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Transition to Independence: A Phenomenological Study of Foster Care Alumni Pursuing a College Degree

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Transition to Independence: A Phenomenological Study of Foster Care Alumni
Pursuing a College Degree

By

Erica Warren Martin

A Dissertation Presented to the
Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences of Nova Southeastern University
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Nova Southeastern University

2015

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**Nova Southeastern University
Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences**

This dissertation was submitted by Erica W. Martin under the direction of the chair of the dissertation committee listed below. It was submitted to the Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences and approved in partial fulfillment for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Conflict Analysis and Resolution at Nova Southeastern University.

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Date of Defense



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Claire Michèle Rice, Ph.D., Chair

Dedication

This research is dedicated to the young adults across the nation who are transitioning from foster care to independence. I particularly would like to thank the individuals who were willing to share their story with me. Without you this study would have been impossible. Sharing your experience of the foster care system has shown me that while great progress has been made for children in foster care there is still a need for more support. I thank you for lending your voice and I hope this work is useful for those who would like to see more improvements in the foster care system.

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I know that words will never fully capture how grateful I am for the individuals who have played a role along the way. As I enter the next phase of my life, I pray that I can show my gratefulness through my actions. To paraphrase C.S. Lewis, “Friendship is unnecessary. Like philosophy, like art, it has no survival value. Rather it is one of those things that give value to survival.” Thank you all for bringing value to my journey.

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Abstract

This dissertation explored the experiences of foster care alumni pursuing a college degree and the perceptions and meanings they attribute to those experiences. This phenomenological study explored the conflicts that may impair foster care alumni from achieving postsecondary educational goals. The researcher conducted face-to-face interviews with 10 foster care alumni in the Central Florida area. The findings were based on the following research question: What are the obstacles to postsecondary achievement for foster care alumni who are currently pursuing or would like to pursue a degree at a two-or-four-year university? Scholarly literature and four theoretical frameworks support the analysis of this study's findings: Burton's (1990) theory of human needs, Chickering's (1969) theory of student development, Vygotsky's (1978) theory on social development and Putnam's (1993) theory on social capital. The primary essence of this study revealed that foster care alumni who are transitioning from foster care to independence expressed feelings of being alone and having a lack of support. The major sub-themes that exemplified this essence included feelings of isolation, lack of confidence, childhood trauma, gaining life skills, financial conflict, changing perceptions, motivation, communication with faculty, and delays in enrollment. Academic advisors, social workers in child welfare agencies, and researchers in the field of conflict analysis and resolution would benefit from the findings of this study to more effectively address the needs of foster care alumni.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Each year in the U.S., thousands of children are removed from their home due to abuse or neglect (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2013). Children's Rights (2013) reported that in 2012, more than 23,000 young people who were unable to be reunified with their families or placed in permanent homes aged out of foster care. To "age out" of foster care means that the youth has reached the age of adulthood as a result are no longer the responsibility of the state (Evans, 2014). While there are federally funded programs that provide resources for young adults between the ages of 18 to 21, statistics report the outcome of young adults who grew up in foster care are low. ChildHelp.org (2010) stated "youth who have experienced some form of abuse or neglect are 59% more at risk to be arrested before the age of 18. Youth who have experienced abuse or neglect are 28% more likely to enter the justice system as an adult and 30% more likely to engage in violent crime".

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2014) reported "foster care alumni are less likely to graduate from high school and are also less likely to attend or graduate college" (para. 5). The Department also reports that by the age of 26, approximately 80 percent of young people who aged out of foster care successfully completed high school degree or a GED program compared to 94 percent in the general population. In regards to postsecondary education, the rates of college attendance for foster care alumni fall well behind their counterparts. Only 7 percent of foster care alumni attended a four year college while 16 percent attended a two year college and 9 percent were in vocational training (Courtney & Dworsky, 2005).

According to data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau (2001), 24 percent of the general population attended a baccalaureate program and 49 percent of youth ages 18 and 19 were in school (Baum & Ma, 2007). Out of the foster care alumni who choose to attend college, only 26

percent report finishing their degree in 6 years as compared to the 56 percent rate of the general population (Synder & Tan, 2006). Even with the negative outlook of the transition to adulthood for foster care alumni, 70 percent of youth in foster care reported that they aspire to obtain a post-secondary education (McMillen, Auslander, Elze, White, & Thompson, 2003).

Additionally, 22 percent of foster care alumni reported that they would like to attain more than a bachelor's degree (Courtney & Dworsky, 2005). Given the proper support system, the youth reported that they feel more confident that they are capable of completing a college degree.

The history of child protection in America can be dated back to three distinct periods (Myers, 2008). Myers stated the first era began during the colonial times around 1875, known as the era before organized child protection. From 1876 to 1962 the formation of organized child protection through nongovernmental child protection societies began to develop and was known as the second era of child welfare. The third era of foster care began in 1963 which is believed to be the beginning of the modern era of child protective services funded by the government. Myers indicated that it was at this time that more formal organizations begin to form to serve children in foster care and the systemic approaches to child welfare begin to form.

Population

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2015) reported that there are approximately 510,000 children in foster care. While there is no official estimate of the number of Americans who lived in foster care during their youth, the director of Foster Care Alumni of America estimates that more than 12 million have experienced foster care (Rios, 2008). The Department of Health also stated the following: “based on the estimated 510,000 children in foster care, 32% of foster children are between the ages of 0 and 5, 28% of foster children are between the ages of 6 and 12, and 40% of foster children are between the

ages of 13 and 21". Foster Care Alumni (2005) reports that as a total percentage, there are more children of color in the foster care system than in the general U.S. population. The organization also states that child abuse and neglect occur at about the same rate in all racial/ethnic groups.

In regards to race demographics, there is a disproportionate amount of minority children who make up the foster care population. Childtrends.org (2007) reported the following demographics on children of foster care.

Black non-Hispanic children make up about 15% of the general population but make up 32% of the foster care population. White non-Hispanic children make up about 61% of the general population but make up 41% of the foster care population. Hispanic children make up 17% of the general population but make up 18% of the foster care population. Asian/Pacific Islander non-Hispanic children make up 3% of the general population and 2% of the foster care population. Children who identify two or more races (non-Hispanic) make up 4% of the general population and 3% of the foster care population. The average age of a child in foster care is 10% with the 11-15 year old age range having the highest percentage of children in foster care at 28%.

