the study to all three sites with an emphasis placed upon senior leadership and the multiplying-disciple-networks they had already started. Personal

interaction within each church's discipleship training program provided an intimate understanding of how the organization's culture interacted with their stated desire to launch a DMM through their church. Additionally, firsthand accounts of how each church's disciple-making effort is nested within the broader organizational culture, to include the physical architecture and organizational architecture, permitted a much more comprehensive understanding of the complex network of actors that have agency in the shaping of a church's effort to launch a DMM.

The data collected through the site visit and direct observation procedure included both descriptive and inferential codes pertaining to the organizational culture of each site. Since organizational culture can be conceptually opaque, Johnson et al. (2008) explained, "The cultural web shows the behavioral, physical and symbolic manifestations of a culture that inform and are informed by the taken-for-granted assumptions, or paradigm, of an organisation" (p. 197). The data in this study were collected, and are here presented, through the lens of the six elements of the Johnson and Scholes (1999) Cultural Web model: stories, symbols, rituals and routines, power structures, organizational structure, and controls. While descriptive codes focused on understanding the physical nature of the communication and describing the tangential nature of what was observed, the inferential codes sought to understand the metaphysical nature of the communication and how an observed data point communicated within the holistic context of the organization's culture, whether intended or unintended. For this reason, many of the descriptive codes are accompanied by photographs taken during site visits to better explain the exact data point being coded. Similar to the holistic approach to understanding the digital media communication from each site, some of the organization's physical aspects may have discipleship multiplication as a priority (a descriptive code); however, physical elements such as

the architecture of the building, the organizational structure, or the methodological approach to routine business may actually communicate a completely contrarian message (an inferential code) than that desired by organizational leadership. While many descriptive codes were unique to each site, the inferential codes were congruent between the three sites, which permits the structuring of this section to present only the descriptive codes for each site followed by a single presentation of inferential codes. This section will then conclude with the overall themes discovered from all participating sites.

Site 1: The Virginia Church

Descriptive Codes.

Stories. The VC presented numerous stories throughout the multiple site visits and ultimately offered several descriptive codes. Certainly, the most prolific story from staff, lay leaders, and lay members alike revolved around participation in, and service at, the Sunday morning worship service. While these stories had a wide range of application, the code clearly was an elevation of attendance and participation at the Sunday worship service. Additionally, stories were told about the transformed lives of visitors and members of the church, leaving transformation of lives as a primary code. A third code was clearly the value of baptism, as stories were readily offered about the most recent baptisms the church enjoyed. Finally, the story of how the church grew, and eventually bought the building they owned, highlighted the value of the organizational infrastructure and the material blessings of the Lord.

While not an identified subunit in this embedded case study, a small remnant of staff, lay leaders, and lay members had experienced personal one-on-one discipleship within the context of a reproducing generational discipleship ministry. The stories shared amongst this population were noticeably different as the primary code throughout the stories was how God directly

interacted in their personal lives to affect the fruitfulness of their discipleship efforts. Their stories centered on the individual disciples they were training and how their disciples were growing spiritually. Additionally, this population was noticeably curious about methods to train their disciples more effectively in different spiritual disciplines.

Symbols. The immediate symbol recognized upon arrival at the site was the expansive commercial property upon which the church building rested. The architectural structure of the church resembled an industrial warehouse and, in fact, had previously served as a Budweiser warehouse prior to being repurposed to serve as a place of worship (see exterior photos of the building in Appendix D). The entire facility remains a multipurpose use structure as the church building houses a gym, indoor soccer fields, numerous basketball courts, and a café (see photos in Appendix D). The church created a second organization designed to run the athletic facility within the church building as an outreach ministry to the local community. The athletic facility organizational leadership is subordinate to the VC's leadership.

Another symbol is the church's baptismal that sits just inside the front entrance of the building within clear view of church members and athletic facility patrons alike. Additionally, the church captured a picture of each person who was baptized and created a collage of the baptism photos for each year, starting in 2017 and continuing through the present (see baptistry photo and baptism collages in Appendix D). However, those collage photos are presented only in the staff section of the building and are not visible to the patrons of the athletic facility.

Several symbols existed within the Sunday morning worship service that synergistically created a deliberately prescribed ambiance for the worship experience. First, lighting was turned down in the sanctuary to create a dimly lit environment that placed congregational focus on the front screen, musicians, or the speaker. Second, a fog machine was used to generate a faint mist

across the stage while the band played worship music. Third, sanctuary seating was placed in rows that bent to place maximum audience attention toward the front stage (see Worship Center photo in Appendix D). Finally, the worship experience incorporated a small, commercially produced communion packet that included a small amount of juice with a wafer packaged on the top of the cup.

Rituals and Routines. The clearest, and most influential, ritual was the Sunday morning worship service. The vast majority of organizational resource investment was to the weekly worship service. For most lay members of the church, the ritual began with a drive to the church facility, followed by finding a parking spot at the commercial property, a walk through the large structure and into a dimly lit auditorium, a 1-hour worship service, followed by an abrupt exit from the building to make way for the next service. For most staff and lay leaders, the ritual consisted of three separate 1-hour services, conducted consecutively with a total cumulative time working to provide the worship experience of approximately 5 hours on Sunday morning.

The organization also maintained numerous routines; however, perhaps the most noteworthy in the context of communicating for individual behavior change toward disciple multiplication would be the staff's daily business regiment. The overwhelming consensus amongst the VC staff was that nearly 95% of their time was dedicated to planning or running the Sunday morning worship service or an event designed to entertain people as an outreach ministry. Organizationally, the VC did not hedge staff time to conduct personal evangelism or disciple multiplication and, thus, did not deliberately create routines that would communicate the importance of multiplying disciples. Additionally, staff routines were predominantly personal tasks in support of corporate activities versus spiritual growth endeavors that could be modeled to younger disciples.

Power Structures. The power structure in the VC church rested primarily with the senior pastor. While an elder board existed and wielded a great deal of influence over the senior pastor, the elder board members remained relatively unknown to most congregants and did not maintain a public voice in the church. Additionally, the athletic facility manager was responsible for the success of the business inside the facility; however, ultimate authority for strategic decisions rested with the senior pastor. While the senior pastor demonstrated progressive ideas and a willingness to take risks in his obedience to God's perceived calling for the church, operational decisions and movement in the organization were only permitted when in alignment with the senior pastor's vision. While leadership personalities can undoubtedly play a significant role in organizational culture, this study deliberately bounded the research to separate personality influence. The role of a leadership position and the use of power organizationally were considered without analysis of personality or charisma influence.

Organizational Structure. The VC maintained a formal organizational structure with an elected elder's board at the head. The senior pastor was subordinate to the elders; however, functionally the senior pastor maintained near autonomous authority for operational decisions and many strategic decisions. The elders remaining relatively silent in public, further strengthened the senior pastor's role as the sole arbiter of most organizational decisions. Overall, the organization maintained a very flat structure with the majority of operational decisions held by the senior pastor.

Controls. The VC presented several measures within their organizational culture to include the counting of baptisms. Based on the VC's stated desire to start a DMM through the church, they added a measure of unique baptizers and disciple generations, counting those who spiritually reproduced through a type of family tree map. The VC also counted the number of

small groups the church had started. The VC rewarded behavior through the permission to baptize those whom a person led to Christ. Additionally, a common reward for approved spiritual behavior appeared to be the awarding of paid or non-paid leadership positions within the organizational structure.

Site 2: The Kansas City Church

Descriptive Codes.

Stories. The KC presented numerous stories throughout the multiple site visits and ultimately offered several descriptive codes. The most prolific story from staff, lay leaders, and lay members alike revolved around the tumultuous history of the organization associated with repeated turnover in the senior pastor position. The repetitive leadership turnover and associated church split presented a level of trauma throughout the organization and certainly played a foundational role in the current organizational culture. The second most told story offered a descriptive code pertaining to participation in, and service at, the Sunday morning worship service. While these stories had a wide range of application, the descriptive code was an elevation of attendance and participation at the Sunday worship service. Additionally, the story of how the church grew, became one of the most popular churches in Kansas City and eventually depleted membership numbers, offered a sense of organizational pride but further highlighted the tumultuous history as a catalyst for the organization falling from its pinnacle.

Similar to the VC, this site maintained a small remnant of staff, lay leaders, and lay members who had experienced personal one-on-one discipleship within the context of a reproducing generational discipleship ministry. The stories shared amongst this population in the KC were nearly identical to the same type of population at the VC and, again, was noticeably different from the rest of the church. The primary code for this population was how God directly

interacted in their personal lives to affect the fruitfulness of their discipleship efforts. Their stories centered on the individual disciples they were training and how their disciples were growing spiritually. Similar to this population at the VC, this population was noticeably curious about methods to train their disciples more effectively in different spiritual disciplines. Unlike the VC, this site's senior pastor had a successful history of personal disciple reproduction and was vocal about his vision for discipleship in the KC. Despite holding the position of senior pastor for less than 6 months at the time of the visit, the senior pastor's vision for disciple multiplication within the KC was prevalent within most conversations with members from the staff, lay leaders, and lay members. Given the relatively nascent nature of the pastor's vision for the KC, it was understandable that his vision had not been actualized in the lives of most members.

   Symbols. The first symbol recognized upon arrival at the church was the expansive commercial property that shared a large parking lot with an impressive religious school next door (see photos in Appendix E). The next symbol that was visible immediately upon entering the commercial structure was an inviting coffee shop that offered ample seating. Additionally, the church offered a large auditorium type sanctuary as another profound symbol (see photos in Appendix E). Overall, these three symbols communicated the descriptive code of commercialism.

   Nearly identical to the VC, the KC offered several symbols within the Sunday morning worship service that synergistically created a deliberately prescribed ambiance for the worship experience. First, lighting was turned down in the sanctuary to create a dimly lit environment that placed congregational focus on the front screen, musicians, or the speaker. Second, sanctuary seating was placed in rows that bent to place maximum audience attention toward the

front stage (see photos in Appendix E). Finally, the worship experience incorporated a small, commercially produced communion packet that included a small amount of juice with a wafer packaged on the top of the cup. In conclusion, the descriptive code again communicated commercialization of the worship experience.

  Rituals and Routines. The clearest and most influential ritual of the KC was the Sunday morning worship service. Most of the organizational resources were investments in the weekly worship service. For most lay members of the church, the ritual began with a drive to the church facility, followed by finding a parking spot at the commercial property, a walk through the large structure and into a dimly lit auditorium, a 1-hour worship service, followed by an abrupt exit from the building to make way for the next service. Staff and lay leaders worked at multiple services, investing several hours each Sunday morning to create a similar experience for people several times.

  While the organization maintained numerous routines, the staff's daily business regiment was perhaps the most noteworthy in the context of communicating for individual behavior change. The overwhelming consensus amongst the KC staff was that most of their time was dedicated to planning or running the Sunday morning worship service. Organizationally, the KC did not create staff time to conduct personal evangelism or disciple multiplication and, thus, did not deliberately create routines that would communicate the importance of multiplying disciples to the leadership of the organization. Additionally, staff routines were predominantly personal tasks in support of corporate activities versus spiritual growth endeavors that could be modeled to younger disciples. Finally, the staff hallway was lined with a dry erase task board which further communicated the impersonal nature of ministry tasks to be completed (see photo in Appendix E). Perhaps the most valuable real estate for organizational communication amongst

church leadership was this staff office hallway, and the real estate was used to repetitively communicate the importance of individual tasks through the reinforcing visual inference provided by the ever-present dry erase task board.

Power Structures. The power structure in the KC church rested primarily with the elders. An elder board existed and wielded a great deal of influence over the senior pastor; however, the elders appeared to greatly empower the senior pastor to operationally make decisions to enact the God-given vision and mission of the organization. Though a problem was not identified in this study with the power structure, a unique dynamic was presented as the founding senior pastor of the organization stepped down from the position yet retained a role on the elder's board. This dynamic certainly offered the opportunity for strategic drift from the current senior pastor's vision, should the founding pastor exercise the power he maintains through his ontological position in the organization.

Organizational Structure. The KC maintained a formal organizational structure with an elected elder's board at the head. The senior pastor was subordinate to the elders; however, functionally the senior pastor was afforded authority for operational decisions. The elders maintained a public voice and supported the senior pastor's role as the decision maker for most organizational decisions.

Controls. The KC presented several measures within their organizational culture such as the total number of former and current members. Based on the KC's stated desire to start a DMM through the church, they desired to measure the number of micro-churches planted throughout the city. The KC also counted the number of small groups the church had started. The KC rewarded behavior through the permission to baptize those whom a person led to Christ. Additionally, a common reward for approved spiritual behavior appeared to be the awarding of

paid or non-paid leadership positions within the organizational structure, though not to the degree witnessed at the VC.

Site 3: The Washington Church

Descriptive Codes.

Stories. The WC presented numerous stories throughout the multiple site visits and ultimately offered several descriptive codes. The most prolific story from staff, lay leaders, and lay members alike revolved around the tumultuous history of the organization associated with repeated turnover in the senior pastor position and a recent church split during the COVID-19 pandemic. The repetitive leadership turnover and associated church split presented a profound level of trauma throughout the organization, particularly within staff and lay leaders, and played a foundational role in the current organizational culture. The next story offered a descriptive code pertaining to participation in, and service at, the Sunday morning worship service. While these stories had a wide range of application, the code was clearly an elevation of attendance and participation at the Sunday worship service, followed closely by outreach events and ministry service projects. Additionally, the story of how the church grew and eventually built the building and expansions of the building highlighted the value of the organizational infrastructure and the material blessings of the Lord.

Similar to the VC and KC, this site maintained the largest remnant, approximately 100 total from staff, lay leaders, and lay members, who had experienced personal one-on-one discipleship within the context of a reproducing generational discipleship ministry. The stories shared amongst this population in the WC were nearly identical to a similar population at the VC and KC and, again, were noticeably different from the rest of the church. The primary code for this population was how God directly interacted in their personal lives to affect the fruitfulness

of their discipleship efforts. Their stories centered on the individual disciples they were training and how their disciples were growing spiritually. Similar to this population at the VC and KC, this population was noticeably curious about methods to train their disciples more effectively in different spiritual disciplines. Similar to the KC, the discipleship pastor in the WC had a successful personal history of reproducing disciples and was the primary catalyst for the current multiplying network of disciples and the rapidly spreading vision of discipleship at the church. However, the senior pastor did not share the same vision and did not place the same emphasis on multiplying disciples. Interestingly, the disciple multiplying vision of the successful pastor was clearly communicated and replicated within his spheres of influence with the staff, lay leaders, and lay members; however, the vision was not spread churchwide.

Symbols. The first symbol recognized upon arrival at the church was the expansive commercial property that sat on a major thoroughfare and boasted a well-manicured landscape. The next symbol, visible immediately upon entering the commercial structure, was a large foyer that offered inspirational discipleship quotes on the wall. Additionally, the church offered a large auditorium type sanctuary as another profound symbol, but also offered several smaller sanctuaries. Overall, these symbols communicated the descriptive code of commercialism (see photos in Appendix F).

Nearly identical to the VC and KC, the WC offered several symbols within the Sunday morning worship service that synergistically created a deliberately prescribed ambiance for the worship experience. First, lighting was turned down in the sanctuary to create a dimly lit environment that placed congregational focus on the front screen, musicians, or the speaker (see photo in Appendix F). Second, sanctuary seating was placed in rows that bent to place maximum audience attention toward the front stage. Finally, the worship experience incorporated a small,

commercially produced communion packet that included a small amount of juice with a wafer packaged on the top of the cup. In conclusion, the descriptive code again communicated commercialization of the worship experience.

Rituals and Routines. The clearest and most influential ritual of the WC was the Sunday morning worship service. Most of the organizational resources were invested in the weekly worship service. For most lay members of the church, the ritual began with a drive to the church facility, followed by finding a parking spot at the commercial property, a walk through the large structure and into a dimly lit auditorium, a 1-hour worship service, followed by an abrupt exit from the building to make way for the next service. Additionally, most staff and lay leaders invested numerous hours to produce a repetitive worship experience for several back-to-back services.

The organization maintained numerous routines; however, the staff's daily business regiment was perhaps the most noteworthy in the context of communicating for individual behavior change. The overwhelming consensus amongst the WC staff was that the majority of their time was dedicated to planning or running the Sunday morning worship service, similar to the staff of both the VC and the KC. Organizationally, the WC did not create staff time to conduct personal evangelism or disciple multiplication and, thus, did not deliberately create routines that would communicate the importance of multiplying disciples to the leadership of the organization. Additionally, staff routines were predominantly personal tasks in support of corporate activities versus spiritual growth endeavors that could be modeled to younger disciples.

Power Structures. The power structure in the WC rested primarily with the elders. An elder board existed and wielded a great deal of influence over the senior pastor; however, the

elders appeared to empower the senior pastor to operationally make decisions through a somewhat bureaucratic construct. Multiple leadership transitions and a massive church split created divergent power pockets within the leadership and laity of the church, often pitting pastoral leadership against each other and laity. In fact, following data collection but prior to publication of this study, another senior leader transition occurred within this organization, further dividing an already fragile organizational culture.

Organizational Structure. The WC maintained a formal organizational structure with an elected elder's board at the head. The senior pastor was subordinate to the elders; however, functionally the senior pastor was afforded authority for operational decisions. The elders maintained a public voice and supported the senior pastor's role as the decision maker for most organizational decisions.

Controls. The WC presented several control measures within their organizational culture, such as counting the total number of former and current members. Based on the WC's stated desire to start a DMM through the church, they desired to measure the number of church ministries throughout the city. The WC also counted the number of small groups the church had started. The WC rewarded approved spiritual behavior through the awarding of paid or non-paid leadership positions within the organizational structure, similar to that witnessed at the VC.

Inferential Codes.

Stories. The prolific descriptive code pertaining to the importance of attendance and participation at the Sunday worship service contained an inferential code of passive acquisition of entertainment and information. Given the organizational investment of resources into the weekly worship service throughout all participating sites, an underlying intent of entertainment through worship music and a charismatic sermon was inherent and drove home the inferential

code. In essence, the professional clergy and staff worked diligently throughout the week to produce a 1-hour experience for the parishioner, who was expected to passively receive and enjoy the work done by the professionals. No expectation was given to a lay member to actively perform or exercise spiritual muscle throughout the service. Additionally, given the resource investment into the weekly worship service, the 1-hour event was clearly the pinnacle of the spiritual week and provided little to no opportunity for lay member involvement, thus driving home the inferential code of passive acquisition of entertainment and information as the primary pursuit of the lay member.

The clear message about the importance of baptism and subsequent life transformation carried an inferential code of personal action in pursuit of spiritual growth that likely caused spiritual cognitive dissonance when coupled with the initial inferential code of passive acquisition. The two inferential codes presented opposite ends of the spectrum and were not bridged with a clear methodological approach for moving from one end to the other. For instance, the passive receipt of information through the Sunday morning worship experience offered the opportunity for a person to hear from and respond to the Holy Spirit in baptism. However, following baptism, the continued passive receipt of entertainment and information as a strategy for spiritual growth theoretically presented a methodological approach that inherently created parishioners who lacked spiritual responsibility, in concert with the Holy Spirit, for their own spiritual growth. This statement is supported through Matthew 4:19 (*NIV*, 1978/1984) when Jesus said, "Come, follow me and I will make you fishers of men." The calling to follow Jesus inherently carries a calling for active pursuit of Him coupled with a deliberate responsibility to perform the actions of reaching the lost as a fisher of men. The methodological approach of passive acquisition of information and entertainment as a strategy for spiritual development

ultimately fails to develop the type of disciple Jesus describes in Matthew 4:19.

Symbols. The first inferential code is that of commercialism. The large structures located in industrial parks and commercial areas inherently communicated a message that the visitor was entering a business. As such, the visitor inherently stepped into a paradigm of learned societal norms associated with conduct inside a commercial facility. For instance, a visitor to a residential home of a friend may carry a societal norm of taking off one's shoes before entering, an action that almost never happens when entering a commercial structure. Another example is that a visitor can enjoy an hour of entertainment inside a commercial facility and feel no sense of obligation to the staff who provided the experience; however, when the same visitor passes an hour in a residential home, an intense expectation of social engagement likely exists prior to exit. Therefore, the inferential code of commercialism is a profound code associated with all participating sites.

Rituals and Routines. The inferential code associated with the rituals and routines of all three organizational cultures further strengthened the inferential code of passive acquisition of entertainment and information. The overwhelming importance placed on the Sunday morning worship service inherently shaped the spiritual paradigm of the American church members; however, the pragmatic routine of lay members on a Sunday morning further solidified the inferential code. The methodological approach to the worship services naturally led a parishioner to park in a commercial parking lot, walk into a dimly lit auditorium, consume an hour worship experience, and quickly exit the facility to make way for the next service. Additionally, the lighting ambiance, the technologically advanced audiovisual presentations, the fog machine mood setting, the laser light shows, the professional band, and numerous other actors that carry agency communicated a message that the visitor was permitted, if not expected, to be entertained

and passively receive information devoid of any expectation other than paying a tithe. The lack of deliberate and focused fellowship opportunities further strengthened the paradigm that passive acquisition of entertainment and information was a spiritual task to be efficiently completed.

Power Structures. The power structures throughout all three organizational cultures carried one inferential code that was congruent between the three; the traditional methodological approach to the routines and rituals which the organization had maintained for many years was the standard of biblical accuracy for Christian living and worship. Johnson et al. (2008) explained, "The most powerful groupings within an organization are likely to be closely associated with the core assumptions and beliefs" (p. 199). Nearly all staff and lay leaders from the three participating sites lacked a tangential understanding of a methodological approach to ministry that was responsible for producing a disciple multiplying movement. Devoid of a conceptual understanding of a different paradigm through which to approach ministry, the power structures of all three sites inherently defaulted to the only ministry paradigm they had available in their comprehension, that of the current American church model. Conversely, when the power structures continue utilization of the current methodological approach, despite overwhelming empirical evidence of its futility, the approach is further strengthened as the proper paradigm upon which the organizational culture is built and functions.

Organizational Structure. The inferential code associated with the organizational structure of the three cultures of the participating sites was the retention of power to only a select few leaders. Johnson et al. (2008) offered, "Formal hierarchical, mechanistic structures may emphasize that strategy is the province of top managers and everyone else is 'working to orders.' Highly devolved structures may signify that collaboration is less important than competition and so on" (p. 199). All three sites offered formal hierarchical structures that imposed a sense of

bureaucracy into the strategy of the organization. Numerous personal observations across all sites afforded examples of lay members who were hesitant to reach the lost or disciple a young believer before receiving express permission from the leadership of the church. While leaders would likely be surprised by this and offer a blanket verbal permission to share the Gospel or disciple, the methodological approach and organizational structure communicated an inferential code that pragmatically left parishioners at all three sites hesitant to act.

 Controls. The inferential codes associated with controls could be found in both the measures and rewards of the organizational cultures. First, the inferential code communicated through the measures of all three sites was the importance of the number of parishioners. Direct observations at all participating sites offered countless comments pertaining to the number of attendees at worship services, events, or studies. Though leaders would sometimes attempt to utilize alternative measures, the foundational measure throughout all sites was the raw attendance number. This inferential code once again reiterated the expectation of passive acquisition of information and entertainment since the measure of success was simply attendance. Of note was that the network of reproducing disciples at each location implemented a measure associated with disciple generations and the number of people who had baptized others. This measure offered an inferential code that every believer was expected to reproduce and baptize others.

