Florida International University

FIU Digital Commons

3-26-2021

Former Foster Youth and Their Pursuit of a College Degree

Lori Ann Gionti
lsher019@fiu.edu

Recommended Citation

FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

FORMER FOSTER YOUTH AND THEIR PURSUIT OF A COLLEGE DEGREE

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

in

ADULT EDUCATION & HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

by

Lori Ann Gionti

2021

To: Dean Michael R. Heithaus
     College of Arts, Sciences and Education

This dissertation, written by Lori Ann Gionti and entitled Former Foster Youth and Their Pursuit of a College Degree, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this dissertation and recommend that it be approved.

_____
Judith Bernier

_____
Sarah Mathews

_____
Barbara Thomlison

_____
Thomas G. Reio, Jr.

_____
Tonette S. Rocco, Major Professor

Date of Defense: March 26, 2021

The dissertation of Lori Ann Gionti is approved.

_____
Dean Michael R. Heithaus
College of Arts, Sciences and Education

_____
Andrés G. Gil
Vice President for Research and Economic Development
and Dean of the University Graduate School

Florida International University, 2021

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all of the foster youth finding their

way…keep going…you can do this.

I'm in your corner and I won't stop working on your behalf.

To my children, Amor, Steven, Christopher, Andreanna, Spencer,

Ashlee, and Dennis … keep going…you can do this.

I am honored to be your Mother.

I love you all.

To Joey, this is for you … for us.

Let's see where it takes us.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Judith Bernier, Dr. Sarah Mathews, Dr. Barbara Thomlison, Dr. Thomas G. Reio, and Dr. Tonette S. Rocco. Special gratitude goes to my chair Dr. Rocco for her guidance, support, and the many opportunities that she has given me. I am very grateful.

I have enjoyed every aspect of this journey, especially all of my doctoral colleagues. Special thanks to Chaundra Whitehead, Craig McGill, Gisela Vega, and Carolyn Meeker whom I can confide in, (roll my eyes with), laugh with, and get quick help and support when needed.

Finally, Mom & Dad, thanks for always honoring and encouraging my ambitions. I lost both of you during this doctoral journey, but I can imagine what you would be saying and which special plaque you would be choosing to honor this occasion. Oh, by the way, Mom … I am getting this degree from Florida International University, which is a University *in* Miami, not the University *of* Miami. But, thanks for bragging to your friends.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

FORMER FOSTER YOUTH AND THEIR PURSUIT OF A COLLEGE DEGREE

by

Lori Ann Gionti

Florida International University, 2021

Miami, Florida

Professor Tonette S. Rocco, Major Professor

The purpose of this collected papers dissertation was to examine former foster youth as they pursue college. Foster youth are known to attend and graduate college at a rate lower than their non-fostered peers. Understanding more about the journey of former foster youth as they pursue a college degree will help to understand what barriers are faced and what supports enhance their likelihood of enrollment and graduation.

Study #1, a structured literature review, examined the scholarly literature on former foster youth and college. Data were collected through a library database search and Google Scholar. Descriptive, demographic-type information was compiled and the article contents were analyzed to identify categories and themes. Four categories with several associated themes emerged: (a) issues that impact college success (associated themes – pre-college factors, barriers and supports, social capital/family, and mental health), (b) on-campus interventions (associated themes – delivery of programs and services and development of programs and services), (c) governmental impacts, and (d) effects of a college education on the adult outcomes of former foster youth.

Study #2, a phenomenological study, explored the experiences of 15 former foster youth as they considered, applied for, and attended college. Purposeful sampling was

used, and data were collected through interviews. Five major themes emerged: (a) college aspirations, (b) utilization of resources, (c) connections with supportive adults, (d) obstacles to completing college, and (d) confidence of success.

This dissertation will help inform policy and practice of the resource needs and gaps, particularly tuition and housing, for former foster youth and strategies that can encourage, support, and increase their college enrollment and graduation. These findings may prompt further research on foster care factors that influence college attendance and the development of evidence-based, on-campus program strategies that improve the college graduation rate for former foster youth.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

My collected papers dissertation will explore the issue of former foster youth pursuing a college degree. The background to the problem, problem statement, overarching purpose and research questions, conceptual background, prior empirical research, proposed collected papers, potential implications, and the structure of the collected papers dissertation are presented in this introductory chapter.

Background to the Problem

Across the United States, over 400,000 children are residing in foster care (Administration for Children and Families, 2019). Children enter the foster care system for a variety of reasons, and their situations evolve in a variety of ways. Some children spend a relatively short time in foster care and are then reunited with their biological parents when those parents have been able to stabilize the situation at home. Some children find *permanency* and exit foster care to a permanent placement by being adopted out of foster care or finding a permanent placement with a relative. Unfortunately, some children never reunite with their natural parents or find a permanent placement. These foster children eventually *emancipate*, or age out, of foster care and will leave the foster care system in their early adult years without the benefit of a family to help and support them (Lee & Berrick, 2014).

Approximately 20,000 foster youth age out and are discharged from the foster care system each year (ACF, 2019). Because of the breakdown of their family units earlier in life, most of these emancipated foster youth then attempt to navigate the transition into adulthood without the help of parents or significant adult connections after they leave the foster care system. Because of all of the disruptions they have experienced,

these emancipated foster youth are known to be at an increased risk for educational and social delays (Blome, 1997; Burley & Halpern, 2001; Pecora et al, 2006). These delays create a serious vulnerability for this population (Berzin, 2008), and research has long indicated that former foster youth experience poorer educational, employment, and life outcomes than youth in the general population during the transition into adulthood (Barth, 1990: Courtney et al., 2001; Okpych & Courtney, 2019; Williams-Washington, 2012). The disparitis in educational and employment outcomes for youth who age out of the foster care system can have an especially detrimental impact on a youth's ability to establish independence in their adulthood (Dworsky & Perez, 2009; Gypen, et al., 2017, Okpych & Courtney, 2019; Yu, et al., 2002).

Factors Affecting Educational Achievement for Foster Children

Life in foster care is known to have a detrimental impact on the educational achievement of a child (Bruce, et al., 2010; Burley & Halpern, 2001; Morton, 2016; Wolanin, 2005). Children enter foster care after their own family unit has ceased functioning in a way that is safe or stable for the child. Even though a foster care placement is intended to put a child in a safer place, the act of removing them from their original family disrupts the child's sense of attachment and connection (Folman, 1998; Morton, 2018). The trauma associated with the abuse or neglect, along with the separation from their family, can lead to developmental problems that affect a child's ability for, or interest in, school success (Berrick, et al., 1998: Harden, 2004; Okpych & Courtney, 2018).

Once in foster care, a child's educational advancement is jeopardized by the risk of multiple placement changes. Often, these placement changes are accompanied by a

school change. These sometimes frequent changes in school enrollment can result in delays in admissions (Legal Center for Foster Care & Education, 2008), absences, and other disruptions that affect the child's educational progress (Courtney et al., 2004; Pecora et al., 2006, 2012; Wolanin, 2005; Yu et al., 2002). These disruptions and delays naturally have a detrimental effect on the academic progress of children in foster care (Wolanin, 2005; Yu, et al., 2002). Placement changes and the ensuing school changes can also impact the foster child's relationships with key connections such as teachers, peers, teams, and coaches. Connections with teachers, coaches, and peers can be steady sources of social support that children in foster care desperately need for continuity (Barker & Adelman, 1994; Wolanin, 2005,), yet these relationships are regularly severed and lost.

These placement disruptions and other foster care factors can contribute to foster children having lower academic achievement than non-fostered children (McMillen & Tucker, 1999). Compared to children in the general population, foster children are twice as likely to repeat a grade (Day, et al, 2011), and foster children are also more likely to experience suspension and expulsion than their peers who are not in foster care (Courtney et al., 2007). It is no surprise, then, that at the high school level, foster youth have significantly lower graduation rates than their classmates who are not being reared in foster care (McMillen & Tucker, 1999; Courtney et al, 2007; Wolanin, 2005). The lack of educational achievement creates difficulties for youth who are aging out of the system and transitioning into adulthood.

Problem

Regardless of their high school level or graduation status, some youth in foster care exit the system when they turn 18, and become adults according to the law. Some

4

states offer foster youth the choice to stay connected to the foster care system beyond age 18 (Courtney & Hook, 2017; Okpych & Courtney 2020). These youth who choose to stay connected to the foster care system must meet certain school (enrolled in high school, GED, college, or vocational program) or work (employed 80 hours per month or participating in an employment promoting program) requirements in order to qualify for "extended foster care" and associated benefits (Florida Department of Children and Families, 2020). Whichever path an older foster youth takes, at some point in their early adulthood these youth leave the system without the systemic support they received while in foster care, and they are typically not prepared with the independent living skills necessary to successfully navigate on their own (Courtney et al., 2001; Merdinger, et al., 2005; Wolanin, 2005). Additionally, emancipated foster youth are often left without key people for emotional support, guidance, and financial and practical assistance. Their non-fostered counterparts generally enter young adulthood with parents and families who help them transition out of high school and into college or a job. Parents typically provide the emotional support (Emerson, 2006) and guidance as well as the financial support for housing, daily needs, and transportation needs. Former foster youth who have aged out of the system do not receive these parental social and practical supports, and the lack of support leaves them at a distinct disadvantage for achieving a successful transition into an independent adulthood (Okpych & Courtney, 2017; Pecora et al., 2006). Since a key component to an independent adulthood is a college education (Baum & Ma, 2007; Okpych & Courtney, 2014; Planty et al., 2007), the former foster youth's tendency toward educational problems only magnifies their difficulties during their transition to adulthood.

Before proceeding further with this introduction chapter, it may be useful to clarify the terms that will be used to refer to foster youth who have emancipated, or aged out, of the system. Throughout the literature addressing this population, several terms are used: *emancipated foster youth* (e.g., Williams & Washington, 2012), *former foster youth* (eg. Courtney, et al., 2007; Dworsky & Perez, 2009), and *foster care alumni* (e.g., Okpych & Courtney, 2020; Rios & Rocco, 2014). For the present dissertation, these three terms are used interchangeably and refer to an individual who resided in foster care as a youth and was still in foster care when they reached legal adulthood at the age of 18.

Purpose of Collected Papers

The over-arching purpose of the collected papers dissertation is to examine former foster youth as they pursue a college degree.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide this collected paper dissertation:

1. How is the issue of former foster youth pursuing a college degree discussed in the related literature?

2. What were the perceptions and experiences of former foster youth as they considered, applied for, and attended college?

Bioecological Model

The conceptual framework for the collected papers dissertation is taken from the work of developmental psychologist, Urie Bronfenbrenner. Bronfenbrenner (1979) wrote that the existing human development concepts of his time were limited and located people only in terms of their "social address" (p. 17), or the social setting, from which they came. Believing that all elements of the surrounding environment affect a person's

development, Bronfenbrenner (1979) developed a framework comprised of four socially

organized systems (micro-, meso-, exo-, and macro-) that guide and influence human

development. His original work known as ecological systems theory continued to evolve,

and it was updated (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994) to include a chronosystem, which

involves the element of time or timing along with a biological notion that considers how

the individual and the environment interact with and affect each other. Because of the

additional elements of timing and the biological notion, ecological systems theory is now

widely referred to as the biological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner &

Ceci, 1994). Details of the five ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979;

Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994) as well as applications important to former foster youth

are presented below.

Microsystem

The microsystem is the immediate and direct environment in an individual's life.

Family, teachers, classmates, neighbors, and others who have direct contact with an

individual are all a part of the microsystem. A microsystem is comprised of these

individuals as well as the settings in which these direct social interactions take place. The

individual is not merely a participant of the interactions within the microsystem, but the

individual also helps to shape and construct the interactions and experiences in the

microsystem setting.

For children placed in foster care, these immediate/direct environments and

interactions experience changes, thus they encounter a new microsystem to navigate.

Caseworkers and social service workers are added to the child's microsystem. Obviously

the parent or caregiver changes when a child is removed from a home, but often other key

relationships such as teachers, tutors, coaches, neighbors, and friends are also left behind.

Even after an initial entry into the system, placement disruptions are common in foster

care (Julianelle, 2008), so the microsystem elements (including school) may continue to

change as the foster child moves from home to home, affecting the child's emotional and

educational development.

For foster youth who have aged out of the system, major changes occur within

their microsystem of immediate relationships and setting. Not only did they encounter

major changes during their years in the foster care system, but they are now tasked with

navigating the world as emerging adults without the typical family or close relationships

to help and support them as they make decisions about higher education and careers. The

frequent change may also affect their ability to connect with others and form deeper

relationships within their microsystems that will help them through this stage in life

(McCormick et al., 2011; Roisman et al., 2004).

Mesosystem

While the microsytstem involves interactions between individuals and those

immediately around them, the mesosystem is comprised of the interactions and relations

between the elements of the microsystem with each other (not the individual). For

example, parents may interact with teachers, parents interact with doctors, or a child's

friends may interact with each other. Whether positive or negative, these interactions

have an indirect impact on the individual.

For a child in foster care, the mesosystem contains additional layers defined by

the interactions between birth families and the new individuals in the child's microsystem

after foster care placement. Caseworkers interact with the birth parents as well as the

8

foster parents, and these interactions certainly have an impact on the foster children and their placements. Because these interactions in a foster care case are often contentious (Rhodes, et al., 2001; Taylor & Quinlan, 2014), emerging adults leaving the foster care system may be at a disadvantage for developing a sense of community or teamwork. They may also lack age appropriate conflict resolution and relationship negotiation skills (Burley & Halpern, 2001; Casey Family Programs, 2003).

Exosystem

The exosystem refers to the situations or settings that affect an individual, even though they are not directly involved. For children in the foster care system, events situated in their exosystem can have a major effect. For example, in 2018, 36% of children entering the child welfare system were placed in substitute care because of the drug or alcohol use of their parent (Administration for Children & Families, 2019). Although the child might not have been directly involved with the drug use, the activity has a significant impact on the child. Changes and inconsistencies in the exosystem system can impact a foster child's development through feelings of helplessness and resentment. Even legal and social policy can have an impact on the exosystem of a child in foster care. As youth age out of the foster care system, they may have either additional opportunities or additional challenges depending on current policy or on current program funding. The policy and program issues are well outside the direct interactions of former foster youth, yet they experience a significant impact from the decisions of others.

Macrosystem

The macrosystem involves the broader contexts, or culture, in which an individual lives. Macrosystem contexts include socioeconomic status, workplace of the individual's family, nationality, ethnicity, race, and heritage.

Many of these social markers or identities may be changed or confused for a child in foster care. A child in foster care may be placed with a family of a different race or ethnicity, and placement in a family of a different race or culture may cause some confusion about norms or customs or even daily patterns. A child may be placed in a home with a different economic status, and that could create the observance of different opportunities in the new family. A foster child placed in a new school with a different racial balance needs to make some adjustments from where they were before.

For youth leaving foster care, financial statuses, neighborhoods, and peer groups often change as they now have to make it on their own. The change of socioeconomic status may cause them to be in a lower economic class without the knowledge of how to navigate a social system for appropriate help and support.

Chronosystem

The chronosystem encompasses change or consistency issues during life and contains the patterns and timing of events and transitions. For children in foster care, the age of removal from their original home may affect the types of difficulties they face as a result of the foster care placement (Zorc et al., 2013). The length of time in foster care may also play a role in the level of college readiness that a former foster youth possesses (Julianelle, 2008).

Historical trends in society are also considered part of the chronosystem. The trend in public policies (Okpych, 2020) mandating assistance for former foster youth, as

well as the increase in campus support programs (Dworsky & Perez, 2009; Geiger et al., 2018) are examples of sociohistorical circumstances that are impacting the higher education pursuits of former foster youth.

Figure 1.1

Bioecological Model for Children in Foster Care.
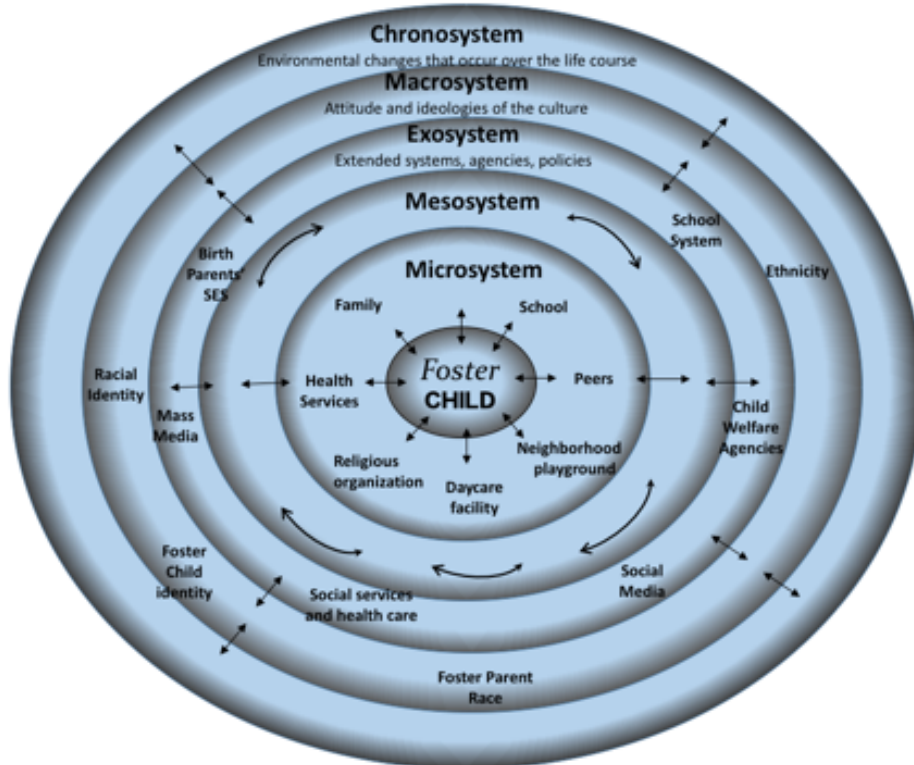
Note. Adapted from "Ecological Models of Human Development," by U. Bronfenbrenner, 1994, *International Encyclopedia of Education* (2nd ed.), *Vol. 3.* Oxford, UK: Elsevier and "Nature-nuture Reconceptualized in Developmental Perspective: A Bioecological Model," by U. Bronfenbrenner and S. Ceci, *Psychological Review, 101*(4), 568.

This present dissertation supposes that certain aspects of a former foster youth's higher education pursuit are influenced by their experiences before and during their time in the child welfare system. Thus, the research methods are designed with this

conceptual framework in mind in order to allow for the inclusion of pre-emancipation factors.

Empirical Research on Former Foster Youth and Higher Education

Empirical research investigating the higher education experiences of former foster youth is fairly recent. By the 1980s, studies were beginning to look at former and emancipated foster youth and their overall educational and life outcomes (Barth 1986; Kraus, 1981; Timberlake, et al. 1987), but these studies did not focus directly on college or higher education. The late 1980s through the early 2000s saw new legislation aimed at better outcomes for former foster youth including: the 1986 Independent Living Initiative (Public Law 99-272) with amendments in 1990 and 1993, the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 (Public Law 106-272), and the Education and Training Voucher program as part of the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Amendment of 2001 (Public Law 107-33). The laws addressing the higher education needs of foster youth may have drawn attention from researchers and began to expand the research interests in the college outcomes of former foster youth.

The body of research on former foster youth and their higher education outcomes is expanding and has revealed significant disparities between fostered and non-fostered youth. Blome (1987) found that foster youth were significantly less likely to have a high school diploma or GED than their same age peers. A longitudinal study, "The Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth" (Courtney, et al. 2004; Courtney et al., 2007, Okpych & Courtney, 2019) as well as the "Northwest Foster Care Alumni Survey" (Pecora et al., 2006, Pecora 2012) have found that former foster youth enter and graduate from college at a rate far less than their non-fostered peers. The

prevalent research regarding the discouraging outcomes then gave rise to on-campus and support programs designed to help former foster youth succeed in college.