DCF (2007) reported there are currently about 6,000 youth and young adults are receiving independent living services in Florida. Independent services include a monthly stipend, housing and case management. This population of young adults serve as the population from which this study's sample was selected.

Statement of the Problem

A conflict is created when there is an expressed struggle by one who perceives incompatible goals or scarce resources as causing interferences in achieving their goals (Hocker

& Wilmot, 1980). For foster care alumni, they face many barriers that may cause interference in pursuing postsecondary education. The Florida Department of Children and Families (2014) reports that independent living services grew by more than 70 percent in 2007. Conversely, there was not a dramatic increase for positive outcomes of foster care alumni. DCF reports that approximately 6,000 youth and young adults are receiving independent living services but are still facing many challenges that pose barriers to their aspirations of pursuing postsecondary education. Despite the services offered to foster care alumni, there are still barriers present that affect their transition into adulthood. This study needs to be completed to uncover the meaning of conflicts that foster care alumni face during their pursuit of a college degree. The study presented research that support the theory that human needs and social development both have a strong impact on conflict management and college success.

There has been previous research that provides statistics of young people that transition into adulthood from foster care. The studies include the U.S. Housing Development's research efforts on the housing needs of the over 25,000 youth that "age out" of the foster care system each year. Lenz-Rashid (2006) reported that foster care alumni are at have an increased chance of experiencing homelessness. Lenz-Rashid stated that the youth also have more trouble gaining employment, accessing healthcare, incarceration and welfare dependency. The foster care alumni also have an increased chance of sexual and physical victimization. Although there have been numerous studies on the outcome of these young adults, there has been limited insight on what young adults perceive to be the barriers to their success and what services they recommend to bridge the gap. There is also limited information on how human needs and social development affect student development for foster care alumni. As a result, for this study focused on the conflicts that young adults in foster care perceive they face as they transition into adulthood. The

researcher also uncovered the perceived supports, help, tools, and strategies used by the youth to overcome the barriers and achieve academic success.

Several studies that have been conducted on foster care alumni (Department of Children and Families, 2014, Foster Care Alumni, 2005, Rios, 2008) show that there is a serious conflict between the youth that age out of foster care and the inability for many of them to achieve a successful transition into adulthood. This study is relevant as it provides a voice to current and former foster youth in the Central Florida region. Understanding what foster care alumni feel is needed for them to succeed will help justify funding for programs that serve their demographics. The study will providing critical insights to the conflicts they have faced while transitioning to adulthood and the resolutions that helped the youth overcome boundaries to enroll in post-secondary education.

Children of foster care experience the loss of their biological parents, extended family, and familiar surroundings (Pecora, 2010). Pecora stated the following: “problems such as sudden placement changes due to rejection by foster parent or siblings, the stigma of being in care, and other factors may contribute to behavioral and emotional problems for foster care youth”. For the purposes of this study, the researcher located articles that examined the emotional outcomes of foster care alumni (Pecora, 2009, Cook, 2007, Walker & Weaver, 2007). The studies have shown that children in foster care are more likely to have a mental disorder or substance use disorder than those who were never in foster care (Pecora et al., 2009). Pecora also determined youth in foster care have traumatic family histories and life experiences that are more likely to result in increased risk for emotional and behavioral disorders. Children who have resided in foster care are also more likely to develop psychological problems as a result of prior trauma or a series of traumatic events in their lives (Cook et al. 2007; Walker and Weaver 2007).

While the majority of previous studies have focused on the problems for former foster youth, this study provided a solution-focused lens to the present barriers. For this study, the researcher focused on the unique needs of foster care alumni in the state of Florida. The study addressed the solutions that have worked for youth who have been able to successfully start or complete a postsecondary education program. There are few studies that have focused on the academic achievement of foster youth in the state of Florida. Previous to this study Rios (2008) wrote on the academic achievement of foster care youth in South Florida.

This study highlighted the experiences of foster care alumni who are pursuing college degrees. Studying the experiences of foster care alumni who are transitioning into adulthood is critical to determining the factors that contribute to college success. It is also an important study as it helps to establish a need for services to prevent homelessness amongst foster care alumni. The goal of this study was to analyze the experiences of foster care alumni and the obstacles they feel prevent them from reaching their collegiate goals. This study will contribute to the field of conflict resolution by uncovering the experiences of achieving college success by young adults who identify as part of foster care alumni. Providing more education on being aware of the conflicts present can assist child welfare agencies with providing services that will help alleviate some of the burdens that foster care youth face. This includes researchers being able to replicate the study in other regions of the state. Additionally the information used from this study can be used for future quantitative studies to determine what barriers or factors have an effect on the surveys or assessments used for determining ratings of success. The outcome of the study will also aid child welfare agencies on understanding what specific barriers should be more closely addressed through funding and support systems.

This study's primary research question is: What are the obstacles to postsecondary achievement for foster care alumni who are currently pursuing or would like to pursue a degree at a two or four-year university?

Secondary questions:

1. What are the negative and positive experiences of foster care alumni pursuing a two or four year college degree?
2. How would foster care alumni describe the conflicts they have faced while working towards a college degree?
3. What strategies have foster care alumni created in order to overcome any current or previous barriers or conflicts?

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe, discover, and explain the obstacles to postsecondary achievement for foster care alumni who are currently attending or planning to attend a two-or-four year university. Foster care alumni is defined as youth who were placed in family foster care as children and have since aged out of the program. (Casey Family Programs, 2013). For the purpose of this study, foster care alumni will be defined as youth between the ages of 18 and 26 who have spent time in the foster care system. This range was selected because 18 is the age of majority in the state of Florida and a person is no longer considered a child. The age of 26 was selected because extended care services such as Medicaid ends at the age of 26 for children who have aged out of foster care (DCF, 2012). The participants selected for this study reside in the Central Florida region. This region was selected because it allowed the researcher to meet the participants face to face for the interviews. The overall purpose of the research was to uncover information from the participants that could serve as

answers to the research questions provided. During the interviews, the researcher asked questions about the experiences of transitioning from foster care into adulthood as well as obstacles faced when pursuing a college degree.