 Second, the inferential code communicated through the rewards of all three sites was the importance of professional clergy. Multiple examples, stemming from all three sites, were found where lay members who demonstrated proactive spiritual lives with an intent for personal growth as well as the spiritual growth of others were subsequently offered paid or non-paid leadership positions within the organization. This inferential code inherently communicated that active

ministry is for professional or lay clergy. Through rewarding parishioners with full-time ministry jobs or organizational leadership positions, lay members were further separated from the inherent biblical freedom they possess to reach the lost and disciple them into spiritual maturity. Equipping and empowering every church member to be a fully functioning disciple reproducer requires lay members to perform spiritual mentorship that is often erroneously reserved only for professional clergy.

Subculture of Disciple Making

While visiting each site, a subculture of disciple makers emerged and shared the fruit of their ministry efforts through stories and fellowship time where data were captured ethnographically. Several unique characteristics were present at all three sites and highlighted communication techniques important for behavior change toward disciple multiplication. First, at all three sites, the subculture was an organic movement without a programmatic approach, an aspect that made the ministry likely to have been unrecognizable as a part of the organizational culture had I not specifically inquired about it. Second, the church leaders in the subculture invested personal time with members who wanted to be discipled and offered a transparent look into both their professional and personal lives. Third, when people were in a discipleship relationship, they maintained high accountability on putting into action the things they were learning. In fact, one group was relearning the same lesson for the third week in a row because the practical application of the lesson had not been enacted; rather than learn a new lesson, they would relearn the same lesson until their behavior changed. Fourth, this subculture revered behavior change and highlighted that, rather than information transmission, they wanted skill acquisition. By this, they meant they desired a disciple to learn actions and behaviors rather than simply more information. Finally, the subculture methodologically approached disciple making

through an action-oriented paradigm where every new lesson was immediately employed. The culture first employed a new lesson through role-playing within their small groups. The culture would then employ the new lesson as small teams in the neighborhoods or other public venues. Methodologically, every member of this small subculture understood that every new lesson they learned was expected to be reproduced almost immediately.

Themes

The primary themes throughout the site visits and personal observations for all three sites were commercialization of the worship experience, attendance at the Sunday morning service, passive consumption of sermons, and entertaining activities. All three sites maintained a similar organizational culture that elevated a professional Sunday morning service through the inordinate investment of organizational resources to the weekly production of a service. The message through all methodological approaches was that attendance at, and consumption of, the Sunday sermon held primacy. Though the three churches had differing descriptive codes with some clearly articulating their desire for a disciple multiplication effort, the methodological approach to communication for all three sites was nearly identical in that nearly all organizational resources at each location were invested to move a visitor toward the Sunday morning worship service and particularly toward the sermon. Additionally, all three sites chose to communicate the commercialization of the organization as well as the commercialization of the worship experience. Of particular note was the overwhelming similarity in the methodological approach to Sunday worship between three churches from different denominational backgrounds located on separate ends of the country, ultimately highlighting the pervasive influence of societal culture upon the organizational culture of the American church.

The themes discovered through the disciple-making subcultures were interesting

compared to the themes present within the main organizational culture. For instance, the subculture placed a high value on personal investment, spending a great amount of time one-on-one before gathering in small groups of people who were all discipling or being discipled. Also, this subculture willingly accepted and perpetuated a culture of high accountability. When they were taught something new, they immediately made accountability goals for the week and inquired the next week about how the person did with their goals. Additionally, this subculture had a theme of intimate community while maintaining an intense focus and passion for the mission of reproducing disciples. Much of the fellowship time in community was focused on helping one another with current issues they faced with those they were discipling or in learning new ways to teach biblical concepts. Finally, the subculture valued obedience to God's Word over simply gaining information. They regularly communicated this value to the point that it was a clear vision for all members of the culture.

Artifact Review

Artifacts were collected and reviewed for each site visited through the study. While enough artifacts were identified at each site to potentially warrant an independent study focused simply on communication through organizational artifacts, the parameters of this inquiry demanded I focus only on communication through artifacts that directly or indirectly influenced individual behavior change toward disciple multiplication. As such, primacy was given to those artifacts that communicated the expressed intent of developing disciples who would multiply; these artifacts were typically labeled as discipleship curriculum. Additionally, several artifacts were collected as examples of organizational communication that may inhibit individual behavior change toward disciple multiplication. As artifacts from all three sites bore very similar characteristics, the collected data will be presented as cumulative and inclusive of all

participating churches.

Data

      Disciple-Making Curriculum Descriptive Codes. Two of the three churches presented artifacts that were programmatic curriculum for disciple making while one site simply recommended parishioners interested in being discipled join a small group already offered by the church. Another site offered a program that presented with four phases (or classes), each phase lasting approximately 14 weeks for a total programmatic approach to disciple making that lasted 56 weeks. None of the classes at this site were available in a hard copy format and could only be accessed through a digital application that required an annual fee. The third site offered a program that lasted a total of 7 weeks. The program was created by the staff of the church, was offered primarily in digital format, but was available in hard copy format upon request. This site's curriculum, in digital format, was available without cost to the consumer. The primary descriptive code from the disciple-making artifacts was learning how to be a disciple, with an emphasis on the academic pursuit of learning and gaining more knowledge as the core message.

      Disciple-Making Curriculum Inferential Codes. While both disciple-making artifacts had practical application exercises built into the curriculum, the primary inferential code was intellectual consumption of a curriculum within a small group focused on the topic of discipleship. In particular, the duration of learning inherent to the course curriculum communicated a message that a life of active multiplication of disciples was a future ontological transformation to be realized upon completion of the curriculum. Additionally, the reliance upon a curriculum also carried an inferential code that communicated the importance of information transmission versus skill acquisition. Finally, the reliance upon a professionally produced curriculum communicated an inferential code that discipleship was an endeavor to be undertaken

by professionals who were subsequently bequeathing their knowledge to the lay person through the curriculum.

Organizational Communication Artifacts Descriptive Codes. Similar organizational communication through professionally produced marketing materials was witnessed at all three sites. In general, the organizational communication populated three categories of intent: connecting with new visitors, advertising upcoming events, and communicating vision. The first category of intent, connecting with new visitors, produced artifacts designed to capture a person's attention through bright colors, simple yet interesting text, and minimal wording (see photo in Appendix G). The artifact provided ways to connect with the organization and opportunities to join a small group.

The second category of intent, advertising upcoming events, saw artifacts designed around traditional marketing techniques. Bright colors captured immediate attention, carefully crafted wording sparked attention, yet not enough details were provided to fully answer questions, a technique designed to psychologically move a person to take action in pursuit of more information (see photo in Appendix G). All artifacts in this category of intent were designed for outreach events that centered on a concept of entertainment.

The third category of intent, communicating vision, saw artifacts designed to motivate individuals to feel a part of something larger than themselves. Additionally, this category was used to influence behaviors of individual congregation members into conformity with the overall direction the organization wished to move. Taglines associated with the specific mission to reach 1% of the population, or 3,630 people, were clearly communicated and repetitive through multiple layouts of the artifacts. This particular artifact took the shape of printed material, clothing, digital media, and public signs (see photos in Appendix G).

Organizational Communication Artifacts Inferential Codes. The first inferential code, a code associated with the connection cards, is a message that communicates an impersonal induction into an organizational system. While the connection card has a pragmatic function organizationally, the card is devoid of humanistic connection and communicates a contrary message to a sincere emotional engagement with another human being. The second inferential code is associated with the event marketing artifacts and communicates a code that consumption of entertainment is a primary endeavor of the organization. This inferential code carries a secondary aspect that simple attendance at an event is a measure of success as the organization primarily desires large-scale events with mass participation. The third inferential code, associated with the communicating vision artifacts, is unity and community. While the artifacts could be perceived as a gimmick, they ultimately stand as a symbol of solidarity under the umbrella of a unified mission and vision, much the same way as a military unit guidon stands as a tangential symbol of solidarity.

Themes

Overall, the themes emanating from an analysis of artifacts highlight the business nature of the organizational culture. The impersonal induction cards, the lengthy academic curriculum, and the marketing pieces for entertainment events all form a theme focused on consumption of entertainment and attendance in pursuit of greater organizational membership numbers. None of the artifacts in these categories of intent inherently inspire individual behavior change toward disciple multiplication and, in fact, communicate a contrarian message of personal interests such as entertainment, religious education, and personal worship. However, a strong theme of unity and community existed in the artifacts focused on communicating vision. The artifacts that unite the organization under the vision of 1%, or 3,630, inherently focus individuals on a mission of

reaching other people in the community and as a community. A clear theme of behavior change existed in these particular artifacts.

Personal Interviews

Personal interviews were conducted with 75 total participants from the three participating sites. Questions were semi-structured and open-ended, permitting volunteers to provide answers as they saw fit, ultimately creating the opportunity for a wide range of responses. Interview responses were coded using both descriptive and inferential codes before the top three trends, from each location, for each question, were recorded. This section is structured so that data are presented by interview question first rather than site, in an effort to place primacy on the transcendence of interview responses across geographical and cultural boundaries. Therefore, each interview question's codes are identified, then each site's trends for that particular interview question are identified, and finally the combined trends for all sites for that question are presented. Ultimately, coded trends between the 17 interview questions revealed themes for the study that are presented as the closing element of this section.

Data

Question 1: Please tell me about yourself as if we just met one another.

Question 1 was designed to create a relaxed atmosphere and develop initial rapport between the interviewee and myself. Ultimately, the question was successful at this given mission; however, data provided through Question 1 responses provided limited utility toward the study.

Question 2: What is one of your fondest memories pertaining to your church?

Question 2 was also designed to create a relaxed atmosphere and develop initial rapport with the interviewee, which the question successfully accomplished. Additionally, Question 2

provided data that proved useful for the study.

Descriptive Codes. Despite the potentially vast range of responses that could have been provided for this question, several descriptive codes emerged throughout the interviews. Relationships were regularly identified in interviewee responses and stood as one of the most prevalent descriptive codes for Question 2. For instance, WC-Leader-2 stated:

Fondest memories? They all revolve around the community of the church, the unity of the church. There's friendships that exist because of that church and they can pick right up right where you have left off like it was yesterday, and it could have been 10 years.

Additionally, service to others was frequently mentioned and became a foundational descriptive code for the analysis of Question 2. Finally, several people identified being discipled as an answer to the question, which provided the final descriptive code for Question 2.

Inferential Codes. The first inferential code used for Question 2 was community. The descriptive code of relationships was further expanded to encompass the groups through which the deep intimate relationships were being formed. Therefore, any response to Question 2 that included the concept of connecting in relationships, small groups, or church family was inferentially coded as community. Additionally, responses offered several concepts for serving others. For instance, some mentioned mission trips, others serving their neighbors, while others identified a more strategic missional ministry approach that were all inferentially coded as serving. Finally, while not everyone mentioned the word discipleship, the concept of a mentor personally investing time and resources into the interviewee was inferentially coded as being discipled.

Site 1 Trends. The VC presented several clear trends from the inferentially coded data. For instance, 36% of interviewees identified serving others as one of their fondest memories

pertaining to their church. Closely behind, 32% of people in the VC identified baptism, either their own or another's, as their fondest memory pertaining to their church. Finally, 20% of interviewees from the VC identified community as their fondest memory pertaining to their church.

Site 2 Trends. The Kansas City Church also presented several clear trends from the inferentially coded data. For instance, 52% of interviewees identified community as their fondest memory pertaining to their church. The second most popular trend saw 28% of people say serving others was one of their fondest memories pertaining to their church. Finally, 8% of interviewees from the KC identified being discipled by someone else as their fondest memory pertaining to church.

Site 3 Trends. The WC also presented several clear trends from the inferentially coded data. The most popular trend in the WC for Question 2 was 68% of interviewees who identified community as their fondest memory pertaining to their church. Sixteen percent of people identified being discipled by someone else as their fondest memory. The third most popular trend, serving others, saw 12% of the responses.

Combined Study Trends. When analyzing the data from all 75 interviews, several compelling trends were identified. For instance, 47% of interviewees identified community as their fondest memory pertaining to their church. Second, 25% of interviewees identified serving others as their fondest memory. Finally, a mere 8% of people identified being discipled as the fondest memory pertaining to their church.

Question 3: Please describe your spiritual life for me.

Question 3 was also designed to create a relaxed atmosphere and develop initial rapport with the interviewee, which the question successfully accomplished. Question 3 sought to

provide an avenue for respondents to lay a foundation of understanding pertaining to their spiritual life that would foster deeper insight into subsequent questions in the interview. Ultimately, Question 3 provided data that proved of limited usefulness for the study as few respondents utilized a spiritual or emotional vocabulary that would permit clarification beyond a superficial understanding.

Descriptive Codes. The only descriptive codes provided through the responses for Question 3 were pertaining to spiritual disciplines. For instance, numerous people used the term *quiet time*, while others offered Bible reading, daily prayer, and some meditation. Another category of interesting descriptive codes included the following: *got saved*, *accepted Christ*, or *became a Christian*.

Inferential Codes. Ultimately, Question 3 yielded two inferential codes. First, the code, *daily quiet time,* was used to group the descriptive codes that referred to the interviewee's spiritual life in terms of present tense disciplines of prayer and Bible reading, implemented daily, to sustain or grow spiritual health. The second inferential code, *chronological*, was used to group the wide array of stories that chronologically portrayed the interviewee's journey of faith throughout their life.

Site 1 Trends. The VC presented several trends from the inferentially coded data. For instance, 36% of interviewees described their spiritual life in terms of daily spiritual habits. The second and third ranked trends were tied with 24% of people in the VC describing their spiritual life by repetitive spiritual disciplines such as tithing, fasting, or worshiping that they implement in their lives. The third trend, also with 24%, saw interviewees describing their spiritual life as a chronological story of faith that was intertwined with their life story.

Site 2 Trends. The KC also presented several clear trends from the inferentially coded

data. For instance, 40% of interviewees described their spiritual life based on their quiet times and attempts to hear God's voice. The second most popular trend saw 26% of people describe their spiritual life on a chronological timeline. Finally, 20% of interviewees from the KC described their spiritual life through a deliberate mentioning of a small group ministry in their life.

  Site 3 Trends. The WC presented several clear trends from the inferentially coded data as well. The most popular trend in the WC for Question 3 was 48% of interviewees who described their spiritual life by their daily quiet times. Twenty-four percent of the WC interviewees described their spiritual life on a chronological timeline while the third most popular trend for Question 3 in the WC saw 16% of the responses describing their spiritual life by worship and time alone with God.

  Combined Study Trends. Analysis of the combined data from all three sites only produced two trends. First, 41% of interviewees described their spiritual life in terms of a daily quiet time. Twenty-eight percent of interviewees described their spiritual life in terms of a chronological review of their faith journey.

  Question 4: What is the most formative spiritual experience in your life and why?

  Interview Question 4 was designed to answer Research Question(RQ) 1. While RQ1 is focused on how an organizational culture *can* communicate, this interview question sought to develop a baseline understanding of how the organizational culture *has* communicated thus far. To this end, Question 4 successfully added to the base knowledge of how the organizational culture of each participating site has communicated thus far and, subsequently, how an organizational culture *can* communicate to affect individual behavior change.

  Descriptive Codes. This interview question produced many similar answers; however,

descriptive codes were limited due to the slight variations in most responses. However, despite

the variances, a clear descriptive code of salvation was communicated as the most formative

spiritual experience for some interviewees. Another descriptive code was life groups and

community groups. Another descriptive code was discipleship and mentorship. The final

descriptive code was hearing God's voice. For example, WC-Staff-1, a pastoral clergy member,

explained,

> I believed in prayer, I believed that I could hear God. Probably very simple, but there was
>
> a voice speaking to me and it would convict me of things. It would tell me things that I
>
> needed to change or address or do. And then I would do it.

He went on to further articulate, "It would be two, three weeks later, I would read in the Bible,

literally verbatim, the same sentences. Whoever I'm communicating with in my head and heart is

the same one who wrote this." WC-Staff-1 described such interactions of hearing God's voice as

the most formative spiritual experiences in his life.

   Inferential Codes. Though variances existed with the descriptive codes, the similarities

lent to clear inferential codes for Interview Question 4. For example, the inferential code of

suffering was used to code relationship problems, divorces, and traumatic events. Another

inferential code for Question 4 was community. This code was used to account for any deep

intimate relationship in a communal environment. Salvation was used as the inferential code to

describe any event or experience that moved a person into close union with God for the first

time. Finally, discipled was used as the inferential code for an experience in which a person

invested time and resources into the deliberate spiritual growth of another with the expressed

purpose of the person replicating the spiritual growth into another. For example, when describing

the most formative spiritual experience in his life, WC-Staff-2, a senior pastor answered, "The

very first person that discipled me." He went on to explain,

> He started by making sure that he knew that I knew he was invested in me, then started
> praying with me and started reading the Bible with me, then started inviting me to serve
> alongside him. He invited me into his home, showed me what it was to be a husband, a
> father that was a follower of Jesus.

WC-Staff-2 concluded,

> It was just a very intentional and strategic, even though I didn't know it at the time,
> relationship that was started in me and really set me on a trajectory of walk with Jesus
> serving him full-time and then also wanting to see people do the same.

This type of deliberate relationship focused on replicating spiritual growth in another person was inferentially coded as discipled.

Site 1 Trends. The VC presented several trends from the inferentially coded data. For instance, 24% of interviewees described a salvation experience as the most formative spiritual experience in their life. The second most popular trend for Question 4 was 20% of people identifying a small group or community experience as the most formative spiritual experience in their life. Finally, 16% said suffering through a traumatic event was the most formative spiritual experience in their life.

Site 2 Trends. The KC also presented several clear trends from the inferentially coded data. For instance, 28% of interviewees described suffering through a traumatic experience as the most formative spiritual experience in their life. The second most popular trend saw 20% of people identify involvement in a close community as the most formative experience in their life. Finally, 20% of interviewees from the KC described their most formative spiritual experience as a salvation experience.

Site 3 Trends. The WC presented several clear trends from the inferentially coded data as well. The most popular trend in the WC had 40% of interviewees describe being personally discipled by another person as the most formative spiritual experience in their life. This was a noteworthy revelation since, of the three sites, the WC had the largest and most active network of disciples who were actively reproducing more disciples. Twenty-four percent of the WC interviewees described their small group ministry and intimate community as their most formative spiritual experience. Finally, only 8% of the WC identified suffering as the most formative spiritual experience in their life.

Combined Study Trends. Analysis of the data from all personal interviews revealed four distinct trends between the three sites. First, 21% of interviewees identified community as the most formative spiritual experience in their life. Second, 17% of people identified suffering as the most formative experience. Third, 15% of people identified a salvation experience as the most formative spiritual experience in their lives. Finally, just behind salvation, 13% of people identified being personally discipled as the most formative experience in their life. Of note, while only 13% identified being personally discipled as formative, only approximately 15% of the entire interviewee populace had ever been personally discipled by someone else, indicating that the influence of being discipled may be more profound than was captured in the statistical data of these interviews.

Question 5: Please define or describe a disciple of Jesus.

Interview Question 5 was also designed to answer RQ1. This interview question also sought to add to a baseline understanding of how the organizational culture *has* communicated thus far. Specifically, this question sought to understand how the organization had communicated one of the most fundamental theological concepts throughout the population. This question was

particularly important when considering individual behavior change toward disciple

multiplication because, if an organization wishes to change individual behavior, it is likely

important to offer a clear definition of the desired new behavior. To this end, Question 5

successfully added to the base knowledge of how the organizational culture of each participating

site has communicated thus far and how each culture might communicate more effectively in the

future.

   Descriptive Codes. Several descriptive codes emerged from the data of this question. For

instance, the word *follower* was popular as a response. Additionally, the phrase, *helps other

people*, was a common descriptive code used throughout the interview. Another descriptive code

was the word *hears* in relation to a disciple hearing the voice of God.

   Inferential Codes. Inferential codes were less necessary for this question as descriptive

codes were somewhat plentiful. However, the concept of *surrender* became an inferential code

for responses pertaining to wholehearted devotion through word, thought, and deed. Another

inferential code was *makes disciples* for any response that identified outreach, evangelism,

helping others, or discipleship as a necessary element of a disciple of Jesus.

   Site 1 Trends. The VC presented several trends from the inferentially coded data. For

instance, 48% of interviewees described a disciple of Jesus as one who hears and follows Jesus.

The second most popular trend for Question 5 was 44% of people identifying a disciple of Jesus

as someone who is consumed with and surrendered to Jesus. Finally, 36% said that making more

disciples is a necessary part of being a disciple of Jesus.

   Site 2 Trends. The KC also presented several clear trends from the inferentially coded

data. For instance, 56% of interviewees described a disciple of Jesus as first being a follower of

Jesus. The second most popular trend saw 44% of people describe a disciple of Jesus as one who

hears and obeys Him. Finally, 32% of interviewees from the KC described a disciple of Jesus as one who shares Jesus with other people.

Site 3 Trends. The WC presented several overwhelming trends from the inferentially coded data. The most popular trend in the WC for Question 5 had 92% of interviewees describe a disciple of Jesus first as a follower of Jesus. Another clear trend from the WC for Question 5 was when 68% of interviewees described a disciple of Jesus as one who is surrendered to Jesus. Finally, 56% of the WC interviewees described a disciple of Jesus as someone who shares Jesus with other people.

Combined Study Trends. Overall, the analysis of Question 5 data revealed four trends pertaining to perceptions of a definition of a disciple of Jesus. These trends reveal how often a certain code was used in the definition of a disciple of Jesus as some interviewees used multiple codes while others used none of them. First, 49% of the definitions provided used the inferential code of *follower*. Second, 41% of the definitions provided used the inferential code of *make disciples*. Third, 37% of the definitions provided used the inferential code of *surrendered*. Finally, 31% of the definitions provided used the inferential code of *hear*, in reference to a disciple hearing the voice of God.

Question 6: If you were instructed to multiply disciples, what would you need from your church to be successful?

Interview Question 6 was also designed to answer RQ1. This interview question also sought to add to a baseline understanding of how the organizational culture *has* communicated thus far. Additionally, Question 6 sought to inform the social cognitive theory (SCT) element of skills (Bandura, 1995b; Maibach & Cotton, 1995). In particular, this question sought to understand how the organizational culture has communicated the actual, or perceived,

transmission of individual skills necessary for a person to replicate disciples. To this end, Question 6 successfully added to the base knowledge of how the organizational culture of each participating site has communicated thus far and how each culture might communicate more effectively for individual behavior change in the future.

Descriptive Codes. The first clear descriptive code that emanated from Question 6 was the response, *nothing*. Numerous respondents confidently stated they needed nothing from their church to successfully multiply disciples. Another descriptive code was *example*, or a model from which to work. Another few descriptive codes were *resources*, *tools*, and *simple way to reproduce*. Finally, the descriptive code *authority* was used throughout all three sites.

Inferential Codes. Several inferential codes were used for Question 6. First, *modeling* was the inferential code used for any response that first sought a behavioral example from leadership of the desired behavior leaders wished to see in organizational members. Second, *freedom* was the inferential code used for any response that sought authority or permission from organizational leadership to practically conduct disciple multiplication practices. Third, *tools* was the inferential code used for any response that sought easily reproduced resources to aide in disciple multiplication. Finally, *nothing* was the inferential code used for any response that saw disciple multiplication as a practice to be conducted without the necessity of resourcing from an organizational body. For instance, WC-Leader-1 explained, "I don't know that I'd need much from my church. I benefited a lot from talking with my disciple-maker. I've benefitted from that, to be sure. But that's from him more so than my church."