The expansion of these support programs has been followed by an increase of academic literature that now discusses on-campus support programs and their participants (Dworsky & Perez, 2009; Geiger et al., 2018; Hernandez & Naccarato, 2010; Unrau et al., 2020). Since the success of foster youth in college is a growing issue and much still remains unknown about specific higher education experiences and outcomes of former foster youth, the current collection of papers will add to the empirical evidence regarding the experiences of former foster youth pursuing a college degree.

Description of Collected Papers

The fulfillment of this collected papers dissertation will take place across two studies related to former foster youth and their pursuit of a college degree. The studies use different research methods; structured literature review and phenomenological inquiry. Table 1.1 presents the title, research questions, method, conceptual framework and intended publication outlet for each proposed study in this collected papers dissertation.

Table 1.1

Collected Papers

Study #1	Study #2

Title	Former Foster Youth Pursuing a College Degree: An Exploratory Examination of the Literature.	Former Foster Youths' Perceptions and Experiences Regarding the Pursuit of a College Degree: A Phenomenological Inquiry
Research Questions	How is the issue of former foster youth pursuing a college degree discussed in the related literature? Subsidiary Questions: • What does the literature discuss regarding the challenges and barriers that hinder former foster youth as they pursue a college degree? • What does the literature discuss regarding supports and strategies that help former foster youth succeed as they pursue a college degree?	What were the perceptions and experiences of former foster youth as they considered, applied for, and attended college? Subsidiary Questions: • What were the perceptions and experiences of former foster youth as they considered pursuing a college degree? • What were the perceptions and experiences of former foster youth as they applied for college? • What were the perceptions and experiences of former foster youth as they attended college? • How did former foster youth pursuing a college degree acquire social capital from institutional agents in their network?
Method	Structured literature review (Rocco, Stein, & Lee, 2003)	Phenomenology
Conceptual Framework	Foster Youth Academic Achievement Model	Social Capital
Journal	*Innovative Higher Education* (APA 7th)	*Emerging Adulthood* (APA 7th)

Potential Implications of Collected Papers

The current research has the potential of identifying currently unknown needs of former foster youth who are attempting to complete a college education. It also has the potential of providing evidence of particular components in a campus support program that have a positive impact on college graduation outcomes for former foster youth.

14

These results will be important to universities and specific campus support programs throughout the country.

My research also has the potential of identifying the current state of barriers and supports, or the perception of barriers and supports, that older and recently emancipated foster youth face when considering higher education. More knowledge about the barriers and supports affecting former foster youth in college can be important to the foster child, foster parents, independent living caseworkers, foster care advocates, teachers, high school counselors, and higher education professionals, and policymakers.

Structure of Collected Papers Dissertation

This doctoral dissertation will follow the FIU School of Education and Human Development guidelines for the "Collected Papers" dissertation format. It will consist of the introductory chapter and a closing chapter written solely for the dissertation, as well as the two related studies outlined above which will be submitted to peer-reviewed journals. Dissertation chapters will be as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction, statement of problem, purpose statement, research questions, conceptual framework, description of the collected papers

Chapter 2: Structured literature review of former foster youth pursuing a college degree

Chapter 3: Phenomenological study of the experiences and perceptions of former foster youth as they considered, applied for, and attended college

Chapter 4: Conclusions, implications, directions for future research.

References

Administration for Children and Families (ACF). (2019). The AFCARS report: Preliminary FY 2018 estimates as of August 22, 2019 – No. 26. https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/report/afcars-report-26

Barker, L. A., & Adelman, H. S. (1994). Mental health and help-seeking among ethnic minority adolescents. *Journal of adolescence*, *17*(3), 251-263.

Barth, R. P. (1986). Emancipation services for adolescents in foster care. *Social Work*, *31*(3), 165-171.

Barth, R. P. (1990). On their own: The experiences of youth after foster care. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal, 7*(5), 419-440.

Baum, S., & Ma, J. (2007). Education pays. *The benefits of higher education for individuals and society*. Washington DC: The College Board

Berrick, J. D., Needell, B., Barth, R. B., & Johnson-Reid, M. (1998). *The tender years: Toward developmentally sensitive child welfare services for very young children.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Berzin, S. C. (2008). Difficulties in the transition to adulthood: Using propensity scoring to understand what makes foster youth vulnerable. *Social Service Review*, 82(2), 171-196.

Blome, W. (1997). What happens to foster kids: Educational experiences of a random sample of foster care youth and a matched group of non-foster care youth. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 14(1).

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development*. Harvard University Press.

Bronfenbrenner, U., & Ceci, S. J. (1994). Nature-nuture reconceptualized in developmental perspective: A bioecological model. *Psychological review*, *101*(4), 568.

Bruce, E., Naccarato, T., Hopson, L., & Morelli, K. (2010). Providing a sound educational framework for foster youth: A proposed research agenda. *Journal of Public ChildWelfare*, 4(2), 219-240.

Burley, M., & Halpern, M. (2001). Educational attainment of foster youth: Achievement and graduation outcomes for children in state care. Washington State Institute for Public Policy.

Casey Family Programs. (2003). Assessing the effects of foster care: Early results from the Casey national alumni study. Casey Family Programs. https://caseyfamilypro-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/media/AlumniStudy_US_Report_Full.pdf

Courtney, M. E., & Hook, J. L. (2017). The potential educational benefits of extending foster care to young adults: Findings from a natural experiment. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *72*, 124-132.

Courtney, M. E, & Piliavin, I., Grogan-Kaylor A., & Nesmith A. (2001). Foster youth transitions to adulthood: A longitudinal view of youth leaving care. *Child Welfare*, 80(6), 685-717.

Courtney, M.E., Dworsky, A., Ruth, G., Havlicek, J., Perez, A., & Keller, T. (2007). Midwest evaluation of the adult functioning of former foster youth: outcomes at age 21. Chicago:Chapin Hall Center for Children.

Courtney, M. E, & Piliavin, I., Grogan-Kaylor A., & Nesmith A. (2001). Foster youth transitions to adulthood: A longitudinal view of youth leaving care. *Child Welfare*, 80(6), 685-717.

Courtney, M. E., Terao, S., & Bost, N. (2004). *Midwest evaluation of the adult functioning of former foster youth: Conditions of youth preparing to leave state care*. Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago.

Day, A., Dworsky, A., Fogarty, K, & Damashek, A. (2011). An examination of post-secondary retention and graduation among foster care youth enrolled in a four year university. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 24(2), 1-7.

Dworsky, A. & Perez, A. (2009). Helping former foster youth graduate from college through campus support programs. *Children and Youth Services Review 32*. 255-263.

Emerson, J. (2006). Strategies for working with college students from foster care. *E-source for College Transitions*, 3(4), 3–4.

Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF). (2020, December 10). Independent living flowchart. https://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/independent-living/docs/Flowchart3.pdf

Geiger, J. M., Piel, M. H., Day, A., & Schelbe, L. (2018). A descriptive analysis of programs serving foster care alumni in higher education: Challenges and opportunities. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *85*, 287-294.

Gypen, L., Vanderfaeillie, J., De Maeyer, S., Belenger, L., & Van Holen, F. (2017). Outcomes of children who grew up in foster care: Systematic-review. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *76*, 74-83.

Harden, B. J., Clyman, R. B., Kriebel, D. K., & Lyons, M. E. (2004). Kith and kin care: Parental attitudes and resources of foster and relative caregivers. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *26*(7), 657-671.

Hernandez, L., & Naccarato, T. (2010). Scholarships and supports available to foster care alumni: A study of 12 programs across the US. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *32*(5), 758-766.

Julianelle, P. (2008). The McKinney-Vento Act and children and youth awaiting foster careplacement: Strategies for improving educational outcomes through school stability. *Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth*.

Kraus, J. (1981). Foster children grown up: Parameters of care and adult delinquency. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *3*(1), 99-114.

Legal Center for Foster Care and Education. (2008). Blueprint for change: Education success for children in foster care (2ed) . Retrieved from: Casey Family Programs, www.casey.org

Lee, C., & Berrick, J. D. (2014). Experiences of youth who transition to adulthood out of care: Developing a theoretical framework. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *46*, 78-84.

McCormick, C. M., Kuo, S. I. C., & Masten, A. S. (2011). Developmental tasks across the lifespan. *The handbook of lifespan development*, 117-140.

McMillen, J. C., & Tucker, J. (1999). The status of older adolescents from exit of out-of-home care. *Child Welfare*, 78(3), 339-360.

Merdinger, J. M., Hines, A. M., Osterling, K. L., & Wyatt, P. (2004). Pathways to college for former foster youth: understanding factors that contribute to educational success. *Child Welfare*, *84*(6), 867-896.

Morton, B. M. (2016). The power of community: How foster parents, teachers, and community members support academic achievement for foster youth. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, *30*(1), 99-112.

Morton, B. M. (2018). The grip of trauma: How trauma disrupts the academic aspirations of foster youth. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, *75*, 73-81.

Okpych, N. (2012). Policy framework supporting youth aging-out of foster care through college: Review and recommendations. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *34*(7), 1390-1396.

Okpych, N. J., & Courtney, M. E. (2014). Does education pay for youth formerly in foster care? Comparison of employment outcomes with a national sample. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *43*, 18-28.

Okpych, N. J., & Courtney, M. E. (2017). Who goes to college? Social capital and other predictors of college enrollment for foster-care youth. *Journal of the Society for Social Work and Research*, *8*(4), 563-593.

Okpych, N. J., & Courtney, M. E. (2018). Barriers to degree completion for college students with foster care histories: Results from a 10-year longitudinal study. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 1521025118791776.

Okpych, N., & Courtney, M. (2019). Longitudinal analyses of educational outcomes for youth transitioning out of care in the US: trends and influential factors. *Oxford Review of Education*, *45*(4), 461-480.

Okpych, N. J., & Courtney, M. E. (2020). The relationship between extended foster care and college outcomes for foster care alumni. *Journal of public child welfare*, *14*(2), 254-276.

Okpych, N. J., Park, S. E., Sayed, S., & Courtney, M. E. (2020). The roles of Campus-Support Programs (CSPs) and Education and Training Vouchers (ETVs) on college persistence for youth with foster care histories. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *111*, 104891.

Pecora, P. J. (2012). Maximizing educational achievement of youth in foster care and alumni: Factors associated with success. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *34*(6), 1121-1129.

Pecora, P. J., Kessler, R. C., O'Brien, K., White, C. R., Williams, J., Hiripi, E., …Herrick, M. A. (2006). Educational and employment outcomes of adults formerly placed in foster care: Results from the Northwest Foster Care Alumni study. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 28, 1459-1481.

Plakhotnik, M. S. (2005). Human Resource Development Practices in Russia: A Structured Literature Review. *ERIC Online Submission*. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED492223.pdf

Planty, M., Provasnik, S., & Daniel, B. (2007). High School Coursetaking: Findings from The Condition of Education, 2007. NCES 2007-065. *National Center for Education Statistics*.

Rhodes, K. W., Orme, J. G. and Buehler, C. (2001). A comparison of family foster parents who quit, consider quitting, and plan to continue fostering. *Social Service Review*, 75(1), pp. 84-114.

Rios, S. J., & Rocco, T. S. (2014, July). From foster care to college: Barriers and supports on the road to postsecondary education. *Emerging Adulthood*.

Rocco, T. S., Stein, D., & Lee, C. (2003). An exploratory examination of the literature on age and HRD policy development. *Human Resource Development Review*, *2*(2), 155-180.

Roisman, G. I., Masten, A. S., Coatsworth, J. D., & Tellegen, A. (2004). Salient and emerging developmental tasks in the transition to adulthood. *Child Development*, *75*(1), 123-133.

Skobba, K., Meyers, D., & Tiller, L. (2018). Getting by and getting ahead: Social capital and transition to college among homeless and foster youth. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *94*, 198-206.

Taylor, B. J. and McQuillan, K. (2014). Perspectives of foster parents and social workers on foster placement disruption. *Child Care in Practice*, 20(2), 232–249.

Timberlake, E. M., Pasztor, E., Sheagren, J., Clarren, J., & Lammert, M. (1987). Adolescent emancipation from foster care. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, *4*(3-4), 116-129.

Unrau, Y. A., Dawson, A. W., Anthony, J. C., Toutant, T. M., & Hamilton, R. D. (2020). An exploration of life outcomes for college graduates with foster care histories by race: Preliminary results from a campus-based program. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *116*, 105108.

Williams-Washington, R. A. (2012). *Contributing factors to successful emancipated foster youth* (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation). California State University, Sacremento.

Wolanin, T. R. (2005). Higher education opportunities for foster youth: A primer for policy makers. Institute for Higher Education Policy. Washington DC.

Yu, E., Day, P., & Williams, M. (2002). *Improving educational outcomes for youth in care: A national collaboration*. Child Welfare League of Amer.

Zorc, C. S., O'Reilly, A. L., Matone, M., Long, J., Watts, C. L., & Rubin, D. (2013). The relationship of placement experience to school absenteeism and changing schools in young, school-aged children in foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *35*(5), 826-833.

CHAPTER II

STUDY #1 –FORMER FOSTER YOUTH PURSUING A COLLEGE DEGREE:

AN EXPLORATORY EXAMINATION OF THE LITERATURE

Across America, approximately 440,000 children reside in foster care (ACF, 2019). Children are typically placed in foster, or substitute, care due to abuse or neglect

from their birth parents. Children in foster care may ultimately end up reunited with a birth parent, placed with a relative, adopted, or age to adulthood in a traditional foster or group home. Nearly 20,000 foster youth age to adulthood, while still residing in a traditional foster or group home each year (ACF, 2019). They will then leave their foster home as a young adult.

Young adulthood is comprised of a combination of major transitions, new challenges, and promising opportunities (Arnett 2000, 2004; Yates & Grey, 2012). These aged-out, former foster youth then navigate into adulthood without the typical undergirding of a family unit or some other close support system, and they embark on this journey with a host of serious vulnerabilities and poor outcomes in young adulthood (Courtney, et al 2014; Pecora, et al., 2006; Rome, 2019). Educational deficits (Blome, 1997; Frerer, et al., 2013), unemployment or low wages (Hook & Courtney, 2011), homelessness (Dworsky, et al., 2013), incarceration (Jonson-Reid & Barth, 2000), and mental health challenges (Courtney, et al., 2014) are all outcomes experienced by this group of young adults at a higher rate than their non-fostered peers.

These vulnerabilities during foster care and during young adulthood make the attainment of college degree much harder for these former foster youth, and this population is far less likely than non-fostered youth to achieve a college degree (Festinger, 1983; Burley & Halpern, 2001; Dworsky & Perez, 2009; Courtney, et al. 2004, 2007; Geiger & Beltran, 2017). There are various and progressive reasons for this disparity. First, due to educational and academic setbacks (Pecora, et al 2006, McKellar & Cowan, 2011) such as placement disruptions and changing schools, children in foster care graduate high school at a much lower rate than the general population (Bruskas,

22

2008; Legal Center for Foster Care and Education, 2014). Next, for those who do graduate high school and advance on to college, former foster youth are at a higher risk of dropping out than traditional students and even other high-risk groups of students (Day, et al., 2013). This disparity is especially disheartening since foster children aspire to attend and graduate college at the same rate as their non-fostered peers (Courtney, et al, 2014). Since a key component to an independent adulthood is a college education (Baum & Ma, 2007; Planty et al., 2007), former foster youths' tendencies toward educational problems only magnify their difficulties during their transition to adulthood

In an attempt to increase the college and postsecondary attainment of this vulnerable population, federal and state lawmakers have initiated specific policies and funding for former foster youth that provide assistance to help former foster youth achieve self-sufficiency. These policies addressing the needs of emancipated foster youth enhanced prior legislation that only provided independent living assistance and education to youth while still in the foster care system.   The John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Act (FCIA) of 1999 (PL 106-169) included funding mandates toward college, vocational training, and other issues that presented challenges for former foster youth. In 2002, the Educational and Training Vouchers (ETV) Program for Youths Aging out of Foster Care was added and provides students from foster care up to $5,000 per academic year toward the cost of postsecondary education (PL 107-133). The College Cost Reduction Act of 2007 (PL 110-84) and the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 (110-315, SEC. 473) defined an *independent student* to include a student who "is an orphan, in foster care, or a ward of the court, or was an orphan, in foster care, or a ward of the court at any time when the individual was 13 years of age or older" (PL 110-315,

SEC. 473). This means that a current foster youth, an aged-out foster youth, or anyone who entered foster care at age 13 or older is automatically considered independent on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FASFA) application, thus qualifying them for a full Pell Grant. The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (PL 110-351) further extends the federal supports available to transitioning foster youth past the age of 18 until the age of 21.

Realizing that a former foster youth may still face some unpaid college expenses, many policymakers at the state level have also addressed the additional needs of former foster youth entering and attending college. States have increasingly enacted tuition assistance policies to cover unmet tuition and fees after other sources of financial aid have been applied, some state have full tuition waivers for emancipated foster youth, and several states have legislative mandates designed to increase the number of former foster youth enrolled in college (Emerson & Bassett, 2010; Sarubbi et al, 2016).

Over time, specifically addressing the needs of foster youth and their college pursuits also became more prominent among child welfare organizations, independent living agencies, and advocacy organizations. This increased focus also attracted the attention of higher education professionals, thus on-campus initiatives and programs began to spring up in colleges and universities. At the 2013 National Convening on Foster Youth and Higher Education, 44 on-campus programs across 12 states presented information regarding their support services (Jones, 2013). Only three years later, a 2016 survey identified 100 four-year colleges and universities in over 30 states that report a program serving foster care alumni (First Star, 2016), and a report by the Aging Out

Institute (2018) reviewed over 100 higher education institutions that have undergraduate

level programs to support youth who have aged out of foster care.

Foster Youth Academic Achievement Model

Utilizing previous research on student achievement (Marzano, 2003) and the

academic success of minority and at-risk students at the high school and college level

(Horn & Carroll, 1997), Rios and Rocco (2014) explored the perceptions and experiences

of youth who have aged out of foster care regarding their own educational and college

pursuit journeys. Rios and Rocco (2014) then categorized the various barriers and

supports affecting former foster youth as they complete their K-12 school years. The

foster youth academic achievement model (Rios & Rocco, 2014) proposes that opposing

forces (barriers vs. academic supports) generating from both internal and external issues

impact the academic achievement of older and former foster youth through high school

and their college journey.

Based on this model, external barriers can be peer related, school related, or foster

care related. Internal barriers can generate from a foster youth's own negative emotions

and behaviors. External academic supports can be school related, foster care related, and

community related. Internal supports derive from the foster youth's individual success

and strengths. Since there is natural overlap between areas, this model also accounts for

the interaction and relationship between the various external barriers as well as between

the external supports.