Significance

It is expected that the study will make at least three contributions to the areas of conflict resolution, foster care and the extended foster care program. First, the research conducted will help uncover what conflict resolution strategies aid foster care alumni who are facing challenges while pursuing a college degree. Additionally, the study will contribute to the expanding knowledge base of learning what services can best help the barriers facing foster care alumni. By gaining a better understanding of the barriers that contribute to foster care alumni who are transitioning to adulthood, child welfare agencies can continue to reform what services are offered. The research will be able to assist with filling in the gap of information of how foster care alumni manage with the conflicts they face after aging out of foster care. Academic advisors will be able to use the information from this study to gain a better understanding of how they can assist students who define themselves as foster care alumni. Social workers in child welfare agencies will also have the ability to provide services to foster care alumni that have been indicated in the interviews as personal obstacles in their transition to independence. Finally, researchers in the field of conflict analysis and resolution would benefit from the findings of this study to more effectively address the needs of foster care alumni.

Definition of Terms

Age of majority is a term used by the legal system to describe the moment at which a person is no longer considered a child. In most states, 18 is the age of majority; in the other states it is 21 (Rios, 2007; Kessler, 2004).

Academic achievement Mehta (1969) defined academic achievement as “academic performance includes both curricular and co-curricular performance of the students. It indicates the learning

outcome of the students. In class rooms students performs their potentials efficiently, as a result of it, learning takes place. The learning outcome changes the behavior pattern of the student through different subjects.”

Emancipated youth are young adults who have reached the age of majority without being adopted or reunified with their families of origin (Hochman, Hochman, & Miller, 2004).

Foster care is defined by the federatl statute as substitute care for children placed away from their parents or guardians and for whom the State agency has assumed placement and care responsibility. The services include the implementation of placements in foster family homes, foster homes or relatives, group homes, emergency shelters, residential facilities, child care institutions, and pre-adoptive homes. The term foster care covers both licensed and non-licensed placements and payments are made by the State or local agency for the care of the child. (45 U.S.C. 1355.20).

Foster care alumni are youth who were placed in family foster care as children and have since aged out of the program. (Casey Family Programs, 2013).

John H. Chaffee Foster Care Independence Program, also known as the "Chafee Program" or the "Independent Living/Chafee Program" is a government funded program by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, and state child welfare agencies. Funding is allocated to states for fund tutoring, help students complete their GEDs, attend specialty classes, and help with postsecondary planning. The states are also allowed to use Chafee funds to pay for tuition, books, fees, room and board expenses, and personal and transitional support services (Casey Family Programs, 2004).

Theories

This study highlighted four theories to better understand the concerns expressed by foster care alumni who are pursuing postsecondary education. Burton's Human Needs Theory describes the importance addressing human needs to resolve conflict. The theory states that when the basic needs are met, an individual is able to manage conflict more successfully and to prevent more conflicts from occurring in the future. Burton also states that conflict occurs when there is a threat social conditions in which the needs are met for the individual. For this study, the theory was applied to explore about the lack of basic human needs such as financial stability or housing can affect the college experience of foster care alumni.

The next theory is Lev Vygotsky's Social Development Theory. This theory outlines the effects of community interaction with cognitive development. Vygotsky believes that a strong community has a positive impact on an individual's ability to learn (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky also theorized that having a cultural influence on an individual can also have a positive impact on their ability to resolve conflict. This study utilized Vygotsky's theory to uncover the influence that peer and community interaction has for foster care alumni and whether it plays a positive role in their experience.

Additionally, Chickering's Student Development Theory was researched. Chickering's theory focuses on the development of a young adult in college. Chickering's theory highlights seven key factors contribute to a young adult's success during college (1969). Chickering's theory addresses the need for faculty interaction, peer interaction and the need for the student to develop a sense of purpose and value while attending college. For this study, the researcher utilized Chickering's theory to address how having a sense of purpose while also interacting with peers and faculty can impact their college experience. Chickering's theory also helped to uncover how missing those factors can impact the college experience of foster care alumni.

The final theory selected for the study was the Social Capital Theory. This theory is defined as the strength of community based on social networks and social relationships and the bonding between similar people and a bridging between diverse people (Adler & Kwon, 2002). While there are many varied theories on social capital (Bourdieu, 1985; Loury, 1977; Coleman, 1988), this dissertation used Putnam's concept of social capital to support the research questions that have been posed. Putnam's theory on social capital is that its three components, moral obligations, social values, and social networks are needed in order to successfully resolve conflict. The theory was examined to determine how foster care alumni use the components of social capital to promote conflict resolution strategies for academic achievement.

Chapter Summary

This study explored how college students who lived in foster care perceive how basic needs and social supports impact their quest for a college degree. In this section, the background of the problem, problem statement and research questions were presented. The population that is being studied and the significance of the study was also addressed. This section concluded with the clarification of terms that will be used throughout the study and its significance to the field of Conflict Resolution. The next chapter provides a review of the literature for this dissertation. The literature review will provide the contextual and theoretical framework for the study. In the next section, the Human Needs Theory, Social Development Theory and Student Development Theory will be presented in further detail. The section will conclude with explaining how the theories underline the conflicts youth face when pursuing academic achievement.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Children of foster care experience many different changes that can contribute to both short term and long terms struggles throughout their lives. The changes may include being removed from their homes without warning, having little to no contact with their parents, and having placement disruptions that may impact their social community. Children in foster care often struggle to build a strong network due to constant placement changes and inconsistent contacts. These factors can contribute to foster care alumni failing to achieve academic success. Fanshel (1965) stated the following: "children exposed to sustained separation from their parents and long-term living experiences in foster care are most vulnerable to the development of serious cognitive and personality impairments, from the moment of their entry into a foster care system" (p. 10).

This chapter will provide the contextual and theoretical framework for the study. The researcher will outline the legal process of foster care. Additionally, literature on the educational pursuits of foster care alumni will be discussed. Current programs provided to aid foster care alumni pursuing postsecondary degrees will be addressed. Additionally, the Human Needs Theory, Social Development Theory, Student Development Theory and Social Capital Theory will be presented. The chapter will conclude with explaining how the theories underlie the statistics presented concerning foster care alumni pursuing academic achievement.

Legal Process of Foster Care

The process of foster care begins when a child is removed from a home due to probable cause (39.402). Chapter 39 states that probable cause is to believe that one of the following has occurred:

- (a) The child has been abused, neglected, or abandoned, or is suffering from or is in imminent danger of illness or injury as a result of abuse, neglect, or abandonment;
 - (b) The parent or legal custodian of the child has materially violated a condition of placement imposed by the court; or
 - (c) The child has no parent, legal custodian, or responsible adult relative immediately known and available to provide supervision and care.
- (2) A child taken into custody may be placed or continued in a shelter only if one or more of the criteria in subsection (1) applies and the court has made a specific finding of fact regarding the necessity for removal of the child from the home and has made a determination that the provision of appropriate and available services will not eliminate the need for placement.