Site 1 Trends. The VC presented several trends from the inferentially coded data. For instance, 40% of interviewees identified modeling as something they would need from their church to successfully multiply disciples. The second most popular trend for Question 6 was

28% of people who identified encouragement as something necessary for success at multiplying disciples. Finally, 24% said that simple disciple-making tools were necessary for success at multiplying disciples.

Site 2 Trends. The KC also presented several clear trends from the inferentially coded data. For instance, 56% of interviewees identified modeling as something they would need from their church to successfully multiply disciples. The second most popular trend saw 24% of people identify freedom, the permission from organizational leadership to practically conduct disciple multiplication practices, as a necessary resource to successfully multiply disciples. Finally, 16% of interviewees from the KC said they needed nothing from their church to successfully multiply disciples.

Site 3 Trends. The WC presented several trends from the inferentially coded data. The most popular trend in the WC for Question 6 had 36% of interviewees identify modeling as something they would need from their church to successfully multiply disciples. Another trend from the WC for Question 6 was when 28% of interviewees said they needed nothing from their church to successfully multiply disciples. Additionally, 24% of people asserted they needed freedom and permission from their organizational structure to successfully multiply disciples. Finally, 20% of the WC interviewees identified tools as the resource they needed from their church to successfully multiply disciples.

Combined Study Trends. Overall, the analysis of Question 6 data revealed four trends pertaining to perceptions of what an organization should supply to ensure successful multiplication of disciples. These trends reveal how often a certain code was used as some interviewees used multiple codes while others used none of them. First, 44% of the responses used the inferential code of *modeling*. Second, 16% of the responses provided used the

inferential code of *freedom*. Third, 15% of the answers used the inferential code of *tools*. Finally, 15% of the responses used the inferential code of *nothing*.

Question 7: Describe your disciple-making efforts over the last 6 months.

Interview Question 7 was designed to answer RQ2. This interview question specifically sought to understand how the organizational culture had historically influenced the interviewee's thoughts and behaviors toward disciple multiplication behaviors. Additionally, Question 7 sought to inform an understanding of the ontological motivators behind the interviewee's disciple-making behaviors. To this end, the question successfully added to the base knowledge of how the organizational culture of each participating site has communicated for individual behavior change thus far. It is noteworthy that several interviewees subsequently identified this question as "condemning" and offered that they felt "judged" by the question. Early in the data collection process, due to this feedback, this question was slightly altered and was presented as, "Can you please describe your disciple-making efforts over the last 6 months?" Even with the softer approach, respondents often appeared uncomfortable and did not appear to have a readily available answer to the question, though they would attempt to explain any church involvement as being their disciple-making efforts.

Descriptive Codes. Descriptive codes were sparse through the responses to Question 7. The only descriptive code that emerged was participation in a small group. The remainder of the responses varied greatly, did not clearly articulate a descriptive code, and often did not directly answer the interview question. However, the lack of descriptive codes and unclear responses gave way to clear inferential codes.

Inferential Codes. Several inferential codes were identified through the responses of Question 7. For instance, the inferential code, *no strategy*, was clear throughout most of the

interview responses. Often interview responses were well intentioned but clearly demonstrated the interviewee did not have a strategic ministry strategy through which to enact the Lord's calling on their life. Another inferential code was *participation* in something. When asked about their disciple-making efforts, a fair number of participants simply described ministry groups of which they were a passive recipient. Finally, a small number of participants provided clear ministry strategies behind their disciple-making efforts and established the inferential code, *multiplying strategy*.

Site 1 Trends. The VC presented several strong trends from the inferentially coded data. For instance, 68% of interviewees were unable to provide a coherent disciple multiplying strategy they utilized during the previous 6 months. The second most popular trend for Question 7 was 20% of people who identified participation in a small group as their primary disciple multiplying strategy. Finally, 20% of the VC respondents said they were simply too busy to make disciples over the previous 6 months.

Site 2 Trends. The KC also presented several strong trends from the inferentially coded data. For instance, 80% of interviewees were unable to provide a coherent disciple multiplying strategy they utilized during the previous 6 months. The second most popular trend saw 36% of people identify participation in a small group as their primary disciple multiplying strategy. Finally, 36% of interviewees from the KC said they were only learning how to make disciples and implied active ministry efforts would only begin once they had learned enough about the process.

Site 3 Trends. The WC presented several important trends from the inferentially coded data. The most popular trend in the WC for Question 7 had 64% of interviewees unable to provide a coherent disciple multiplying strategy they utilized during the previous 6 months.

Another trend from the WC for Question 7 was when 36% of interviewees said they were leading a disciple multiplication ministry through a coherent multiplication strategy. A potentially important trend associated with those leading multiplication ministries was that 32% of interviewees noted having been personally discipled by someone else in a strategic multiplication ministry. Specifically, nine of 25 were using strategic multiplication strategies and eight of those nine had been previously discipled by another inside a strategic multiplication ministry.

Combined Study Trends. In total, analysis of the Question 7 data revealed several trends throughout the three sites. First, 71% of interviewees did not have a coherent disciple multiplication strategy through which they made disciples in the previous 6 months. Second, 19% identified making disciples over the previous 6 months through involvement in a small group ministry. Finally, 12% of respondents identified using a strategic disciple multiplication strategy over the previous 6 months to multiply disciples. Subsequently, 89% of those using a strategic multiplication strategy had been personally discipled by another person in a strategic disciple multiplication ministry.

Question 8: What are the most significant things you've learned from your church?

Interview Question 8 was designed to answer RQ2. This interview question specifically sought to understand how the organizational culture had historically communicated information that would inform values and ultimately drive the interviewee's thoughts and behaviors toward disciple multiplication behaviors. Additionally, Question 8 sought to inform an understanding of the ontological motivators behind the interviewee's disciple-making behaviors. To this end, the question successfully added to the base knowledge of how the organizational culture of each participating site has communicated for individual behavior change thus far.

Descriptive Codes. Several descriptive codes emerged from the data collected with Question 8. For instance, *obedience to God* was a popular descriptive code in one site. Another site had a strong descriptive code of *importance of the Word*. Several descriptive codes that were present in all three sites were *relationships*, *how to love*, *grace*, *community*, and *family*. For instance, KC-Leader-4, a lay leader, explained, "Being supportive of each other regardless of falling or being broken at times. Loving the members of our church, the members of our family, even when they don't make the best decisions." Finally, *how to make disciples* was another descriptive code present through all three sites. Speaking about her disciple maker, VC-Staff-4 offered,

> He taught me different ways to pray; how to pray, listening prayer, taught me how to fast, taught me the importance of focusing on my relationship with God, because without that relationship nothing else was going to fall into place.

Inferential Codes. One inferential code that encompassed several descriptive codes was *community*. In particular, people would describe meaningful aspects of community, such as learning to love, learning to forgive, or giving grace as the most significant thing they learned from their church. All of these aspects were included in this inferential code because they were all experienced in community. Similarly, aspects of disciple making were included in the inferential code of *learning to make disciples*.

Site 1 Trends. The VC presented several trends from the inferentially coded data. For instance, 28% of interviewees identified obedience to God as the most significant thing they've learned from their church. The second most popular trend for Question 8 was 28% of people who identified community, and learning to love in community, as the most significant thing they have learned from their church. Finally, 24% of the VC respondents said the most significant thing

they have learned from their church was how to make disciples.

Site 2 Trends. The KC also presented two trends from the inferentially coded data of Question 8. For instance, 32% of interviewees identified community as the most significant thing they have learned from their church. The second most popular trend saw 24% of people identify disciple making as the most significant thing they have learned from their church. Finally, the range of additional answers to Question 8 produced no discernable trends from the KC.

Site 3 Trends. The WC presented several trends from the inferentially coded data. The two most popular trends in the WC for Question 8 had 36% of interviewees respond. The first trend was for the importance of the Word of God in their life. The second trend that tied for most popular in response to Question 8 was the importance of community. The final trend discerned through the responses to this interview question was when 16% of people identified discipleship as the most significant thing they have learned from their church.

Combined Study Trends. While a great deal of answers spread a wide gamut of potential responses to this question, two discernable trends emerged through the overall analysis. For instance, 32% of respondents across all three sites identified community as the most significant thing they have learned from their church. Additionally, 21% of people identified disciple making as the most significant thing they have learned from their church. The remaining responses all fell within unique categories and did not present discernable trends for this question.

Question 9: How has your church specifically influenced your behavior?

Interview Question 9 was also designed to answer RQ2. This interview question specifically sought to understand how the organizational culture had historically influenced the interviewee's thoughts and behaviors toward disciple multiplication behaviors. In particular, the

question allowed the interviewee to respond by describing either the organizational mechanism used to influence behavior or to describe the changed behavior. To this end, the question successfully added to the base knowledge of how the organizational culture of each participating site has communicated for individual behavior change thus far.

  Descriptive Codes. Responses to Question 9 produced numerous descriptive codes. For instance, answers fell into two types of categories: either they described the mechanism in the church that influenced their behavior or they described the actual changed behavior. Accountability was a descriptive code used to describe a church mechanism used whereas evangelism was a descriptive code used for a new behavior that was influenced by the church. I allowed both descriptions and used them freely in this study as both types of answers provided value to the study.

  Inferential Codes. Several inferential codes emerged through the analysis of the data from Question 9. For instance, *accountability* was the inferential code used to encapsulate several responses to described how others in the church helped keep a respondent on their spiritual journey. *Small groups* was an inferential code used to describe responses that included a community element as the core of the response. Finally, the inferential code *outreach* was used to explain any changed behavior from selfish inward focus to selfless outward focus.

  Site 1 Trends. The VC presented several trends from the inferentially coded data. For instance, 16% of interviewees identified *evangelism* as how their church specifically influenced their behavior. Tied as the most popular trend in the VC for Question 9 with 16% of people was the inferential code *service to others* as the way their church influenced their behavior. Finally, 12% of the VC respondents said their church influenced their behavior to be more obedient and less sinful; however, the same percentage of respondents at the VC also said their church had not

influence their behavior at all.

Site 2 Trends. The KC also presented several trends from the inferentially coded data of

Question 9. For instance, 32% of interviewees identified *accountability* as the church mechanism

that influenced their daily behavior. The second most popular trend saw 24% of people identify

disciple making, or the desire to start disciple making, as the way their church had most

influenced their behavior. Finally, 16% of the KC respondents identified *small groups* as the

church mechanism that most influenced their behavior.

Site 3 Trends. The WC presented several trends from the inferentially coded data that

were similar to the other sites. For instance, the most popular trend in the WC for Question 9 was

small groups and *community* and had 28% of interviewees respond. The second trend that saw

24% of interviewees identify as how their church specifically influenced their behavior was *daily*

quiet time and *Bible study*. The final trend discerned through the responses to this interview

question was when 20% of people identified *accountability* as the church mechanism that most

influenced their behavior.

Combined Study Trends. Overall analysis of the data from Question 9 revealed three

trends across the three sites. The first trend saw 17% of people identify *accountability* as the

most effective church mechanism for influencing their behavior. The second most popular trend

across all the sites was the influence of *small groups* on individual behavior, with 15% of

respondents offering the inferential code. Finally, *evangelism* saw 13% of respondents identify as

the way their behavior was most influenced by their church.

Question 10: What is the purpose of your church in your life?

Interview Question 10 was designed to partially answer RQ3. This interview question

specifically sought to understand how the organizational culture had historically communicated

the mission and vision of the organization. In particular, this interview question sought to understand the ontology of the interviewee's relationship with the organizational culture. To this end, the question successfully added to the base knowledge of how the organizational culture of each participating site has communicated mission and vision thus far. An interesting aspect of this question was that a majority of respondents did not have a readily available response, though the level of personal investment into the relationship with the organization would logically demand that the interviewee know exactly why they made such personal investment into the relationship. As such, many respondents required time to contemplate the reason they maintain a relationship with the organization.

Descriptive Codes. Responses to Question 10 produced numerous descriptive codes. For instance, *community* was a common descriptive code. VC-Staff-1, a senior pastoral staff member, clearly offered, "The purpose of my church in my life is to provide a community of people whose mission is to glorify God and make disciples." Follow up questions were posed when this descriptive code was offered to gain a better understanding of the full meaning of the word community. When asked to describe or define what another respondent meant by community, WC-Leader-3 explained, "We're transparent. 100% transparent. Nobody's faking it." The additional commentary offered by people better assisted the creation of an inferential code for community as well. Accountability was another descriptive code used to describe the purpose of a person's church in their life. Several descriptive codes were provided pertaining to spiritual growth such as *grow me*, *teach me*, and *train me*. Finally, a few descriptive codes were also provided pertaining to an outward focus such as *serving others*, *missional focus*, and a *mission bigger that myself*. For instance, KC-Leader-4 explained, "The purpose of my church is to have a corporate family that worships together and serves together and does life together." She

went on to further offer, "I mean, the church is to lead us spiritually and then to encourage us to lead; to follow that lead, to make disciples, to follow the Great Commission."

Inferential Codes. Several inferential codes emerged through the analysis of the data from Question 10. For instance, *community* was the inferential code used to encapsulate several responses to described how deep and intimate relationships in the church were the primary purpose of the church. *A missional focus* was an inferential code used to describe responses that included an outward focus on helping others as the core of the response. Both of those inferential codes were regularly offered together such as when WC-Leader-3 stated, "The purpose that we find in our church right now is our small group and those relationships. All of us are in significant ministry outside of the church." Another inferential code was *spiritual growth*, used to encapsulate any response pertaining to the church's responsibility to provide the necessary nurture to foster individual spiritual growth. Finally, the inferential code *accountability* was used to explain any response that focused on the assistance from others in the church to assist the respondent to remain on their desired spiritual journey.

Site 1 Trends. The VC presented several trends from the inferentially coded data. For instance, 52% of interviewees identified *community* as the purpose of their church being in their life. Next, 40% of the VC interviewees identified *serving others* and a *missional focus* as being the primary purpose of their church being in their life. Finally, 32% of the VC respondents said the primary purpose of their church being in their life was to *grow them closer to God*.

Site 2 Trends. The KC also presented several trends from the inferentially coded data of Question 10. For instance, 64% of interviewees identified *community* as the purpose of their church being in their life. The second most popular trend saw 44% of people identify *accountability* as the reason they were a part of their church's organizational culture. Finally,

40% of the KC respondents identified *serving others* and a *missional focus* as the primary purpose of their church being in their life.

    Site 3 Trends. The WC presented several trends from the inferentially coded data of Question 10 that were similar to the other sites. For instance, the most popular trend in the WC for Question 10 was *community* and had 68% of interviewees respond. The second trend that saw 48% of interviewees identify as the purpose of their church was *learning the Word of God*. The final trend discerned through the responses to this interview question was when 40% of people identified a *missional focus* as the purpose of the church being in their life.

    Combined Study Trends. Overall analysis of the data from Question 10 revealed four trends across the three sites. The first trend saw 61% of people identify *community* as the purpose for their church being in their life. The second most popular trend across all the sites was the implementation of a *missional focus* on individuals, with 40% of respondents offering this as the reason they are a part of their church. The third most popular trend across the sites was 27% of people who identified *spiritual growth* as the reason they are members of their church. Finally, *accountability* saw 15% of respondents identify as the reason they are active members of their church.

    Question 11: How confident are you in your ability to multiply disciples right now?

    Interview Question 11 was designed to partially answer RQ3. This interview question sought to understand how the organizational culture had historically communicated to influence a person's perception of their own ability to multiply disciples. Specifically, this interview question sought to inform the SCT element of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1995a; Maibach & Cotton, 1995). To this end, the question successfully added to the base knowledge of how the organizational culture of each participating site has communicated to influence the self-efficacy

of individuals thus far.

Descriptive Codes. The descriptive codes for Question 11 were simple to identify based on the question. In essence, the question inherently asked participants to respond in a similar fashion, which ultimately created the descriptive codes. For instance, *confident* was the first descriptive code that was presented in the question responses. The second descriptive code, *not confident*, was also presented in the responses.

Inferential Codes. Only one inferential code was discerned through the data of Question 11 responses. While participants were questioned whether they were confident or not, some responded with an indirect answer. Indirect answers were analyzed and associated with either the two descriptive codes above or they were associated with the inferential code, *somewhat confident*.

Site 1 Trends. The VC presented several trends from the inferentially coded data. For instance, 56% of interviewees identified *not confident at all* as their level of confidence toward making disciples right now. Next, 36% of the VC interviewees identified *confident* or *very confident* as their level of confidence toward making disciples right now. Finally, 16% of the VC respondents said they were *moderately confident* as their level of confidence toward making disciples right now.

Site 2 Trends. The KC presented several of the same trends from the inferentially coded data. For instance, 44% of interviewees identified *not confident at all* as their level of confidence toward making disciples right now. Next, 36% of the KC interviewees identified *confident* or *very confident* as their level of confidence toward making disciples right now. Finally, 16% of the KC respondents said they were *moderately confident* as their level of confidence toward making disciples right now.

Site 3 Trends. The WC also presented several trends from the inferentially coded data. For instance, 32% of interviewees identified *not confident at all* as their level of confidence toward making disciples right now. Next, 44% of the WC interviewees identified *confident* or *very confident* as their level of confidence toward making disciples right now. This was particularly interesting given that seven of the 11 respondents who were very confident were already leading disciple-making efforts. Finally, 24% of the WC respondents said they were *moderately confident* as their level of confidence toward making disciples right now.

Combined Study Trends. Overall analysis of the data from Interview Question 11 revealed three trends across the three sites. The first trend saw 44% of people identify *not confident at all* as their level of confidence toward making disciples right now. The second most popular trend across all the sites was people who were *confident* or *very confident*, with 39% of respondents offering this as their current confidence level toward multiplying disciples. Finally, *moderately confident* saw 17% of respondents identify as their level of confidence.

Question 12: What benefit, if any, would you get from multiplying disciples?

Interview Question 12 was designed to partially answer RQ3. This interview question sought to understand how the organizational culture had historically communicated to influence a person's perception of the outcome associated with disciple making. Specifically, this interview question sought to inform the SCT element of outcome expectation (Bandura, 1995b; Maibach & Cotton, 1995). To this end, the question successfully added to the base knowledge of how the organizational culture of each participating site has communicated the expected outcomes associated with disciple making.

Descriptive Codes. Responses to Question 12 produced numerous descriptive codes. For instance, *joy* was the most common descriptive code. Follow up questions were posed when this

descriptive code was offered to gain a better understanding of the full meaning. The additional commentary offered by people better assisted the creation of an inferential code for joy as well. *Hearing well done* was another descriptive code used to describe the benefits of multiplying disciples. Another descriptive code was *seeing others come to faith*.

  Inferential Codes. Several inferential codes emerged through the analysis of the data from Question 12. For instance, *intrinsic* was the inferential code used to encapsulate several responses to describe an intrinsic joy as the benefit of multiplying disciples. *Duty* was an inferential code used to describe responses that included a humanistic duty to fulfill the work of God, devoid of an immediate intrinsic benefit. Another inferential code was *none*, used to encapsulate any response that highlighted no perceived benefit from multiplying disciples.

  Site 1 Trends. The VC presented several trends from the inferentially coded data. For instance, 44% of interviewees identified *an intrinsic joy* as their benefit from making disciples. Next, 20% of the VC interviewees identified *a sense of duty* as their benefit from making disciples. Finally, 16% of the VC respondents said they would receive *no benefit* from making disciples.

  Site 2 Trends. The KC presented several similar trends from the inferentially coded data. For instance, 48% of interviewees identified *an intrinsic joy* as their benefit from making disciples. Next, 32% of the KC interviewees identified *a sense of joy watching others grow* as their benefit from making disciples. Finally, 16% of the KC respondents said they would receive *no benefit* from making disciples.

  Site 3 Trends. The WC also presented several similar trends from the inferentially coded data. For instance, 40% of interviewees identified *an intrinsic joy* as their benefit from making disciples. Next, 40% of the WC interviewees identified *a sense of duty* as their benefit from

making disciples. Finally, 20% of the WC respondents said they would receive *no benefit* from making disciples.

Combined Study Trends. Overall analysis of the data from Interview Question 12 revealed three trends across the three sites. The first trend saw 39% of people identify *an intrinsic joy* as their benefit from making disciples. The second most popular trend across all the sites was people who identified *a sense of duty* as their benefit from making disciples, with 36% of respondents offering this as their perceived benefit from multiplying disciples. Finally, receiving *no benefit* at all from making disciples saw 17% of respondents identify as their perceived benefit. Interestingly, only two people identified an immediate tangential benefit to the organization from multiplying disciples.

Question 13: What are three spiritual goals you have for the next 5 years?

Interview Question 13 was designed to partially answer RQ3. This interview question sought to understand how the organizational culture had historically communicated to influence a person's goal setting toward disciple making. Subsequently, this question sought to understand how goal setting influenced a person's decision to change their personal behavior toward disciple making. Specifically, this interview question sought to inform the SCT element of personal goals (Bandura, 1995b; Maibach & Cotton, 1995). To this end, the question successfully added to the base knowledge of how the organizational culture of each participating site had communicated to influence goal setting of individuals thus far.

Descriptive Codes. Several descriptive codes emerged from the data review of Question 13. The first descriptive code was *children*, in regard to raising children spiritually. The next descriptive codes were *learn the Bible* and *learn to pray*. Finally, the descriptive code *disciple others* was prevalent throughout the interviews.

Inferential Codes. Five inferential codes were discovered throughout the Question 13 responses. First, many interviewees did not already have goals prior to the presentation of the question, resulting in an inferential code of *none*. Several respondents like WC-Member-1 explained, "I don't like setting spiritual goals. But, when I think about spiritual goals, I could read my Bible more or I could grow in this and that." Therefore, once respondents were permitted time to generate goals, the inferential code of *discipling* became clear. Next, the inferential code of *children* was present as people provided a range of goals associated with raising their kids to fear God. Additionally, the inferential code of *spiritual disciplines* was created to account for all goals oriented toward becoming more proficient at spiritual tasks such as prayer, scripture reading, fasting, or tithing. Finally, the inferential code of *hearing God* was evident as people described unique goals of learning to hear God's voice more clearly in their lives.

Site 1 Trends. The VC presented several trends from the inferentially coded data. To begin, 100% of the VC respondents did not have spiritual goals available prior to the presentation of the question. Once permitted to create goals, 44% of interviewees identified *becoming a better disciple maker* as their primary spiritual goal. Next, 44% of the VC interviewees identified *spiritual disciplines* as their primary spiritual goal. Finally, 20% of the VC respondents said they would disciple their *children* as their primary spiritual goal.

Site 2 Trends. The KC presented several similar trends from the inferentially coded data. To begin, 100% of the KC respondents did not have spiritual goals available prior to the presentation of the question. Once permitted to create goals, 48% of interviewees identified *discipling children* as their primary spiritual goal. Next, 48% of the KC interviewees identified *becoming a better disciple maker* as their primary spiritual goal. Finally, 28% of the KC

respondents said they would learn *to hear God's voice* as their primary spiritual goal.

Site 3 Trends. The Washington Church also presented several similar trends from the inferentially coded data. To begin, 92% of the WC respondents did not have spiritual goals available prior to the presentation of the question. Once permitted to create goals, 64% of interviewees identified *spiritual disciplines* as their primary spiritual goal. Next, 44% of the WC interviewees identified *becoming a better disciple maker* as their primary spiritual goal. Finally, 40% of the WC respondents said they would learn *to disciple their children* as their primary spiritual goal.