Figure 2.1

Foster Youth Academic Achievement Model
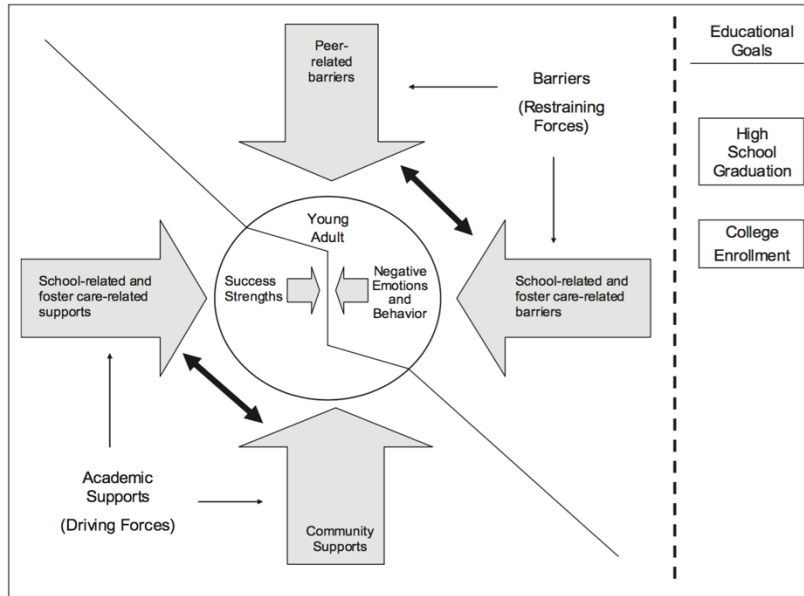
From "From Foster Care to College: Barriers and Supports on the Road to Postsecondary Education," (Rios & Rocco, 2014), *Emerging Adulthood*, p.8.

The topic of foster youth and their college pursuits has bridged multiple disciplines: social work, education, mental health, policy, program evaluation, and others. This broad range of interest creates the need for multidisciplinary, comprehensive research exploring this topic. A structured, wide-ranging look at the available literature in a variety of disciplines can help identify themes regarding the issue of former foster youth and their pursuit of a college degree.

Purpose

The purpose of this structured literature review (Rocco, et al., 2003) was to identify issues related to former foster youth pursuing a college degree by systematically examining the literature. This literature review was guided by the research question: How is the issue of former foster youth pursuing a college degree discussed in the related literature? Subsidiary research questions are:

- What does the literature discuss regarding the challenges and barriers that hinder former foster youth as they pursue a college degree?

- What does the literature discuss regarding supports and strategies that help former foster youth succeed as they pursue a college degree?

Structured Literature Review

A structured literature review (Rocco, et al., 2003) was used to identify, select, and examine literature related to former foster youth pursuing a college degree. A structured literature review is a systematic way of identifying and selecting pertinent sources from the literature across multiple disciplines. Utilizing this method allowed for the detection of issues (Rocco et al., 2003) surrounding former foster youth and college pursuits.   This prescribed approach to the literature collection and analysis can reduce the risk of researcher bias and increase reader confidence in the comprehensiveness of the literature search.

Data Collection

The section describes the steps (Collins, 2015) utilized for data collection: (a) material identification, (b) publication selection, (c) Google Scholar and (d) data organization.

Material Identification

A university research librarian was consulted to assist with database selection and appropriate search terms. In order to obtain a broad, multidisciplinary range of literature (Harzing, 2013; Walters, 2007), databases associated with the following disciplines were selected: (a) education, (b) psychology, (c) social service and social work, and (d) policy. Six databases were selected as representative of these disciplines: ERIC (ProQuest), APA PsycInfo, Social Science Database, Applied Social Science Index & Abstracts (ASSIA), Social Service Abstract, and Academic Onefile. The various database searches were executed using a combination of search terms, or keywords, including "foster youth," "former foster youth," "emancipated foster youth," "aged out foster youth," and "foster care alumni" paired with "college," "university," and "higher education." All database searches were conducted during a two-day period, completed on July 2, 2020, in order to obtain a truly comprehensive search of the literature at one specific point in time. The complete database search yielded a total of 686 records. Table 2.1 details the number of articles identified from each of the six utilized databases. Once records were identified through the search strings noted above, the entries comprised of the citation and abstract were imported into Mendeley, a research/reference software tool, for data management. At this stage, duplicate entries were eliminated, which produced a final total of 423 identified records from the database search.

Table 2.1

Number of Articles Identified by Database

Database	Number of articles identified
Eric (ProQuest)	131
APA PsycInfo	93
Social Science Database	71
Applied Social Science Index & Abstracts (ASSIA)	112

Social Service Abstract	122
Academic OneFile	<u>157</u>
Subtotal	686
(Duplicates)	<u>-263</u>
Total	**423**

Publication Selection

The downloaded entries from the material identification stage were then carefully scrutinized by scanning the title, publication source, and the abstract. Those that were included in the final sample for analysis met the following criteria:

Criterion 1: Publications must have been published in a peer-reviewed journal or by a policy research group known to utilize the same standards for expert authors and academic scholarship.

Criterion 2: Each publication had to fully discuss both former foster youth *and* college as a combined, related topic. A mere mention of one topic within a publication centered on the other did not meet this criterion for inclusion.

Criterion 3: The complete English language, full text article had to be accessible.

Several papers did not meet criterion 1 and were eliminated. These papers included: (a) non peer-reviewed reports such as Florida's Children First (2014) and Congressional Research Service (2019), (b) dissertations which populated because of their publication through institutional repository platforms such as Digital Commons, and (c) articles in practitioner journals such as Unrau (2011). Articles that did not meet criterion 2 were eliminated such as Morton (2017) and Singer et al., (2013) that discussed foster youth aging to adulthood but only mentioned college. Likewise, criterion 2 caused the elimination of Zetlin & Weinberg (2004), the often-cited Barth (1990), and others that

discussed the academic achievement of foster youth but only mentioned former foster youth in college as one of the stages. Criterion 3 did not result in any eliminations.

Google Scholar

After the initial material identification and publication selection stages were completed, Google Scholar was also searched. Google Scholar is extensively used as an academic search engine due to its wide ranging access to articles (Guesenbaurer, 2019), convenience, and users' familiarity (van Noorden, 2014). Google Scholar served the purpose of a single-source, broad search that may have identified additional publications within the previously searched disciplines and disciplines not represented in the original search. Google Scholar was searched on July 27, 2020 and February 15, 2021 utilizing the same keyword parameters as the database searches. 13 additional articles were identified by the Google Scholar searches.

Data Organization

The full-text PDFs of the 78 articles selected from the steps above were downloaded for access and analysis. Certain *demographic* or descriptive-type data was gathered such as date of publication, title, authorship, journal, and journal's field of study. This information was organized utilizing a spreadsheet software.

Data Analysis

Once the selected, full-text articles had been downloaded, the reading and analyzing process began. In this type of literature review, the "literature is the data" (Torraco, 2005, p. 360), thus the details of each publication are carefully organized and analyzed.

Once the sample was analyzed for the demographic, descriptive-type information, a paper copy of each article was scanned for "raw information" (Joffe & Yardley, 2003, p. 57) with highlighting and margin notes utilized to document notable keywords, phrases, and topics that were relevant to this study. The articles were read in ascending chronological order to get a sense of how, and if, the literature developed over time. In order to get a "sense of the whole" (Creswell, 2009), after all articles were read, the highlights and notes were summarized for each individual article and then cross examined, looking for associated topics across all articles as a whole (Plakhotnik, 2005). These emergent clusters of categories and topics (Patton, 1990) became the identified categories and themes that emerged from the sample of articles. The articles were then grouped together by those categories and themes and re-scanned together to confirm that the themes were properly identified. The results from these demographic-type and thematic analyses were then used to make meaning of the literature relative to the research questions and conceptual framework.

Description of Sample

The 78 articles in the sample were comprised of fifteen (15) non-empirical studies (literature reviews, specific program reports, and policy reports) and sixty-three (63) empirical studies (30 qualitative studies, 20 quantitative studies, and 13 mixed method studies). Data sources for the empirical studies included college level registration data, state-level financial aid data, interviews and surveys with higher education program staff, and interviews and surveys with former foster youth.

Articles by Publication Date

The earliest article in the literature sample was published in 2001. Table 2.2

displays the detailed breakdown of articles by one-year and five-year timespans

beginning in 2001. Five-year timespan totals are included to more easily view the number

of articles over time. This breakdown of article dates reveals that the topic of former

foster youth and higher education in the academic literature had a steady, but only slight,

increase in the time spans from 2001 – 2015. The timeframe of 2016-2020 has a

significant jump in the number of articles, with 50, roughly 64%, of the total publications.

The years 2017 and 2018 had the highest number of publications, with 11 and 17

respectively. The 2000s and the early 2010s saw a wide expansion of federal and state

policies and campus-based programs and supports directly addressing the needs of former

foster youth on campus. Perhaps the data generated from the expansion of policies,

programs, and supports is one reason for the increase in publications in 2017 and 2018.

Table 2.2

Number of Articles by Publication Date

Publication Date	Number of articles in sample
2001	1
2002	0

Year	Count
2003	1
2004	0
2005	3
2001-2005	**5**
2006	1
2007	0
2008	3
2009	2
2010	3
2006-2010	**9**
2011	3
2012	4
2013	4
2014	3
2015	0
2011-2015	**14**
2016	5
2017	11
2018	17
2019	10
2020	7
2016-2020	**50**
Total Articles	**78**

Article by Publication Type

The sample of 78 articles were published in 33 different journals. These journals represent a variety of fields including social services, child welfare, higher education, law and policy, young adults, and family consumer sciences. Table 2.3 details the number of articles by journal scope and timespan. Nearly half of the articles (37) were published in social services journals, the second highest number of articles (22) were in higher education journals. Eleven (11) articles were published in child welfare journals. Journals with a focus on child welfare are being reported separately from the social service journals because of their more specific focus on the public child welfare system

which means that child abuse or neglect are involved, rather than social service and social work more generally. Thus, 70, roughly 90%, of the articles were published in the three fields of social services, higher education, and child welfare. Table 2.4 details the top journals by number of articles with the associated date range of publication.

Table 2.3

Number of Articles by Journal Scope and Timespan

Journal field	2001-2005	2006-2010	2011-2015	2016-2020
Social Services/Social Work	-	2	9	26
Higher Education	1	2	1	18
Child Welfare	2	4	1	4
Law/Policy	-	1	1	1
Mental Health/Psychiatry	1	-	-	1
Young Adults	-	-	2	-
Family Consumer Services	1	-	-	-
Total by 5-year timespan	**5**	**9**	**14**	**50**

Even with the increase over time of articles published in higher education journals, social work journals published the majority of articles related to former foster youth and college for the most recent 2016-2020 timespan. This may indicate that even with the increased attention from the higher education community, young-adult aged, former foster youth pursuing college and other postsecondary education continue to be viewed as a topic for social work based on the extra level of challenges brought on by their time in the child welfare system.

Table 2.4

Top Journals with Number of Articles and Date Range

Journal	Number of articles	Range of publication dates

1. *Children and Youth Services Review*	29	2009-2020
2. *New Directions for Community Colleges*	7	2018
3. *Child Welfare*	5	2003-2019
4. *Journal of Public Child Welfare*	3	2008-2020
All other 29 journals	34	2001-2020
Total Articles	**78**	

Findings

Four broad categories emerged from the literature regarding former foster youth and college: issues that impact college success, on-campus interventions, governmental policy impacts, and the effects of a college education on the adult outcomes of former foster youth. Within these categories were several themes. Issues that impact college success broke down further into four themes: pre-college factors, barriers and supports, social capital/family, and mental health. Likewise, on-campus interventions included the themes of *delivery* of programs and services and *development* of programs and services. Table 2.5 details the number of articles associated with each category by five-year timespan. The five-year timespan grouping is used again to more easily view the category numbers over time. Forty-one (41) articles focused on issues that affect college success for foster care alumni. Twenty-four (24) articles discussed the topic of on-campus support programs specifically geared toward former foster youth. The topics of governmental policies and the effects of a college education on adult outcomes emerged eight (8) and five (5) times respectively in the selected publications.

Table 2.5

Article Categories by 5-Year Timespan

Category	2001-2005	2006-2010	2011-2015	2016-2020
Issues that Impact College Success				
Pre-College	4	0	7	2
Barriers/Supports	0	2	2	13
Mental Health	0	0	0	6
Social Capital/Family	0	0	0	5
On Campus Interventions				
Delivery of Programs and Services	0	4	1	14
Development of Programs and Services	0	0	0	5
Governmental Policies	1	2	2	3
	0	1	2	2
Effects of a College Education on Adult Outcomes				
Total Articles				78

Issues that Impact College Success

Forty-one (41) articles discuss factors that affect college success for former foster youth. In this sample of articles, overall *success* is considered to be the completion of a college program and the attainment of a degree (Davis, 2006; Day, et al., 2011). There are various stages that lead to the completion of that degree such as college admission, academic achievement, persistence, and final completion/graduation, and these articles break down into four themes that address specific aspects in those stages toward ultimate completion.   Thirteen (13) articles discuss pre-college considerations that have an impact on college success for foster care alumni. Seventeen (17) articles discuss the impact of various barriers that former foster youth face and supports that they can access to

overcome barriers. Six (6) articles point to the level of family involvement and social capital that emancipated foster youth have access to while on their college journey, and another five (5) articles address the impact that mental health can have on the success of a former foster youth as they pursue a college degree.

Pre-College

Pre-college issues addressed college aspirations and expectations, readiness for college engagement, and pre-college programs for former foster youth. Educational aspirations are the amount of education that someone would like to achieve (Reynolds & Pemberton, 2001), and educational expectations are a more realistic view of actual possibility (Kirk & Day, 2011). Studies have historically found that the college aspirations of foster youth equal their non-fostered peers, but enrollment of foster youth has lagged (Courtney et al., 2004; McMillen, et al, 2003, Wolanin, 2005). In contrast, Kirk and Day (2011) found that youth in foster care report significantly lower aspirations and expectations than youth who are not in foster care.

College readiness factors for foster youth can consist of educational aspirations, academic readiness, academic motivation, general coping ability, and resilience (Batsche, 2014; Kirk & Day, 2011; Unrau, 2012). In 2005, nearly two-thirds (63.8%) of foster care alumni enrolled in college feel that they were "not very well" (p. 884) prepared for college by the foster care system (Merdinger et al, 2005). Another study reports that youth aging out of care self-report college readiness indicators such as academic confidence, social motivation, receptivity, general coping at levels similar to the general freshman population, but lower academic performance that the general population (Unrau et al., 2012).

Because college admission rates are known to be lower for foster youth (Courtney et al., 2014; Wolanin, 2005), pre-college interventions have been developed to encourage and enhance enrollment. Pre-college programs can take place on high school campuses (Kirk, et al., 2013), through educational advocates (McMillen, et al., 2003) or as seminars or summer camps on college campuses (Kirk & Day, 2011; Jackson et al., 2019, Unrau et al., 2012). The National Social Work Enrichment program hosts a summer program that develops leadership skills, relationship skills, college readiness skills, and employment skills (Jackson et al., 2019). Another summer program at Michigan State University provides peer support, role modeling, and mentoring and positively impacts participants' perceptions of educational and developmental outcomes (Unrau et al., 2017).

Barriers/Supports

In this context, barriers are obstacles that limit academic achievement, limit financial and resource access, negatively impact persistence, and ultimately limit the attainment of a college degree (Davis, 2006; Okpych et al., 2020; Rios & Rocco, 2014). Supports are the services, programs, resources, and interventions that are made available to help overcome the negative impact of the barriers.

Federal educational vouchers, state tuition waivers, and financial aid policies favorable to former foster youth are all supports that largely help foster care alumni overcome barriers to their successful college pursuit (Davis, 2006; Dworsky, 2018; Okpych et al, 2020; Salazar, 2012). However, these financial supports cannot always cover housing, transportation, and other expenses. Support is needed to alleviate the barrier to stable housing (Courtney & Hook, 2017; Piel, 2018) and day-to-day and emergency-type expenses (Hernandez & Naccarato, 2010) that former foster youth may

face while attending college. Some states are offering extended foster care which allows a foster youth to remain connected to foster care benefits and a foster family into their young adult years (Courtney & Hook, 2017), which can then help with some of these day-to-day needs.

Along with financial and resource barriers, former foster youth must overcome academic and foster care-related barriers. These academic barriers to educational success for foster youth include lower academic test scores, lower GPA, higher rates of repeating grades, and lower high school graduation rates than their non-foster peers (Burley & Halpern, 2001; Courtney, et al., 2004; Okpych & Courtney 2017). Foster care-related barriers can include mental health challenges, lack of family support, and lack of emotional support (Johnson, 2019; Piel, 2018; Rios & Rocco, 2014; Salazar et al., 2016).

Supports are needed to help former foster youth succeed in college. Academic supports as displayed in the foster youth academic achievement model (Rios & Rocco, 2014) include four types: school related, foster care related, community related, and internal. When considering their educational success, foster youth both need and want supportive, caring adults who encourage their academic progress (Day et al., 2012; Haas & Graydon, 2008; Salazar et al., 2016). Academic and foster care-related barriers are decreasing with the rise of on-campus programs with structured academic and wraparound supports and dedicated staff (Johnson, 2019; Piel, 2018).

Mental Health

Early maltreatment, separation from their birth family, and placement in foster care can be very traumatic for children. This trauma puts children in foster care at a

greater risk for mental and emotional challenges, and foster children experience more

depression, anxiety, and behavioral issues than non-foster children (Morton, 2018;

Turney & Wildman, 2016). Mental health challenges for foster youth continue to the

college years with depression, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress disorder being the most

prevalent challenges (Courtney et al., 2004; Salazar 2012; Salazar et al., 2016) These

mental and emotional challenges are a significant factor that adversely affects the

successful completion of a college degree (Morton, 2018). Almost one-third of surveyed

program participants reported having a current mental health diagnosis which included

depression, ADHD, PTSD, and anxiety (Huang, et al., 2020). Even though some foster

youth have been able to establish and maintain relationships with supportive adults,

others display higher levels of avoidant attachment which results in a considerable

negative effect on persistence and the completion of a college degree (Okpych &

Courtney, 2018). Unfortunately, mental health service utilization decreases soon after

leaving foster care (Courtney et al., 2007; McMillen & Raghavan, 2009), which means

that many college-aged former foster youth are navigating college with unsupported

complex mental health needs. Campuses both with and without dedicated programs for

foster care alumni have taken notice, are taking notice and are encouraging services

through campus counseling and health centers (Hallett, 2018; Seon, et al., 2019).

Social Capital/Family

Social capital includes the resources that are known and accessible because of relational

ties (Coleman, 1998). Social capital is "what we draw on when we get others…to help us

solve problems, seize opportunities, and accomplish aims that matter to us" (de Souza Briggs, 1998). This social capital for college bound youth typically comes from parents and family, but for a foster youth, those biological family ties are often fragmented or severed. Finding these relationships within the the child welfare and school systems can help to reduce the gap from the loss of familial ties. Okpych and Courtney (2017) found that tangible supports and guidance from institutional agents such as caseworkers, foster parents, and therapists coupled with encouragement from school personnel can increase the likelihood that that foster youth enroll in college. High schools that can establish a college-going culture with supportive and well trained teachers, counselors, and leaders can create the social connections that improve the academic resilience and confidence of foster youth (Neal, 2017). Foster youth who are able to find supportive adults and then utilize that social leverage are able to better navigate the path from high school to college (Skobba et al., 2018). Supportive adults into the early college years through campus support services can help to sustain these students all the way to a college degree (Franco & Durdella, 2018). Foster care alumni experiencing success in college report that in the absence of reliable birth family members, they were able to create meaningful relationships with adults whom they can count on (Kearney, et al., 2019).

On-Campus Interventions

On-campus interventions "…help reduce barriers and risk factors that derail [foster care alumni] from achieving successful post-secondary educational outcomes." (Randolph & Thompson, 2017, pp. 602-603). These interventions are sometimes implemented as individual supports and sometimes they are offered as part of a composed program designed for former foster youth. Twenty-four articles discuss on-

campus interventions. Nineteen of the articles (79%) were published between 2016 and 2020 indicating a rapid increase of publications in recent years. The category of on-campus interventions can be broken down into two themes: *delivery* of programs and services and the *development* of programs and services.