In 2014, Florida Governor Rick Scott signed legislation that requires any individual who suspects that a child has been abused by any person to report that to the Florida Abuse Hotline (myflfamilies.com, 2014). When the call is received and accepted by the hotline, the case is then investigated by the Department of Children and Families. Additionally, reports of child abuse given by someone that is not the caregiver will be accepted at the hotline and immediately transferred to the appropriate local law enforcement agency where the child lives. Once the investigator deems that there is probable cause the case is brought before a judge or magistrate. The judge or magistrate makes the decision as to whether the child should be removed from the home or allowed to stay in the home under the supervision of another caregiver.

Currently, the Florida Statute states that "abuse" means any willful act or threatened act that results in any physical, mental, or sexual injury or harm that causes or is likely to cause the child's physical, mental, or emotional health to be significantly impaired. Abuse of a child includes acts or omissions. Corporal discipline of a child by a parent or legal custodian for disciplinary purposes does not in itself constitute abuse when it does not result in harm to the child. (Florida Statute 39.1).

The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (P.L. 93-24) provided funding to improve state governments' capacity to address and prevent child abuse and neglect. In order to qualify for funding, states must have mandatory reporting laws and prompt investigations of abuse or neglect reports. Since then more laws have been passed that allow children to gain more rights and protection. Assessments have also been created in order to determine which situations should be investigated.

Transition out of foster care

Prior to 2014, foster care children who resided in Florida did not have the option of remaining in foster care when they reached the age of 18. Since January 1, 2014, current and former foster youth have more options that are available to help with their transition into adulthood (myflfamilies.org, 2015). Through the Extended Foster Care program, foster care alumni have the flexibility of receiving a stipend to cover housing and other basic needs. In order for the child to continue receiving case management services and other means of support, they have to agree to either enroll in school or obtain employment. The youth are allowed to reside with a licensed foster parent, group home, or reside in a college dormitory or apartment (centerforchildwelfare.usf.edu, 2014).

Studies that Address Foster Care Children Exiting the Foster Care System

It is estimated that over 25,000 youth age out of and exit foster care each year (Jim Casey Youth Initiative, 2009). The rates have increased steadily every year for the number of children in foster and the number of children that age out of foster care. Experts have often questioned why children age out of foster care. According to Courtney and Barth (1996), exits from care occur primarily due to the youth becoming emancipated to independent living or return to live with their birth families. Courtney and Barth also state that incarceration, psychiatric hospitalization, and run away status also contribute to the reasons for youth aging out of foster care. To better prepare foster care youth for their transition into adulthood, child welfare practitioners conducted research on best practices for preparing youth with an effective plan for their exit from the foster care system. There are three major studies that have been conducted to uncover the reasons and outcomes for foster youth exits. The first two studies, conducted in California and Wisconsin, studied youth who left the care of the state by the age 18. For the California study of 2,653 older youth, 60 percent were classified by the state as discharged due to emancipation or reaching the age of majority (Courtney & Barth, 1996).

Additionally, 17 percent of the foster care youth returned home or were adopted. The remaining 23 percent ran away, were incarcerated, were psychiatrically hospitalized, refused services, were abducted, or died. Regarding the Wisconsin study, “6,274 foster care alumni age 17 and older, 53% were reunified with parents or placed with relatives, 28% were emancipated or had completed their education, 6% were transferred to another facility, 6 percent were discharged to independent living and allowed to live off-site, 6% were on runaway status, and less than 1 percent were adopted” (Dworsky & Courtney, 2000, para. 4). The third study was conducted by McMillen and Tucker (1999) in Missouri. In Missouri, where youth are allowed to stay in the care of the state until the age of 21, the study was conducted on a smaller scale. Out of

the 252 youth discharged after age 17, 60% of the cases were listed as closed as “goals achieved,” with 4 percent released because runaway status and 29% released for “other” reasons.

While the three studies conducted seemed to suggest that foster care youth who had negative outcomes were in the minority, additional research has suggested that foster care alumni generally do not have as many positive outcomes as youth not involved in child welfare. The outcomes studied address a variety of outcomes. This includes educational attainment, employment, public assistance receipt, criminal justice involvement, and material hardships (Goodkind, Schelbe, Shook, 2011). One study examined the outcomes of foster care alumni and by the age of 24, the youth were three times more likely to not have a high school diploma or GED, fewer than half had acquired a job, approximately one-quarter had experienced homelessness and over 40 percent of males had contact with the criminal justice system (Courtney, Dworksy, lee & Raap, 2010). Foster care alumni often experienced a long term history of instability and many challenges associated with foster care. Due to their previous unpredictable and challenging experiences, foster care alumni are often unprepared for emancipation from state care (Daining & DePanfilis, 2007; Keller et al., 2007; Pecora et al., 2006; Vaughn et al., 2008).

College Access

Research has been conducted to focus on college access for the population. According to Wolanin (2005), of the 300,000 young adults in foster care between the ages of 18 and 25, approximately half of the population will graduate from high school. Furthermore, only 10 percent attend postsecondary education. Given the statistics regarding the outcomes of foster care alumni, it is evident that very few young adults from foster care are able to attend college. When considering the reasons for the limited college rate of foster care alumni, research has been

conducted to determine the reasons behind the low numbers. Academic struggle and behavior concerns have been two major reasons for limited college access. Emerson and Lovitt (2003) stated that foster children have been found to score significantly lower than their non-foster peers on standardized tests. Additionally, researchers reported a deficit of between 15-20 percentile points. Additionally, many of the children in foster care experience a change in placement at least once a year. In the state of Florida, 65% of foster children experienced 7 or more school changes before 12th grade (Pecora et al., 2005). As for behavioral concerns, Scherr (2007) reported that 24 percent of foster youth had experienced either a suspension from school or expulsion. Scherr's research suggests that foster youth are three times more likely to experience disciplinary actions than their non-foster counterparts. This can create a barrier for youth who experienced academic and behavioral struggles while in high school and now aspire to attend college.