Combined Study Trends. Overall analysis of the data from Question 13 revealed five trends across the three sites. The first trend saw 97% of people identify *no goals* upon presentation of the question. The second most popular trend across all the sites was people who identified *becoming a better disciple maker* as their spiritual goal, with 45% of respondents offering this as their response. The third most popular trend across all the sites, with 40%, was learning to implement spiritual disciplines in their life. The fourth most popular response to Question 13 was learning to *disciple children*, with 36% of respondents identifying this as their goal. Finally, *learning to hear from God* saw 17% of respondents identify as their spiritual goal.

Question 14: Please describe your communication with God.

Interview Question 14 was designed to partially answer RQ3. This interview question sought to understand how the person's perception of their ability to multiply disciples was influenced by their perception of hearing the voice of God. Specifically, this interview question sought to inform the SCT element of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1995a; Maibach & Cotton, 1995). To this end, the question successfully added to the base knowledge of how a person's communication with God influences the self-efficacy of that individual.

Descriptive Codes. Several descriptive codes emerged from the data review of Question 14. The first descriptive code was *not enough*, regarding the regularity of the interviewee's communication with God. The next descriptive code was *regular*, again in the context of regularity in the interviewee's communication with God. Finally, the descriptive code *intimate* was prevalent throughout the interviews as a description of the person's communication with God.

Inferential Codes. Three inferential codes were discovered throughout the Question 14 responses. While a wide range of responses were provided to this question, the answers fell within two categories. The first category, which is the first inferential code, was *1-way communication* to God. An example is when VC-Leader-3 explained, "I do all the talking. He does all the listening." Next, the inferential code of *2-way communication* with God was used to describe those respondents who attempted to not only talk to God but to also hear from God, particularly in response to their questions and comments to God. Finally, the inferential code of *in the Word* was the code given to those who sought their primary communication with God through the Bible.

Site 1 Trends. The VC presented three trends from the inferentially coded data. To begin, 76% of the VC respondents identified primarily *1-way communication* with God. Next, 24% of the VC interviewees identified *2-way communication* as their primary communication with God. Finally, 20% of the VC respondents said they used *the Word* as their primary resource for hearing from God.

Site 2 Trends. The KC presented three trends from the inferentially coded data. To begin, 72% of the KC respondents identified primarily *1-way communication* with God. Next, 28% of the KC interviewees identified *2-way communication* as their primary communication with God.

Finally, 32% of the KC respondents said they used *the Word* as their primary resource for hearing from God.

Site 3 Trends. The WC presented three trends from the inferentially coded data. To begin, 76% of the WC respondents identified primarily *1-way communication* with God. Next, 24% of the WC interviewees identified *2-way communication* as their primary communication with God. Finally, 32% of the WC respondents said they used *the Word* as their primary resource for hearing from God.

Combined Study Trends. Overall analysis of the data from Question 14 revealed three trends across the three sites. The first trend saw 72% of people identify *1-way communication* as their primary method of communication with God. The second most popular trend across all the sites was people who identified *2-way communication* as their primary method of communication with God, with 28% of respondents offering this as their response. The third most popular trend across all the sites, with 24%, was hearing God's voice primarily through the Bible.

Question 15: How would it change your behavior if you personally heard God instruct you to do something?

Interview Question 15 was also designed to partially answer RQ3. This interview question also sought to understand how the person's perception of hearing the voice of God would influence their behavior toward disciple multiplication. Specifically, this interview question sought to inform the SCT element of self-efficacy in association with the perception of hearing the voice of God (Bandura, 1995a; Maibach & Cotton, 1995). To this end, the question successfully added to the base knowledge of how a person's communication with God influences the self-efficacy of that individual.

Descriptive Codes. Several descriptive codes emerged from the data review of Question 15. The first descriptive code was *not sure*, in regard to the interviewee's response to a directive from the voice of God. The next descriptive code was *do it*, again in the context of the interviewee's response to a directive from the voice of God. Finally, the descriptive code *hesitate* was prevalent throughout the interviews as a description of the person's response to a directive from God.

Inferential Codes. Three inferential codes were discovered throughout the Question 15 responses. While a wide range of responses were provided to this question, the answers fell within three categories. The first category, which is the first inferential code, was *do it* in relation to the interviewee's response to God's directive. Next, the inferential code of *hesitate and question it* was the code for any response that was not definitive as a positive or negative response to God's directive. Finally, the inferential code of *would not change* was the code given to those who definitively stated that a message given directly from God would not change how they behave. To be clear, some respondents said they would not change because they already do what God told them while others said they would simply not obey what God told them. Nonetheless, this group clearly articulated that their behavior would in no way change if God personally instructed them to do something.

Site 1 Trends. The VC presented three trends from the inferentially coded data. To begin, 60% of the VC respondents asserted that if God personally told them to do something, they would *do it*. Next, 32% of the VC interviewees said they would be *hesitant and question it*. Finally, 8% of the VC respondents said they *would not change* if God personally told them to do something.

Site 2 Trends. The KC also presented three trends from the inferentially coded data. To

begin, 84% of the KC respondents asserted that if God personally told them to do something, they would *do it*. Next, 8% of the KC interviewees said they would be *hesitant and question it*. Finally, 8% of the KC respondents said they *would not change* if God personally told them to do something.

Site 3 Trends. The WC presented the same three trends from the inferentially coded data. To begin, 64% of the WC respondents asserted that if God personally told them to do something, they would *do it*. Next, 20% of the WC interviewees said they would be *hesitant and question it*. Finally, 16% of the WC respondents said they *would not change* if God personally told them to do something.

Combined Study Trends. Overall analysis of the data from Question 15 revealed three trends across the three sites. The first trend saw 69% of people assert that if God personally told them to do something, they would *do it*. The second most popular trend across all the sites was people who said they would be *hesitant and question it*, with 20% of respondents offering this as their response. The third most popular trend across all the sites, with 11%, was respondents who said they *would not change* if God personally told them to do something.

Question 16: How many family, friends, or acquaintances do you know who multiply disciples and what does that look like to you?

Interview Question 16 was designed to partially answer RQ3. This interview question sought to understand how seeing disciple making in another person's life would influence the person's perception of their own disciple-making efforts. Specifically, this interview question sought to inform the SCT element of social learning (Bandura, 1995b; Maibach & Cotton, 1995). To this end, the question successfully added to the base knowledge of how social learning influences a person's behavior toward disciple multiplication.

Descriptive Codes. Several descriptive codes emerged from the data review of Question 16. The first descriptive code was *none*, in regard to people the interviewee knew who multiplied disciples. The next descriptive code was *not many*, again in the context of people the interviewee knew who multiplied disciples. Finally, the descriptive code *being a good person* was prevalent throughout the interviews as a description of the example of disciple multiplication available to the interviewee.

Inferential Codes. Four inferential codes were discovered throughout the Question 16 responses. While a wide range of responses were provided to this question, the answers fell within three categories. The first category, which is the first inferential code, was *very few* in relation to people the interviewee knew who multiplied disciples. Next, the inferential code of *many* was the code for any response that indicated the interviewee knew of five or more people who multiplied disciples. The third inferential code of *example* was given to those who offered an example of a DMM with which they had personal interaction or observation. Finally, the inferential code of *no example* was the code given to those who did not offer an example of a DMM with which they had personal interaction or observation.

Site 1 Trends. The VC presented four trends from the inferentially coded data. To begin, 68% of the VC respondents stated they knew *very few* people who multiply disciples. Next, 32% of the VC interviewees said they knew *many* people who multiply disciples. Then, 92% of the VC respondents identified that they did not have a practical example of a DMM. Finally, 8% of the VC respondents offered a practical example of a DMM with which they had interacted or observed.

Site 2 Trends. The KC also presented four trends from the inferentially coded data. To begin, 52% of the KC respondents stated they knew *very few* people who multiply disciples.

Next, 48% of the KC interviewees said they knew *many* people who multiply disciples. Then, 76% of the KC respondents identified that they did not have a practical example of a DMM. Finally, 24% of the KC respondents offered a practical example of a DMM with which they had interacted or observed.

Site 3 Trends. The WC also presented four trends from the inferentially coded data. To begin, 60% of the WC respondents stated they knew *very few* people who multiply disciples. Next, 40% of the WC interviewees said they knew *many* people who multiply disciples. Then, 56% of the WC respondents identified that they did not have a practical example of a DMM. Finally, 44% of the WC respondents offered a practical example of a DMM with which they had interacted or observed. Of the 44%, six respondents identified active participation in a DMM in the WC at the time of the interview.

Combined Study Trends. Overall analysis of the data from Question 16 revealed four trends across the three sites. The first trend saw 60% of people assert that they knew *very few* people who multiply disciples. The second trend across all the sites was people who said they knew *many* people who multiply disciples, with 40% of respondents offering this as their response. The third trend across all the sites, with 75%, was respondents who said that they did not have a practical example of a DMM. The fourth trend across all the sites was 25% of respondents who offered a practical example of a DMM with which they had interacted or observed. A noteworthy observation is the disparity in the population that claimed to know many people who multiply compared to the lack of tangential examples of multiplying ministries in that same population.

Question 17: What could your church change to better help you multiply disciples?

Interview Question 17 was designed to partially answer RQ1. While RQ1 is focused on

how an organizational culture *can* communicate, this interview question sought to develop a baseline understanding of how the organizational culture *has* communicated thus far. Additionally, this interview question sought to understand how the individual perceived organizational communication could be improved to help equip disciple making within the church. To this end, Question 17 successfully added to the base knowledge of how the organizational culture of each participating site has communicated and how individuals think organizational communication could be improved.

   Descriptive Codes. The first clear descriptive code that emanated from Question 17 was the response, *example*. Numerous respondents stated they needed a tangible example of disciple multiplication from their church to successfully multiply disciples on their own. Another descriptive code was *tools*. Further questioning the definition of this descriptive code yielded the understanding that people wanted simple ways to reproduce. In essence, tools represented functional techniques or artifacts that could assist in making the spiritual development of someone else a simple process. VC-Leader-3, a lay leader speaking about her church, elaborated, "The way they are presenting the disciple-making movement is very unattainable to many of the people that go to our church because it seems too hard, too big, too scary." Another descriptive code used throughout all three sites was *freedom*. WC-Staff-6 said, "I think the biggest thing is tools and freedom. So the tools and the freedom to go out and multiply disciples." Several comments throughout the data collection process pertaining to freedom highlighted an inherent fear of not knowing enough, ignorantly not being congruent with organizational doctrine, and not obtaining organizational ordination to be responsible for the spiritual development of another person. For example, WC-Staff-8 explained, "The biggest thing would be probably just approval from the leadership because it was the way the church is structured. Unity is a big thing and

processes are a big thing." Finally, the last descriptive code was *definition of disciple*.

     Inferential Codes. Several inferential codes were used for Question 17. First, *modeling* was the inferential code used for any response that first sought a behavioral example from leadership of the desired behavior leaders wished to see in organizational members. Second, *freedom* was the inferential code used for any response that sought authority or permission from organizational leadership to practically conduct disciple multiplication practices. Third, *tools* was the inferential code used for any response that sought easily reproduced resources to aide in disciple multiplication. Finally, *vision* was the inferential code used for any response that desired a big picture understanding of what disciple multiplication could look like and how it would fit into the overarching organizational strategy. One example of vision was offered by WC-Staff-7, a church staff member, who opined, "I would say one is change of mentality to be open to it [disciple multiplying], to understand. I think it's changing the mentality of generational-type stuff, making it part of the culture." Specifically, WC-Staff-7 was speaking about a dichotomy between generational style disciple multiplication compared to a traditional model of Sunday morning worship service attendance as the pinnacle of a person's spiritual life.

     Site 1 Trends. The VC presented four trends from the inferentially coded data. To begin, 28% of the VC respondents stated a desire for leadership to *model* the behavior required for successful disciple multiplication. Next, 24% of the VC interviewees said they needed *tools* from their church to successfully multiply disciples. Then, 24% of the VC respondents stated they needed the church to change the organizational paradigm toward disciple multiplication and communicate that new *vision*. Finally, 16% of the VC respondents identified the need for *freedom* from organizational leadership to multiply disciples outside officially sanctioned church events.

Site 2 Trends. The KC presented four trends from the inferentially coded data. To begin, 48% of the KC respondents stated they needed leadership to *model* the necessary behavior to successfully multiply disciples and provide tangible training to create those behaviors. Next, 36% of the KC interviewees said they needed a *vision* of what disciple multiplication could be and implementation of a new paradigm for that vision. Then, 24% of the KC respondents identified the need for simple *tools* that would aid in disciple reproduction. For example, KC-Leader-4 explained, "I mean, I need it spelled out. I need structure and I like recipes. For me personally, it would be very practical instruction with other believers." Finally, 16% of the KC respondents identified the need for *freedom* from organizational leadership to multiply disciples outside officially sanctioned church events.

Site 3 Trends. The WC also presented four trends from the inferentially coded data. To begin, 32% of the WC respondents identified the need for simple *tools* that would aid in disciple reproduction. Then, 24% of the WC respondents stated they needed leadership to *model* the necessary behavior to successfully multiply disciples and provide mentorship to hone those behaviors. Next, 24% of the WC interviewees said they needed a *vision* of what disciple multiplication could be and overall clarity on how the church wanted to pursue disciple multiplication. For instance, VC-Leader-7 stated, "I think I would need a road map of steps to take to get me confident enough to talk to people about discipleship." Finally, 16% of the WC respondents identified the need for *freedom* from organizational leadership to multiply disciples outside officially sanctioned church events.

Combined Study Trends. Overall analysis of the data from Question 17 revealed four trends across the three sites. The first trend saw 33% of people state that they needed leadership to *model* the necessary behavior to successfully multiply disciples. For example, VC-Staff-6

explained, "I don't need a booklet—I don't think disciple making is about transfer of knowledge only. Have somebody that would disciple me or lead by example. This is how disciples are made. Do this kind of thing with somebody else." The second trend across all the sites was people who said they needed a *vision* of what disciple multiplication could be and overall clarity, with 28% of respondents offering this as their response. The third trend across all the sites, with 27%, was respondents who said they needed simple *tools* that would aid in disciple reproduction. The fourth trend across all the sites was 16% of respondents who identified the need for *freedom* from organizational leadership to multiply disciples outside officially sanctioned church events.

Themes

Overall, several themes emanated from an analysis of the data produced from the personal interviews. While every interview question produced trends, themes arose that transcended multiple questions and highlighted deeper organizational culture characteristics. The pervasiveness of these themes throughout numerous interview question responses highlighted their foundational aspect of the culture and ultimately hinted at their role in the organization's attempts to communicate for individual behavior change. While numerous themes were identified, several are intimately intertwined with each other and wield greater agency when understood synergistically.

Community and Mission. Community was a foundational theme throughout all three sites and clearly stood as the primary reason people are committed to a church organization, as seen in the Question 10 trends. Additionally, community was identified in Questions 2, 4, 8, and indirectly in Question 9 as a foundational element of the desired organizational experience people expect from their church. In fact, when considering all interview question responses, 87% of people highlighted the importance of community in at least one of their responses. Similarly,

the theme of mission, or serving for a purpose greater than oneself, was a clear secondary theme for people's involvement with their church organization. Therefore, the discovered theme is that the primary reason people are committed to their church organization is to experience deep and intimate *community* where that community is on *mission* to serve a purpose greater than any one member of the community, in this case, to pursue the mission of God for their community.

Discipleship and Modeling. Another foundational theme discovered through the interviews was the concept of discipling others and being discipled. For instance, Question 2 highlighted being discipled as a common fond memory while Question 4 highlighted being discipled as one of the most formative spiritual experiences. For example, VC-Leader-6 explained, "I always knew what it meant to be a Christian, but how to share my faith and how to break it down for someone or even to understand it myself has been life changing and super easy." Then Question 13 highlighted a common trend of 45% of people desiring to become better disciple makers; however, Questions 6 and 17 pointed out a perceived deficiency of all three sites in that people desired leadership from the church to model the expected behavior of successful disciple multiplication. In fact, modeling the desired behavior would inherently require small group, if not one-on-one, discipleship. Therefore, the discovered theme is that nearly half of the interviewed population desires *discipleship* and vocalized their desire in a request for church leadership to invest in individual disciples through the *modeling* of disciple multiplying behavior.

Hearing God's Voice. When considering how a church organizational culture can better communicate to effect individual behavior change toward disciple multiplication, the theme of *hearing God's voice* rose as a necessary bedrock to any church's communication strategy. Question 4 highlighted God's voice in a person's life as one of the most formative spiritual

experiences such as when KC-Member-1 explained, "That was the first time I really encountered the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Just really being able to encounter Jesus in the broken, dysfunctional places and hear from the Lord for myself, receive just significant healing." KC-Member-1 went on to assert about her experience of hearing God's voice that the experience, "Just radically transformed my life." Additionally, question 5 highlighted hearing God's voice as one of the most popular elements for a definition of a disciple of Jesus. Question 15 highlighted the overwhelming number of people who said they would definitely change their behavior if they heard God tell them to do something; however, Questions 13 and 14 highlighted that many people desired their church to teach them how to hear God's voice. Therefore, the discovered theme is that hearing God's voice would likely be a highly effective method to communicate for individual behavior change; however, few of the interviewees expressed knowing *how* to hear God's voice.

      Strategy and Goal Setting. When asked to describe their disciple-making efforts over the previous 6 months, 71% of respondents had no coherent disciple multiplying strategy. Additionally, Question 16 highlighted that few respondents understood what is meant by the term *disciple multiplying*, fewer had acquaintances who actively tried to multiply disciples, and even fewer had a practical example of a DMM. Furthermore, 97% of respondents identified they had no spiritual goals prior to the posing of Question 13. While some people may have had spiritual desires, they were not present enough in the conscious mind to recall for the interview and, therefore, were not likely to carry enough agency in the person's life to motivate behavior change consistent with an actual goal. Therefore, the theme that emerged was that a vast majority of respondents had no coherent strategy for multiplying disciples and did not set personal goals to achieve spiritual growth. Ultimately, a disciple multiplying ministry is outside the current

paradigm of most church members and will likely be impossible to pursue without the direct

intervention of a paradigm-shifting tangible model that is intimately crafted with Spirit-led

personal goal setting.

Perceived Needs. Another theme that arose was that of *perceived needs* by the

respondents. This theme bore four subthemes throughout the interview questions. Interestingly,

while many did not fully understand what disciple multiplying is, they clearly articulated that to

be successful, they needed leadership to clearly communicate a *vision* for the ministry.

Furthermore, respondents argued that to be successful they needed church leadership to *model*

the desired behavior for disciple multiplication. Additionally, simple to reproduce *tools* were

highlighted as a necessary need for many people to be successful at disciple multiplying. For

example, KC-Staff-5 stated, "I think one thing that I would really love for us to do is as we talk

about making disciples and helping people to go do that and do it where you work, do it where

you live, to give them real tools to be able to do that." Finally, the fourth subtheme that emerged

from interviews was *freedom*. This concept was directly referring to the approval and support of

church leadership for a person to disciple others outside formally sanctioned church events.

Themes in Correlation.

Confidence versus Experiential Knowledge. Several other interesting themes arose in

correlation with multiple interview questions. For instance, Question 11 highlighted

approximately 57.65% of respondents who were medium to highly confident in their ability to

multiply disciples right now. However, as I pointed out, very few had a strategy, fewer had a

practical example of a multiplying ministry, and even fewer were actively engaged in a DMM.

Therefore, most of the 57.65% of respondents who were confident found their confidence

outside of successfully engaging in the behavior in which they were confident. Ultimately, the

theme that arose was that confidence to multiply disciples can potentially be generated outside of experiential knowledge.

Community versus Staff Responses. Another interesting theme that arose from the interviews was nested in staff responses from all three sites. While community was the overwhelming theme throughout most respondents' reasons for being a member of their church, many staff responses were generated from a leadership position that seemed ontologically outside the community. For example, when asked about the purpose of his church in his life, KC-Staff-2 honestly retorted, "That's a hard question as a leader." VC-Staff-9, a campus pastor, speaking about his limitation in making disciples asserted, "Time! I'm just sure there are some of the things we do because of the culture that we live in that we don't need to do, we shouldn't do, but we probably don't even know what those things are." Additionally, though offered jokingly, six staff members identified "a paycheck" as the purpose of their church in their life. For instance, when WC-Staff-5 explained the purpose of his church in his life he started with, "For one, they pay my salary." WC-Staff-6 explained, "The purpose of the church I'm at in my life, sometimes it feels like a paycheck and other times it's the place where I can minister to people and have connections." Additionally, out of 75 total interviews, 65 highlighted community as a foundational value for their membership with their church. Of the 10 total people who did not mention community throughout their interview, six were church staff members. Overall, the theme that emerged was that church staff may tend to view the organization as a job or a business to run more than they view it as a family in which to belong.

Outreach versus Community. The final theme that arose throughout the interview responses was a dichotomy between a stated desire for outreach compared to a practical example of inward focus. For example, serving others was identified in Question 2 as one of the fondest

memories, reaching out to lost people was a common element of a definition for a disciple of

Jesus, and outreach was listed in Question 9 as one of the key areas the church has influenced the

respondent's life; however, practical examples of such evangelism were nearly nonexistent

throughout interviews. In fact, the overwhelming majority of attention was placed on the inward

focus of developing intimate community with those already in the organization. While deep

intimate community is a biblical desire seen throughout the early church in Acts, the intimate

community in Acts was the catalyst for rapid church growth. The theme that emerged through

the interviews was that respondents seem to have neutered intimate community of its inherent

evangelistic properties and settled for a self-gluttonous alternative version that caters only to

those within the organizational culture. I say organizational culture because, these may not, and

often are not, members of the church but will usually be from a palatable socioeconomic class so

as to seamlessly fit with the organizational culture. By inviting members from other churches to

a small group, the air of evangelism dangerously dulls the Spirit's call to the lost in local

neighborhoods.

   Noteworthy Absent Themes. The final section on themes discovered through the

interview responses does not identify the themes provided by respondents but rather identifies

topics that were surprisingly omitted from respondent answers. For instance, preaching or Bible

teaching was not a trending answer for any of the interview questions despite the overwhelming

organizational investment of resources toward them each week. Similarly, only one person out of

75 even mentioned worship music as an important aspect of their church membership. While the

Sunday morning service did not trend for any question, several respondents identified the service

as "a necessary evil" to maintain their true intent for organizational membership, the small group

and deep community. For example, WC-Leader-3, a lay leader courageously offered, "We are

going to the large gathering, and other things that we are called to go to, out of obedience, not desire, and often leave frustrated; feel like it wasn't worthwhile. That there wasn't life in it." WC-Leader-3 later explained, "We've had very good friends leave and have asked them what they've discovered in other churches in their area and it's not any better." While all three churches maintained coffee cafés and invested a substantial amount of resources into construction and operation, not one respondent mentioned the existence of such an amenity. Finally, large-scale outreach or entertainment events did not trend for any interview question; however, several staff members highlighted how attractional model church had left them burnt-out and considering a career change.

Research Questions

This research was predicated on three research questions designed to garner understanding about societal influence on an American church's organizational culture and, subsequently, the organizational culture's influence on individual behavior change. The four methodological approaches to data collection yielded a substantial amount of information that successfully garnered a partial answer for each of the research questions. The findings from the research produced individual themes that, when considered synchronously, form a coherent potential solution to each research question (RQ). This section presents each individual RQ with the themes that support a partial answer to that question, followed by an understanding of the research procedures utilized to obtain the data necessary to answer each RQ.