Delivery of Programs and Services

On-campus program elements and services are the "array of financial, academic, social/emotional, and logistical supports to help former foster youth stay in school and graduate" (Dworsky & Perez, 2009, p. 256). Articles in addressing this theme discuss assessing, evaluating, and reviewing on-campus program, and the specific services that they offer to former foster youth during their quest for a college degree.

Characteristics of on-campus program services tend to center around financial and resource assistance, academic support, and mentoring/emotional support (Geiger, et al., 2018; Randolph & Thompson, 2017). For foster care alumni without financial means or know-how, financial barriers may be enough to discourage a college application. Finding financial support to attend college was ranked "important" or "very important" by 98.6% of students surveyed in an on-campus support program (Dworsky & Perez, 2009), and 68% of programs report providing financial assistance (Geiger et al., 2018). Financial assistance support through campus support programs includes help with obtaining scholarships and tuition waivers, help with the financial aid process, and housing (Dworsky & Perez, 2009; Geiger, et al., 2018; Lenz-Rashid, 2018; Randolph & Thompson, 2017; Unrau, 2017; White 2018).

Academic supports provided by on-campus support programs include academic coaching, tutoring, academic related group trainings, and a first-year course to reinforce

college skills (Geiger et al., 2018; Unrau, et al., 2017). Dworsky and Perez (2009) report that nearly all of their survey participants perceived academic support such as help with choosing a major and choosing courses as "important" or "very important. Information from 81 programs in 22 states found the most frequently occurring services available in on-campus programs for former foster youth were: (a) resource information and referral, (b) career exploration and planning, (c) financial assistance or support, (d) website, (e) coaching, and (f) academic tutoring (Geiger et al., 2018).

Mentoring and emotional support elements were also a discussed as part of an on-campus support program. Mentoring and emotional support may come through individuals such as mentors, academic coaches, and program staff. As compared to a staff-person academic coach, volunteer mentors report that they don't have access to the same knowledge of programs and services available to their mentee, nor do they have the resources for referrals when their mentee struggles with an emotional issue such as depression or low self-esteem (Huang et al., 2018). Another approach to providing emotional support for program participants is a unique space, a sort of safe space, on campus where the program students can spend time and obtain resources or information from various college departments without having to identify their unique situation all around the campus. A dedicated staff in this area could then develop a deeper relationship with these students (Hallett, et al., 2018). However, Hogan (2018) found declines in the self-reported perceptions of mental health of program participants as compared to foster care alumni students who did not participate in a campus support program. This study continued with cautions that a campus support program that

attempts to offer too much emotional support, perhaps so much that it feels like pressure, may actually have adverse effects on the mental health of the participants.

Development of Programs and Services

Articles discussing the development of on-campus programs and supports present practical and conceptual frameworks for developing and implementing programs that support foster care alumni on college campuses. Miller et al., (2017) and Miller et al., (2019) utilized a group concept mapping approach with both former and extended foster care youth who were presently enrolled or had recently stopped attending college. Eight clusters for creating an on-campus program emerged: campus awareness, advocacy, data tracking, pre-college supports, fostering family connections, academic financing, campus life, and peer/mentor supports. Much of the literature identified in this present study discusses supports related to those clusters, affirming that those are, indeed, important areas to address for former foster youth.

In other articles addressing the development of on-campus programs, a strengths perspective was explored as a theoretical framework for an on-campus support program (Geiger et al., 2016). A strengths perspective framework shows potential because of elements that align well with the unique needs of foster care alumni: (a) foster care alumni can redefine their existing identity as a foster youth, (b) a strengths perspective offers support but values the autonomy of the foster care alumni, and (c) a strengths perspective highlights the positive attributes of former foster youth in college such as resilience and perseverance (Watt et al., 2013). Other discussions of on-campus program development highlighted leadership, individualized case management, and more financial resources for basic needs such as clothing and food (White, 2018). Also discussed were

the strategies of obtaining support and funding for on-campus programs from outside of the college/university setting, leveraging all possible campus resources, and establishing an advisory council (Geiger, et al., 2016).

Governmental Policy Impacts

Eight articles published from 2001-2020 discuss governmental policies at the federal and state level that were designed to enhance opportunities for former foster youth to earn a college degree. These articles that form a legal and policy arguments can be summed up by Benedetto (2008), "When states assume a parental role for children in foster care, they also assume a constitutional duty to properly prepare youth for emancipation" (p. 410). Wolanin (2005) and Benedetto (2008) both establish cogent arguments and further recommendations for the need for the government to continue implementing policies that reduce barriers for former foster youth to succeed in college. Direct funding and tuition waivers for former foster youth are having positive effects on college persistence. The educational and training vouchers (ETV) provide direct funding for former foster youth who are pursuing a college degree and maintain satisfactory academic progress. Initial studies of California college students from foster care suggests that ETV receipt increases the odds of persistence (Okpych et al, 2020). State tuition waivers are also available to former foster youth in some states. Three studies discussing ETVs and tuition waivers found wide disparities on the benefit amounts, implementation, and management across various states (Hernandez et al., 2017; Simmel et al., 2012).

In a study assessing rural service providers' knowledge of ETVs and interaction with youth accessing ETVs, providers experienced a large number of youth who did not want to stay involved with the child welfare system when they aged to 18, and they opted

out of this benefit. The authors speculated that these youth may be trying to avoid any possible stigma from child welfare involvement or simply trying to establish their independence fom foster care (Wells & Zuns, 2009). Okpych (2012) delivers policy framework recommendations that support extending the Foster Care Independence Act (FCIA) of 1999 funding to age 25, utilizing FCIA funds to establish on-campus support programs, and adjusting the value of Educational Training Vouchers (ETVs) with the cost of college.

Not all policy recommendations and implementations involve funding such as ETVs or tuition waivers. Extended foster care, or allowing youth to remain connected to the foster care system until age 21, is associated with a 46% increase in their odds of reaching the next level of education attainment of high school graduation or the completion of one year of college (Courtney & Hook, 2017). These findings come with a strong recommendation that more states, beyond the 22 in this 2017 study, implement extended foster care for the youth in their state.

Effects of College on Adult Outcomes

Five articles discussed the effect of a college education on the adult outcomes for former foster youth. These articles spread between 2006 – 2020. Higher levels of college attainment increase the employment rate and annual earnings of former foster youth (Okpych & Courtney, 2014) as compared to other former foster youth. However, as compared to the general population with a four-year degree or higher, former foster youth with a four-year degree youth lag behind in annual earnings, perhaps indicating that foster care challenges may still exist even for those youth who have completed a college degree (Okpych & Courtney, 2014).

In a study comparing foster youth bachelor's graduates with general population bachelor's graduates, Salazar (2013) found something different. While former foster youth struggled more with mental health, job security, and had lower overall *household* incomes, *individual* incomes and employment rates were not significantly different. These lower household incomes may indicate that the former foster youth graduate is the primary or only income earner in the household (Salazar, 2013).

Jones (2010) collected educational path data for a group of foster care alumni over the course of three years. Findings indicated that students in a two-year college stay in school longer than those in a 4-year college. Additionally, more participants (including college students) reported substance use two years after discharge from foster care than those same youth reported 6 months after discharge (Jones, 2010).

Unrau et al. (2020) assessed life outcomes for former foster youth college graduates from the same university and compared outcomes by racial identity. Racial identity was found to be associated with lower outcomes in two areas: GPA and relationships with supportive people. Racial identity was not associated with different outcomes in the domains of: type of degree earned, employment, perspectives on quality of life after graduation, financial variables, types of housing or intent to pursue additional education (Unrau et al., 2020). Gillum, et al. (2016) reviewed literature that included at least one research questions related to college outcomes for former foster youth. Gillum et al. (2016) identified a total of 24 articles and found that academic performance, retention rates, and graduation rates lagged behind general population students.

Discussion

Four broad categories emerged in the literature that discusses former foster youth pursuing a college degree: issues that impact college success, on-campus interventions, governmental policies, and effects of a college education on adult outcomes. These topics provide the foundation for answering the research questions:

- What does the literature discuss regarding the challenges and barriers that hinder former foster youth as they pursue a college degree?
- What does the literature discuss regarding supports and strategies that help former foster youth succeed as they pursue a college degree?

Challenges and Barriers

The roots of these challenges and barriers can be tracked through the lifetime of a child who is placed in care. First, the trauma that can come from early maltreatment, being removed from their birth family, and placed in a foster home puts children at a greater risk for mental and emotional challenges and academic delays (Morton, 2018; Turney & Wildman, 2016). Second, A foster child is likely to experience placement changes (including school changes) during their time in foster care, which can lead to educational setbacks, lower grades, and higher rates of repeating grades (Courtney et al., 2004; Courtney et al., 2017). Third, once in middle and high school, the cumulative effects of these emotional and academic challenges continue and can lead to truancy, higher rates of suspension and expulsion, and ultimately to lower levels of high school graduation (Davis, 2006; Rios & Rocco, 2014).

Some foster children make it through all of this and graduate high school with aspirations of achieving a college degree (Courtney et al., 2005; McMillen, et al, 2003, Wolanin, 2005). At this stage, the foster youth will set out into young adulthood and their college journey without the typical levels of familial, social and emotional supports (Day, et al., 2012; Salazar et al., 2016) or financial, housing, and resource supports (Courtney et al., 2011; Piel, 2018). Ultimately, all of these challenges have a negative impact on the successful attainment of a college degree for former foster youth and a negative impact on their overall adult outcomes later in life (Okpych, 2014; Salazar, 2013).

Supports and Strategies

The articles in this literature review largely address supports for former foster youth, and the amount of this literature has rapidly increased in the last five years. Supports and strategies that are designed to increase the graduation rate for former foster youth may be implemented prior to college or during college. Some of this literature discussed academic supports throughout the school years in the forms of caring teachers, helpful counselors (Rios & Rocco, 2014), tutoring, and educational encouragement from caseworkers, foster parents, and significant adults.

The majority of the research that discussed supports in this literature review included strategies and interventions for former foster youth once they considered and applied for college. Pre-college programs are designed to increase college readiness and enrollment. These interventions include educational advocates on high school campuses and seminars and summer camps on college campuses (McMillen, et al., 2003; Unrau, 2012). Resource supports reduce the financial barriers that prevent a former foster youth

from earning a college degree. The literature discussed federal stipends and state tuition waivers as the primary benefits available. Some colleges and universities also provide housing to former foster youth (Davis, 2006; Dworsky, 2018; Okpych et al., 2020). These supports are not enough to fully sustain a former foster youth while in college, and housing and transportation options are often unstable (Courtney et al., 2011; Piel, 2018).

Once enrolled in college, former foster youth may have access to an on-campus program designed to help them successfully complete college. The literature typically discussed these programs in terms of the services provided such as financial and resource assistance (Dworsky & Perez, 2009; Geiger et al., 2018), academic support (Unrau et al., 2017), and mentoring/emotional support (Hallett, et al, 2018; Huang et al., 2018). The literature also discussed the process of program development which included overarching frameworks (Miller et al., 2017; Watt et al., 2013) and practical aspects such as obtaining funding and community support (Geiger et al., 2016).

Finally, the literature discussed supports that currently come from federal and state policies as well as suggestions for additional policies to enhance that governmental support. Federal stipends for former foster youth in college and state tuition waivers are having a positive impact on former foster youth persisting in college (Okpych, 2020). Extended foster care is also associated with positive educational outcomes in high school and early college (Courtney& Hook, 2017). Increasing the cut-off age for the federal stipendand implementing tuition waivers and extended foster care in more states were recommended as additional supports (Okpych, 2012; Courtney & Hook, 2017).

Implications

This literature review produced implications for policy, practice, and further research.

Policy and Practice

When a child enters the foster care system, they become a ward of the state. This parental role makes the state fully responsible for the well-being of that child while in care and prepared for life after foster care (Bendetto, 2008). This study revealed that some states still do not offer college tuition waivers/exemption for former foster youth. Child welfare advocates and state legislators need to be sure that their state is alleviating these financial barriers to college access for foster youth.

This study also revealed that part of the development process for on-campus programs for former foster youth entails acquiring funding. States should also be investing resources specific to the needs of former foster youth in their colleges and universities. This could entail funds for program staff and services, trainings for point-of-contact personnel who may engage with foster youth, and efforts to raise internal awareness of the needs of this group (Miller, et al., 2017).

Multiple studies addressed the mental health challenges for former foster youth. Studies also noted that campus counseling centers could not always meet the complex needs of former foster youth (Morton, 2018; Seon, 2018). Foster care workers should work with foster youth throughout their time in care with careful attention to underlying (or obvious) mental health needs. For the sake of foster youth exiting the system, resource information should be readily available and shared about outlets for mental health services and a plan for continued insurance or health care options for these

services. No foster youth, current or former, should have to do without desired mental health care.

Limitations and Further Research

The number of on-campus programs for former foster youth has rapidly expanded, and many of the studies in this literature review focused on an assessment of a particular service or intervention being offered through an on-campus program. Yet, there is still a lack of evidence-based frameworks or validated best practices that serve as a foundation for the development of on-campus programs serving former foster youth (Miller et al., 2017; Randolph & Thompson, 2017). Interventions and services need to be more widely tested across programs and colleges. Ongoing, data-heavy studies that track program participants from entry into the program through their years after college can help to assess the actual impacts of the program. Results from these ongoing studies can then be used in (a) comparative studies with outcomes of foster youth college students *not* in the program, (b) studies that compare outcomes by racial identity (Lane, 2017), and (c) studies that evaluate specific foster care factors with the program participants' college and adult outcomes.

Johnson (2019) noted that only a small number of studies regarding the college success of former foster youth are published in higher education journals, and he called for more educational researchers to take up this topic. In this present literature review, less than 30% of the articles were published in higher education journals. This presents the need for more studies published in higher education journals from educational scholars and collaborative, multidisciplinary research teams that can bridge "disparate theoretical and methodological approaches" (Johnson, 2019, p. 10).

Tuition waivers are used inconsstently across states. The present study did not

provide a concise list of states that offer tuition waivers for former foster youth nor

specific information on how states implement this benefit. Research comparing states'

tuition waiver programs and the college entrance and graduation rates (Lenz-Rashid,

2018) of foster youth between states could reveal how and if the waivers impact college

outcomes for former foster youth.

References

Administration for Children and Families (ACF) (2019). The AFCARS report: Preliminary FY 2018 estimates as of August 22, 2019 – No. 26. https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ sites/default/files/cb/afcarsreport26.pdf

Aging Out Institute. (2018) AOI higher education foster youth programs: 2018 review. https://agingoutinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/AOI-2018-Higher-Ed-Foster-Care-Program-Survey-Report-20180508.pdf

Arnett, J. J. (2000). Emerging adulthood: A theory of development from the late teens through the twenties. *American Psychologist*, 55, 469–480.

Arnett, J. J. (2004). *Emerging adulthood: The winding road from the late teens through the twenties.* Oxford University Press.

Barth, R. P. (1990). On their own: The experiences of youth after foster care. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, *7*(5), 419-440.

Batsche, C., Hart, S., Ort, R., Armstrong, M., Strozier, A., & Hummer, V. (2014). Post-secondary transitions of youth emancipated from foster care. *Child & Family Social Work*, *19*(2), 174-184.

Baum, S., & Ma, J. (2007). *Education pays. The Benefits of higher education for individuals and society.* Washington DC: The College Board

Benedetto, M. M. (2008). The key to successful independence: State-funded post-secondary educational assistance for emancipated foster youth. *John's J. Legal Comment.*, *23*, 383.

Blome, W. W. (1997). What happens to foster kids: Educational experiences of a random sample of foster care youth and a matched group of non-foster care youth. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal, 14*(1), 41−53.

Burley, M., & Halpern, M. (2001). *Educational attainment of foster youth: Achievement and graduation outcomes for children in state care*. Washington State Institute for Public Policy.

Bruskas, D. (2008). Children in foster care: A vulnerable population at risk. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing*, *21*(2), 70-77.

Coleman, J. S. (1988). Social capital in the creation of human capital. *American Journal of Sociology*, *94*, S95-S120.

Collins, J. C. (2015). Characteristics of "masculinized" industries: Gay men as a provocative exception to male privilege and gendered rules. *Human Resource Development Review*, *14*(4), 415-441.

Congressional Research Service. (2019). John H. Chafee foster care program for successful transition to adulthood. https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/IF11070.pdf

Courtney, M. E., Charles, P., Okpych, N. J., Napolitano, L., Halsted, K. (2014). *Findings from the California youth transitions to adulthood study (CalYOUTH): Conditions of foster youth at age 17*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago

Courtney, M.E., Dworsky, A., Ruth, G., Havlicek, J., Perez, A., & Keller, T. (2007). *Midwest evaluation of the adult functioning of former foster youth: outcomes at age 21*. Chicago: Chapin Hall Center for Children.

Courtney, M. E., & Hook, J. L. (2017). The potential educational benefits of extending foster care to young adults: Findings from a natural experiment. *Children and youth services review*, *72*, 124-132.

Courtney, M. E., Terao, S., & Bost, N. (2004). *Midwest evaluation of the adult functioning of former foster youth: Conditions of youth preparing to leave state care*. Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago.

Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative and mixed methods approaches*. London and Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Davis, R. J. (2006). *College access, financial aid, and college success for undergraduates from foster care*. National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NJ1).

Day, A., Dworsky, A., Feng, W. (2013). An analysis of foster care placement history and post-secondary graduation rates. *Research in Higher Education Journal, 19*, 1–17.

Day, A., Dworsky, A., Fogarty, K., & Damashek, A. (2011). An examination of post-secondary retention and graduation among foster care youth enrolled in a four-year university. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *33*(11), 2335-2341.

Day, A., Riebschleger, J., Dworsky, A., Damashek, A., & Fogarty, K. (2012). Maximizing educational opportunities for youth aging out of foster care by engaging youth voices in a partnership for social change. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *34*(5), 1007-1014.

de Souza Briggs, X. (1998). Brown kids in white suburbs: Housing mobility and the many faces of social capital. *Housing policy debate*, *9*(1), 177-221.

Dworsky, A. (2018). Improving the postsecondary educational attainment of youth in foster care. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, *2018*(181), 11-19.

Dworsky, A., Napolitano, L., & Courtney, M. (2013). Homelessness during the transition from foster care to adulthood. *American Journal of Public Health*, *103*(S2), S318-S323.

Dworsky, A., & Pérez, A. (2009). Helping former foster youth graduate from college through campus support programs. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *32*(2), 255-263.

Emerson, J. & Bassett L. (2010). *Supporting success: Improving higher education outcomes for students from foster care*. https://www.casey.org/supporting-success/

Festinger, T. (1983). *No one ever asked us: A postscript to foster care.* New York: Columbia University Press.

First Star Institute (2016). *Foster youth success in college: Policy to progress*. https://www.firststar.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/05222018-REPORT-FINAL-with-COVER.pdf

Florida's Children First. (Fostering Higher eduction success: Tuition & fee exemption for Florida's foster youth. http://www.floridaschildrenfirst.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Tuition-Exemption-White-Paper-Floridas-Children-First.pdf

Franco, J., & Durdella, N. (2018). The influence of social and family backgrounds on college transition experiences of foster youth. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, *2018*(181), 69-80.

Frerer, K., Sosenko, L. D., & Henke, R. R. (2013). *At greater risk: California foster youth and the path from high school to college.* San Francisco, CA: Stuart Foundation.

Geiger, J. M., & Beltran, S. J. (2017). Experiences and outcomes of foster care alumni in postsecondary education: A review of the literature. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *79*(2), 186-197.

Geiger, J. M., Hanrahan, J. E., Cheung, J. R., & Lietz, C. A. (2016). Developing an on-campus recruitment and retention program for foster care alumni. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *61*, 271-280.

Geiger, J. M., Piel, M. H., Day, A., & Schelbe, L. (2018). A descriptive analysis of programs serving foster care alumni in higher education: Challenges and opportunities. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *85*, 287-294.