Nationwide and Local Initiatives

In most states, youth must leave foster care at the age of 18 but many states offer extended services (jimcaseyyouth.org, 2013). There have been programs established at both the local and national level to provide foster care alumni with the opportunity to attend a 2 or 4 year college after they leave the foster care system. Nationwide initiatives include the federal Chafee Foster Care Act which was established to identify children who are likely to remain in foster care until the age of 18. The law was also created to help the youth to "make the transition to self-sufficiency by providing funding for services such as assistance in obtaining a high school diploma, career exploration, vocational training, job placement and retention, training in daily living skills, training in budgeting and financial management skills, substance abuse prevention,

and preventive health activities” (SSA.gov, 2014, para. 1). The law states that a state may apply for funds from its allotment after submitting a plan for providing services in writing.

In addition to Florida launching extended foster care initiatives, there are additional states that have launched similar programs. For example, in 2013 Nebraska extended the age limit for their foster care subsidy program to age 21 (jimcaseyyouth.org, 2013). In June 2013, Nebraska enacted LB 216, the Young Adult Voluntary Services and Support Act. This legislation provides services and monetary support to foster care alumni under the Fostering Connections Act. The coverage also provides extended subsidies and Medicaid coverage for foster care alumni who entered into a guardianship with a court-approved relative or were adopted at the age of 16 or older. Before the act was enacted foster care services for foster care alumni were terminated at the age of 19, the legal age of majority in Nebraska (neappleseed.org, 2014).

Additionally, Nebraska has a Former Ward program for foster care alumni who participate in post-secondary education before they age out. The program was criticized by those who thought it did not provide adequate services for those who desired to enroll or re-enroll after they left care. The program was also unavailable to young people who chose not to pursue post-secondary education or were adopted or in a guardianship. Through Nebraska’s new legislation, foster care alumni are now able to continue to receive support on a voluntary basis until their 21st birthday. The services under the program include case management, health insurance coverage, and housing support through continued foster care maintenance payments.

Similar to the legislative changes in Nebraska, in 2014 Florida extended the age of their foster care subsidy programs to the age of 23. The services offered are on a voluntary basis and the youth must agree to meet the requirements of the program. Requirements of the program include maintaining a 2.4 GPA and being enrolled in a program or employment. The independent

living services program in Florida is open to foster youth ages 18 to 23 (cbccfl.org). There have been recent changes to the extended foster care program for children who turn 18 while in foster care. According to Community Based Care of Central Florida (2013), on January 1, 2014, the services of current and former foster youth have expanded to nurture their success. Previously youth did not have the option to remain in foster care after their 18th birthday. Once children turned 18 they were expected to find their own housing and receive a stipend per month for basic needs. Through the new law, children who have aged out of foster care have the flexibility needed to transition into adulthood by providing more services that assist them with their basic needs and tuition for school. Youth are allowed to enter the program voluntarily and if they qualifications they can continue to receive continuity of care through case management services, emergency aftercare services, and any other services that will assist them with transitioning successfully into adulthood.

Theoretical Framework

Human Needs Theory

The Human Needs Theory is an approach that focuses on individuals' needs being met (Christie, 1997). The theory summarizes that when the basic needs are met, an individual is able to manage conflict more successfully and to prevent more conflicts from occurring in the future. Burton (1990b) states that if social conditions are the problem for an individual, then conflict resolution and prevention is possible by removing the sources of conflict in the environment.

Burton's (1990a) theory states that human needs are genetically programmed predispositions and common to all humankind across time and space. Burton does not focus on the different needs of individuals but rather the constant needs and how the needs may be impacted by the changes in the conditions of the environment. An example would be how the

need for security is constant and becomes apparent only when the environment is perceived to pose a threat to security (Dimanna, 2012). While basic human needs are constant across time and space, they may vary depending on the circumstances of the individual. Additionally, people work to have their needs met or make a plan to have their needs met so that conflict does not arise.

Burton's theory includes factors such as feelings of control, security, justice, stimulation, response, meaning, rationality, and esteem and recognition (Christie, 1997; Danesh, 2011).

Burton's list of needs derived from Maslow (1954), Sites (1973), and Ledger, Galtung and Antal (1980). Danesh (2011) explained that the human needs theory is ranked in three orders of needs. The first order of is based on the basic needs for human survival such as food and shelter. The second order of needs are associated with human rights needs such as justice and equality. The third order of needs involved internal motivators such as spiritual needs and purpose (Danesh, 2011). Burton (1990) stated that conflicts are the direct result of social norms being incompatible with inherent humans needs. Burton stated that the aggressions and antisocial behaviors of individuals are stimulated by social circumstances.

There are many limitations of this theory that have been pointed out by other scholars. The list of critiques were listed by Scimecca (1991) as the following: it emphasizes generic determinism, it fails to consider cultural components and differences as influential factors in practice and theory (Avruch & Black, 1987), the relationships among the different human needs identified by Burton are unclear (Mitchell, 1990) and it considers power relationships irrelevant to the conflict resolution practice. (Abu-Nimer, 1999). For the sake of this study, the most important most notable critique is the one listed by Avruch. The researcher took into account the cultural difference among the population studied to determine whether cultural components have

an effect on their perceptions of barriers to post academic achievement. This is critical because there may be underlying issues affecting a particular group within the foster care alumni population that has yet to be addressed.

In relation to foster care alumni, this study obtained data through interviews to support the notion that when one of the three needs categories is not met, the foster care youth is negatively impacted and unable to successfully transition into adulthood. Missing one of the three categories can contribute to the formation of conflicts that can prevent the youth from developing both socially and as a student. Burton argued the following “We believe that human participants in conflict situations are compulsively struggling with respective social levels to gain control of their environment that is necessary to ensure the satisfaction of these needs” (1991, p. 82).

Social Development Theory

Lev Vygotsky’s Social Development Theory emphasized the critical role that interaction with the community placed in cognitive development. Vygotsky theorized that having a strong community would positively impact the individual’s ability to of making a learning opportunity meaningful (Vygotsky, 1978). Another key component of the theory is its consideration for a cultural component. Where Burton’s theory on human needs is lacking, Vygotsky is able to account for the influence of culture on development and how it may ultimately affect an individual’s conflict resolution strategy.

Vygotsky’s (1978) theory of social development focused on children from an early age and theorized that in order for maturation to gain a cognitive level, a social component had to be present. Edward (2005) stated that the theory represented the important interaction between adults and children for a successful learning experience. In regards to the importance of youth

having interaction with adults, he argued stated the following ‘. . . what children can do with the assistance of others might be in some sense even more indicative of their mental development than what they can do alone’ (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 85). From Vygotsky’s perspective, in order for a child to truly gain from a learning experience it was critical for them to have social interaction with someone more knowledgeable on the subject.