Creating the Organizational Culture: RQ1

"How can a church organization communicate to increase disciple multiplication?"

Themes

Several themes were discovered throughout the data analysis that began to inform an

understanding of an answer for RQ1. This research question was partially answered through this inquiry, and several recommendations are presented in Chapter Five in response to this question. Some discovered themes represent positive communication techniques to increase disciple multiplication while others represent adverse techniques for the desired outcome. For instance, the disciple-making subculture at each site demonstrated unique communication techniques that were likely a catalyst for the successful multiplication they had experienced while the main organizational culture demonstrated communication techniques that were likely an additive to a mixture of movement-stalling elements. This section will first highlight the potentially adverse communication themes followed by the positive communication themes. Finally, this section will identify the procedures utilized to gain an understanding of the themes used to inform the research question.

The first adverse theme for organizational communication to increase disciple multiplication is commercialization of the worship experience. The inherent understanding behind any commercial enterprise is the offering of services or goods. Therefore, the commercialization of the worship experience communicates an expectation for consumption of a product being offered by the commercial entity. The absence of a trend in any interview question for the worship service or music is potentially affiliated with this theme as well. This is closely followed by the theme of the business nature of the culture. While the worship service was commercialized, the entire culture emanated a business nature as well, permeating most activities provided by the organization. Next, the theme of passive consumption of sermons was perceived as an adverse theme for increasing disciple multiplication as the theme inherently communicates reception of information rather than the acquisition of a skill.

The first positive theme for organizational communication to increase disciple

multiplication is personal investment. Next, high accountability is a positive theme closely associated with the theme of personal investment. Additionally, the theme of skill acquisition rather than information transmission appeared to be an important paradigm for the disciple-making subculture. Next, the theme of strategy and goal setting appeared to be an important theme for communicating to increase disciple multiplication. Finally, the theme of unity and community associated with the vision-casting artifacts was a positive communication theme.

Theme Producing Procedures

Several data collection procedures were utilized to produce the themes used to partially inform RQ1. For instance, Interview Questions 1, 2, 3, 16, and 17 were all used to add understanding to RQ1 through the theme of strategy and goal setting. Digital media was used to partially develop the theme of passive consumption of sermons. Finally, the site visit procedure was used to partially develop the theme of passive consumption of sermons, the commercialization of the worship experience, personal investment, high accountability, and skill acquisition rather than information transmission.

Communicating Through the Organizational Culture: RQ2

"How does a church's organizational communication influence individual disciple multiplication?"

Themes

Several themes were discovered throughout the data analysis that began to inform an understanding of an answer for RQ2. This research question was thoroughly answered by this inquiry with data highlighting both positive and negative organizational influence in relation to the organizational mission. The first adverse theme for organizational communication to influence individual disciple multiplication is the theme of entertaining activities and the

consumption of the entertaining activities. Closely associated with the theme of entertaining activities is the theme of Sunday morning worship attendance. Coupled with the theme of commercialization of the worship experience, this theme strongly communicates an expectation for simple attendance as the pinnacle of action rather than a springboard for further disciple multiplication. Disdain for this message was expressed when VC-Leader-3 offered, "I don't like it when a church values quantification over quality because you can say: Oh, we're a church and we baptized 4,000 people this year. What's your relationship with those 4,000 people?" VC-Leader-3 then questioned, "How many of them got spiritually attacked immediately after and fell off the horse?" Another associated theme was that of the importance placed on organizational membership numbers. These themes are interesting when contrasted with the lacking themes of preaching, Sunday service, Bible teaching, or entertaining events from personal interviews.

The first positive theme for organizational communication to influence individual disciple multiplication is the theme of community and mission. To begin, community was highlighted as potentially the most influential element of communication in the organization's repertoire. As people bond on a deep level, they are greatly influenced to behave in accordance with the accepted social norms within that small group (Bandura, 2002). Given the social influence within a small group, when a group is led in unison on a mission perceived to be greater than any one individual in the group, individuals are influenced to partake in the mission. This theme can be amplified through the same theme found in the artifact data review. When individuals are influenced to join the disciple multiplication mission through the influence of a small group, the vision and influence can be magnified through unified messaging from other communication mediums. Finally, another positive theme for organizational communication to influence individual disciple multiplication is the theme of hearing God's voice.

Theme Producing Procedures

Several data collection procedures were utilized to produce the themes used to partially inform RQ2. For instance, Interview Questions 7, 8, and 9 were all used to add understanding to the research question through the theme of community and mission as well as the theme of hearing God's voice. Artifact review was used to partially inform the theme of unity and community through the amplification of a message communicated through a separate medium. Finally, the site visit procedure was used to partially develop the theme of community and mission.

Communicating for Behavior Change: RQ3

"How can elements of the social cognitive theory be communicated to encourage individual behavior change toward disciple multiplication?"

Themes

Several themes were discovered throughout the data analysis that began to inform an understanding of an answer for RQ3. This research question was sufficiently answered by this study; however, additional research with varying methodological approaches could certainly prove fruitful in providing a more exhaustive understanding of the answer to this question. The first adverse theme for elements of the SCT being used to communicate for individual behavior change toward disciple multiplication is the theme of confidence. This theme highlighted a large number of people who were not confident in their ability to multiply disciples, and most of those who responded with confidence did not have an example of a DMM and had no personal experience multiplying disciples. Therefore, self-efficacy can be assumed low in those who clearly stated they have low confidence and assumed low in those who have no social learning of a DMM. Additionally, the theme of community versus staff responses highlighted a divide

between staff and lay member paradigms. While lay members considered the organization a type of family, staff answered from the paradigm that the organization was a job and community was a necessary task. Finally, the theme of reaching others versus community highlighted the social influence of inward focus versus missional focus from small group leaders.

The first positive theme for elements of the SCT being used to communicate for individual behavior change toward disciple multiplication is the theme of discipleship and modeling. The SCT articulates the profound influence of modeling behavior and stands as a primary justification for this theme's role in partially informing RQ3 (Bandura, 1995b, 2002). Additionally, the theme of strategy and goal setting is likely to prove profitable for influencing individual behavior change. Finally, the theme of perceived needs, specifically modeling, tools, vision, and freedom highlights the role of self-efficacy in organizational communication.

Theme-Producing Procedures

Several data collection procedures were utilized to produce the themes used to partially inform RQ3. For instance, Interview Questions 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15 were all used to add understanding to the research question through the themes of strategy and goals, perceived needs, confidence, community versus staff responses, and outreach versus community. Artifact review was used to partially inform the theme of unity and community through the amplification of a message communicated through a separate medium. Finally, the site visit procedure was used to partially develop the theme of strategy and goals, perceived needs, and confidence.

Summary

Chapter Four presented findings that developed from a social and digital media review, personal observations during site visits, an artifact review, and personal interviews that were transcribed and coded. The multiple research procedure strategy using four separate vectors to

garner qualitative data produced valuable insights for better understanding the overall purpose of the study, which was knowing how an American church organizational culture can better communicate to effect individual behavior change toward disciple multiplication. The chapter introduced and described themes produced through each research procedure and highlighted those themes that traverse multiple procedures. The organization of the chapter was structured to first provide an understanding of the study participants, then each research procedure, the data collected from each procedure, and themes discovered in each procedure. Next, the chapter structure presented the three research questions that guided the study and presented the pertinent collected data for answering each question. Photographs from site visits, artifact examples, and direct quotes from interviews were added to better illustrate the discovered themes in support of each research question. Based on the findings from this collected data, conclusions and recommendations are presented in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The problem identified in this study was pervasive across denominations, cultures, and demographics in America as national disciple-making and church planting thought-leaders have been unable to identify any disciple-making movements (DMMs) within the American church (Discipleship.org, 2021; B. Smith, personal communication, November 3, 2021; Trousdale et al., 2018; Wilson, 2014). However, this dearth of disciple multiplication was not due to a lack of desire on the part of church leadership, as the three sites selected for this research were all vocal in their desire to multiply disciples. In fact, each site invested great resources toward their efforts to materialize this desire, all to no avail at the time of this study. A glaring indicator that the problem ultimately rested within the organizational culture was presented when a senior pastor opined, "One of the things we are trying to do is create what basically amounts to a secondary organization." When questioned why the pastor needed to create a second organization to pursue a disciple making movement he responded, "It gives us the place where we can 100% pursue disciple-making movements and the multiplication without taking the prevailing model, traditional version of the church, and blowing it up." This senior pastor's intuition was that the current paradigm of traditional American church was not only unable to support DMMs but that, disciple multiplication may in fact "blow it up."

The purpose of this ethnographically informed, comparative embedded case study was to understand the lack of DMMs for congregations at three evangelical churches in the United States. In essence, this study sought to understand, as the fore-mentioned senior pastor indicated, if an American church organizational culture could communicate to effect individual behavior change toward disciple multiplication or if such a DMM was unattainable in the status quo

paradigm of the American church. The theories guiding this study were the actor–network theory (Latour, 2008) and the social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1995b) as they provided a theoretical framework to understand the influence of culture on the creation of meaning followed by the influence of meaning on individual behavior. This chapter first provides a summary of the findings, then a discussion of the findings, followed by the presentation of methodological and practical implications, the delimitations and limitations of the study, recommendations for potential future research, and finally a summary.

Summary of Findings

This research produced a substantial amount of data which subsequently spawned a robust dossier of findings. In this study, I have termed some of the findings as micro-findings or lowest common denominator findings that can support one another in the creation of what I call macro-findings, or findings that are a result of a combination of several micro-findings yet distinct from any individual micro-finding. To assist in the digestion of these micro-findings, concepts will be presented in three groups that each represent a synergistic conglomerate presented as a macro-finding. Each grouping first identifies micro-findings and then presents the macro-finding through a synchronous understanding section.

Group 1 Findings

The first group of findings sought to better understand practical techniques an organizational culture could employ to effectively influence individual behavior change. While not exhaustive, this group of findings was compiled as a representation of a practical approach to immediate culture transformation. This group of findings presents techniques using social learning, accountability, presentation of a clear mission and vision, and simple tools. Finally, Group 1 presents a synchronous understanding section that presents a hypothetical application of

all presented techniques in one coherent strategy as the Group 1 macro-finding.

Social Learning

The first technique a church organizational culture can use to communicate to increase disciple multiplication is deliberate social learning. In fact, more than simply a technique, social learning should be the primary medium through which most organizational communication transpires. As was discovered through personal interviews, over 86% of study participants highlighted intimate community, outside of the Sunday morning worship experience, as the primary reason for their decision to engage with their church. The vast majority of church members long for deep, intimate relationships within a small group setting. Brown (2019) pointed out that such an overwhelming desire for community is biologically hardwired in humans as "our neural, hormonal, and genetic makeup support interdependence over independence" (p. 53).

In addition to the inherent humanistic desire for close community noted by Brown (2019), Bandura (2002) pointed out the influence of the small group: "Fortunately, most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action" (p. 22). When considering individual behavior change, Bandura (2002) argued for the influence of the group while interviews highlighted the desire for the group, and Brown (2019) explained the biological need for the group. Certainly, social learning through an intimate small group community is a formidable influencer of individual behavior change that could be a powerful tool in the organization's communication repertoire.

Accountability

The second technique a church culture can use to communicate to increase disciple

multiplication is loving accountability. This concept was highlighted through interviews as both the descriptive code of accountability and the code of encouragement; however, the loving aspect of this accountability highlights the necessity of ownership of the behavior change by the individual. Accountability without ownership simply constitutes an imposed rule that quickly devolves into spiritual legalism that has limited utility for behavior change (Bandura, 1995b; Pietsch, 2022). Spiritual legalism is predicated on a dictated standard whereby a person is expected to maintain an ontological state in congruence with the standard.

Loving accountability seeks to support behavior change at the micro level to support sustainable transformation toward a desired ontological state. For example, when a young disciple is trained how to read the Bible, they may choose a goal to read their Bible 5 of the 7 days in the coming week. Loving accountability could be employed by personally joining them all 5 days, calling them on the phone each day, or texting them to see how their reading went. The accountability is void of any condemnation and is inherently a burden shared between the two parties involved in the accountability. Loving accountability communicates value in certain actions. For instance, as a young military leader, I was offered the advice, "You should only expect what you inspect" as a lesson on the importance of accountability. In essence, the message was that younger soldiers would not likely change their behavior unless the expected behavior was given attention by leadership. The inspection, or accountability, given by leadership clearly communicated what actions were most valuable and what actions were less valuable.

Clear Mission and Vision

The third technique an organizational culture can use to communicate to increase disciple multiplication is to provide clarity in mission and vision. Numerous interviewees stated that they

needed a clear definition of a disciple, an idea of how the church wanted to make disciples, and a vision of what a disciple-making ministry would look like for them if they were going to be asked to participate in the organization's mission. The concept of presenting a clear mission and vision is not new as Rainer and Geiger (2011) argued, "If you want your process to be clear, you must define it, illustrate it, discuss it, and measure it. You must also constantly monitor the understanding of your people in regard to your process" (p.111). However, what may present a unique communication technique is to illustrate the exact big picture disciple making strategy through the deliberate actions of organizational leadership. Nothing communicates clearer than modeling the exact behavior the organization wishes to see in all congregation members. If the leaders are not first multiplying disciples, it will be incredibly difficult to accurately communicate what is expected from lay members.

Simple Tools

The final technique a church can use to communicate to increase disciple multiplication is the development and implementation of simple tools (Rainer & Geiger, 2011). First, simple tools refers to any mechanism that can be used to assist a disciple in understanding and replicating a biblical concept. A tool could be an acronym, an illustration that could be redrawn, a parable, or any other such device used to assist a disciple in reproducing. The importance of the tool rests in its simplicity and reproducibility (Shepperd, 2017). If a tool is too difficult, it is unlikely to be reproduced by a young believer (Galanos, 2018; Gallaty & Swain, 2020; Putman et al., 2013). Next, the implementation of the tool comes through consistent training until the disciple is both competent and confident with the new tool (Barrett, 2017). The difference between teaching and training in this context is this: teaching is information transmission while training is skill acquisition. Based on examples witnessed through the ethnographically informed

site visits and some interviews, congregation members are not likely to quickly change their behavior based on information transmission; however, skill acquisition nearly always resulted in rapid behavior change.

Synchronous Understanding

When understanding these themes synchronously, we begin with a very influential small community of people. The actions that take place, or fail to take place, in this small community will likely be replicated based on social learning (Bandura, 2002). Therefore, if a clear mission and vision to multiply spiritual generations of disciples through the group becomes the primary paradigm, it is likely most individuals in the group will desire behavior change to be congruent with the social norm of the group, that norm being disciple making (Galanos, 2018; Gallaty & Swain, 2020). Next, when simple tools are introduced and trained within the group, members will grow in competence and confidence with the new tool, ultimately gaining a new skill. Immediately after a new tool is acquired, goals for sharing the new tool could be provided so that loving accountability can be utilized the following week (Bandura, 1995b). Therefore, the inherent motivation to change behavior through social learning is immediately weaponized through skill acquisition and increased self-efficacy, a recipe likely to change individual behavior toward disciple multiplication (Bandura, 1995a, 1995b, 1997, 2002).

Group 2 Findings

The second group of findings sought to better understand how an organizational culture could influence individual behavior change toward disciple multiplication. This group of findings was certainly not exhaustive as individual behavior change, both positive and negative, was influenced by a vast number of independent and codependent actors. Therefore, this study found some actors that detracted from an organization's mission and others that supported the

mission. This group of findings presents ways an organizational culture can positively influence behavior change toward the desired goal of disciple multiplication. This section presents the concepts of inherent expectation for action, entertainment and consumption, commercialization, and vision and resources. Finally, Group 2 presents a synchronous understanding section that presents a hypothetical application of all presented techniques in one coherent strategy as the Group 2 macro-finding.

Inherent Expectation of Action

The first way a church's organizational culture can influence individual behavior change toward disciple multiplication is through the clear communication of an expectation for action. This communication can take place in multiple ways; however, during a personal conversation with Addison (2019), he explained that he communicates the expectation of action through what he calls the Monday Morning Test. Addison explained that, when he taught a new concept, his primary focus was that the student knew the first action they would take on Monday morning. He would deliberately overcommunicate the simplicity and clarity of a physical action every member could take within 24 hours of hearing a new concept. Often Sunday morning sermons provide concepts or ideals that may be valuable; however, if the congregation members are not provided specific examples of actions to be taken Monday morning, the new lesson is not likely to inform behavior change.

Loving accountability can be a powerful tool to communicate the inherent expectation of action within the culture; however, the loving accountability must be an organizational characteristic and not simply a tool used by a few people in the culture. On the contrary, the lack of an inherent expectation for action is an extremely powerful influencer of behavior as the status quo of non-action is typically a much simpler behavioral choice. Therefore, the expectation for

action must be clearly communicated through the methodological approach the church uses. If the expectation for immediate action is relegated to a few mentors, the organizational culture will likely override the psyche of most members and those few mentors will represent a subculture or countercultural movement rather than the organizational culture (Hurt & Dye, 2020; Lang & Bochman, 2017; McHale, 2020).

Entertainment and Consumption

The second way a church's organizational culture can influence individual behavior change toward or away from disciple multiplication is through the communication of an expectation for consumption and entertainment. The societal influence on the organizational culture of the American church was most clearly seen in this research through the paradigm of entertainment and consumerism that was pervasive through all communication mediums (Postman, 2006). The problem with this paradigm, in regard to behavior change toward disciple multiplication, is that both entertainment and consumption are the ends in themselves; there is no further action necessary to be successfully entertained or filled through consumption. Therefore, in this social contract between the organization and the membership, when creating a culture of entertainment, the staff owns the responsibility of providing entertaining content and the responsibility received by members is to consistently be entertained. In fact, the intent of entertainment is that the audience be amused. Amusement is not inherently detrimental to the organization's mission; however, overindulgence of amusement can be catastrophic as Yerkovich and Yerkovich (2017) explained, "The word *muse* is not used often anymore, but it means 'to consider, think, contemplate, or mull over in one's mind.' *Amuse*, then, literally means 'without musing, thinking, or pondering'" (p. 293). Amusing entertainment in church can act like a spiritual sedative with an almost addictive element that can keep a person in a spiritually

comatose state, enticing the person to simply return on a weekly basis to passively receive another dose of numbing amusement.

Similarly, the consumerist paradigm requires the teaching staff to produce consistent content while members are expected to consistently consume. Simply showing up on a consistent basis fulfills the social contract entered by the organizational members (Schein & Schein, 2017). Individual behavior change toward disciple multiplication is outside the constructed entertainment and consumerism paradigm and requires a rather invasive transformation of spiritual worldview for most church members compared to what they voluntarily accepted when first attending their church (Bandura, 1995a, 2002). Another element of the consumerist paradigm was viewed at all three sites where content was crafted to be easily consumed with minimal effort on a congregant's part. In essence, the professional clergy were expected to conduct the necessary biblical research to present palatable content while the recipients had no expectation other than to receive and digest what was presented. Much like a child who is never taught to feed herself, such a consumerist paradigm will likely create consumptionists who are incapable of conducting the cognitive work required to produce the spiritual content they desire.

Commercialization

A third way a church's organizational culture can influence individual behavior change toward or away from disciple multiplication is through the commercialization of the organization. The clearest example of this paradigm in the research was seen through the large commercial properties that housed the professionally trained clergy who led the worship experience. Commercialization certainly added an atmosphere of professionalism and quality, which are sought-after characteristics needed for entertainment and consumerism; however, commercialization ultimately diminished the self-efficacy of many parishioners to effectively

change their behavior toward disciple multiplication (Bandura, 1997; Latour, 2008). Interviews and personal engagements during site visits revealed many people who expressed not having adequate training or organizational authority to pursue disciple making. Commercialization often creates the perception in parishioners that they lack necessary ability and need something from the organization to be successful at disciple multiplication. Furthermore, commercialization directly counters the most prolific desire of intimate community. Overwhelmingly, interviewees stated they desired a familial type of connection in their relationships at church, a concept that is inherently diametric to the concept of commercialism. Therefore, the social learning influence is likely to be more impactful on behavior change in the desired communal context than in a commercial context (Bandura, 1969, 1995a, 2002).

Lack of Vision and Resources

A fourth way a church's organizational culture can influence individual behavior change toward or away from disciple multiplication is through the lack of a clear vision and resources to accomplish that vision. Certainly, a clearly communicated end state is important for a mission; however, a clear understanding of how the organization can arrive at the desired end state is paramount. Every participating site in this study had a stated desire to commence a DMM, which was part of why they were chosen for the study. However, none of the sites had a clearly defined or communicated strategy for how the organization would pragmatically move toward that stated goal. In particular, all three sites lacked a clearly communicated path for each individual's practical role in moving the organization toward the stated goal. An overwhelming majority of interviewees did not have a practical model of what disciple multiplication is, and some did not even have a working definition of a disciple of Jesus.

Most participants engaged through the interviews or during site visits expressed a

personal desire to make disciples. When people who already have a personal desire to change

their behavior are given a clear vision of how to change their behavior, and then given resources

to enact that change, they will likely initiate the change very quickly (Bandura, 1995b). The

second most popular trend through the interviews revealed that people wanted to be a part of a

mission for God that was bigger than themselves. Ultimately, this theme highlighted that these

respondents desired a clearly communicated vision and resources to achieve the desired end

state. This type of population would likely change their behavior toward disciple multiplication

rather quickly if they were provided a clear vision of the organization's mission and their

personal role in that mission (Bandura, 1969).

Synchronous Understanding

When understanding these themes synchronously, the status quo paradigm of

entertainment and consumerism within the American church often counters the need for an

inherent expectation for immediate action. The commercialization of the organization further

reinforces the parishioner's role to simply attend activities at the behest of the professionally

trained clergy who will provide a service to the consumer, a service that ultimately entertains as

the measure of success. This methodological approach to the ontological function of the church

clearly communicates a vision that requires only passive participation from the vast majority of

organizational members. This contextual environment holds overwhelming influence pertaining

to the subsequent behavior of congregation members and powerfully works against their desires

to change their behavior toward disciple multiplication (Bandura, 1969, 1995b, 1997).

On the contrary, the disciple-making subcultures experienced at all three sites

methodologically utilized personal goal setting at every meeting, inherently communicating the

necessity for action (Bandura, 1995b). While their meetings were fun, they did not center on

entertainment or consumerism but rather relied on active participation of all attendees. Every new lesson was geared toward skill acquisition rather than information transmission, inherently countering the societal influence that draws many Americans toward consumerism. None of the subcultures utilized commercial structures, and in fact, made great efforts to keep their methodological approach simple and reproducible for everyone. All three sites provided a clear vision, and mentors invested heavily in others to ensure the vision was understood in each person's individual context. The subcultures trained on simple tools regularly to ensure all members were well resourced to accomplish their role in the overall vision.

Group 3 Findings

The third group of findings sought to better understand how elements of the social cognitive theory (SCT) could influence individual behavior change toward disciple multiplication. This group of findings was thorough in consideration of all elements of the SCT; however, practical application of the findings could far exceed the scope of this dissertation. Therefore, this study identified the social science principles that were most applicable within an American church organizational culture and derived what was perceived as the most effective elements of the SCT for influencing behavior toward disciple multiplication. This group of findings presents elements of the SCT that an organizational culture can effectively implement to influence behavior change toward the desired goal of disciple multiplication. This section presents the concepts of social learning through small groups, self-efficacy, hearing the voice of God, simple tools, confidence and competence, personal stories, goal setting, and outcome expectation. Finally, Group 3 presents a synchronous understanding section that presents a hypothetical application of all presented techniques in one coherent strategy as the Group 3 macro-finding.