Gillum, N. L., Lindsay, T., Murray, F. L., & Wells, P. (2016). A review of research on college educational outcomes of students who experienced foster care. *Journal of Public Child Welfare*, *10*(3), 291-309.

Gusenbauer, M. (2019). Google Scholar to overshadow them all? Comparing the sizes of 12 academic search engines and bibliographic databases. *Scientometrics*, *118*(1), 177-214.

Hass, M., & Graydon, K. (2009). Sources of resiliency among successful foster youth. *Children and youth services review*, *31*(4), 457-463.

Hallett, R. E., Westland, M. A., & Mo, E. (2018). A trauma-informed care approach to supporting foster youth in community college. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, *2018*(181), 49-58.

Hernandez, L., Day, A., & Henson, M. (2017). Increasing college access and retention rates of youth in foster care: An analysis of the impact of 22 state tuition waiver programs. *Journal of Policy Practice*, *16*(4), 397-414.

Harzing, A. W. (2013). A preliminary test of Google Scholar as a source for citation data: A longitudinal study of Nobel prize winners. Scientometrics, 94(3), 1057-1075.

Hernandez, L., & Naccarato, T. (2010). Scholarships and supports available to foster care alumni: A study of 12 programs across the US. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *32*(5), 758-766.

Hogan, S. R. (2018). Foster youth in higher education: Mental health and academic achievement during the first college year. *Journal of the First-Year Experience & Students in Transition*, *30*(2), 65-78.

Hook, J. L., & Courtney, M. E. (2011). Employment outcomes of former foster youth as young adults: The importance of human, personal, and social capital. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *33*(10), 1855-1865.

Horn, L. J., & Carroll, C. D. (1997). *Confronting the odds: Students at risk and the pipeline to higher education.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

Huang, H., Fernandez, S., Rhoden, M. A., & Joseph, R. (2018). Serving former foster youth and homeless students in college. *Journal of Social Service Research*, *44*(2), 209-222.

Huang, H., Fernandez, S. B., Rhoden, M. A., & Joseph, R. (2020). Mental disorder, service utilization, and GPA: Studying mental health of former child welfare and youth experiencing homelessness in a campus support program. *Families in Society*, *101*(1), 54-70.

Jackson, M. S., Colvin, A. D., & Bullock, A. N. (2020). Development of a pre-college program for foster youth: Opportunities and challenges of program implementation. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, *37*(4), 411-423.

Joffe, H., & Yardley, L. (2004). Content and thematic analysis. In D. Marks & L. Yardley (Eds.), Research methods for clinical and health psychology (pp. 56-68). London, UK: Sage.

Johnson, R. M. (2019). The state of research on undergraduate youth formerly in foster care: A systematic review of the literature. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000150

Jones, L. P. (2010). The educational experiences of former foster youth three years after discharge. *Child Welfare*, *89*(6), 7.

Jones, M. G. (2013). 2013 National convening on foster youth and higher education: Conference Proceedings. https://cdn.fc2success.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/FCS-2013-National-Convening-2014-0410.pdf

Jonson-Reid, M., & Barth, R. P. (2000). From placement to prison: The path to adolescent incarceration from child welfare supervised foster or group care. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *22*(7), 493-516.

Kearney, K. S., Naifeh, Z., Hammer, T., & Cain, A. (2019). " family" ties for Foster alumni in college: an open systems consideration. *The Review of Higher Education*, *42*(2), 793-824.

Kirk, C. M., Lewis, R. K., Nilsen, C., & Colvin, D. Q. (2013). Foster care and college: The educational aspirations and expectations of youth in the foster care system. *Youth & Society*, *45*(3), 307-323.

Kirk, R., & Day, A. (2011). Increasing college access for youth aging out of foster care: Evaluation of a summer camp program for foster youth transitioning from high school to college. *Children and Youth Services Review, 33*(7), 1173-1180.

Legal Center for Foster Care & Education (2014). *How can state law support school continuity and success for students in foster care?* https://firstfocus.org/resources/report/can-state-law-support-school-continuity-success-studentsfoster-care/

Lenz-Rashid, S. (2018). An urban university campus support program for students from foster care: Services and outcomes. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *94*, 180-185.

Marzano, R. J. (2003). *What works in schools: Translating research into action*. ASCD.

McGill, C. M. (2019). The professionalization of academic advising: A structured literature review. *NACADA Journal*, *39*(1), 89-100.

McKellar, N., & Cowan, K. C. (2011). Supporting students in foster care. *Principal Leadership*, *12*(1), 12-16.

McMillen, C., Auslander, W., Elze, D., White, T., & Thompson, R. (2003). Educational experiences and aspirations of older youth in foster care. *Child Welfare: Journal of Policy, Practice, and Program, 82*(4).

McMillen, J. C., & Raghavan, R. (2009). Pediatric to adult mental health service use of young people leaving the foster care system. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, *44*(1), 7-13.

Merdinger, J. M., Hines, A. M., Lemon Osterling, K., & Wyatt, P. (2005). Pathways to college for former foster youth: Understanding factors that contribute to educational success. *Child welfare*, *84*(6).

Miller, J. J., Benner, K., Donohue-Dioh, J., & Segress, M. (2019). Supporting collegiate foster youth and alumni: A mixed-method planning approach for higher education. *Evaluation and program planning*, *72*, 67-76.

Miller, J. J., Benner, K., Kheibari, A., & Washington, E. (2017). Conceptualizing on-campus support programs for collegiate foster youth and alumni: A plan for action. *Children and Youth Services Review, 83*, 57-67.

Morton, B. M. (2017). Growing up fast: Implications for foster youth when independence and early adulthood collide. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *82*, 156-161.

Morton, B. M. (2018). The grip of trauma: How trauma disrupts the academic aspirations of foster youth. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, *75*, 73-81.

Neal, D. (2017). Academic resilience and caring adults: The experiences of former foster youth. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *79*, 242-248.

Okpych, N. (2012). Policy framework supporting youth aging-out of foster care through college: Review and recommendations. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *34*(7), 1390-1396.

Okpych, N. J., & Courtney, M. E. (2014). Does education pay for youth formerly in foster care? Comparison of employment outcomes with a national sample. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *43*, 18-28.

Okpych, N. J., & Courtney, M. E. (2017). Who goes to college? Social capital and other predictors of college enrollment for foster-care youth. *Journal of the Society for Social Work and Research*, *8*(4), 563-593.

Okpych, N. J., & Courtney, M. E. (2018). The role of avoidant attachment on college persistence and completion among youth in foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *90*, 106-117.

Okpych, N. J., Park, S. E., Sayed, S., & Courtney, M. E. (2020). The roles of Campus-Support Programs (CSPs) and Education and Training Vouchers (ETVs) on college persistence for youth with foster care histories. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *111*, 104891.

Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. SAGE Publications, Inc.

Pecora, P. J., Kessler, R. C., O'Brien, K., White, C. R., Williams, J., Hiripi, E., ... & Herrick, M. A. (2006). Educational and employment outcomes of adults formerly placed in foster care: Results from the Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *28*(12), 1459-1481.

Piel, M. H. (2018). Challenges in the transition to higher education for foster care youth. *New directions for community colleges*, *2018*(181), 21-28.

Plakhotnik, M. S. (2005). Human Resource Development Practices in Russia: A Structured Literature Review. *ERIC Online Submission*. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED492223.pdf

Planty, M., Provasnik, S., & Daniel, B. (2007). *High School Coursetaking: Findings from The Condition of Education, 2007.* NCES 2007-065. National Center for Education Statistics.

Randolph, K. A., & Thompson, H. (2017). A systematic review of interventions to improve post-secondary educational outcomes among foster care alumni. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *79*, 602-611.

Reynolds, J. R., & Pemberton, J. (2001). Rising College Expectations Among Youth in the United States: A Comparison of the 1979 and 1997 NLSY. *Journal of Human Resources*, *36*(4).

Rios, S. J., & Rocco, T. S. (2014, July). From foster care to college: Barriers and supports on the road to postsecondary education. *Emerging Adulthood*. July, 2014.

Rocco, T. S., Stein, D., & Lee, C. (2003). An exploratory examination of the literature on age and HRD policy development. *Human Resource Development Review*, 2(2), 155-180.

Rome, S. H., & Raskin, M. (2019). Transitioning out of foster care: The first 12 months. *Youth & Society*, *51*(4), 529-547.

Salazar, A. M. (2012). Supporting college success in foster care alumni: Salient factors related to postsecondary retention. *Child Welfare*, *91*(5), 139.

Salazar, A. M. (2013). The value of a college degree for foster care alumni: Comparisons with general population samples. *Social work*, *58*(2), 139-150.

Salazar, A. M., Haggerty, K. P., & Roe, S. S. (2016). Fostering higher education: A postsecondary access and retention intervention for youth with foster care experience. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *70*, 46-56.

Sarubbi, M., Parker, E., & Sponsler, B. A. (2016). Strengthening Policies for Foster Youth Postsecondary Attainment. Special Report. *Education Commission of the States*.

Seon, J., Prock, K. A., Bishop, J. D., Hughes, A. K., Woodward, A. T., & MacLean, M. (2019). Formal and Informal Social Support and Academic Achievement among College Students with Unstable Childhood Experiences. *Child Welfare*, *97*(1).

Simmel, C., Shpiegel, S., & Murshid, N. S. (2013). Foster care alumni and funding for postsecondary education: Examining variation in state support. *Journal of Policy Practice*, *12*(1), 43-61.

Singer, E. R., Berzin, S. C., & Hokanson, K. (2013). Voices of former foster youth: Supportive relationships in the transition to adulthood. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *35*(12), 2110-2117.

Skobba, K., Meyers, D., & Tiller, L. (2018). Getting by and getting ahead: Social capital and transition to college among homeless and foster youth. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *94*, 198-206.

Torraco, R. J. (2005). Writing integrative literature reviews: Guidelines and examples. *Human Resource Development Review*, *4*(3), 356-367.

Turney, K., & Wildeman, C. (2016). Mental and physical health of children in foster care. *Pediatrics*, *138*(5).

Unrau, Y. A. (2011). From foster care to college: The Seita Scholars program at Western Michigan University. https://wmich.edu/sites/default/files/attachments/u356/2014/2010Unrau.pdf

Unrau, Y. A., Dawson, A. W., Anthony, J. C., Toutant, T. M., & Hamilton, R. D. (2020). An exploration of life outcomes for college graduates with foster care histories by race: Preliminary results from a campus-based program. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *116*, 105108.

Unrau, Y. A., Dawson, A., Hamilton, R. D., & Bennett, J. L. (2017). Perceived value of a campus-based college support program by students who aged out of foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *78*, 64-73.

Unrau, Y. A., Font, S. A., & Rawls, G. (2012). Readiness for college engagement among students who have aged out of foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *34*(1), 76-83.

Van Noorden, R. (2014). Online collaboration: Scientists and the social network. *Nature News*, *512*(7513), 126.

Walters, W. H. (2007). Google Scholar coverage of a multidisciplinary field. *Information Processing & Management, 43*(4). 1121-1132.

Watt, T. T., Norton, C. L., & Jones, C. (2013). Designing a campus support program for foster care alumni: Preliminary evidence for a strengths framework. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *35*(9), 1408-1417.

Wells, M., & Zunz, S. (2009). Challenges and strengths among Chafee Education and Training Voucher eligible youth: The rural service providers' perspective. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *31*(2), 235-242.

White, C. C. (2018). Creating a structured support system for postsecondary success. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, *2018*(181), 59-67.

Wolanin, T. R. (2005). *Higher education opportunities for foster youth: A primer for policymakers*. Washington, DC: Institute for Higher Education Policy.

Yates, T. M., & Grey, I. K. (2012). Adapting to aging out: Profiles of risk and resilience among emancipated foster youth. *Development and psychopathology*, *24*(2), 475-492.

Zetlin, A. G., & Weinberg, L. A. (2004). Understanding the plight of foster youth and improving their educational opportunities. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, *28*(9), 917-923.

CHAPTER III
STUDY #2 – FORMER FOSTER YOUTH'S PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES REGARDING THE PURSUIT OF A COLLEGE DEGREE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY

Interviewer: Can you tell me what your overall experience of college has been like so far?
Chainz: A glorious battle

At the age of majority (18 in most states), nearly 20,000 young adults in the U. S. *emancipate* or *age out* of the foster care system (Administration for Children and Families [ACF], 2019). They are then left to navigate their early adult years without the help and support that parents and family members typically provide during this stage of life. Not only are they navigating into their young adult years without the typical family support, but former foster children have additional challenges that stem from their family disruptions and lives in foster care. Attachment difficulties arise from initial removal and placement disruptions (Julianelle, 2008). Trauma experienced by youth in foster care has been linked to mental health and behavioral difficulties (Courtney, et al., 2014; Merdinger et al., 2005; Salazar, 2013), learning disabilities, and educational delays (Blome, 1997; Frerer et al., 2013; Okypych et al., 2017). Depending on the length of placement, up to 61% of children in foster care experience three or more placements (ACF, 2019), and these disruptions can negatively impact academic achievement (Yu et al., 2002), increase the rate of suspension and expulsion (Morton, 2015), and sever relationships with supportive adults such as teachers, coaches, and foster parents.

Consequently, these problems affect the college success of former foster youth. Foster youth are known to achieve high school diplomas, college admission, and college graduation at significantly lower rates than their non-fostered peers (Courtney et al.,

63

2004; Geiger & Beltran, 2017; Pecora, et al., 2006). College aspirations for foster youth, however, have been found to be similar to non-foster youth (Courtney et al., 2014; McMillen et al., 2003). Foster youth also lack the typical support systems (immediate families, extended families, teachers, coaches, church family) enjoyed by non-fostered youth at this stage of life (McMillen et al, 2005; Salazar, 2013). Foster youth who do attempt to follow their college aspirations may not be able to overcome financial, emotional, and practical obstacles without a support system. Consequently, the lack of access to the *social capital* typically available from those support systems has a negative impact on success (Okpych & Courtney, 2017).

Social Capital

Social capital "refers to those social relationships that provide access and control over various types of resources" (Caspi et al., 1998, p. 428). Social capital is what people draw on to seize opportunities and solve problems (de Souza Briggs, 1998). Social capital typically comes largely from the strength of the parent-child relationship (Parcel & Menaghan, 1994), and parental involvement is known to promote college enrollment (Coleman, 1988; Perna & Titus, 2005).

Social capital can be derived from non-parental relationships as well. Kearney et al. (2019) found that *foster alumni* (youth who spent a portion or all of their adolescent years in foster care) college students developed their own unique definitions of family. These self-defined families provided access to a wide variety of non-traditional supports (social capital) on their path to college success. Some of the supportive adults were connections that were developed through the foster care system such as foster parents and caseworkers. Supports and guidance from foster care and school system *institutional*

agents (Stanton-Salazar, 2011) can help to fill familial voids and increase the likelihood that foster youth enroll in college (Okpych & Courtney, 2017). Institutional agents are high-status, non-kin connections who "occupy relatively high positions…and who are well positioned to provide key forms of social and institutional support" (Stanton-Salazar, 2011, pp. 1074-1075). For a foster youth pursuing a college degree, institutional agents may include teachers, guidance counselors, caseworkers, foster parents, and college advisors and registrars. Connecting with these institutional agents and leveraging those social supports eases the path from high school to college and can help former foster youth college students achieve a college degree (Franco & Durdella, 2018; Skobba et al., 2018).

Purpose

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the perceptions and experiences of former foster youth as they considered, applied for, and attended college. This research was guided this research question:

1. What were the perceptions and experiences of former foster youth as they considered, applied for, and attended college?

Subsidiary research questions are:

- What were the perceptions and experiences of former foster youth as they considered pursuing a college degree?
- What were the perceptions and experiences of former foster youth as they applied for college?
- What were the perceptions and experiences of former foster youth as they attended college?
- How did former foster youth pursuing a college degree acquire social capital from institutional agents in their network?

Phenomenological Research Design

Phenomenological research identifies the "essence" of human experiences as described by the participants (Creswell, 2009, p. 13). Through in-depth interviews, this present phenomenology will seek to find the "essence of and commonalities among" (Patton, 1990, p. 69) the experiences of former foster youth as they considered, applied for, and attended college.

Setting

The setting for the current study is southeast Florida. In the state of Florida, upon reaching the age of 18, a foster youth chooses one of three options: (a) postsecondary supports and services (PESS) which provides a monthly stipend of $1,256 to aged-out foster youth who are full time (9 hours per semester) students in college or vocational school, (b) extended foster care benefits (housing, help with education and living expenses, and general support) which are available for foster youth still in a high school or GED program or working at least 80 hours per month, or (c) access to emergency-type benefits upon full exit from the traditional foster care program. Foster youth can change between programs under certain conditions (Florida Department of Children and Families, 2021).

Participants were located from three community programs that serve former foster youth who have aged-out of the traditional foster care system at the age of 18. All programs are in the same county. The first program is managed by the Community Based Care lead agency that manages the state of Florida educational stipend and tuition waivers for the entire county. It provides independent living trainings and classes as well

as life coaches, advocates, and resource guidance to former foster youth who choose to access either postsecondary supports and services or extended foster care benefits.

The second program is a drop-in resource center that guides and supports youth aging out of foster care. They provide services such as tutoring, vocational training, household items, and resource guidance for government benefits, housing options, and transportation. The third program is a two-year, independent living residential program for youth transitioning out of foster care that focuses on education, employment experience, and independent living skills. These three agencies are highly collaborative and often serve the same former foster youth.

Participants

Designated contacts in the three programs assisted with recruitment by posting flyers and informing their program youth about the study. The flyers contained an explanation of the study, the criteria for participation, and an email address for responding to the researcher. The purposeful sampling located "information-rich" (Patton, 1990, p. 176) informants who provided in-depth information drawing on their experiences (Patton, 1990). Criteria for participation in the study included youth who: (a) had aged out of the foster care system, (b) had earned a high school diploma or GED, and (c) were pursuing admission, currently enrolled, or had graduated from a post-secondary college or university. Some interested youth responded to the posted email address directly, and the contact information for some youth was emailed to the researcher by the designated contacts. Prospective participants were then contacted by the researcher. All who responded were eligible to participate.

Fifteen participants, eight women and seven men, comprised the sample. Participants were between the ages of 18 and 25 years old. The majority (87%) of participants were minorities: ten were Black non-Hispanic, one was Black Hispanic, two were Hispanic, and two were Caucasian.

The average age at their entrance into foster care was 12, with a range of one year to 13 years in the foster care system. The number of residential placements while in foster care ranged from one to five per participant with an average of 3.07 placements per participant (Note – these placement numbers are for 14 participants; the participant who spent 13 years in foster care was unable to remember how many placements she had been in).

Thirteen participants earned a high school diploma and two received a GED. At the time of the interviews, the college status of the participants was:

- one participant had graduated with a master's degree
- one participant had graduated with a bachelor's degree and was applying for a master's program
- one participant had graduated with a technical college certificate and was applying for an associate's program
- two participants had graduated with a technical college certificates
- three participants were college juniors
- five participants were college sophomores
- one participant was applying for a bachelor's program

Additionally, one participant was presently *stopped out*, thus temporarily withdrawn with

the intention of returning to complete their college program. Table 3.1 provides a list of the participants.