There are a few critiques of Vygotsky’s theory. Santrock (2010) believed that the theory overemphasized the role language and did not focus on differences in children such as gender or culture. He also believed that the theory focused too much on the role of the adult and that the theory could allow an adult to become over controlling. There is also a lack of mention of age differences and how the theory can affect different age groups of children. Santrock believed that it was important to consider age as adolescents have more ability to ability their knowledge in addition to acquiring it. He also suggested that there were overall differences in the thinking patterns of young children and older ones.

For the purposes of this study, this theory was used to support the idea that the roles of adults such as a mentor or teacher can help foster care alumni between the ages of 18 to 20 with their transition. It is hypothesized that the youth who report having an older person who supports them in their life are more likely to report college readiness and success. Vygotsky’s emphasis on the role of mentorship helped address the degree to which maintaining healthy relationships with college faculty, older mentors or even a parental figure contributes to the conflict management skills and academic success of young adults who are pursuing a college degree. It also addressed the youth who do not have an adult figure in their life and whether the impact serves as a barrier to their transition in to adulthood.

Student Development Theory

College students' identity development was theorized by Chickering (1969). Chickering believed that the development of a young adult in college was through a series of seven vectors. Chickering's theory has been helpful in determining the factors contribute to a young adult's success during college. The theory states that there are seven key factors that play a role in college readiness. The concepts, which were revised by Chickering and Reisser (1993) due to initial criticism of the critique includes: the seven vectors were revised to include developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity.

The first vector that Chickering (1969) theorized dealt with the developing competence vector. In this vector it is believed that students achieve intellectual, physical, and interpersonal proficiency. In order to successful gain interpersonal competence, the student must acquire a sufficient level of social skills and gain the ability to be aware of and respond to others in appropriate ways. In regards to the vector that address emotions, Chickering believed that students are able to better learn how to identifying and processing both positive and negative feelings. The vector that addresses autonomy toward interdependence states that when students become emotionally independent from the need for reassurance or approval from others and that there may be conflict when there is lack of balance between independence and affiliation (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). This vector mainly address the critical role of relationships and the need to have both a feeling of interdependent and community. In the fourth vector, the vector that addresses developing mature interpersonal relationships, students grow in their

capacity for intimacy and meaningful commitment in relationships with significant others and close friends (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

The fifth vector addresses self-identity, and the ability for students to strengthen their self-awareness. This includes self-identification of race, gender, and sexual orientation for example. This vector is critical because it allows the student gain a sense of purpose and confidence in themselves as they transition into adulthood (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). The sixth vector highlights the student's sense of setting goals, commitments and aspirations in life. The seventh vector addresses personal values, behaviors and using the social skills developed through interpersonal relationships to gain a sense of right and wrong. The seventh vector also address conflict management using the skills acquired from the other six vectors.

Chickering's initial 1969 theory of college student development received a lot of support (Knefelkamp, Widick & Parker, 1978; Winston, 1990). Many believed that the vectors served as a valuable learning tool for young adults transitioning into adulthood. However, many critics believed that the earlier version of Chickering's work did not accurately portray student development. This was due to its primary focus on white males during the initial study (Chickering, 1969). The general concern was that the theory had a lack of consideration for women (Greely & Tinsley, 1988) or people of different races (Branch-Simpson, 1984).

In an effort to validate Chickering's theory, the researcher conducted one-on-one interviews with young adults ages 18 to 21 who are pursuing post-secondary education. The interviews included a series of questions that identified the experiences that young adults believes pose or are currently posing as a conflict that affects their collegiate success. The vectors helped support the notion that students who have interpersonal relationships with others,

especially older adults, are able to better gain conflict management skills and have a better transition into adulthood than their counterparts who do not have social support.

Social Capital Theory

Putnam's Social Capital Theory addresses the need for individuals to build strong relationships in order to successfully manage social conflicts. Putnam (1993) described his theory by stating the following:

This insight turns out to have powerful practical implications for many issues on the American national agenda for how we might overcome the poverty and violence of South Central Los Angeles or nurture the fledgling democracies of the former Soviet empire. (p. 36)

Social capital has been widely described as the value that is created by investing in relationships with others through processes of trust and reciprocity (Coleman, 1988). While there is a wide range of interpretations of the theory (Bourdieu, 1986; Jacobs, 1965; Woolcock, 1998; Borgatti & Foster, 2003), this dissertation highlighted Putnam's definition as it addresses the use of social capital to assist in the development of conflict resolution strategies. Putnam's concept of social capital is that having personal connections and relationships are a valuable resource that can impact an individual's social or economic status that can be used towards achieving their goals (Putnam, 2000). Putnam (1993) also states that lacking social capital can negatively impact an individual's chances of reaching their goals because they are not privy to information about opportunities that are typically provided within social networks. Putnam argues that individuals that lack social capital are lacking a key component to resolving conflicts that may lead to greater problems such as poverty and isolation.

There are a few critics of the theory that feel relying too much on the theory of social capital can have a negative impact on conflict resolution. For example, theorist Ben Fine believes that social capital is presented as a tool of consensus for overcoming ideological divisions between the political left and right. However, he argues that the concept is actually highly political in both neutralizing dissent and systematically disregarding key questions and issues concerning the social conflicts it is claimed to address (Haynes, 2009). Fine also believed that too much reliance on social capital can have a negative effect on resolving conflict through independence. Fine (2002) states that “Social capital is the degradation of scholarship, independence and self-help. Isolated occurrences aside, it can only be rejected, not appropriately transformed” (Fine, 2002, p. 799).

For the purposes of this study, this theory was used to support the idea that having strong connections with peers on and off campus as well as faculty can positively impact the conflict resolving skills of foster care alumni. It is hypothesized that the youth who report having strong relationships with other individuals will also report having a more positive experience of working towards reaching their collegiate goals. Putnam’s emphasis on the role of social connections helped address the conflict resolution strategies that foster alumni create after they age out of foster care. It also addressed the youth who do not have strong connections in their life and whether the impact serves as a barrier to developing conflict resolution strategies.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the contextual and theoretical framework for this study. It provided a detailed summary of the theories that address the conflict of the study. Statistical data painted a picture of the population being studied and the current initiative that currently exist to address the conflicts of the study. In order to support the framework of the study and to address

the underlying conflict, the Student Development Theory, Social Capital Theory, Human Needs Theory and the Social Development Theory were also presented in this chapter. The strengths and limitations of each theory was also presented. The next section is a methodology summary for the study. In the next section, the purpose of research, research questions and phenomenological framework will be presented in further detail. The section will conclude with explaining the interview protocol and data collection process.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter begins with the purpose of the research. The researcher will outline the design of the research and its design to answer the research questions presented in Chapter 1. Additionally, the phenomenological framework will be outlined to highlight the relevance of the methodology to this research. The recruiting process and sample characteristics will also be addressed. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the data collection and analysis.