Social Learning Through Small Groups

Elements of the SCT can be communicated to encourage individual behavior change through social learning in small groups (Arnold, 2004; Bandura, 2002). The positive effect from social learning on subsequent behavior change is well documented in social science (Arain et al., 2017; Bandura, 1995b, 2002; Gan, 2018; Lu et al., 2019; Maibach & Cotton, 1995). For instance, behavior modeled by a group leader has been documented to influence the subsequent behavior of group members (Arain et al., 2017; Dempsey & Earley, 2016). Additionally, Arain (2018) documented that when group members are given the freedom to try new things without fear of reprisal, individual self-efficacy increases, and subsequent behavior change often occurs (Bandura, 1997; Ferguson & Bird, 2018). This research built upon the well-documented understanding of social learning to identify the potential deliberate application of the theory into a religious setting as a communication medium through which to influence individual behavior (Gibbons, 2019; Grenny et al., 2013). Given the overwhelming trend in personal interviews to identify intimate community as the primary reason for affiliation with the organization, the population in all three sites seemed primed to willingly engage within the context of social learning (Gallagher, 2020). Subsequently, the social learning element of the SCT can potentially be strategically implemented as a communication medium through small groups to positively affect individual behavior change toward disciple multiplication (Logan et al., 2011).

However, the simple participation in a small group setting does not constitute a paradigm shift toward disciple multiplication as many church members attend a small group without engaging in DMMs. The small group, or intimate community, must be understood and utilized as a strategic communication medium. A methodological approach to multiplying disciples must still be implemented through the small group. This is an important distinction since the small

group inherently wields great influence due to the social learning; therefore, if the small group methodologically models a lifestyle void of disciple making it will be difficult to change the behavior of group members toward disciple multiplication (Bandura, 2002).

Self-Efficacy

Elements of the SCT can be communicated to encourage individual behavior change through the increasing of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Since self-efficacy has been well documented to inform behavior change, this study did not seek to determine if self-efficacy could help effect individual behavior change toward disciple making but rather how to communicate to increase self-efficacy within the given organizational cultures of the participating sites (Bandura, 1995a, 1997). First, the lack of paradigm understanding pertaining to a DMM coupled with the theme of need for modeling from organizational leadership highlighted the potential to increase individual self-efficacy through the modeling process. In fact, Sternszus et al. (2018) identified role modeling as a powerful means of increasing individual self-efficacy. Further, Schwaninger et al. (2021) highlighted that increased self-efficacy helps to support people receiving assistance from others, an element that further strengthens the utility of social learning in a small community.

An important aspect of self-efficacy was identified when Baldwin et al. (2006) identified the negative effect on self-efficacy from fear, guilt, and shame within a person's emotional being. These emotions were prevalent within all three embedded categories, at all three sites, during visits and personal interviews. In fact, many people expressed guilt and shame over not multiplying disciples, an emotional state that directly decreases the likelihood they will change their behavior to remedy the negative emotion. Despite these negative emotions working against the organization's desire for behavior change, four areas were discovered in this research that are

likely to help increase a person's self-efficacy toward disciple making.

Hear the Voice of God. Self-efficacy for individual behavior change toward disciple multiplication can be increased by training people to discern the voice of God. For instance, many interview respondents said they would immediately change their behavior if they personally heard God tell them to do something. Unfortunately, a great deal of people through the interviews and site visits identified that they had no idea how to hear the voice of God in their life. In fact, one senior clergy member said God's voice in his life was like "a crackling radio that just couldn't be tuned." Therefore, a powerful way to increase a person's self-efficacy for disciple multiplication, and subsequently their behavior change, would be to train them how to hear the voice of God.

Simple Tools. Self-efficacy for individual behavior change toward disciple multiplication can be increased by training people to utilize simple and reproducible tools (Bandura, 1997). As was discussed earlier, simple tools can bring great value to an organization's attempt to effect individual behavior change. In particular, a simple tool is easily understood and mastered by a person, a characteristic that inherently increases a person's self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). When someone thoroughly understands a tool, and their self-efficacy for using that tool increases, they are far more likely to voluntarily change their behavior to include the use of the new tool (Bandura, 1997). If the tool was easy for the person to understand, their perception of positive reception from another person also increases their self-efficacy for sharing the tool. For example, when a person masters a new tool, positive emotions are attributed to the experience and the person will likely want to assist others in experiencing those positive emotions (Bandura, 1969).

Confident and Competent. Self-efficacy for individual behavior change toward disciple multiplication can be increased by training people until they are confident and competent in a

new skill (Bandura, 1995b). While making tools simple and reproducible is desired, some

concepts supersede the ability to remain simple. However, a more complex tool can be

repetitively trained until someone is confident and competent in the use of the more complex

tool, which allows the person to replicate a concept that otherwise may have superseded their

ability to reproduce. This training method inherently requires increased investment of time from

a mentor, another unique method of increasing a person's self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997).

     Personal Stories. Self-efficacy for individual behavior change toward disciple

multiplication can be increased by sharing personal stories of successful encounters with disciple

multiplication. A recommendation from several interview participants for how an organization

could better equip members to multiply disciples was to hear more personal stories of disciple

multiplication from the stage on Sunday morning. Hearing the success of other organization

members stands as a positive technique for increasing the self-efficacy of congregation members

(Bandura, 1997). However, research also indicates that the act of sharing those successes in

public can have compounding positive influence on the self-efficacy of those who share (Burke

& Rains, 2019; Kashian & Liu, 2020). Therefore, sharing personal stories of disciple

multiplication in public forums within the organizational culture is an important technique for

increasing self-efficacy in support of effecting individual behavior change.

Goal Setting

     Elements of the SCT can be communicated to encourage individual behavior change

through the use of personal goal setting. In fact, goal setting has been identified as one of the

most influential elements for effecting behavior change (Bandura, 1995b; Maibach & Parrott,

1995). Unfortunately, out of the 75 interviews conducted, only two respondents had spiritual

goals at the time of the interview. Some respondents articulated that they did not like to set goals,

particularly pertaining to spiritual matters. However, in conjunction with learning to hear the voice of God, people can craft their spiritual goals with God and focus them on learning to hear Him better. No matter what the content of the goals may be, setting spiritual goals will likely become a catalyst for positive behavior change toward disciple multiplication (Bandura, 1995b).

Outcome Expectation

Elements of the SCT can be communicated to encourage individual behavior change through the establishment of positive outcome expectation. Many interview respondents found great difficulty in identifying a personal benefit from multiplying disciples. However, Bao and Han (2019) explained, "Outcome expectations and self-efficacy are two beliefs that can be viewed as two major cognitive factors guiding an individual's behavior" (p. 640). While some respondents identified an intrinsic benefit from serving the Lord and others identified increased community with new disciples, the organization can likely offer possible examples of positive outcomes associated with disciple multiplication. In fact, the benefits can be celestial in nature but could also be carnally attached to the organization. For instance, perhaps organizational recognition could accompany disciple making efforts. Nonetheless, when an organizational culture highlights the benefits associated with certain behaviors, individuals are likely to change their behavior to conform with those that receive greater benefits (Bandura, 1995b; Scherf, 2022).

Synchronous Understanding

When understanding these themes synchronously, elements of the SCT can certainly be communicated to effect individual behavior change toward disciple multiplication. To begin, social learning stands as the communication foundation for subsequent elements to influence an individual; therefore, the small group context should be the primary medium through which

directed behavior change is catalyzed. Inside the small group setting, self-efficacy can be deliberately increased by training people to hear the voice of God, providing simple tools, training people until they are confident and competent, and sharing personal stories of successful disciple multiplication. Also, within the small group context, individuals can be trained and assisted in setting goals that help move them toward spiritual maturity and disciple multiplication. Finally, the small group setting can illuminate or create benefits associated with disciple multiplication that will increase an individual's outcome expectation associated with the behavior change.

Discussion

This study produced a great deal of data pertaining to the organizational cultures of the participating sites, the physical and human infrastructures of the sites, the core spiritual values of individuals from the sites, and the communication efforts designed to influence the individual behavior changes necessary to ignite a DMM within each organizational culture. The depth and breadth of data collected compared to the empirical and theoretical literature presented in Chapter Two opened a gateway to a more robust understanding of potential methodological approaches to more effectively communicate in the American church to influence disciple-making practices. This section will present the discussion of how this study corroborates previous research, how the study extends upon previous research, novel contributions this study adds to the communication discipline, and how this study sheds new light on theory informing communication to effect individual behavior change toward a DMM. The section will first address the findings in relation to the empirical literature and then in relation to the theoretical literature; the section then discusses how the findings extend upon previous research, and finally the section presents the novel contributions to the communication discipline.

Findings in Relation to the Empirical Literature

In the American Church

The findings in this study contrasted greatly from most empirical literature pertaining to

the planting and maintaining of an American church (Hesselgrave, 2001; Stetzer & Im, 2016;

Towns, 2018, 2020). For instance, Stetzer and Im (2016) started their work with the disclaimer:

"Despite this bigger-is-better mentality, statistics do not support the assumption that size is

necessarily the best way to reach people" (p. 7). The pair continued, "Though large churches are

often more cost effective than small churches, new churches are often more effective than large

churches in evangelism" (p. 7). After this disclaimer, the authors launched into the rest of their

influential work on church planting to discuss the intricacies of starting and growing a religious

business called a church. Their disclaimer alone contains indicators of contrasting concepts

compared to the findings in this research. For instance, large churches are identified as more cost

effective, a statement that inherently resonates as a business expression. Next, the adjectives used

to describe *church* change throughout their sentence, from *large* compared to *small* in relation to

cost effectiveness, then *new*, rather than *large* or *small*, used in relation to effectiveness. The

implication is that a small church is only small when it is new. However, findings through this

study reveal the majority of church members desire small intimate community and merely

tolerate the business aspects of a larger church.

Another contrasting element from the empirical literature is the paradigm that disciple

multiplication comes from first starting an organization. For instance, Stetzer and Im (2016)

stated, "People came to be objects of ministry rather than co-laborers on mission. They wanted to

be what I could call today 'customers of religious goods and services' distributed by our exciting

new church. And it was killing me" (p. 227). In this regard, Stetzer and Im are completely

congruent with the findings of this research as the outcome of the westernized church's

methodological approach inherently produces consumerists of entertainment. This research

highlights that Stetzer's frustration was a byproduct of the organization he created. When the

authors discussed multiplication and movements, they offered, "When you decide to plant a

daughter church, sometimes the assessment, training, and preparation of the planter goes well;

however, other times the process unfortunately ends prematurely" (Stetzer & Im, 2016, p. 319).

The authors then asserted, "And when that daughter church is finally ready to be launched, it's

painful because everything changes" (p. 319). Stetzer and Im inherently communicated that

multiplication is very difficult, even for the professionals, and it is often painful for everyone

involved. The empirical literature identifies a trend of professional clergy who desire a DMM yet

continue to propagate a methodological paradigm that inherently counters their desired end state.

In Disciple Making Movements

The findings in the study were congruent with most empirical literature pertaining to the

multiplication of disciples outside the context of the American church but differed from the

traditional American church's approach to discipleship (Addison, 2019; Chan & Beuving, 2012;

Comiskey, 2016; Earley & Dempsey, 2013; Galanos, 2018; Gallaty & Swain, 2020; McDaniel,

2012; Putman et al., 2013; Shepperd, 2017; Smith & Kai, 2011). The primary differences

between the findings in this research and traditional expressions of discipleship in the American

church were the lack of understanding pertaining to generational ministry, diminished

empowerment and authority, lack of accountability, and communication through methodological

approach. For instance, the majority of American church literature on discipleship is focused on

the individual spiritual growth of the reader, whereas this research discovered the importance of

a generational paradigm for disciple multiplication (Hawkins & Parkinson, 2016; Wilhoit, 2008).

The institutional construct of most westernized organizational cultures inherently reserves authority for organizational leaders which inherently limits the empowerment of non-leadership members of the organization. Loving accountability was also discovered as a driving catalyst for behavior change and should be implemented as a coherent aspect of the methodological approach to disciple making.

Findings in Relationship to the Theoretical Literature

Actor–Network Theory

The findings in this study corroborated previous research conducted with the actor–network theory (ANT) as clear evidence of societal influence on the organizational culture existed (Latour & Woolgar, 1986; Pietsch, 2022; Scherf, 2022; Shank & Burns, 2022). For instance, the paradigm of commercializing the organization, a characteristic found to be detrimental to the stated mission of the organization, was communicated by an influential agent outside the organizational culture (Cali, 2017; Strate, 2017). This characteristic was an intricate aspect of all three sites and never became a point of deliberation for continued use, meaning the paradigm was so strong that no one through this data collection ever challenged whether the organization should be a commercial entity or not. The fact that three separate churches from different denominations, with different leaders and members, maintained nearly identical methodological approaches to church indicates that a network of actors outside the organizational cultures existed and had agency within each individual organizational culture (Blok et al., 2020; Latour, 2008; Law & Hassard, 2005; Michael, 2017). These findings revealed that the ANT was a useful tool in determining that agency existed outside the organizational culture and that influence was communicated through the organizational culture to individual members (Blok et al., 2020).

Social Cognitive Theory

The findings in this study not only corroborated previous research conducted with the SCT but also extended upon previous research, as elements of the SCT were identified as useful for influencing individual behavior change toward disciple multiplication, a specific topic previously unstudied (Bandura, 1995b; Maibach & Cotton, 1995). In particular, social learning was associated with the overwhelming desire of most interview respondents for intimate community relationships. With small groups and intimate community being a common theme at many American churches, this research used previously published literature on the effectiveness of social learning to influence behavior change as a catalyst to investigate community as a methodological communication medium (Bandura, 2002). This study corroborated the previous research while also extending the utility of that research. Numerous elements of the SCT were highlighted through this study as effective tools for influencing behavior change in a religious context; however, the other elements were seen as most effectively being communicated through the medium of social learning.

Extending Previous Research

Understanding the Soil

The first avenue of extending previous research was in understanding the soil, or culture, in which disciple multiplication efforts were being attempted in the American church. This research represents the first attempt to study the influence of American society on the organizational culture of an American church with a subsequent inquiry into the influence of the organizational culture on the behavior change of individual members toward disciple multiplication. This research highlighted several foundational aspects of the current American church paradigm that are detrimental to efforts to ignite a DMM. Each of these identified aspects

of the organizational culture extend upon previous research and perhaps offer one of the first dissenting academic voices to the prevailing model of church in the United States (Bandura, 1995b, 2002; Sikkink & Emerson, 2020).

Understanding the Seed

The second avenue of extending previous research was in understanding the seed, or message, through which disciple multiplication efforts were being attempted in the American church. Previous empirical literature was full of efforts to present the message of disciple multiplication, both in a western context and the foreign mission field (Earley & Dempsey, 2013; Gallaty & Swain, 2020; Guindon, 2020; McNabb, 2013; Smith & Kai, 2011; Trousdale, 2012; Trousdale et al., 2018; Watson & Watson, 2014). However, limited literature existed pertaining to the sociological elements of influence to be used in and with the presentation of the disciple multiplication message. For instance, understanding the effective elements of the SCT and how they can be incorporated into the message presented an opportunity for highly effective communication. Previous research was extended by understanding how the message was influenced by the culture, an aspect of research that was sparse in previous literature (McLuhan, 1994; McLuhan et al., 2010; Postman, 1993).

Understanding the Growth

Finally, the third avenue of extending previous research was in understanding the growth, or the role of hearing God's voice, with which disciple multiplication efforts were being attempted in the American church. Literature existed pertaining to God as an actor with agency in an individual's life; however, little academic literature existed on the role of hearing God's voice as a means of igniting a DMM or changing behavior (Baesler, 2002; Lassander & Ingman, 2012; Stausberg, 2010). Therefore, this research marked one of the first attempts to understand

the influence of an individual's perception of hearing God on their self-efficacy toward behavior change. This research certainly extended this aspect of previous research and in some areas marked novel contributions to the discipline of communication.

Novel Contributions from This Research

Societal Influence on the Organizational Culture of an American Church

The first novel contribution from this research to the discipline of communication stemmed from the inquiry of societal influence on the organizational culture of an American church. In particular, the discovery of a consistent theme across all three sites to methodologically communicate a message of consumerism and entertainment, despite the vocal disdain for the byproduct of that communication, indicated an influential church paradigm that had been communicated to the organizational culture by society. In essence, the organization's recognized they were not content with the byproduct of their organizational cultures yet were unable to fathom a different model that would represent a transformative paradigm shift away from the societally influenced model of consumerism church. Very similar, this research challenged the prevailing paradigm of the organizational culture being nested inside an American business model and presented data that indicated the business context of the church was potentially detrimental to their stated goals. All three sites maintained a 501(c)(3) status as a tax-exempt benefit, making them legal businesses; however, additional paradigms exist that could still render benefits without hindering communication efforts to influence individual behavior change (Comiskey, 2016). In essence, all three organizations could transform the paradigm to nearly completely remove the bureaucratic functions of the business model that hinder disciple multiplication; however, the current organizational paradigm has been so influenced by society that eradication of the business model of church is not even a topic of deliberation.

Influencing Behavior Change in a Spiritual Context

The second novel contribution from this research to the discipline of communication was the use of the SCT to inform methodological communication approaches to American church attempts to ignite DMMs. For instance, this research highlighted the necessity to communicate through modeled behavior as the most effective methodological approach to alter individual behavior. This research presents novel contributions in that understanding methodological approaches to daily activity is a more influential communication medium than any rhetorical approach, thus making the method the message, as this dissertation is titled. The communication concept that the method is the message, as presented in this dissertation, transcends organizational communication and could have applicability in most secular markets. Finally, placing this research within the context of spiritual growth and disciple multiplication further adds to the novel aspect of the work.

ANT and Mediatization: Bridging Between Secular and Religious Contexts

The third novel contribution from this research to the discipline of communication was the bridging of mediatization and the ANT. In fact, mediatization is a type of ANT in that communication mediums are actors with agency that ultimately influence human ontology (Cali, 2017; Strate, 2017). The ANT simply broadens the spectrum of inquiry beyond communication mediums to include all actors that carry agency, such as God or architecture (Chambon, 2017; Guggenheim, 2013). While the principles of mediatization were highly influential in this study, many actors existed outside communication mediums and needed to be accounted for when understanding societal influence on the organizational culture of an American church. The two theories were bridged and used synonymously to intricately understand the influence of secular actors within a religious context, representing a novel aspect of this research.

Implications

The findings from this study produced several methodological and practical implications, implications that are applicable for those both inside and outside a religious context. For example, several elements of the prevailing church paradigm were discovered to be a deterrent to the organization's mission, thus leading to an implication of necessity for a paradigm shift. This section will, therefore, present the discovered disparities between the status quo and the research findings, thus presenting the inherent implication of the necessity for change. The section will first address the methodological implications, then the practical implications, followed by recommendations, and finally a site recommendation case study.

Methodological

ANT: Extent of Influence on Religious Culture

The first implication stems from the extent of influence the American society has on the organizational culture of the American church. The three sites visited in this study were heavily influenced by the American business and entertainment model and clearly communicated a culture of consumerism, despite offering rhetorical disdain for the consumeristic nature of the culture. Using the ANT, the implication is that the organizational culture should be assessed for outside influence and more properly aligned with a methodological approach to communication that is congruent with their stated mission and vision (Blok et al., 2020). This implication is not only for the American church but extends to any organizational culture that wishes to influence individual behavior change toward an organizational end state. The ANT revealed through this study that outside influence on an organizational culture can adversely impact attempts to move an organization in a deliberate manner (Blok et al., 2020). This discovery is likely applicable to any organizational culture and the influence must be uniquely understood for each organization

and each desired end state, as the desired behavior of individuals is highly contextual.

Social Cognitive Theory Extent of Influence on Individual Behavior

The second implication stems from the extent of influence elements of the SCT have on individual behavior change. For instance, the influence of social learning on behavior change, coupled with the overwhelming theme of small intimate community, sends a clear implication that organizations should attempt to communicate their most important messages through this medium (Bandura, 1995b, 2002). The implication that organizations should communicate methodologically as well as rhetorically stems from the influence of social learning as well (Bandura, 2002). An implied task from this implication is that organizations must become intimately familiar with the exact goal they wish to achieve, followed by the subsequent message they wish to communicate (Sinek, 2013). Without that thorough understanding of the desired goal and message, it is unlikely an organization will be capable of crafting a methodological approach to communication that will capture the desired results. For instance, if the desired goal is truly the accumulation of many church members and the building of a large church, the leadership *must* be truthful about the goal. Multiplication of disciples is a separate goal from amassing a large crowd and the two goals require different methodological approaches to communication. This appears to be a common problem in the organizations visited, as the methodological approach to communication is designed to achieve a different goal than their stated desire to multiply disciples.

Technique and the Church

The third implication stems from the paradigm of technique within the organizational culture of the westernized church. As Ellul and Merton (1964) explained, "In our technological society, *technique* is the totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency

(for a given stage of development) in every field of human activity" (p. xxv). While the collected data in this research revealed a sincere leadership desire to help individuals grow spiritually in all three churches, all three sites also displayed an overwhelming influence of technique in their chosen methods to help those people grow spiritually. The common paradigm at all three sites was to continuously consider ways of improving effectiveness and efficiency in their ministry efforts, searching for ways to reach more people, better ways to teach more people, ministries to engage more people. However, Ellul and Merton highlighted that the ultimate end of technique is the loss of humanity in place of ultimate efficiency. This implication can be seen in the ministry of Jesus, who having the mind of God could have created the most efficient ministry system the world had ever known, yet Jesus chose to invest an inordinate amount of time with only twelve people. Jesus's ministry strategy directly contradicted the paradigm of technique found in this study.

Practical

Entertainment Consumerists

The first practical implication stems from the organizational paradigm of entertainment consumerism which was discovered through this study. As Postman (2006) pointed out,

> Our politics, religion, news, athletics, education and commerce have been transformed into congenial adjuncts of show business, largely without protest or even much popular notice. The result is that we are a people on the verge of amusing ourselves to death.
>
> (p. 4)

While Postman's assertion of pervasive entertainment was clearly evident throughout the three participating sites, he later explained a way to begin changing a culture of entertaining consumerism:

We know enough about language to understand that variations in the structures of

language will result in variations in what may be called "world view." How people think

about time and space, and about things and processes, will be greatly influenced by the

grammatical features of their language. (p. 10)

Therefore, one practical implication may be consciously moving away from consumerist

language such as worship *service*, attendance, membership, or asking what someone *got* from the

service. All such language implies the organization is providing a good or service to the

consumer.

A second practical implication can be seen in the words of the risen Christ for the newly

converted Saul in Acts 9:16 (*NIV*, 1978/1984) when Jesus said, "I will show him how much he

must suffer for my name." Rather than offer Saul an entertaining consumerist paradigm, one that

was present in the rabbinical temple system of the time, Jesus initiated His relationship with Saul

predicated on how Saul would labor with God and ultimately suffer (Lea & Black, 2003). The

practical implication for the modern American church is to move away from providing services

in place of providing guidance for laboring with God in the mission field of the local

neighborhood. This guidance must be communicated through the small group communication

medium with a clear model of expected behavior being provided by organizational leadership.