Table 3.1

Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Age at interview	Age at placement in foster care	# of foster care placements	Race	Area of Study
Derrick	19	17	1	White	Biology/Pre-Med
Amanda	18	13	4	Black Non-Hispanic	Social Work
Chainz	22	17	4	Black Non-Hispanic	Performing Arts
Alexis	21	11	3	Black Non-Hispanic	Physical Therapy
Jessica	23	11	4	Hispanic	Gaming Design
Sara	5	12	4	White	Social Work/Law
Tavon	19	6	5	Black Non-Hispanic	Business
Rachel	22	12	2	Black Non-Hispanic	Psychology
Mark	23	13	2	Black Hispanic	Public Safety
Sage	22	16	2	Black Non-Hispanic	Business
Beth	24	5	Unknown	Black Non-Hispanic	Education
Rodney	21	12	4	Black Non-Hispanic	Cosmetology
Maria	25	14	2	Hispanic	Hospitality
Daniel	25	9	4	Black Non-Hispanic	Culinary
Lisa	23	13	2	Black Non-Hispanic	Cosmetology

Data Collection

Data were collected via semi-structured interviews with the participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006). Prior to developing the interview protocol, the researcher reflected on the topic being studied in an effort to bracket, or set aside, existing knowledge and preconceived judgments in order to see the topic as something new (Moustakas, 1994). A semi-structured interview guide was developed and administered consistently with all participants. Questions began with basic demographic questions (alias, age, age at foster care entrance, number and types of residential foster care placements, age at high school completion, current college status, etc.). Demographic questions were followed by open-ended questions related to the participants' experiences as they (1) considered college, (2) applied to college, and (3) attended college. Follow up probes were utilized to gather more detailed information when needed.

The interview guide was pilot tested with two former foster youth, now adopted, known to the researcher. The pilot test revealed the potential of too many primary questions, thus reducing the conversational nature of the interview and possibly stunting the participants' expanded responses. Primary questions were revised, and the number was reduced. Then, prior to finalization, the interview guide was emailed to a group of 23 doctoral students and candidates for review. Feedback from this group resulted in one significant change of wording where the prompt wording assumed that the participant *wanted* to attend college. Other changes included wording revisions that enhanced the open-ended aspect of two questions and clarified some vague wording that created confusion.

To conduct the interview in a manner most comfortable and convenient for the former foster youth, participants were given the choice of time, method (in-person or phone), and location (if necessary) for the interviews. Ten interviews were conducted via telephone and five were conducted in person. Regarding telephone interviews, Novik (2007) found no evidence that the interpretation of data or quality of findings is compromised when interview data are collected by telephone. Additionally, in a study that utilized both telephone and in-person interviews and then compared the response data (Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004), the researchers found that "Given the marked similarities in the quantity, nature, and depth of responses, we conclude that mode of interview did not influence the data to any significant degree" (p. 113). Participants provided verbal consent and the interviews were digitally recorded. The interviews averaged 45 minutes in length. After all interviews had been conducted, the recordings were transcribed verbatim by an independent transcription service. The transcripts were returned to the researcher via email.

Data Analysis

The data were inductively analyzed in order to reduce data, identify categories, and develop themes (Merriam, 1998). Each transcript was read line-by-line while listening (and pausing when necessary) to the associated digital recording in order to verify accuracy and make notes of any significant tones, inflections, unusual pauses, etc. from the participants. During the review, the transcript was also marked with margin notes and highlighting of complete significant statements. A handwritten recap sheet for each participant was created by listing a short summary of each highlighted statement.

Using Excel, the short statements from each recap sheet were listed in columns in the order they appeared, by participant. After cross examining statements from all participants, tentative codes (Creswell, 2007) were identified. The short statements were color coded according to tentative code and cross examined again. Additional codes emerged. Themes for the phenomenological study emerged by grouping codes while considering participants' common (or different) perceptions and experiences and the context of those perceptions and experiences (Creswell, 2007).

To organize the data by themes, a new spreadsheet was opened and populated with the previously highlighted statements (data chunks) listed in columns by theme. The result of the data organization was a final spreadsheet with the themes across the top row with data chunks in the column under each theme. Each data chunk was labeled with the participant's name and transcript row. The final spreadsheet facilitated seeing all significant statements listed by theme and participant. To check that all data were thoroughly analyzed, each transcript was re-read with a goal of identifying any significant statements (data chucks) that had not been properly assigned to a theme.

Findings

Five major themes emerged: (a) college aspirations, (b) utilization of resources, (c) connections with supportive adults, (d) obstacles to completing college, and (d) confidence of success. College aspirations were identified by participant's comments regarding when they knew or why they wanted to attend college. Utilization of resources includes participants perceptions about the financial and tangible benefits available to them. Connections with supportive adults includes accounts of adults from school, foster care, family, etc who have been emotionally and practically helpful to the participants'

college journeys. Obstacles to completing college include the participants' concerns over the practical and emotional barriers they have encountered. Confidence of success relays the participants' perceptions that they will overcome barriers and have a successful college career and life.

College Aspirations

An aspiration can be defined as a hope or ambition of achieving something. College aspirations are the hopes of attending and graduating from college. Derrick indicated that college has always been his goal, "Yeah, college has always been the end goal. So, I don't want the military, the goal is to get to college." Derrick continues, "I always knew I wanted to be a doctor, and about a year and a half ago, I realized I wanted to be a cardiologist." When asked how he originally arrived at the decision of being a doctor, he responded, "I made it all on my own."

Jessica states that she has always thought about going to college, "I've always known that I needed to get my degree. Education was a big thing to my mom." Similarly, Sara relayed, "I always wanted to go to college." Tavon relayed that he had given up on thinking about college until a caseworker at his new independent living program began to discuss his future goals with him. He then started the college application process. Rachel stated,

> I have always though about college since I was very young; I already knew the
> university I wanted to go to…even before I was 12, that's something my
> biological mom drummed into me, that I should make sure I go to school. I should
> get an education so I can be somebody in this world.

Mark wanted "to make it somewhere in life…to be the first person in my blood family between my brothers, sisters, and my mother, to be the first person in college." Alexis stated that she "wanted to be successful and be able to take care of myself and not depend on anyone." Chainz relayed that his thoughts about college began in high school and he thought, "everybody wants to be successful and they don't want to be left behind in life." Chainz' aspirations grew when members of his family told him, "You know, you would be the first one in your family to go to college." Amanda expressed her college plans and her desire to become a social worker. Amanda's college aspirations were already tied to specific career aspirations:

> I would like to get a master's degree, and I would like to start off at [name of agency]. When I look at all of the young girls that are going through what I went through or they just want to stop period, it makes me want to go become a child advocate and be the best child advocate I can. Just do what I have to do and try to make a difference because there are not a lot of good people out here.

For some, the foster care experience enhanced internal desires and thoughts about attending college. Rachel remembers thinking about college from a young age and now wanting to be an example to others in foster care: "I want to be able to inspire and help other people kind of get out of this place [foster care] that they are in and realize that there is more." Sara stated that her family background motivated her: "Yes, I mean I always wanted to go to college just because I knew I had seen the other options. Because of my family background and problems at home, I always wanted to be at school." While discussing her college aspirations, Alexis says she knows "what everyone thinks of kids in foster care. I want to prove everyone wrong." Beth, who entered foster care at age 5

states: "What I've been through with social work and things of that nature; so I definitely wanted to go to college to be that [social worker]." Amanda relays when she decided against nursing and aspired to social work instead: "It changed when my friend was in foster care. She is 16 and was going through horrible things and some things could have been avoided. Because I was in care so long, I knew that someone could have done something about it. And I was like, maybe I can – I don't know."

For some participants, learning about the available financial assistance seemed to influence or solidify their college aspirations. Amanda, who already considered college, learned that full time college students from foster care can receive help with expenses; she shared, "Once I learned of the benefits that came along with being in care when I get out there, I figured, why not? Take that opportunity to do something." Chainz was told by his child advocate (caseworker) that he could get monetary benefits while attending college and he responded, "so I was like, okay, yes I want to go." Sage simply states that his motivation for attending college is "the check, cause if I didn't go to school there was no way to stay on the check."

Utilization of Resources

Tangible resources available for former foster youth may include housing, food, educational expenses, and direct cash assistance. Throughout the interviews, the need for monetary resources were a prevalent theme. Five participants acknowledged receiving the monthly stipend, six participants mentioned utilizing the tuition waiver, and three participants discussed both of those benefits. Beyond the monthly stipend and the tuition waiver, two participants also discussed additional financial benefits and resources they receive through their extended foster care agencies. Beth, who is 24 years old, states that

"I had the check when I aged out. I went into my own personal life, but I was trying to get my education, so I got the stipend for $1,256." Beth is now too old to receive the stipend, but she stated that she still receives help for childcare expenses for her two children as she completes her education. Mark, who is 23 years old, mentioned that even though his monthly stipend stopped because of his age, he still receives financial help with "expenses for living, books for college." Alexis described housing help that did not come from the foster care system, but rather her former foster mother from ten years prior, "It was between the military and college, and she [former foster mother] said I can move back in with her and pursue my college career, so that's what I did." When Derrick was asked what more could have been done for him in terms of tangible support, he responded, "it's been great, there's nothing I would ask."

Tavon, who aged out of foster care in a different county and recently moved to southeast Florida has had a different experience getting the resources he needs to attend college, "I have applied, filled out applications. I just haven't got the necessary paperwork like my tuition waiver. I called a couple or few times, they didn't have a waiver." When asked which county would issue his waiver, he responded, "I don't know at this point. I have been all over Florida."

Connections With Supportive Adults

Connections with supportive adults from the foster care system, the school system, and elsewhere can provide emotional and informational support for foster youth. Eleven participants mentioned specific supportive people within the child welfare/foster care system who have provided significant help, encouragement, and direction during their college pursuits. When Beth was discussing positive experiences, she mentioned,

"I've met my guardian-ad-litem who is still in my life." Alexis, age 21, speaks about her first foster parent at age 11 who has supported her during her college endeavors, "She was my foster mom. When it was time for me to move, she said she still wanted to be a part of my life. That's how she became my God-Mother."

Sage described a caseworker at his agency that guided him through his college application and registration process,

"She's a cool lady. She does the job. She loves the job. She's probably a selfless person, she always thinks first of everybody else in front of her. She makes me proud of her. She's a happy person, nice energy. Yeah, she is very helpful."

While discussing the staff at the group home that she aged out from, Sara, age 25, states,

"there were all positive aspects at the group home. I lived there when I was 14 until 18, and they're still in my life today. They were at my graduation. They were at my graduation party and paid for dinner with me and my friends. They bought my graduation dress."

Chainz details how his independent living team would take groups on outings and have "mini seminars and we would talk about something important. We would talk about financing and the benefits of foster care." Jessica mentioned that her life coach is a "good motivator and supports me." When asked how he thought foster care impacted his college experience, Derrick responded, "it gave me support; there is a support system." When asked what she knew about about the application process for college, Amanda responded, "I had no idea to be honest. Those permanent staff at the group home, they helped me out. And I think the ones from [agency] actually came to the school with me and showed me how to do it."

Some participants highlighted supportive adults from the school system. After describing the long-term support she has received from her group home, Sara also mention that an "awesome guidance counselor and great advisor" at her high school helped her through her college application and registration process. Chainz describes a teacher that helped her students with college applications, "She really helped me with the application process. She was a poetry [teacher], she really got involved."

Mark, details how a coach and a group of teachers at his high school worked extra with him to overcome a learning challenge and earn a qualifying GPA for a Florida Bright Future's Scholarship. "I was very lucky to have those teachers," he stated. Others at his high school then helped him with the college application process because "there is a lot of paperwork to get into college."

Obstacles

Obstacles impeding the college success of former foster youth are well documented. Participants in this study identified the following obstacles: transportation, housing, and cessation of the stipend at the age of 23.

Transportation

Unreliable transportation causes difficulties for former foster youth attending college. Two participants stated that they have cars. A majority of participants spoke about transportation problems when trying to attend classes. Rachel, a college graduate applying to a master's program, received a scholarship to a private college approximately 25 miles from her home and admitted, "there were days I didn't go. It wasn't that easy. For all of the four years, it was more tedious because I would have to wake up two, three hours before my classes to take the bus." Daniel, who is currently stopped out of college,

talked about trying to get to the technical college for each stage of the application and orientation process, "it took me six tries before I had all of the right paperwork, and I had to take the bus each time." Daniel also stated that his bike was stolen from the county bus terminal which made it difficult to get to class.

Tavon, who is applying for college, had trouble completing the process due to using the bus system.

> "I have applied; I have filled out all applications. I just haven't got the necessary paperwork like my waiver, my transcripts. I was supposed to go to an orientation and I had a meeting beforehand but I didn't do that either. It takes me two hours to get from work to home."

Chainz, a part-time college sophomore, said he sometimes has difficulty with transportation and described all of the ways he transports, "there is a very diverse bus system and Uber. I have family and friends, so it's a lot of ways to get around here. I go on bikes, skateboard." Alexis states, "transportation was a problem in college because I didn't have a car and I was taking the bus. The bus is unpredictable. When the bus doesn't come on time, I would be late to class."

Housing

Unstable housing can be very disruptive for former foster youth attending college**.** Three participants reference losing their housing and having to stop their college pursuits until they found somewhere to live. Jessica states, "The reason I had to stop going to college was because I lost my housing. So, I was kind of bouncing from place to place, and I didn't have a stable living arrangement, I wasn't able to continue because of it." Daniel recalls, "When I lost my housing, I ended up at a shelter that was far from school.

They help with bus passes, but the routes do not really work for getting to school, it just takes too long." Sage lost his subsidized housing benefit and could never get it restored, "I lost my housing, and after that, they didn't give me any more housing. They didn't want to help me at all. I couldn't get a second chance, which is pretty weird. That's why I had to stop out of college because of the housing situation. That's why I am kind of late with graduation because I was on and off with the school terms."

Cessation of Benefits at age 23

In Florida, the direct monthly benefit (the stipend) to former foster youth enrolled in college full time stops at their 23rd birthday. Participants who have lost, or who will soon lose, the benefit before completing their education stated concerns. Mark, who is a college athlete states, "I do have the financial need. I am not able to get a job because basically I spend most of my time in school and football. I do wish [they] would give the money until you are done with school." Alexis, who is 21 and is working toward being a physical therapist, is planning, "I am currently living on my own and when I turn 23, I won't be receiving the benefit that I am currently receiving. I want to be able to take care of myself and still go to school. I just want to get my associates and start working and I can still go to school during the weekends." Sage, 22, states "The college thing didn't really hit me as much until recently because I will need a career now that I will be going off the check in December." Even Derrick, who is 19 with the goal being a doctor, is already planning for when the monthly direct benefit stops, "I am going to start working after I transfer [to junior year after AA degree]. I have been saving up money now, but I want to make sure I have everything that I need."

Confidence in Success

Seven participants perceived and expressed confidence in their ability to succeed in college. Beth stated that she was good in school, even though she moved so much. Rachel states, "I was the kind of student who put my education first. I was always making As and Bs in high school and graduated second in my class with a 5.4 GPA." While discussing what she thought about going to college, Sara stated, "I never had any doubt about my grades," and Alexis states she always made good grades and graduated early. Derrick states that he never had any doubts that he would make it to college. Amanda states, "I don't have any doubts, I will never doubt myself. I know I am capable of doing anything I put my mind to." Jessica states, I always made good grades. I was the type that never really had to study a lot. I know it's possible. I feel you create whether or not you will fail or succeed. So, I know the only chance I have; I cannot fail, I will succeed.

Discussion

This section will answer each of the research questions.

Perceptions and Experiences as They Considered College

Most of these participants identified strong personal aspirations toward attending college, and most participants also discussed receiving encourgement and practical information from supportive adults at school and from foster care. The combination of aspirations and supportive adults may be what led to college enrollment for these participants. Studies have shown that foster youth aspire to college as much as non-fostered youth (Courtney et al., 2004; McMillen et al., 2003), yet the actual enrollment of these *aspiring* youth is dismal. Okpych & Courtney (2017) found that the likelihood of

enrolling in college increases with the number of institutional agents and school personnel providing tangible support and guidance.

Not only were these youth receiving support and guidance, they were also learning about ways to overcome the financial and resource barriers that hinder college success. Chainz mentioned outings that included "mini seminars" where they would talk about the benefits available for college. Through their foster care workers, these youth knew about the options for ETVs, tuition waivers, financial aid, and other resources for college. This was not mere encouragement, but "supportive relationships with adults who can leverage their positional power and mobilize college-relevant knowledge and resources" (Okpych & Courtney, 2017, p. 586). Due to some of the academic and emotional challenges that foster youth deal with, schools should consider having a particular liason who serves at the point person for the foster youth. This can foster a greater sense of trust and connection that is vital to these relationships.

Perceptions and Experiences as They Applied for College

For most participants, the college application process did not present any significant barriers, but this does not mean that they did not utilize help. Collectively, they employed a variety of methods to complete the application process. Some got help from existing networks of teachers and counselors at their schools, and some had help from their foster care workers. Some participants reported that they chose to complete their applications on their own. Two participants report finalizing their process at the college campus with the help of new contacts. Utilizing new contacts to complete the task of college applications could be considered social leverage. "Social leverage or bridging social capital, provides linkages to new people, opportunities, and information" (Skobba,

2018, p. 200). In the wake of leaving high school and going on to college, a youth is leaving some relationships with instituitional agents. Okpych and Courtney (2017) note that accessibility and availability are both necessary for connections with institutional agents. These foster youth that utilized the college staff for application help may now be a step ahead in establishing valuable connections to replace ones they will be losing once they leave high school.

Two participants reported that they had difficult times completing their application process. The difficulties came from a lack of transportation to take an entry exam and attend orientation. While the lack of reliable transportation is known to adversely affect former foster youth once they are attending college (Hernandez & Naccarato, 2010; Piel, 2018), these accounts reveal transportation can also be a hindrance to enrollment. Since it is known that youth in the foster care system face unique obstacles as they pursue a college education, extra steps should be made by school personnel or the independent living team to arrange transportion for these college entrance requirements.

Perceptions and Experiences as They Attended College

While former foster youth enter college with expectations of completing and earning a degree, multiple obstacles can derail their efforts (Courtney, et al., 2010; Salazar et al., 2016). These youth had a way to pay their tuition and fees, but money for housing, transportation, and personal needs were were not assured (Hernandez & Naccarato, 2010; Piel, 2018). There was a wide array of living arrangements when they began college. Those that reported living with former foster parents did not have any housing instability. Some participants received rental subsidies that allowed them to pay a reduced rent. The rental subsidy with the stipend proved stable for most participants

that had this arrangement. Conversely, almost half of the participants did not have a

permanent housing plan while thay were attending college and five participants report

that they had housing troubles that impacted their college progress. This aligns with what

is known about housing instability for former foster youth and the impact it has on

completing a college degree. (Dworsky & Courtney, 2010; Curry, 2015). There are calls

for states to coordinate with their college and university systems to find ways to provide

housing for former foster youth (Geiger et al., 2018; Lenz-Rashid, 2018), but for most

foster youth in college, this problem contines to be an obstacle.

Participants overwhelmingly experienced problems with reliable transportation

for getting to work and to classes. Participants utilized busses, bikes, ride-share, family,

and friends to get where they needed to be, but some reported that their grades suffered

because of missed classes due to transportation. While some people can utilize a bus

system for regular and reliable transportation and even value the time on the bus for

studying or organizing, these participants were not able to widely use the bus system to

align with their class schedule. Efforts at the state level must continue to find either on-

campus or close-to-campus housing for foster youth.   Residential programs that serve

aged-out foster youth can consider housing that is near the local colleges and prioritize

those rooms for former foster youth who are in college.

These housing and transportation obstacles negatively impacted their attendance,

their grades, and their continued enrollment. Since full time college enrollment is a

requirement for receiving the monthly stipend, these threats to continued enrollment also

jeopardized their income. Even students that persisted, but did not graduate by their 23rd

birthday, had to deal with concerns of losing their monthly stipend prior to finishing

school. In addition to transportation, housing, and income concerns, former foster youth are also known to face academic barriers to a college degree (Frerer et al., 2013, Okpych & Courtney, 2017; Rios & Rocco, 2014), and two participants reported significant academic problems causing poor grades and academic probation.