Purpose of Research

The purpose of this research was to explore the experiences of youth who have reached the age of majority for foster care and the conflicts that they face when working to receive a college degree. The interview questions were provided as data that would serve as answers to the research questions on the experiences of foster care alumni and what they believe has been positive or negative during their journey to achieve their collegiate goals. The interview process included the researcher asking 10 foster care alumni about their experiences of pursuing their college degree and the conflicts have faced. The researcher also asked participants about strategies used to manage and overcome their conflicts. The intent of the research is to uncover the meaning behind the experiences of foster care alumni and the experiences may contribute to the conflicts that may hinder academic success. Specifically, by uncovering the meaning behind the experiences of the participants, this study will aim to enhance the conflict management strategies of foster care alumni working towards a college degree.

Research Questions

The introduction and literature review presented the negative statistics for youth in foster care who are attempting to successfully transition into adulthood. While there have been many quantitative studies that address foster youth's academic achievement, there has been little

research on learning the perspective of students who are gaining the ability to manage conflict through social support for a better outcome. The literature review established the need for more research on the role of social support and how foster care alumni can gain skills that allow them to become more self-aware of their goals, values and how those skills can increase a youth's chance of success. Through the fact stated in the literature review, the research questions were developed for this study. The primary research question for this study will be: What are the obstacles to postsecondary achievement for foster care alumni who are currently pursuing or would like to pursue a degree at a two or four year university?

The secondary questions were:

1. What are the negative and positive experiences of foster care alumni pursuing a two or four year college degree?
2. How would foster care alumni describe the conflicts they have faced while working towards a college degree?
3. What strategies have foster care alumni created in order to overcome any current or previous barriers or conflicts?

Methodology and Design of Research

Using a qualitative lens, researcher has conducted interviews with participants using a phenomenological structure. Creswell's (2007) qualitative research model was used for the study. Creswell's model implements the following steps when conducting research: Selecting relevant statements from each interview; using the statements selected to create a description of the experience (Creswell, 2007, p. 159); organizing the statements into themes; creating the structural description of each experience; creating a description that highlights the textural and structural descriptions; including "significant statements and themes" to form the textural

descriptions (Creswell, 2007, p. 61). Additionally, the researcher used a list of interview questions that were prepared prior to the interview. The participants remained anonymous during the interview process. The next portion of this chapter will outline the qualitative research that will be used in the dissertation.

Qualitative Methodology

The term of phenomenological is defined by Creswell (2003) as a phenomenological study describes the meaning of several individuals of their lived experience. Phenomenology research method is also the framework that will serve as the primary guide for this study. The phenomenological perspective is that experience affects perceptions, which influence behavior and attitudes. Phenomenology promotes the description of participants' subjective experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The goal of phenomenology to help the researcher learn how people perceive a certain event in their lives and how they talk about it with others (Patton, 2002). Mouton and Marais (1990) state that individual researchers hold “explicit beliefs” (p. 12). The focus of this research is to gather data regarding the perspectives of research participants about the phenomenon of growing up in foster care and working through barriers towards a post-secondary education and successful transition into adulthood. A phenomenological research design was decided by the researcher to be the most appropriate method of addressing the perceptions of young adults regarding what influenced their academic achievement and how they have been able to manage their conflicts while pursuing a college degree.

Phenomenological research also searches for shared experience among various participants who have the same phenomenon. There are different elements that describe the method. The participants may have all gone through the same experience the participants are able to give the research more understanding of the experience. Interviewing multiples will often give different

accounts of the same story which provides more clarity of the experience to the researcher. It is critical for the researcher to ask certain open ended questions that can illicit an empathic response from the response. This is critical because it promotes a better rapport between the researcher and the participant and allows the person to speak freely. The first element is quoted by Creswell (2007) “the study of a lived experience of individuals.” When interviewing, for example, a person who is conscious of the effects of their situation may exhibit strong emotions during the session. The researcher was mindful of this when asking questions to the subject.

The purpose of the qualitative methodology was to assess the experience of foster care alumni. Through assessing the experiences, the researcher can uncover the meaning that may be present in the experiences. Through the qualitative lens, the interview explored the positive and negative experiences of the youth. This study conducted phenomenological research to discover the meaning behind the attitudes of the participants. Creswell (2007) stated that phenomenological research occurs when commonalities are found in the shared experiences of participants. The interviews allowed the youth to share their experiences how the experience of foster care may have affected their attitude towards pursuing a college degree.

Phenomenological Framework

Christensen, Johnson, and Turner (2010) stated that the primary objective of a phenomenological study is to explain and explore the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experiences of a person, or a group of people, around a specific phenomenon. There are many forms of phenomenological studies that can be used for qualitative research. To determine which phenomenological design and methodology, form, the researcher will outline three types of phenomenological designs. Moustakas, who is thought to have a key role in the formation of phenomenological research, stated that research should focus on the wholeness of experience and

a search for essences of experiences (1994). The three types of phenomenological research discussed will be transcendental phenomenology, existential phenomenology, and hermeneutical phenomenology.

Transcendental phenomenology is described as a study in which the researcher sets aside as many prejudgments as possible for the interview and uses a systematic procedure for analyzing the data (Moustakas, 1994). During the interview, the interviewer shares their experiences with the phenomenon while identifying significant statements in the database from participants. The researcher is able to identify themes into the experiences of the individuals and describe the meaning behind the experiences (Mouerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). Mouerer-Urdahl and Creswell stated that the benefit of transcendental phenomenology is the fact that this form of asking questions allows the researcher to heavily rely on the participant's experience and ensures that the story will be told through the voice of the participant rather than the researcher. However, a drawback listed is the fact that essence of a participant's experience can only reflect a particular place and time and that finding a common thread may prove to be more challenging due to the various backgrounds of the participants.