Communication as Sensemaking

Another practical implication of this study stems from the concept that communication is

sensemaking. In fact, Belliger and Krieger (2016) asserted, "Organizations are not entities or

systems, but forms of sensemaking that takes place in communication" (p. 61). My positivism

assumption, as presented in Chapter Two, is rooted in man's ability to learn through both the

logos (*Λόγος*, Logos) and rhema (*ῥήματος*, rhēmatos) Word of God (Thornhill, 2016; Voorst,

2001; Zodhiates et al., 2002). While humans can learn through diligent academic inquiry coupled with Divine revelation from the Holy Spirit, both approaches exemplify positivism as the learning is created through a distinct, static, and autonomous source from outside the human being. However, interpretivism is simultaneously happening when human beings create and transmit meaning through communication methods in their fallen human nature. Therefore, the implication is that the organizational culture required to foster the first DMM in an American church can be achieved through the sensemaking of deliberate communication crafted to achieve such an end. In particular, when methodological approach and rhetoric align within a small community, the resulting worldview will be a profoundly influential catalyst for behavior change given that the way group members view the world was deliberately crafted through strategic sensemaking (Bandura, 2002).

Goals of Communication

The next practical implication of the study is focused on the deliberate crafting of goals for communication. Given the auspice that methodological approaches to daily organizational practices communicate a more influential message than rhetoric, organizational leaders must be brutally honest with themselves about their true objectives in order to craft a precise methodological approach to achieve those objectives. For instance, several common church organizational objectives discovered through site visits that typically go unspoken are to make money, grow the congregation numerically, build bigger buildings, grow in popularity, grow in influence with politicians or other churches, maintain congregational members, or multiply disciples. While none of these goals are inherently wrong, striving after them all simultaneously will likely cause mission drift and leave every objective less than fulfilled, whereas clearly identifying the primary objective allows organizational leaders to strategically plan the most

effective strategy for achieving that objective. Once the primary strategy is identified, secondary objectives can be introduced and the strategies to achieve those objectives overlayed with the primary strategy. This allows strategic planners to identify overlapping areas to maximize resources or to identify areas where strategies may compete, thus protecting the primary mission.

Frequency

The final practical implication of the study deals with frequency. As Bandura (1995b) highlighted, frequency is one of the most influential elements of behavior change. When a person is attempting to change behavior, the more often they experience the new behavior, the more likely they will be to fully adopt the behavior (Bandura, 1995a; Maibach & Parrott, 1995). Therefore, the implication to increase the frequency of disciple-making behavior is paramount to the shifting of organizational culture to communicate for behavior change. However, site visits and interviews revealed that most parishioners did not wish to increase their time commitment with the organization but were willing to increase the time invested in a mission greater than themselves. The implication is that organizational leaders should be prepared to export their disciple-making culture outside the church building to engage their population where they live, work, and play. In fact, Dougherty and Mulder (2020) found a correlation between commitment to an organization and proximity to that organization, revealing that efforts to bridge geographical gaps could also increase commitment to the organization. Once the culture is exported outside the organizational facilities, it is likely that increasing the frequency of disciple-making activities will become more palatable and ultimately more influential toward behavior change.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are the culmination of this ethnographically informed

research and represent a gentle blending of Jesus' model of disciple making in scripture coupled with the themes discovered through this academic inquiry. This blending was an attempt to better understand the social science behind the success of Jesus' ministry, followed by modern application of those ancient scientific truths. The blending of social science and biblical practices was similar to Hagger and Hamilton (2022) who explained, "We demonstrate the virtue of augmenting theories with additional constructs and processes to provide comprehensive, parsimonious behavioral explanations" (p. 1). Based on collected data, analyzed themes, ethnographically collected examples of successful discipleship, and biblical congruence, the following recommendations are discussed in this section: community, hearing from God, mission, modeling from leadership, simple tools, training verses teaching, freedom and empowering everyone, goal setting, accountability, creation of fishing holes, investment into generational ministry, re-design of methodological approaches, building of ministries with lay members, paradigm shifts from numbers to names, and leader-led counterculture; the section concludes with a site recommendation example.

Community

The first recommendation is to methodologically design small intimate community as the center of the organizational effort to conduct church. Certainly, many American churches utilize the small group strategy; however, most of those strategies are secondary and only offer an additional event following attendance at the Sunday worship service (Dempsey & Earley, 2016). Social learning happens outside small community as well, but as Diekmann (2022) found through his research on behavior change through the COVID-19 pandemic, most behavior change occurred in accordance with perceived self-interest. The influence of intimate community through social learning can lower behavior change for self-interest reasons and support altruistic

ontology (Bandura, 1995b; Sanders & Mazzucchelli, 2022). Building a methodological approach to church that centers on small community would likely require a dramatic paradigm shift for most American churches; however, the paradigm does not need to extricate the large gathering from the church methodology. One potential option would be to view church like a homeschool co-op, where church happens in the home but many homes also gather to experience larger fellowship. Nonetheless, the recommendation is that organizations get serious about small community, design a methodological approach that uses small community as the primary communication medium, and resource small communities to succeed.

Hearing from God

The second recommendation is that churches begin practicing and training others to hear the voice of God. This practice is perhaps the most important skill any follower of Jesus could acquire and mature in their life, as hearing the voice of God is one of the primary characteristics that separates a Christian from any other religion. People are able to perceive the voice of God in numerous different ways but often need assistance in making sense of what they have perceived (Baesler, 2002). When people are trained to clearly hear the voice of God, they will likely adopt extensive behavior change in a rather rapid timeframe.

Mission

The third recommendation is that organizational leadership needs to determine their exact primary mission and the vision for how they would like to accomplish that mission. This recommendation implicitly requires organizational leaders to embody the ethos of the mission through modeling behaviors associated with successful accomplishment of the prescribed vision. All communication mediums should be congruent with precision messaging of the mission and vision, with each individual person being engaged with their personal role in the mission.

Ultimately, the mission must be clear, meaningful, and applicable to every organization member. Important terms associated with the mission and vision should be clearly defined and easily understood by the general population of the organization.

Modeling from Leadership

The next recommendation is that organizational leadership model the specific behavior they wish to be replicated by organizational members. Certainly, senior pastors fulfill a specific and niche role within the organization; however, they must be willing and able to model the specific disciple-multiplying behavior they wish to see within their congregation (Dempsey & Earley, 2016). While rhetoric has value in explaining the larger vision of a ministry, Mercado and Trumbull (2018) pointed out how a culture of mentorship can impact the overall message leadership wishes to communicate. For example, some parishioners may have no idea how to systematically read their Bible or pray; however, when a leader physically models a daily quiet time, there is little need for additional questions on how to enact such a discipline in their own life (Lang & Bochman, 2017). Similarly, many parishioners harbor a fear of conducting evangelism; however, personal observations during site visits revealed training followed by mentor modeling decreased fear and typically resulted in behavior change. Every intricate aspect of an organization's disciple-making ministry should be modeled by leadership.

Simple Tools

The next recommendation is that organizational leadership develop or acquire simple tools for propagation throughout the disciple-making ministry. While some organizations will wish to create their own set of simple tools, no such need exists as many tools have already been created and are free to the public (Addison, 2019). Most importantly, an organization should intimately understand the 10 most important Christian living topics they wish a new believer to

understand and then acquire or develop a simple tool to assist in training a new believer how to implement the topic into their life. For instance, a simple tool used to assist a new believer in reading and understanding their Bible is the acronym SPECKA: Sin to confess, Promise to keep, Example to follow, Command to obey, Knowledge to retain, and Attitude to change. Every chapter in every book of the Bible will have one of these elements, which assists the new believer who is learning to hear God's voice in scripture to make sense of what they are reading.

Training versus Teaching

The next recommendation is that organizational leadership first understand the inherent differences between teaching and training, followed by a systematic organizational shift toward a training-centric paradigm. In essence, teaching is the transmission of information and does not necessarily constitute the acquisition of the ability to alter behavior to conform with the newly acquired information, whereas training is the acquisition of a new skill and inherently equips the student with the ability to immediately alter behavior. For the stated purpose of this study, to alter individual behavior toward DMMs, training is a paramount requirement for success. Of note, training is conducted to standard not time, meaning a student continues to train on the same topic until they are competent and confident, whether that requires 5 minutes or 5 months. Success is not the teacher transmitting information; success is a student acquiring and successfully applying a new skill in their life.

Freedom Empowering Everyone

The next recommendation is that organizational leadership cast vision for their specific mission and then grant freedom to the organization, thus empowering everyone to fully function in their God-ordained role of disciple makers as commanded in Matthew 28:19–20 (*NIV*, 1978/1984). In fact, Dave Ferguson, president of the national church planting ministry

Exponential, identified permission giving as one of the most important pillars for spiritual

leaders to multiply more leaders (Ferguson & Bird, 2018). A characteristic identified through the

interview process was that every embedded group, including staff and some senior pastors,

expressed reservations for taking steps toward making disciples until they received permission

from someone else in the organization. The perception of organizational restraints, whether real

or not, acts as birth control for an organization's efforts to multiply new disciples. Perhaps some

organizational members simply hold the perception and never actively seek personal permission,

though they've been given general organizational freedom. For this reason, following the

example of Jesus in Matthew 28:19–20, leadership must be very clear and direct with every

organizational member when they bestow freedom and empower people to actively pursue

DMMs.

Goal Setting

The next recommendation is that organizational leadership implement a culture of goal

setting. Hawkes et al. (2022) explained some of the reasons goal setting is so effective for

behavior change:

> The mechanisms by which goals work are: (1) they direct attention towards behaviors
>
> that are goal-relevant, (2) specific goals allow individuals to regulate their effort in
>
> relation to the difficulty of the task, and (3) they affect an individual's persistence, as
>
> effort is maintained until the goal is attained. (p. 2)

While goal setting as an individual characteristic is simplistic in nature, marking a culture

through the practice of goal setting requires a deliberate methodological approach to

communication that centers on the practice of goal setting as an inherent aspect of most

organizational functions. For instance, some of the disciple-making subcultures witnessed during

site visits utilized a methodological approach proposed by Smith and Kai (2011) that concluded every meeting, whether a worship service, small group meeting, or ministry working group with practice and goal setting. Therefore, these subcultures within each site were comfortable with goal setting and utilized the practice to encourage behavior change. One important note to assist in maximizing the effectiveness of goal setting was discovered when Conner et al. (2022) found positive behavior change with one or two goals but diminished change with three or more goals at a time.

Accountability

The next recommendation is that organizational leadership implement the practice of loving accountability. Site visits revealed the primary methodological communication at all three sites was the Sunday morning worship experience. None of these worship experiences included any personal accountability for congregation members, an aspect that means any small groups from these sites would be forced to implement a form of accountability that their leadership did not model on a regular basis. Again, Smith and Kai (2011) offered a methodological approach that inherently included loving accountability for any group meeting. While every meeting concluded with practice and goal setting, every meeting commenced with loving accountability for the new item for which goals were set the week prior. The accountability was not a surprise to group members who knew the following week they would be asked to share their progress on implementing the new lesson into their daily lives.

Create Fishing Holes

The next recommendation is that organizational leadership deliberately create and resource fishing holes for members to practice what they have been trained to do. The term *fishing hole* refers to Matthew 4:19 (*NIV*, 1978/1984) where Jesus says, "Come, follow me, and I

will make you fishers of men." The current church paradigm for two of the three sites required members to exit the church facilities or sanctioned events to actively pursue evangelism or disciple making. The Virginia Church deliberately purchased a commercial facility that housed basketball courts, indoor soccer fields, and a gym as an attempt to invest in a fishing hole for their congregation. While the Virginia Church facility as a fishing hole is a grandiose example, other examples could be a neighborhood cookout, an outreach study, a skate park, alcoholics anonymous, or even a coffee shop. The point of a fishing hole is to attract people, and in particular, spiritually hungry people. The crux of the fishing hole problem is designing events that will attract non-Christian people who are searching for spiritual fulfillment in their lives.

Invest in Generational Ministry

The next recommendation is that organizational leadership invest in the paradigm of spiritual generational ministry. The concept of spiritual generations is derived from 2 Timothy 2:2 (*NIV*, 1978/1984) where Paul, speaking to Timothy, says, "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others." While an attractional model of church seeks to draw large crowds of people who may hear and receive the Gospel message, a generational ministry seeks to reach large amounts of people through people who have been trained to multiply the Gospel message (Chan & Beuving, 2012; Gallaty & Swain, 2020). Generational ministry is not simply something a church does; a generational ministry is a transformative paradigm in which an organizational culture exists. The application of generational thinking will spur countless methodological changes such as counting the number of baptisms to counting the number of unique baptizers or perhaps celebrating congregation members who have reached four generations of disciples. As a generational ministry paradigm encapsulates the organization, church members will begin to see the world

through a new lens, often considering how they can affect disciples four generations away,

disciples they will likely never personally encounter. This concept of reaching people without

ever personally meeting them was a completely foreign paradigm at all three sites and is likely

indicative of the American church writ large.

Re-Design Methodological Approaches

The next recommendation is that organizational leaders strategically consider how they

can re-design their methodological approaches to church so they can more effectively

communicate the precise message about disciple multiplication they wish to convey. As has been

argued throughout this work, the current methodological approach to church in the Western

context often communicates an influential message that is contradictory with the desired end

state of most church organizations. Understanding the message communicated through our

methods is critical; however, the willingness to break centuries' old tradition in an effort to

become more congruent with the ministry methods of Jesus is perhaps the most difficult and

important task faced by the modern American church. Once desired end states are clearly

defined, methodological approaches should be strategically and deliberately implemented to

achieve the goal. Failure to transform methodological approaches to communicate more

effectively is akin to telling a child they should eat their vegetables, then feeding the child only

candy, and upon learning of the discrepancy, continuing to feed candy because that is simply the

tradition of the family.

Build Ministries with Lay Members

The next recommendation is that organizational leaders build ministries with lay

members. While offering discipleship training through the ethnographically informed site visits,

one church provided numerous individuals for training; however, every person present was a

paid church staff member. To train only paid staff members communicates a message of professional elitism and ultimately undermines the organization's efforts to affect the behavior of all individuals in the organization, whereas developing ministry leaders through the laity and maintaining the leaders as non-paid lay members communicates a message of self-efficacy to the organization (Bandura, 2002). In fact, some churches have a senior pastor who maintains a part-time secular job, a situation that presents a phenomenal opportunity for the senior pastor to model how congregation members can make disciples in the workplace. When all staff are full time at the church, an inherent disconnect occurs between the professional clergy and those they are asking to alter behavior. The situation creates a context whereby the professional clergy require actions of their organizational members that they, as the professionals, do not first do themselves. This once again brings us back to the recommendation that all leaders first model the behavior they expect from their members.

Paradigm Shift: Names not Numbers

The next recommendation is that organizational leaders deliberately pursue a paradigm shift to individual names rather than numbers. Bill Smith, a very experienced International Mission Board (IMB) missionary, explained that people within growing DMMs talk about people by name whereas people who are not seeing movements talk about programs and tools (personal communication, November 3, 2021). His point was that disciple making is inherently an intimate relationship experience and when the practice is relegated to a programmatic experience, multiplication fails to form. This recommendation is inherently connected with the discussion of technique, as most organizational leaders in the western context strive within the paradigm of thinking bigger is better, often wondering how to create a system to more efficiently mass produce disciples (Ellul & Merton, 1964). However, a paradigm shift to names rather than

numbers recognizes that the most efficient way to make disciples is to follow the model of Jesus: go slow with a few, grow them deep, and equip them to do the same with others who will also do the same with others.

Leader-Led Counterculture

The final recommendation is that organizational leaders initiate a leader-led counterculture in their own church. The current membership at each site maintains people who joined the organization for certain amenities offered by the church. If organizational leaders decided to programmatically implement every recommendation in this study, many of the amenities that initially drew the members would be withdrawn rather quickly. This would represent what amounts to a bait and switch and would likely instigate a mass exodus from the organization. However, all the recommendations in this study can be immediately implemented into a subculture in the church, and the subculture should be led by current organizational leaders.

As the new subculture gains momentum and members, those who had originally joined the organization for certain amenities will be afforded the opportunity to willingly invest into the new subculture for a different set of amenities that are in line with the church's disciple-making ministry goals. The subculture of disciple multiplication will inherently bring new members into the church through natural ministry functions; however, those new members will only be introduced to the subculture of disciple making at the church, thus growing the subculture to eventually become a larger counterculture to the original organizational culture. It is important that the subculture be led by current organizational leaders in order to maintain unity within the body, as the current leadership will be able to maintain a leadership presence within both cultures. Without the presence of current organizational leadership in both cultures, as the

subculture grows to an equal counterculture with the original culture, a schism is likely and would ultimately be detrimental to both cultures.

Site Recommendation Example

One example of a wholistic site recommendation was presented to the Kansas City Church during my site visit. While the recommendation was uniquely tailored to the strengths and weaknesses of that individual church, the principles were universal and are applicable to most organizations in a western context. To begin, the church presented approximately 10 to 15 small rooms in the basement of the building that had been transformed from offices to living room style meeting rooms. The meeting rooms had couches, carpet, and a familial ambiance that completely removed any commercial context once the doors to the rooms were closed. The first recommendation was to add a television to every room and facilitate a live feed of the Sunday morning worship experience to the rooms.

Next, I recommended that the church leadership create a training group where the senior pastor would model how to use the Smith and Kai (2011) methodological approach to a worship meeting. In essence, the methodological approach would have a trained leader who would initially engage a small group in socialization where members are allowed to share their praises and burdens of the previous week. The leader would then lead the small group in prayer, followed by loving accountability, and then vision casting for generational ministry. Then the group would watch the live feed of the sermon that was being presented just above them in the building. Following the sermon, the small group leader would help the group practice anything new they had just learned. Finally, the small group leader would assist group members in setting goals for the upcoming week.

This construct inherently demands the preacher consciously tailor the message to present

concepts that would facilitate immediate practice of something followed by goal setting. While any theological concept can still be the focus of the message, the simple tools acquired or designed by the organizational leadership become invaluable at this point. Also, by initially holding the small groups in living room atmospheres within the church building, the new subculture pays recognition to the former traditions and preconceived notions of some people who perceive church as only taking place within a commercial religious structure. This methodological approach gently walks people from the current culture into a newly established subculture of small group church.

The next recommendation focused on the large auditorium type sanctuary that inherently opposed the common desire for close intimate community that was expressed through the interviews. I recommended that the leaders remove the row style pew seats and replace them with 12-seat dining room type tables throughout the sanctuary. A rough estimation of size revealed that approximately the same number of people could fit into the sanctuary with a properly laid out floor plan of tables. The table concept would immediately usher in a deeper sense of community. Also, the table concept would allow the church to replace the commercialized communion contraptions with a real loaf of bread and a bottle of wine at each table, a situation that exponentially increases the intimacy of the Lord's supper.

Next, I recommended that they redesign the stage in the sanctuary, providing the opportunity to make the preacher's background look very similar to the living room environments in the basement. This would facilitate a type of modeling behavior from the organizational leader that was preaching on any given Sunday, as the preacher would be in a similar environment to most people watching the live feed. Also, this would facilitate a sense of community on the live feed throughout the message and Lord's supper. Finally, I recommended

that each table in the sanctuary have a trained leader, similar to the meeting rooms in the basement, who would facilitate using the Smith and Kai (2011) methodological approach. This would not only implement key aspects of the subculture in the main sanctuary but would also facilitate the potential start of a new small group as table comradery grew. A cohesive sanctuary table would in essence have all the necessary skills and resources to be transplanted into the living room of any apartment complex at any time, thus turning the Sunday morning sanctuary into a missionary training ground.

Finally, I recommended that the coffee shop located in the church building remain open before and after Sunday morning services. The coffee shop presented a potential fishing hole and missionary training location. In essence, organization members could bond with one another, deepening their sense of community, in the coffee shop but could also practice their evangelism techniques. People could use the communal coffee shop as a place to further practice the new skills they just learned in their small groups. Practicing in the safety of the coffee shop on church premises would be an excellent step toward building the self-efficacy for doing the same thing in a coffee shop in their local neighborhood.

Transferability of Recommendations Outside a Religious Context

The previous recommendations were presented specifically for the three participating churches in this study; however, many of the findings and recommendations in this study have applicability in a diverse range of secular contexts. For instance, Hooker et al. (2022) explained,

> Although primary care is an ideal setting in which to address behavioral influences on health, clinicians spend little time discussing preventive care, including lifestyle counseling. There is a dearth of comprehensive training and evidence-based resources to educate clinicians in how to effectively engage with patients about these topics. (p. 1)

In an attempt to transform the organizational culture of a government office, I utilized several of the previous recommendations to implement a paradigm change through a methodological approach to communication that hinged on social learning in small intimate community. Transformative behavior changes were first modeled by organizational leaders who then presented simple, reproducible steps to mimic the modeled behavior. Organizational leaders then implemented practical exercises for every new behavior to foster experiential learning until individuals were competent and confident with the new behaviors. Though these recommendations were made for a church, implementation into a government context resulted in a dramatic increase of productivity, organizational morale, and procedural efficiency that ultimately saved the government untold amounts of money. The nuances of the recommendations are tailored to churches; however, with only minimal adaptations these recommendations could positively influence organizational cultures ranging from banks, to factories, theaters, or even laboratories.

Delimitations and Limitations

Given the nascent nature of research focused on influencing individual behavior change toward disciple multiplication, the scope of this novel inquiry could have been extensive. Delimitations were carefully constructed to define the boundaries of the study to increase the potential for discovery of coherent data and subsequent findings. This study had several limitations that posed potential weaknesses that were outside my control. This section will first describe the delimitations of site selection, participants, leadership, lay members, and theological understanding before addressing the limitations of design, analysis, and sample.

Delimitations

Sites

Since the lack of DMMs was an American church problem that transcended denominational lines, the potential site selections for this study were diverse. However, in an effort to isolate the communication phenomenon apart from extenuating circumstances, the delimitation parameters specified that the sites needed to be of similar size, evangelical in nature, have an expressed desire to initiate a DMM, have demonstrated investment of resources toward initiating a DMM, and represent geographical diversity within the United States. Without these delimitations, extenuating circumstances, such as church size, could have clouded the results. For instance, a church of 15 people would likely communicate in a far different manner than a church of 50,000. As a novel inquiry into the problem, this inquiry needed to understand the situation and isolate potential factors supporting the lack of DMMs; however, circumstances such as disparity in church size could have hindered efforts to isolate individual factors.

Participants

Delimitations were also utilized with participants to help focus on communication to effect behavior change. In particular, all participants in this study voluntarily participated in what they understood was a research project focused on discipleship. The fact that participants willingly pursued research on discipleship isolated organizational communication as the object of study rather than a participant's inherent lack of desire to make disciples. Therefore, most participants already wanted to make disciples but had not changed their behavior to do so, a situation that begged the question why. This allowed me as the researcher to focus on the influence of organizational culture on each individual and intricately inspect how the culture was affecting the individual's behavior.

Leadership

A deliberate choice to exclude the influence of the senior leader was made as an attempt to assist in the inquiry of organizational culture. A great deal of research already existed on leadership and the influence of a charismatic leader; therefore, by delimiting this aspect, I was permitted to remain focused on the influence of the message once the charisma of the senior leader was removed (Crouch, 2008; Dempsey & Earley, 2016; Friedman, 2018; Rainer & Geiger, 2011; Sharot, 2018; Sinek, 2013). While personality and charisma play a unique part in an organizational culture, this inquiry delimited the influence of leadership to the embedded group titled staff. This inquiry was still able to discern the communication influence of organizational leadership without specifically focusing on one charismatic personality.