Most of the participants were enrolled in the local technical college and state college. Neither of those school have an on-campus program. The state college does have a liason who serves as the point/contact for foster youth who enroll, but extra services are not provided. The state college is a multi-campus institution and should establish more than just a point person for their foster youth students. A focus on their foster youth students could help alleviate the transportation obstacle some of our participants encountered while attending there.

One of the participants was at a university that houses an on-campus program for foster youth, but stated that he did not participate due to his football schedule. None were involved with an on-campus support program for former foster youth, thus missing out on an opportunity to be and feel more connected on campus and have access to more supportive adults at their school (Day, et al., 2012; Kinarsky, 2017). Even with these challenges, hopes and aspirations remained relatively high with these participants. All (but one) that had stopped out returned to college at least part-time.

Social Capital from Institutional Agents in their Network

Participants in this study are part of a minority of foster youth who were able to turn their college aspirations into college enrollment and, for some, a college degree (Courtney et al., 2004; Geiger & Bertran, 2017; Pecora, et al., 2006). While in high school and foster care, participants reported close connections with teachers, guidance

counselors, and foster care workers. For some participants, school connections provided tutoring and help with test prep to overcome academic barriers in order to meet college entrance requirements. Participants used social capital acquired from foster care connections to learn about financial benefits and other resources available to them for college funding. These resources are essential for former foster youth to attend college. Relationships with supportive adults in these positions, known as institutional agents (Stanton-Salazar, 2011), are known to be valuable connections for foster youth. Having more institutional agents encouraging college aspirations increases the likelihood of enrollment (Okpych & Courtney, 2017), so these connections may have played significant roles on the college path of these youth.

As they applied to college, the majority of participants continued to receive help from their high school and foster care connections, but two participants utilized college personnel to help with their application process. Once admitted, participants utilized college advisors to finalize programs and choose classes. The participants have naturally left many of their high school connections behind when thay graduated, but participants are staying connected to their foster care workers including caseworkers, life coaches, and Guardians-ad Litems. A few participants report close relationships with their Guardians and life coaches, and the majority report staying in touch monthly. Overall, the participants in this study maintained multiple relationships with supportive adults, and these relationships seem to have contributed to their successful enrollment and forward path in college.

Implications

This section will discuss implications for policy, practice, and research.

Policy and Practice

The participants for this study were all engaged with college in some way. They are the minority within foster care that are able to turn their college aspirations into college enrollment and, for some, college graduation. Okpych and Courtney (2017) found that both the *number* of institutional agents and the *type* of institutional agents are important to increase college enrollment for foster youth. Relationships with supportive adults who are in a position to mobilize both information and resources, increase the likelihood of college enrollment. In an effort to convert more college aspirations to college enrollment, agencies should deliver college information through key independent learning personnel, also in collaboration with school personnel. College information coupled with information regarding available financial resources can spark aspirations as well as flame existing aspirations.

Not all states have extended foster care programs and tuition waivers, these benefits clearly reduce barriers to a college degree (Hernandez et al., 2017; Simmel et al., 2012). Child welfare advocates and state legislators should work to implement these programs and benefits in their states. This study demonstrated that the mere knowledge of these programs and benefits can reinforce college aspirations.

Limitations and Further Research

This present study included only former foster youth that had considered, applied to, or attended college. By design, it is no surprise that high levels of college aspirations were reported. But these foster youth that made it to college are in the minority, and further research that explores foster youth who attend college compared with foster youth who do not attend can begin to uncover foster care influences (good and bad) that affect college attendance for former foster youth.

This participants in this study encountered transportation and housing instability that jeopardized their college completion. These are known barriers (Courtney, et al., 2011; Hernandez & Naccarato, 2010; Piel, 2018) but further research is needed to explore what supports have been utilized by former foster youth who have been able to achieve a college degree.

The participants in this study steadily acknowledge members of their independent living team. Participants that have graduated from college still report continued connections. Franco & Durdella (2018) report that "by establishing relationships not connections" (p. 79), programs can hope to make a difference. Further research is needed to explore the establishment of connections, the development of relationships, and the maintaining of these relationships between foster youth and supportive adults.

This present study did not discuss the demographic factors of race nor ethnicity. Further research is necessary to explore the college-ralated experiences, perceptions, interactions, and outcomes for former foster youth while considering their intersectionality as a former foster youth and a racial and/or ethnic minority.

This present study utilized an interview protocol that focused on perceptions and experiences regarding the process of considering, applying to, and attending college. The traits of personal resilience and optimism were not specifically addressed. The influence of personal resilience, optimism, and other traits should be empirically explored with foster youth who are both attending and not attending college.

References

Administration for Children and Families (ACF) (2019). The AFCARS report: Preliminary FY 2018 estimates as of August 22, 2019 – No. 26. https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ sites/default/files/cb/afcarsreport26.pdf

American Psychological Association (APA). (2021). APA dictionary of psychology. https://dictionary.apa.org/social-support

Blome, W. W. (1997). What happens to foster kids: Educational experiences of a random sample of foster care youth and a matched group of non-foster care youth. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal, 14*(1), 41−53.

Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (2006). Qualitative Research in Education: An Introduction to Theory and Methods. Allyn & Bacon.

Caspi, A., Wright, B. R. E., Moffitt, T. E., & Silva, P. A. (1998). Early failure in the labor market: Childhood and adolescent predictors of unemployment in the transition to adulthood. *American sociological review*, 424-451.

Coleman, J. S. (1988). Social capital in the creation of human capital. *American journal of sociology*, *94*, S95-S120.

Courtney, M. E., Charles, P., Okpych, N. J., Napolitano, L., Halsted, K., & Courtney, M. E. (2014). Findings from the California Youth Transitions to Adulthood Study (CalYOUTH): Conditions of foster youth at age 17.

Courtney, M. E., Dworsky, A. L., Lee, J. S., & Raap, M. (2010). *Midwest evaluation of the adult functioning of former foster youth: Outcomes at ages 23 and 24* (pp. 1097-3125). Chicago: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

Courtney, M. E., Terao, S., & Bost, N. (2004). *Midwest evaluation of the adult functioning of former foster youth: Conditions of youth preparing to leave state care*. Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago.

Creswell, J. W. (2007). Five qualitative approaches to inquiry. *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among the five approaches* (pp 53-84). Thousand Oaks, CA. Sage.

Creswell, J. W.(2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Sage publications.

Curry, S. R., & Abrams, L. S. (2015). Housing and social support for youth aging out of foster care: State of the research literature and directions for future inquiry. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, *32*(2), 143-153.

Day, A., Riebschleger, J., Dworsky, A., Damashek, A., & Fogarty, K. (2012). Maximizing educational opportunities for youth aging out of foster care by engaging youth voices in a partnership for social change. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *34*(5), 1007-1014.

de Souza Briggs, X. (1998). Brown kids in white suburbs: Housing mobility and the many faces of social capital. *Housing policy debate*, *9*(1), 177-221.

Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF). (2020, December 10). Independent living flowchart. https://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/independent-living/docs/Flowchart3.pdf

Franco, J., & Durdella, N. (2018). The influence of social and family backgrounds on college transition experiences of foster youth. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, *2018*(181), 69-80.

Frerer, K., Sosenko, L. D., & Henke, R. R. (2013). At greater risk: California foster youth and the path from high school to college. *San Francisco, CA: Stuart Foundation.[Report]. Retrieved from the Stuart Foundation website: http://www. stuartfoundation. org/docs/default-document-library/at-greater-risk-califomia-foster-youth-and-the-path-from-high-school-to-college. pdf*.

Geiger, J. M., & Beltran, S. J. (2017). Experiences and outcomes of foster care alumni in postsecondary education: A review of the literature. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *79*(2), 186-197.

Hernandez, L., Day, A., & Henson, M. (2017). Increasing college access and retention rates of youth in foster care: An analysis of the impact of 22 state tuition waiver programs. *Journal of Policy Practice*, *16*(4), 397-414.

Hernandez, L., & Naccarato, T. (2010). Scholarships and supports available to foster care alumni: A study of 12 programs across the US. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *32*(5), 758-766.

Julianelle, P. (2008). The McKinney-Vento Act and children and youth awaiting foster care placement: Strategies for improving educational outcomes through school stability. *Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth*.

Kinarsky, A. R. (2017). Fostering success: Understanding the experience of foster youth undergraduates. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *81*, 220-228.

McMillen, C., Auslander, W., Elze, D., White, T., & Thompson, R. (2003). Educational experiences and aspirations of older youth in foster care. *Child Welfare: Journal of Policy, Practice, and Program, 82*(4).

Merdinger, J. M., Hines, A. M., Osterling, K. L., & Wyatt, P. (2004). Pathways to college for former foster youth: understanding factors that contribute to educational success. *Child Welfare*, *84*(6), 867-896.

Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education. Revised and Expanded from" Case Study Research in Education."*. Jossey-Bass Publishers, 350 Sansome St, San Francisco, CA 94104.

Morton, B. M. (2015). Barriers to academic achievement for foster youth: The story behind the statistics. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, *29*(4), 476-491.

Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Sage Publications.

Novick, G. (2008). Is there a bias against telephone interviews in qualitative research?. *Research in nursing & health*, *31*(4), 391-398.

Okpych, N. J., & Courtney, M. E. (2017). Who goes to college? Social capital and other predictors of college enrollment for foster-care youth. *Journal of the Society for Social Work and Research*, *8*(4), 563-593.

Parcel, T. L., & Menaghan, E. G. (1994). Early parental work, family social capital, and early childhood outcomes. *American Journal of sociology*, *99*(4), 972-1009.

Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. SAGE Publications.

Pecora, P. J., Kessler, R. C., O'Brien, K., White, C. R., Williams, J., Hiripi, E., …Herrick, M. A. (2006). Educational and employment outcomes of adults

formerly placed in foster care: Results from the Northwest Foster Care Alumni study. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 28, 1459-1481.

Perna, L. W., & Titus, M. A. (2005). The relationship between parental involvement as social capital and college enrollment: An examination of racial/ethnic group differences. *Journal of Higher Education*, 485-518.

Piel, M. H. (2018). Challenges in the transition to higher education for foster care youth. *New directions for community colleges*, *2018*(181), 21-28.

Rios, S. J., & Rocco, T. S. (2014, July). From foster care to college: Barriers and supports on the road to postsecondary education. *Emerging Adulthood*. July, 2014.

Salazar, A. M. (2013). The value of a college degree for foster care alumni: Comparisons with general population samples. *Social work*, *58*(2), 139-150.

Salazar, A. M., Haggerty, K. P., & Roe, S. S. (2016). Fostering higher education: A postsecondary access and retention intervention for youth with foster care experience. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *70*, 46-56.

Seidman, I. (2006). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences*. Teachers college press.

Simmel, C., Shpiegel, S., & Murshid, N. S. (2013). Foster care alumni and funding for postsecondary education: Examining variation in state support. *Journal of Policy Practice*, *12*(1), 43-61.

Skobba, K., Meyers, D., & Tiller, L. (2018). Getting by and getting ahead: Social capital and transition to college among homeless and foster youth. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *94*, 198-206.

Stanton-Salazar, R. D. (2011). A social capital framework for the study of institutional agents and their role in the empowerment of low-status students and youth. *Youth & Society*, *43*(3), 1066-1109.

Sturges, J. E., & Hanrahan, K. J. (2004). Comparing telephone and face-to-face qualitative interviewing: a research note. *Qualitative research*, *4*(1), 107-118.

Yu, E., Day, P., & Williams, M. (2002). *Improving Educational Outcomes for Youth in Care. Symposium Summary Report (Washington, DC, February 8, 2002)*. Child Welfare League of America, Inc., 440 First Street, NW, Third Floor, Washington, DC 20001-2085.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSIONS

"When states assume a parental role for children in foster care, they also assume a constitutional duty to properly prepare youth for emancipation" *(Bendetto, 2008, p. 410).*

The purpose of this collected papers dissertation was to examine former foster youth as they pursue college. Understanding more about the journey of former foster youth as they pursue a college degree will help to understand what barriers are faced and what supports enhance their likelihood of graduation. This collected papers dissertation was guided by two over-arching questions: How is the issue of former foster youth pursuing a college education discussed in the literature? What were the perceptions and experiences of former foster youth as they considered, applied for, and attended college? Two studies using two different methods, structured literature review and phenomenology, were conducted as part of this dissertation. This concluding chapter includes four sections: (a) summary of study # 1, the structured literature review, (b) summary of study #2, the phenomenology, (c) an overview of findings for the collected papers dissertation, and (d) the overarching implications of this collected papers dissertation for policy, practice, and research.

Summary of Study #1: Former Foster Youth Pursuing a

College Degree: An Exploratory Examination of the Literature

This structured literature review (Rocco, et al., 2003) explored former foster youth pursuing a college degree. Aged-out foster youth encounter young adulthood without the typical support of parents and family. Coupled with other vulnerabilities resulting early maltreatment and time in foster care, these youth are far less likely than

their non-fostered peers to obtain a college degree (Festinger, 1983; Burley & Halpern, 2001; Dworsky & Perez, 2009; Courtney, et al. 2004, 2007; Geiger & Beltran, 2017).

The findings revealed four broad categories with several associated themes: (a) issues that impact college success (associate themes – pre-college factors, barriers and supports, social capital/family, and mental health), (b) on-campus interventions (associated themes – delivery of programs and services and development of programs and services), (c) governmental impacts, and (d) effects of a college education on the adult outcomes of former foster youth.

The resulting implications for policy and practice include all states providing college tuition waivers for former foster youth, states investing money in their colleges and universities for additional services and programs for former foster youth, and better mechanisms to continually address the mental health needs of foster youth. Implications for further research include on-going, data-heavy studies that track on-campus program participants through the program and beyond in order to assess the program impacts and lead to evidence-based programming and evaluation. Less than 30% of the articles in this literature review were published in higher education journals. More higher education researchers and publications can produce a more collaborative, multi-disciplinary approach to addressing the college needs of former foster youth.

Summary of Study #2: Former Foster Youth's Perceptions and Experiences

Regarding the Pursuit of a College Degree: A Phenomenological Inquiry

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the perceptions and experiences of former foster youth as they considered, applied for, and attended college.

Five major themes emerged: (a) college aspirations, (b) utilization of resources, (c) connections with supportive adults, (d) obstacles to completing college, and (d) confidence of success. Participants expressed strong college aspirations. As former foster youth navigating their college journey without parents and family support, they spoke about the post-foster care benefits that they would need. The participants had access to many supportive adults, institutional agents (Stanton-Salazar, 2011) from school and foster care who helped them along the way. Obstacles that these youth faced included unreliable transportation, unstable housing, and the cessation of benefits at age 23. As a whole, participants expressed a high level of confidence in their own ability to succeed in college and in life.

Participants in this study reported bolstered college aspirations when they learned of the foster care benefits such a tuition waivers and stipends available to them if they attend college. Implications for policy and practice include early interventions (as early as middle school) with independent living case workers who deliver steady information about college options and the available financial benefits. Not all states have tuition waivers and extended foster care benefits that help former foster youth attend college. Child welfare advocates, higher education professionals and state legislators must work to pass policies that support these youth as they pursue a college degree. Implications for future research include comparative studies with foster youth who attend college and foster youth who do not attend college in order to uncover potential impacts that foster care factors have on college enrollment. The participants in this study encountered transportation and housing instability while attending college. For some, those challenges stopped their college progress. Further research is needed to explore the experiences of

foster youth who have faced the same barriers and challenges, yet persisted, and obtained
their degree.

<div align="center">

Former Foster Youth Pursuing a College Degree

as Discussed in the Scholarly Literature

</div>

Foster youth pursuing a college degree face a host of challenges that negatively
impact their college success. The path of a child entering the foster care system typically
entails early maltreatment, separation from their birth family, multiple residential
placements in foster care, and multiple school changes. The resulting academic delays,
mental health challenges, and entrance into adulthood without typical parental and family
support lay the groundwork for the specific barriers that impede the college success of
former foster youth.

These barriers to college are well documented. Foster youth graduate high school
and enroll in college at rates lower than their non-fostered peers (Bruskas, 2008; Legal
Center for Foster Care and Education, 2014). Foster youth lack the financial and practical
support typically available from their parents and families, so foster youth who do make
it to college experience housing instability, and transportation problems, and a lack of
resources for food and day-to-day expenses. (Courtney et al, 2011; Hernandez &
Naccarato, 2010, Piel, 2018). Ultimately, former foster youth are far less likely than non-
fostered youth to achieve a college degree. (Burley & Halpern, 2001; Courtney, et al.,
2004, 2007; Dworsky & Perez, 2009; Festinger, 1983; Geiger & Beltran, 2017).

In response to these barriers, the literature largely addresses strategies and
supports that have been implemented to help foster youth succeed in college, even as they
face these challenges. Some supports are available before college in the forms of pre-

<div align="center">96</div>

college programs and educational advocates on high school campuses or as seminars and summer programs on college campuses. These pre-college programs aim to address issues of academic readiness, college aspirations, motivation, general coping, and resilience (Batsche, 2014; Kirk, 2011; Unrau,2012;). Mental health challenges are discussed with strategies to address avoidant attachment, encourage tangible supports at the university level, and encourage former foster youth to utilize mental health services on campus (Hallett, 2018; Huang, et al., 2020; Morton, 2018; Okpych & Courtney, 2018; Seon, et al., 2019). Strategies that former foster youth utilize to acquire necessary social capital amid the loss of parental and familial support include utilizing institutional agents and utilizing available social leverage. Some former foster youth have even redefined *family* and created a network of supportive adults that they can access for emotional, informational, and resource support (Franco & Durdella, 2018; Kearney, et al., 2019; Neal, 2017; Okpych & Courtney, 2017).

Some of the supports for former foster youth attending college have come through policy initiatives. Direct benefits to former foster youth in the form of federal educational and training vouchers (ETVs), state tuition waivers, and *extended foster care* (foster youth having the option to stay connected with the foster care system, even after they age out) are having positive effects on college persistence. Legal arguments and policy framework suggestions address raising the cutoff age for ETVs (from 23 to 25 years old) and expanding extended foster care into more states (Courtney & Hook, 2017; Okypych, 2012; Wells & Zuns, 2009).

A frequently discussed topic in the scholarly literature regarding former foster youth attending college is on-campus support programs. There has been a marked

increase in the number of on-campus support programs in the last decade (Geiger, et al., 2018) and this has impacted the number of recent publications about the programs and the services that those programs offer. Nineteen of the 24 (79%) articles discussing on-campus programs have been published in the last five years. Characteristics of on-campus programs, thus the delivery of services from the programs, revolve around (a) financial and resource support, (b) academic support, and (c) mentoring/emotional support (Dworsky & Perez, 2009; Geiger, et al., 2018; Randolph & Thompson, 2017; Unrau, 2017; White 2018). The development of these on-campus programs is a consideration and is approached through a strength perspective lens, a concept-mapping approach, and funding considerations. A broad consensus among the on-campus program literature is the need for continued research on the impact of particular services and elements that produces evidence-based practices and evaluation tools (Dworsky & Perez, 2010; Geiger et al., 2016; Hernandez & Naccarato, 2010; Miller et al., 2017; Salazar, 2013).

The barriers that former foster youth face are hard to overcome, and even with all of the supports and services afforded to former foster youth, their adult outcomes, as a group, still tend to lag behind their non-fostered peers. Even those who have earned a 4-year degree earn less than a degree holder without a foster care background, former foster youth have more mental health struggles and less job security (Gillum et al., 2016; Okpych & Courtney, 2014; Salazar, 2013). Okpych & Courtney (2014) suggest that even with all of the available interventions, foster care challenges may linger – even for those who achieve their college degree.