Lay Members

The next delimitation in the study was implemented through the methodological choice to incorporate three embedded groups in the comparative case study approach. Through the utilization of three embedded groups, lay members were segregated from both church staff as well as lay leaders, thus isolating a membership group that did not receive financial remuneration or leadership benefits from the church. This delimitation facilitated a glimpse of common behaviors for each group followed by inquiry into the specific motivations for those behaviors.

Theological Understanding

The delimitation of theological understanding was important for this study as certain theological beliefs could derail the discovery process of the project. For instance, certain ecclesiology dictates specific functions pertaining to the methodological approach to church; any challenge to the status quo liturgical structure could be perceived as an afront to core religious values. Similarly, the cessationist theological persuasion would preclude inquiry into the

perception of hearing the voice of God. Therefore, denominational theological understanding was delimited to only utilize general evangelical theology when necessary to guide the study.

Limitations

Design

The first limitation is derived from the design of the study. Golafshani (2003) explained, "Qualitative research uses a naturalistic approach that seeks to understand phenomena in context-specific settings" (p. 600). As a qualitative approach to the inquiry, this research first sought to understand the situation and make sense of the phenomenon within the context. The design was limited from the production of quantitative data as Golafshani pointed out, "Quantitative researchers employ experimental methods and quantitative measures to test hypothetical generalizations, and they also emphasize the measurement and analysis of causal relationships between variables" (p. 597). Therefore, the use of a qualitative design is an inherent limitation from measuring causal relationships between variables.

Analysis

The second limitation was pertaining to the data analysis of the research. As qualitative research often produces vast amounts of data, coding was utilized to make sense of the information presented in this project. While the subjective nature of coding qualitative data presents a limitation, rigorous standards were applied to mitigate the limitation to a palatable level. As Morse et al. (2002) asserted, "Without rigor, research is worthless, becomes fiction, and loses its utility" (p. 14). Therefore, the presentation of quality data with the highest level of credibility was important and was achievable as Keyton (2019) recommended,

> Researchers use triangulation, or the use of several kinds of methods or data, to bring
>
> credibility to their findings. If the analysis of two or more methods of data collection or

two or more investigators point toward the same conclusion then validation is enhanced.

(p. 250)

Ultimately, the triangulation through collection of data from four distinct methods produced nearly identical codes and themes, thus creating additional credibility for the research and mitigating the limitation of analysis. In addition to triangulation, credibility was increased with member validation (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Keyton (2019) explained member validation as "the process of taking the research findings back to individuals from whom data were collected or were observed. Research participants can comment on, even edit, the preliminary research report" (p. 251). Therefore, every effort was made to mitigate the limitation of analysis and ultimately increased credibility.

Sample

The final limitation was pertaining to the sample of interview participants. In particular, participants from the staff and lay leader embedded categories were limited and offered minimal diversity. However, the requirement to provide nine staff volunteers and eight lay leaders often meant that every staff member and most church lay leaders would need to participate, thus reducing the ability to select for diversity. This limitation was outside my control and simply represented an unmitigated limitation. Though this limitation was unmitigated, the lack of diversity in the sample population did not likely skew the data and did not have any clear derogatory effects on the research.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings from this inquiry not only extend previous research but also offer novel contributions; however, the delimitations and limitations of the study inherently create opportunities for future research on the topic of communicating to effect individual behavior

change toward disciple multiplication. For example, the study could be replicated with different site delimitations to include membership sizes, non-evangelical sites, multi-ethnic and multi-lingual sites, or even foreign missions churches operating in the United States. The study could be replicated with participants from an active DMM rather than American churches that have not yet realized a DMM. Many opportunities exist to replicate this study, with slight alterations, followed by comparison of the findings from this study with the replicated study; however, additional opportunities for future research have arisen from these findings and merit mention. This section will discuss future research possibilities focused on confidence, methodological approaches to digital media, methodological approaches to traditional worship services, the influence on self-efficacy from the perception of hearing God's voice, and effective elements of communication for disciple multiplication.

Confidence

The first recommendation for future research concerns a person's confidence to conduct disciple-making activities. One finding from interviews in this study revealed that a fair number of people expressed being very confident in their ability to multiply disciples right now despite never having successfully done so, not having an example of a successful model, and having no plans or intentions to attempt such behavior in the near future. Future research could identify a population of people who express being confident in their ability to multiply disciples and systematically inquire as to the origin of their confidence. This research could use a qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods design; however, each design will render different types of findings, all of which could be valuable. For instance, a qualitative design could better understand the phenomenological origins of a participant's confidence within the context of their individual narrative (Patton, 2009; Punch, 2014; Waters et al., 2022). A quantitative design could

measure the difference in relationship between confidence and behavior change, thus quantifying confidence (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Naturally, a mixed methods design could provide findings that bridge the qualitative and quantitative gap.

Methodological Approaches to Digital Media

The second recommendation for future research pertains to methodological approaches to digital media for the American church to influence behavior change in parishioners. This topic is relatively untouched despite the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 pushing most American churches to rely upon online services. Findings in this study found the methodological approach to digital media in all three sites was nearly completely focused on moving a site visitor to a database of recorded sermons or providing information for Sunday morning worship services. Future research could use a population of digital content consumers from an organization and determine effective digital methods to communicate for behavior change outside of sermon consumption or Sunday services. This study could be conducted through a quantitative design to measure the relationship between multiple digital communication strategies and individual behavior change. For instance, a small group leader could be used to proactively send digital messages that encourage certain behaviors. This data could be compared to a group that does not use digital messages, and the compared data could reveal a measurement of effectiveness associated with the digital message sending. Future research on this topic should seriously inquire about the effectiveness of interactive digital media in effecting behavior change, particularly within online communities and the role of social learning through an online social environment.

Methodological Approaches to Traditional Worship Services

The third recommendation for future research pertains to the effectiveness of different methodological approaches to traditional Christian worship services. This research could be

conducted through different populations but should specifically seek to understand the stated desire of the organization coupled with a precise audit of the methodological approach being used to affect the outcome of that desired end state. For instance, a Catholic church, Methodist church, or even Mennonite church could be used because this research would seek to understand how each organization attempts to use their methodological approach to traditional worship services to communicate to achieve their organization's goal. This study could be conducted through a qualitative design to assist in understanding the specific phenomenon and the context in which it takes place. Findings from this type of inquiry could likely extend the research conducted on the method being the message as was found in this study.

Influence of the Perception of Hearing God's Voice on Spiritual Self-Efficacy

The fourth recommendation for future research pertains to the influence of a person believing they heard the voice of God. Aside from Baesler (2002), little inquiry into prayer as a communication medium has been conducted, thus leaving this topic relatively unresearched. In fact, this study represents a novel contribution to the literature pertaining to the influence of a person's perception of hearing God's voice on their self-efficacy to make disciples. While such a relatively untouched topic presents countless qualitative study opportunities, some valuable quantitative opportunities also exist. In particular, a quantitative design could be used with a population of people who perceive to hear God's voice to measure the relationship between hearing and changing behavior. A population of people who do not perceive to hear God's voice could be measured using a self-efficacy instrument, then trained how to hear the voice of God, then remeasured using the same self-efficacy instrument to determine the change in self-efficacy after being trained.

Effective Elements of Communication for a Disciple Making Movement

The fifth recommendation for future research is to more intricately research each of the elements of communication for disciple making that were highlighted in this study. For instance, social learning was highlighted as an influential element for effecting individual behavior change but a future study could isolate the element of social learning that measures the relationship between social learning and behavior changes within a religious context. Similarly, outcome expectation was highlighted by Bandura (1995a) as an influential element of behavior change; however, history is full of Christians who changed their behavior only to increase suffering and receive martyrdom. Therefore, an inquiry into outcome expectation within the context of religious behavior change could identify a difference between temporal and spiritual benefits.

Summary

This academic inquiry started with a recounting of a successful disciple-making movement that saw 158,993 new church plants and 1,738,143 baptisms in a country that severely persecuted Christians, and all within 10 years (Smith & Kai, 2011, p. 21). While the Ying Kai case study was impressive, as of 2021 there were at least 122 similar Christian DMMs where at least 1,000 new believers had been baptized within 2 years (Discipleship.org, 2021; Trousdale et al., 2018; Watson & Watson, 2014). Unfortunately, none of the known DMMs in the world appear to be taking place in Western churches, with a most notable absence in the American church despite concerted efforts to use successful ministry models (Wilson et al., 2015). This glaring problem undergirded the overall investigation; however, the purpose of this ethnographically informed, comparative embedded case study was to understand the lack of DMMs for congregations at three evangelical churches representing the East Coast, Midwest, and West Coast of the United States.

The theories guiding this study were Latour's actor–network theory and Bandura's social cognitive theory as they provide a theoretical framework to understand the influence of culture on the creation of meaning followed by the influence of meaning on individual behavior. The primary research question that guided this study asked, How can a church organization communicate to increase disciple multiplication? To answer this research question, a qualitative approach was used with data collected through site visits to the three participating sites, a digital media review, an artifact review, and 75 personal interviews. Data from each method were descriptively coded, inferentially coded, and then analyzed for patterns and themes.

This study found substantial cultural influence on the organizational culture of all three churches, with a common theme of commercialism throughout all three sites. Despite unique organizational visions and rhetoric, nearly identical methodological approaches to core functions of the organizations existed between the three sites. The methodological approaches to disciple making at all three sites failed to engage elements of the social cognitive theory that are proven to influence individual behavior change. Additional findings revealed that the primary desire of organizational members is to be engaged in small intimate community, an aspect of organizational practice that is relegated to secondary importance after the large Sunday worship service. Findings revealed that a majority of organization members desired a mission that was greater than any individual, a clear vision of disciple multiplication, simple tools to assist their efforts in making disciples, and modeled behavior from organizational leaders.

The primary recommendation from this study was to ontologically transform the organization's methodological approach to disciple making to focus most of the organizational communication through small, intimate community. The primary message to be communicated through small community should be a narrow message focused on mission, predicated by a

tangential model of expected behavior first provided by organizational leadership. Additional recommendations included training versus teaching, providing clear freedom to all organizational members, incorporating loving accountability into the methodological approach of all church activities, and training people to hear the voice of God. A site recommendation example was provided to model how multiple recommendations could be synergistically implemented to create a wholistic solution that could quickly, but carefully, transition an organizational culture to a generational discipleship paradigm.

Overall, this study used proven communication theoretical constructs to identify deficiencies in the organizational communication of three American churches. While none of the participating churches in this study saw successful DMMs, this study revealed that transformation of organizational culture in an American church could ignite the behavior change needed for each participating site to realize their disciple-making goals. However, contrary to the current American church paradigm, this transformation of organizational culture is not likely to take place through a strategic programmatic effort but rather, as Jesus modeled, this transformation will take place as the organizational leaders begin to model the desired behavior and lead a subculture of disciple makers within their current organizational construct. Church leaders should dedicate themselves to consistent prayer, deliberately seek to hear the voice of God, train others to hear the voice of God, and obey whatever He tells them. When leaders model this surrendered behavior, the power of the Holy Spirit moves through their human relationships, and the influence of the SCT elements moves people to become more congruent with the desires of the Lord.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Informed Consent Form

DISCLOSURE: This interview is for research and educational purposes. Participation in this interview is strictly voluntary. You may choose not to participate in this interview at any time.

CONFIDENTIALITY: All data obtained from participants will be used for educational purposes and will only be reported in a professional format or for future research. This research will only be used by Jeff McDaniel. If there is a need for your information to be further processed, the participant will be consulted for further permission to be granted.

PROCEDURES: In order to participate in this study, the participant must have a Christian faith, be a member of a church participating in this study, and be willing to discuss their faith and church with the interviewer and talk about his/her disciple making efforts and desires. The participant must be at least 18 years of age. The participant must volunteer to participate in the study. No payment for this interview will be tendered and should not influence the responses of the participant. The interview will be audio and/or video recorded. The participant should know that the interview may take up to 1 hour.

PURPOSE: Jeff McDaniel who is a doctoral candidate at Liberty University is conducting a study on: *How can American Churches communicate to more effectively multiply disciples?*

PARTICIPANT CONSENT (To be read to the participant before the interview): *I acknowledge that Jeff McDaniel has explained to me the purpose of this research and the intended outcome of this interview concerning my Christian faith, church membership, and disciple multiplication. I understand that I will be asked to participate in a face-to-face interview with the researcher on a voluntary basis. I understand that the researcher will ask me personal questions about my experiences pertaining to my faith and disciple making. I also acknowledge that all interviews will be audio and/or video recorded. I understand that all audio/video recordings will be used for research purposes only. I know that I may refuse to answer any question asked, and that I may discontinue participation at any time. I also understand that I am volunteering to participate in this study, and lack of payment*

for participation will not affect my responses as I will strive to give answers openly and honestly. I also verify that I

am at least 18 years of age. I am aware that I can seek further information about this study by contacting Jeff

McDaniel at (email address) or (phone number).

I also acknowledge that I meet all of the criteria to participate in this study including (please initial):

- Meeting this study's definition of a Christian (*A person who openly acknowledges faith in Jesus Christ)*_____
- A member of an American church that is participating in this study_____
- Being willing to talk to the interviewer about my faith, church membership, and disciple making efforts_____
- Being willing to have the interview audio recorded and/or video recorded _____
- Being at least 18 years of age. _____

By signing this, I acknowledge that I am fully capable of participating in this study, meet all of the participant

requirements, and understand the purpose of this study and how it will be conducted.

Signature: _____   Date: _____

Name: _____

Phone Number: _____ Email: _____

Address: _____

Appendix B: Recruitment and Pre-Screening

PURPOSE: Jeff McDaniel is a doctoral candidate at Liberty University and is conducting a study on:

How can American Churches Communicate to More Effectively Multiply Disciples?

Participants are needed for a study about how a church's communication influences individual disciple-making behaviors. You may qualify to participate if you meet the following criteria:

- Meet this study's definition of a Christian: ***A person who openly acknowledges faith in Jesus Christ***
- A member of an American church that is participating in this study
- Are willing to talk to the interviewer about your faith, church membership, and disciple making efforts
- Are willing to have an interview audio recorded and/or video recorded concerning your involvement with your church as well as your disciple making efforts
- Are at least 18 years of age

This interview is for research and educational purposes. Participation in

this interview is strictly voluntary. You may choose not to participate in this interview at any time. The participant should know that the interview may take up to 1 hour. The participant should also know, that should he/she choose, his/her identity may stay anonymous.

Individuals who complete the interview will not be compensated but will play a part in advancing God's Kingdom on earth.

You may set up an interview by asking church staff to help you make an appointment with an interviewer OR by contacting Jeff McDaniel at (email address).

Appendix C: Demographic Questions Leading the Interview

Section A-Participant Demographic Questions:

1. Name:
2. Age:
3. Marital Status:
4. Family:
5. Born (State):
6. Occupation:
7. Level of Education:
8. Personal Hobbies:

Section B-Christian Demographics:

1. How long have you been a Christian?
2. What is your denominational affiliation?
3. Are there doctrinal beliefs in your church that you do not agree with? Please explain.
4. What is your definition of a disciple?
5. Have you led someone else to the Lord? (how many)
6. Have you baptized someone? (how many)
7. Have you discipled someone?
8. What does the spiritual practice of reading your bible look like for you?
9. What does the spiritual practice of prayer look like for you?
10. What are the 5 most important things you think a brand new Christian should know?
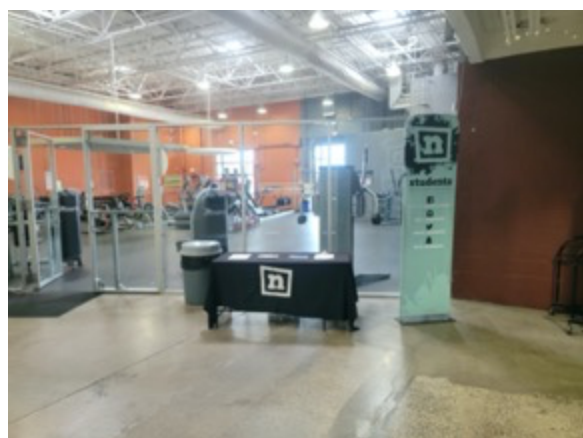
Section C-Participant Questions:

The interview questions as presented in Chapter Three commenced following sections A and B
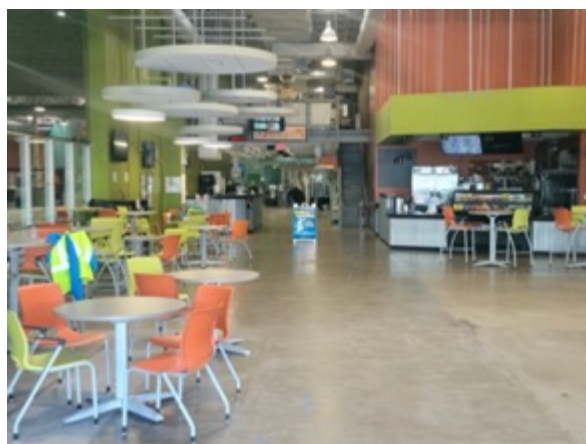
of the demographics questionnaire.

Appendix D: Symbols from the Virginia Church
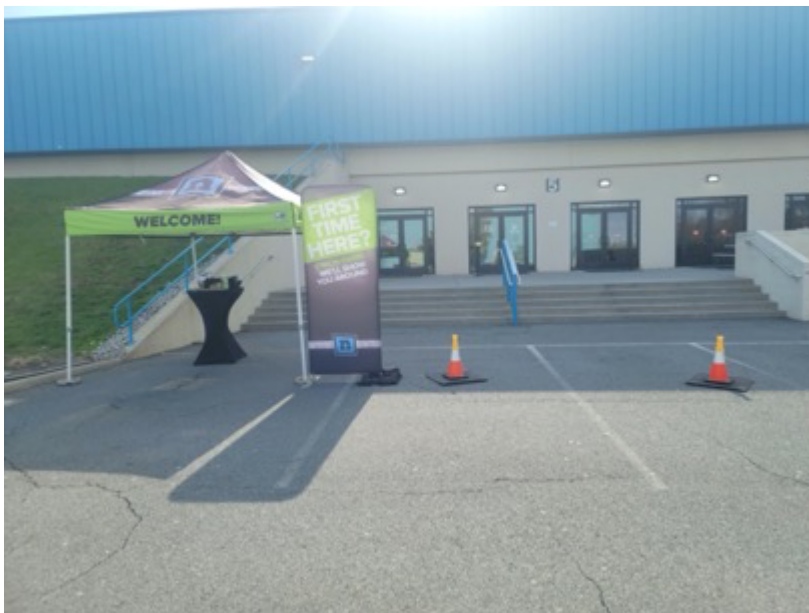
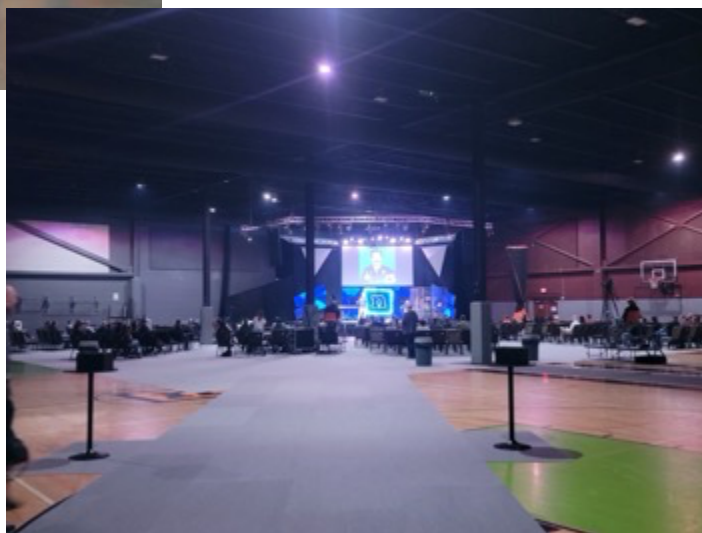Site 1: Virginia Church Exterior

Site 1: Gym

Site 1: Coffee Bar

Site 1: Indoor Soccer Fields

Site 1: Baptistry

Site 1: Worship Center

Site 1: Baptism Collages 2017–2021

Appendix E: Symbols from the Kansas City Church

Site 2: Church Property

Site 2: Neighboring School
and Shared Parking Lot

Site 2: Coffee Shop

Site 2:
Sanctuary

Site 2: Sanctuary Lighting

Site 2: Sanctuary Seating

Site 2: Staff Hallway Lined
with Dry Erase Task Board

Appendix F: Symbols from the Washington Church

Site 3: Church Property

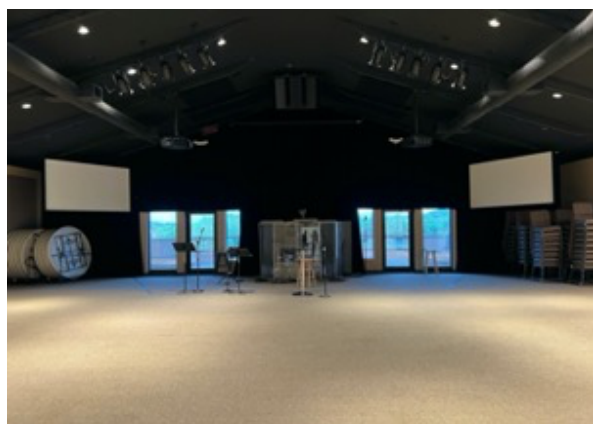Site 3: Church Foyer with Inspirational Discipleship Quotes

Site 3: View of Main Sanctuary

Site 3: Sanctuary Lighting

Site 3: Additional Smaller Sanctuaries

Appendix G: Communication Artifacts

Organizational Communication

Outreach Events

Communication of Vision

Appendix H: Structure for Site Visits

To discover the full extent of influence from outside actors on the culture of an

organization, site visits utilized eight elements as a structure to guide each site visit. While the

eight elements offered organizational bins for genres of data, they also acted as catalysts to direct

intentional efforts to personally view organizational mechanisms from each bin. For instance, the

architectural makeup bin guided me to not only critically review the overall organizational

property but also to focus on elements such as the parking lot, the décor inside the facility, and

the functionality of the architecture in such instances as a coffee shop or other commercial

aspects. Ultimately, using the eight elements provided sound structure that allowed for

qualitative license to make sense of the dynamic network of influencing actors at each site. The

eight elements used to structure each site visit were as follows:

1. Architectural Makeup

2. Flow of Action

3. Methodological Approach

4. Organizational Communication

5. Commercialization

6. Call to Action

7. Rhetorical Messages

8. Artifacts

In addition to the eight elements used to structure the site visits, the Johnson and Scholes

Cultural Web (JSCW, 2008) was used to inform each site visit as well. In particular, each

element of the JSCW was specifically sought out to facilitate a thorough and accurate assessment

of the current culture at each location. The elements of the JSCW used for each site visit were as follows:

1. Stories

2. Symbols

3. Rituals and Routines

4. Power Structures

5. Organizational Structure

6. Controls

Overall, the eight elements coupled with the six elements of the JSCW provided an adequate structure for each site visit to produce the necessary data required to understand how the culture was influenced by outside actors.

Appendix I: Copyright Permissions

All photos and images in this dissertation were taken by the author and are property of the author. Permission from all three sites was given to take the photos, use the photos, and publish the photos.