Biological Model and Perceptions and Experiences of Former Foster Youth

The findings from both studies offer insights on the perceptions and experiences of former foster youth on their college journey. In Chapter 1, this collected papers dissertation introduced an adapted model of Bronfenbrenner and Ceci's (1994) bioecological model that included people and circumstances within the various systems that are specific for foster children. These studies were commenced with the adapted model in mind to account for pre-emancipation and college-related factors and relationships that affect the college journey of a former foster youth.

The findings from these two studies informed how foster care changes in a child's systems of direct environment (microsystem) and extended environment (exosystems) can influence their path to college. Trauma from early maltreatment, placement in foster care, and further placement disruptions (direct environment circumstances specific to foster children) can lead to behavioral issues, mental health challenges, and academic challenges, which then reduce their chances of obtaining a college degree (Kirk & Day, 2011; Morton, 2018) A foster child's path to college can also be influenced by an extended environment (exosystem) in a unique way due to child welfare agency policies and practices, governmental policies, lost networks of extended family, and new networks of supportive adults. For example, the participants in the phenomenological study included in this present dissertation utilized policy-based services while attending college. Policies that have implemented stipends, tuition waivers, and favorable financial aid rules are all beyond the direct control of these former foster youth, yet the foster youth has no direct influence on the development of those policies.

Considered part of the foster child's microsystem, foster care influences are known to create academic barriers for foster youth, but foster youth are also know to aspire to college at a rate equal to their non-foster peers (Courtney, et al, 2005; Wolanin, 2005). As they are considering college, they need supportive adults who can encourage them, but even more – inform and empower them. Because of the disruptions that a foster youth has faced, they may need steady support to improve GPAs, succeed on college entrance tests, and gather the necessary documents for their college application. As they age out of foster care and embark on college, they need to be prepared with information about the funding sources and housing option that they will have access to (Courtney, et al, 2017; Hernandez & Naccarato, 2010). Unlike the average college student, a foster youth must also develop and execute a plan to financially and practically support themselves while pursuing their college degree.

In the adapted bioecological model presented earlier in this dissertation, the individual at the center is the foster child who eventually becomes the former foster youth considering college. The foster youth, now an emerging former foster youth, may need help with the application process for college which potentially adds new significant individuals to the microsystem. The academic literature typically addresses the college application process through discussions about financial aid, tuition waivers, and ETVs (Okpych et al.,, 2020; Simmel et al., 2013). The participants in the this phenomenology (Study #2) completed their college aplications in a variety of ways. Some completed the entire process by themselves. Some had help from supportive adults at school and from supportive adults from foster care. Some made connections with new supports at the college registrar office to help complete and finalize the process. These approaches

100

highlights the value of foster youth having relationships with supportive adults (Stanton-Salazar, 2011; Okpych & Courtney, 2017). Two youth had transportation problems and had difficult times completing their applications, entrance assessments and orientations. Their obstacles hightlight the vulnerabilities that foster youth face even at this stage of their college journey.

When foster youth attend college, they are vulnerable to a host of setbacks that are unique to their foster care status. Some youth encounter setbacks with school due to unstable housing and unreliable transportation (Curry, 2005). For some, mental health challenges cause disruptions (Huang, 2020; Morton, 2018). For some, any disruption in a funding source: tuition waivers, financial aid, and ETV stipends may jeopardize their collge degree.

Even with these vulnerabilities, foster youth have a good sence of self-reliance and independence (Morton, 2018; Wells & Zuns, 2009), and some find ways to persist and achieve a college degree. On-campus programs that support fosmer foster youth as they pursue their degree offer various services such as mentoring, counseling, turoting, and financial assistance. On-campus support programs also offer emotional support and connections that are so important to this group as they navigate the college journey largely on their own.

Overarching Implications of the Collected Papers

This section discusses the implications for policy, practice, and research.

Policy and Practice

Much has been done to alleviate financial barriers for foster youth to attend college. Federal education vouchers, state tuition exemptions, and favorable financial aid

policies have helped ease the financial burden of college for former foster youth (Davis, 2006; Dworsky, 2018; Okpych et al, 2020; Salazar, 2012). Yet, significant resource instability in the areas of housing and transportation are prevalent (Courtney et al., 2017; Piel, 2018). Solutions that address stable housing for former foster youth attending college need to be explored, and associated policies quickly enacted. Possible solutions include subsidized campus housing for students from foster care, subsidized housing vouchers for foster youth that can be utilized in close-to-campus housing. Location needs to be considered in order to also alleviate potential transportation problems.

After attending college for six years, 59% of general population, first-time college students have completed their bachelor's degree (Kena et al., 2015). For former foster youth attending college, the federal educational and training voucher (ETV) ceases on their 23 birthday, five years after aging out of foster care and typically four to five years after graduating high school. Like general population students, many former foster youth have not completed their college degree by age 23, thus this loss of benefits jeopardizes their ability to continue as a full time student. ETV funding needs to continue to an older age, (25 according to Okpych, 2012) in order to align with realistic graduation timelines. for former foster youth.

Limitations and Further Research

Mental health is a significant theme in the scholarly literature discussing former foster youth and college. Children in foster care endure early maltreatment, separation from families, and further disruptions that can lead to debilitating mental health challenges. These challenges are known to be a significant barrier to academic achievement (Morton, 2018). Since utilization of mental health service decreases after

leaving foster care (Courtney, et al., 2007; McMillen & Raghavan, 2009), former foster youth pursuing a college degree are often left with unsupported mental health needs. The present dissertation identified some mental health needs from both the literature and the participants, but did not explore interventions during foster care or college. Further research with young adult-aged former foster youth investigating perceptions of their mental health needs and their utilization of services could be a good starting point for then assessing what types of counseling and services former foster youth may utilize, both on-campus and in the community.

In the absence of typical parental and family connections, foster youth need to find and utilize other supportive adults as they embark on adulthood. Social capital to fill these familial voids may come from institutional agents (Stanton-Salazar, 2011) or other significant relationships within each foster youth's own definition of family (Kearney, et al., 2019). Post-care independent living programs and on-campus support programs may give *access* to supportive adults, but not much is known about (a)what supportive adults are utilized and (b) how these connections can turn into relationships, and (c) how supportive adults impact the the successful college journey for former foster youth. Further research is needed regarding the significant relationships and connections with supportive adults that former foster youth develop and maintain during their college journey.

While it is established that unreliable transportation options pose an obstacle to degree completion for former foster youth (Hernandez & Naccarrato, 2010), not much is known about the transportation utilized by former foster youth who have completed their degree. Further research with foster youth college graduates that investigates what

103

transportation modes were utilized while they obtained their degree can give insights to help the persistence of current college students from foster youth.

This dissertation identified on-campus support programs as a theme in the literature about former foster youth and college but did not assess any particular program or intervention. There is a wide call for on-campus support programs to collect detailed data on their participants and their practices (Dworsky & Perez, 2010; Randolph & Thompson, 2017, Salazar et al., 2016) in order to systematically study and validate best practices. Some scholars even expand that to call for standardized frameworks and impact evaluations (Dworsky & Perez, 2010; Okpych, 2012). Certainly, more systematic data collection would enable the investigation of program impacts as well as factors that impact the success of former foster youth pursuing their degree. Systematic and potentially shared databases and data sets could fuel investigations on:

- Comparison studies on tuition former foster youth graduation rates between community colleges, state colleges, and universities, while considering foster care and college factors
- Single campus comparison studies of graduation rates of foster care students that utilize campus support programs vs, foster care students who do not utilize a support program, again considering foster care and college factors
- Examine time to degree for foster youth in order to inform policy question of raising age of ETV

It is known that college completion rates for foster youth are dismal. We can, and do investigate students who persist toward their college degree, but not much is know about the perspective of foster youth college students who have dropped

out. Further research is needed to investigate the experiences of former foster

youth dropped out of college.

References

Batsche, C., Hart, S., Ort, R., Armstrong, M., Strozier, A., & Hummer, V. (2014). Post-secondary transitions of youth emancipated from foster care. *Child & Family Social Work*, *19*(2), 174-184.

Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (2006). Qualitative Research in Education: An Introduction to Theory and Methods. Allyn & Bacon.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development*. Harvard University Press.

Bronfenbrenner, U., & Ceci, S. J. (1994). Nature-nuture reconceptualized in developmental perspective: A bioecological model. *Psychological review*, *101*(4), 568.

Bruskas, D. (2008). Children in foster care: A vulnerable population at risk. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing*, *21*(2), 70-77.

Burley, M., & Halpern, M. (2001). *Educational attainment of foster youth: Achievement and graduation outcomes for children in state care*. Washington State Institute for Public Policy.

Courtney, M. E. (2005). Youth aging out of foster care. *Network on transitions to adulthood policy brief. The network of transitions to adulthood*, *19*.

Courtney, M.E., Dworsky, A., Ruth, G., Havlicek, J., Perez, A., & Keller, T. (2007). *Midwest evaluation of the adult functioning of former foster youth: outcomes at age 21*. Chicago: Chapin Hall Center for Children.

Courtney, M. E., & Hook, J. L. (2017). The potential educational benefits of extending foster care to young adults: Findings from a natural experiment. *Children and youth services review*, *72*, 124-132.

Courtney, M. E., Terao, S., & Bost, N. (2004). *Midwest evaluation of the adult functioning of former foster youth: Conditions of youth preparing to leave state care*. Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago.

Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative and mixed methods approaches*. London and Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Curry, S. R., & Abrams, L. S. (2015). Housing and social support for youth aging out of foster care: State of the research literature and directions for future inquiry. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, *32*(2), 143-153.

Davis, R. J. (2006). *College access, financial aid, and college success for undergraduates from foster care*. National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NJ1).

Dworsky, A. (2018). Improving the postsecondary educational attainment of youth in foster care. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, *2018*(181), 11-19.

Dworsky, A., & Pérez, A. (2010). Helping former foster youth graduate from college through campus support programs. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *32*(2), 255-263.

Festinger, T. (1983). *No one ever asked us: A postscript to foster care*. New York: Columbia University Press

Franco, J., & Durdella, N. (2018). The influence of social and family backgrounds on college transition experiences of foster youth. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, *2018*(181), 69-80.

Geiger, J. M., & Beltran, S. J. (2017). Experiences and outcomes of foster care alumni in postsecondary education: A review of the literature. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *79*(2), 186-197.

Geiger, J. M., Piel, M. H., Day, A., & Schelbe, L. (2018). A descriptive analysis of programs serving foster care alumni in higher education: Challenges and opportunities. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *85*, 287-294.

Gillum, N. L., Lindsay, T., Murray, F. L., & Wells, P. (2016). A review of research on college educational outcomes of students who experienced foster care. *Journal of Public Child Welfare*, *10*(3), 291-309.

Hallett, R. E., Westland, M. A., & Mo, E. (2018). A trauma-informed care approach to supporting foster youth in community college. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, *2018*(181), 49-58.

Hernandez, L., & Naccarato, T. (2010). Scholarships and supports available to foster care alumni: A study of 12 programs across the US. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *32*(5), 758-766.

Huang, H., Fernandez, S. B., Rhoden, M. A., & Joseph, R. (2020). Mental disorder, service utilization, and GPA: Studying mental health of former child welfare and youth experiencing homelessness in a campus support program. *Families in Society*, *101*(1), 54-70.

Kearney, K. S., Naifeh, Z., Hammer, T., & Cain, A. (2019). " family" ties for Foster alumni in college: an open systems consideration. *The Review of Higher Education*, *42*(2), 793-824.

Kena, G., Musu-Gillette, L., Robinson, J., Wang, X., Rathbun, A., Zhang, J., ... & Ballard, D. (2015). The condition of education 2015. *National Center for Education Statistics*, *144*.

Kirk, R., & Day, A. (2011). Increasing college access for youth aging out of foster care: Evaluation of a summer camp program for foster youth transitioning from high school to college. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *33*(7), 1173-1180.

Kirk, C. M., Lewis, R. K., Nilsen, C., & Colvin, D. Q. (2013). Foster care and college: The educational aspirations and expectations of youth in the foster care system. *Youth & Society*, *45*(3), 307-323.

Legal Center for Foster Care & Education (2014). *How can state law support school continuity and success for students in foster care?* https://firstfocus.org/resources/report/can-state-law-support-school-continuity-success-studentsfoster-care/

McMillen, J. C., & Raghavan, R. (2009). Pediatric to adult mental health service use of young people leaving the foster care system. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, *44*(1), 7-13.

Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education. Revised and Expanded from" Case Study Research in Education.".* Jossey-Bass Publishers, 350 Sansome St, San Francisco, CA 94104.

Morton, B. M. (2018). The grip of trauma: How trauma disrupts the academic aspirations of foster youth. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, *75*, 73-81.

Neal, D. (2017). Academic resilience and caring adults: The experiences of former foster youth. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *79*, 242-248.

Okpych, N. (2012). Policy framework supporting youth aging-out of foster care through college: Review and recommendations. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *34*(7), 1390-1396.

Okpych, N. J., & Courtney, M. E. (2014). Does education pay for youth formerly in foster care? Comparison of employment outcomes with a national sample. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *43*, 18-28.

Okpych, N. J., & Courtney, M. E. (2017). Who goes to college? Social capital and other predictors of college enrollment for foster-care youth. *Journal of the Society for Social Work and Research*, *8*(4), 563-593.

Okpych, N. J., & Courtney, M. E. (2018). The role of avoidant attachment on college persistence and completion among youth in foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *90*, 106-117.

Okpych, N. J., Park, S. E., Sayed, S., & Courtney, M. E. (2020). The roles of Campus-Support Programs (CSPs) and Education and Training Vouchers (ETVs) on college persistence for youth with foster care histories. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *111*, 104891.

Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. SAGE Publications, Inc.

Piel, M. H. (2018). Challenges in the transition to higher education for foster care youth. *New directions for community colleges*, *2018*(181), 21-28.

Randolph, K. A., & Thompson, H. (2017). A systematic review of interventions to improve post-secondary educational outcomes among foster care alumni. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *79*, 602-611.

Rocco, T. S., Stein, D., & Lee, C. (2003). An exploratory examination of the literature on age and HRD policy development. *Human Resource Development Review*, 2(2), 155-180.

Salazar, A. M. (2012). Supporting college success in foster care alumni: Salient factors related to postsecondary retention. *Child Welfare*, *91*(5), 139.

Salazar, A. M. (2013). The value of a college degree for foster care alumni: Comparisons with general population samples. *Social work*, *58*(2), 139-150.

Salazar, A. M., Haggerty, K. P., & Roe, S. S. (2016). Fostering higher education: A postsecondary access and retention intervention for youth with foster care experience. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *70*, 46-56.

Seon, J., Prock, K. A., Bishop, J. D., Hughes, A. K., Woodward, A. T., & MacLean, M. (2019). Formal and Informal Social Support and Academic Achievement among College Students with Unstable Childhood Experiences. *Child Welfare*, *97*(1).

Simmel, C., Shpiegel, S., & Murshid, N. S. (2013). Foster care alumni and funding for postsecondary education: Examining variation in state support. *Journal of Policy Practice*, *12*(1), 43-61.

Stanton-Salazar, R. D. (2011). A social capital framework for the study of institutional agents and their role in the empowerment of low-status students and youth. *Youth & Society*, *43*(3), 1066-1109.

Unrau, Y. A., Dawson, A., Hamilton, R. D., & Bennett, J. L. (2017). Perceived value of a campus-based college support program by students who aged out of foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *78*, 64-73.

Unrau, Y. A., Font, S. A., & Rawls, G. (2012). Readiness for college engagement among students who have aged out of foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *34*(1), 76-83.

Wells, M., & Zunz, S. (2009). Challenges and strengths among Chafee Education and Training Voucher eligible youth: The rural service providers' perspective. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *31*(2), 235-242.

White, C. C. (2018). Creating a structured support system for postsecondary success. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, *2018*(181), 59-67.

Wolanin, T. R. (2005). *Higher education opportunities for foster youth: A primer for policymakers*. Washington, DC: Institute for Higher Education Policy.

VITA

LORI ANN GIONTI

1987	Associate is Arts (A.A.) Business Administration Indian River Community College Ft. Pierce, FL
1995	Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) Management of Human Resources Palm Beach Atlantic University West Palm Beach, FL
2003	Master of Arts (M.A.) Teaching Barry University Miami, FL
2021	Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) Adult Education & Human Resource Development Florida International University Miami, FL

PUBLICATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS (Selected)

Plakhotnik, M. S., Gionti, L., Rocco, T. S., & Pashkina, M. V. (2020) Teaching undergraduate management students to write research papers: A case of a Russian English medium instruction university. *New Horizons in Adult Education and Human Resource Development 32*(1).

Plakhotnik, M. S., Rocco, T. S., Gionti, L. A., Munn, S. L. & Collins, J. C. (2018). Addressing the Scholarly Writing and Publication Needs of Graduate Students. In V. X. Wang (Ed.) *Scholarly Publishing and Research Methods Across the Disciplines*. Hershey, PA: Information Science Reference/IGI Global.

Rocco, T. S., Gionti, L. A., Januszka, C. M., Munn, S. L. & Collins, J. C. (2014). Creating a support structure for academic writing and publication support: The rationale and lessons learned. In Victor C. X. Wang *(Ed.) Handbook of Research on Scholarly Publishing and Research Methods*. Hershey, PA: Information Science Reference/IGI Global.

Montz, R. Gionti, L. A., Lane, M. (2018) Collaborative strategies for a safe and efficient medical gas shutdown. AHCA/FHEA, 2018 Joint Conference of AHCA Seminar & FHEA Meeting and Trade Show. Orlando, FL.

Gionti L.A. (2016). The impact of a training component on the "Job" satisfaction of foster parents: Implications for HRD. *Proceedings of the Fifteenth Annual South Florida Education Research Conference,* Miami, FL
  - L. R. Gay Award for Best Paper

Record, M., Gionti, L., & Nielsen, S. (2015). In T. S. Rocco (Moderator), *How local universities support graduate writers.* Symposium conducted at the South Florida Education Research Conference, Miami, FL.

Rocco, T., Gionti, L.A. (2015) Improving scholarly writing of graduate students and faculty. IGI-Global. Blog: http://www.igi-global.com/newsroom/archive/improving-scholarly-writing-graduate-students/2175/

Collins, J., Nimblett, D., Clayton, H., Gionti, L. A., Munn, S., Rocco, T. (2015). Underutilization of talent in the workforce: What is the role of human resource development? Academy of Human Resource Development, 2015 International Conference in the Americas. St. Louis, MO. FOCUS Session.

Rocco, T. S., Gionti, L.A., Januszka, C. M., (2014). Facilitating scholarly writing and publishing in the writing center. International Writing Centers Association Annual Conference, Orlando, FL. *Paper Presentation*.

Rocco, T. S., Gionti, L. A., Januszka, C. M., Munn, S. L. & Collins, J. C. (2014). Creating a support structure for academic writing and publication support: The rationale and lessons learned. In Victor C. X. Wang *(Ed.) Handbook of Research on Scholarly Publishing and Research Methods*. Hershey, PA: Information Science Reference/IGI Global.

Whitehead, C., Gionti, L. A., Meeker, C., Vega, G. (2014). Perspectives on marginalized adult populations in education. South Florida Education Research Conference, Miami, FL. *Symposium.*

Gionti L.A. (2003). Strategic solutions for foster care: What effect will an individualized continuing education plan have on the confidence, satisfaction, and retention of foster parents? Unpublished Action Research Master's Thesis. Barry University, Miami, FL.

Gionti L.A. (1995*). Children in foster care: Rescued or held hostage?* Unpublished Bachelor Thesis, Palm Beach Atlantic University, West Palm Beach, FL.