Existential phenomenology is described as interviews that offer a subjective human experience as it reflects people's values, purposes, ideals, intentions, emotions, and relationships (Jun, 2008). Jun stated that existential phenomenology deals with the experiences and actions of the individual, rather than conformity or behavior. Instead of being object, the individual is seen as an active and creative subject. The benefit of existential phenomenology is that it offers great flexibility given the subjective nature of the study while also concentrating on the consciousness of the participant instead of their reaction to the event (Sowder, 1991). However, this form of

phenomenology does not offer an organized method of analyzing data when compared to the other forms of phenomenological studies.

Hermeneutical phenomenology is defined as a method in which the researcher combines an interpretive and descriptive approach to the interviews. Kafle (2011) described this type of phenomenology as the premises that reduction is impossible and acceptance of endless interpretations as the researcher attempts to put an effort to get beneath the subjective experience and find the genuine objective nature of the things as realized by an individual. Hermeneutic phenomenology focuses on the subjective experience of individuals and groups. It also involves the researcher generating the most valid interpretation of a phenomenon. The benefit of hermeneutic phenomenology is that it goes beyond description in order to discover meanings that are not immediately apparent (Merleau-Ponty, 1996). However, the researcher is cautioned to bracket any biases that may be present to ensure that their bias does not affect the interpretation of the responses.

For the purposes of this study, the researcher used transcendental phenomenology. The transcendental phenomenological research design was determined to be the most appropriate to explore and describe the perceptions of foster care alumni and what they feel influenced their academic achievement. This method was chosen over the other approaches due to its heavy reliance on the perception of the participant's experience. The method also aided the researcher with ensuring that prejudgments were addressed and removed before the interview. Moustakas (1994) stated that transcendental phenomenology promotes the notion of noema. Noema is not the real object but the phenomenon of the topic at hand. Allowing the researcher to capture greater detail in the noematic qualities provides more awareness of the topic and creates a deeper level of perception of the participant's experience.

Sample

The sampling procedure included selecting participants based upon their age, pursuit or desire to pursue a college degree, and the ability to answer the interview questions on sharing their experiences on the conflicts or support systems while pursuing a college degree. The sample selected included participants aged 18 and older based upon the individuals who fit the description of the population referenced in Chapter One. Ten research participants completed the interview. The participants in the sample included both men and women who have been in the foster care program or are currently in the extended foster care program. Foster care is defined in this study as either living in a group home, with a relative or nonliving relatives as ordered by the court. The sample included individuals who were willing to participate in a confidential interview on their perception of their educational experience.

Recruitment Process

Following approval from the Nova Southeastern University Institutional Review Board, the researcher contacted the independent living managers of Community Based Care of Central Florida and requested for them to recommend participants who qualified for the study. The independent living managers are responsible for managing the services of foster care alumni who meet the qualifications for housing and financial assistance. The researcher was invited by the independent living managers to the Youth Advisory Board meeting of Osceola County. The Youth Advisory Board is comprised of teens and young adults who are in foster care or foster care alumni. During the meeting the researcher was able to explain the purpose of the study and request for participants. As an outcome of the presentation, the researcher recruited two participants who were interviewed by the researcher. There were two additional people who were interested but both indicated that they were 17 and therefore under the age of consent for the

study. An additional participant indicated that they were interested in the study but when the researcher contacted them for the study they did not answer and did not reply to the two messages left for the participant. Afterwards, the researcher contacted the participants recruited from the meeting and requested a time and date for the interview. Subsequently, the researcher was invited to the group home of one of the participants in order to recruit more participants. At the group home, the researcher also explained the purpose of the study and request for participants. The researcher was able to recruit six participants. Due to the availability of the participants and the flexibility of the researcher's schedule for that day, the researcher completed the interviews on the same day.

Setting

The researcher completed the interviews at coffee shops near or on the respective campuses of four participants and group homes of six participants. The group home allowed the researcher to complete the interviews in the back of the dining area away from the common area so that the participants could have privacy when giving their statements. In addition to the participants recruited at the meeting and group home, the researcher recruited two participants through contacts who had relatives that had aged out of foster care. For the coffee shops, the researcher interviewed the participants in a booth in the back of the coffee shop. The settings allowed for the participants to have privacy during their interview, were free of distractions. The researcher prepared for the interview using McNamara's interview plan. McNamara (2009) stated that interview settings should have the following elements: 1) Little distractions and no loud music or noises; 2) Explain the purpose of the interview; 3) Address the terms of confidentiality; 4) Explain the format of the interview; 5) Indicate how the interview usually takes; 6) Tell the interviewee how to they are able to contact you if they want to; 7) Ask them if

they have any questions before starting the interview; 8) Don't count on your memory to recall their answers-ask for permission to record the interview.

Sample Characteristics

In order to protect the confidentiality of the participants, the actual names of the individuals were not used to report the data. Additionally, the researcher did not indicate the name of the group home where some of the participants reside. All of the participants met the criteria for the phenomenological study as they were all over the age of 18, lived in the state of Florida, and had identified themselves as foster care alumni currently in college or interested in attending college. The sample included 8 women and 2 men. The ages of the participants ranged from 18 to 23. Eight of the participants lived in foster care from the age of approximately 6 to 18, one participant lived in foster care from 13 to 18. One participant lived in foster care from the age of 16 to 18. Nine of the participants were Black non-Hispanic and one was Caucasian. Nine of the participants were from Orlando, Florida. One participant is originally from Gainesville.

Three of the participants attend University of Central Florida, one participant attends Seminole State College, two participants attend Valencia Community College, one participant stated that she wanted her university's name withheld from the study, one participant is completing a GED program and two attend a local high school in Orlando. Snowball sampling was used for this study. This strategy involves locating participants who easily meet the criteria established for participation in the study by asking early key participants to refer you to other participants that also meet the criteria (Merriam, 2009). Due to this purposeful method of sampling, the participants used for the study do not fully reflect the actual population indicated in Chapter One. A table with the characteristics of the participants is listed below.

Table 1. Demographics of Participants

Name (Pseudonym)	Age	School
Jade	22	University of Central Florida
Brittany	19	University of Central Florida
Rose	18	A High School in Orlando, FL
Tyler	18	A High School in Orlando, FL
Nelah	20	Valencia Community College
Ryan	18	A High School in Orlando, FL
Jennifer	20	Seminole State College
Pamela	19	University of Central Florida
Sharon	18	Valencia Community College
Gloria	19	A local university

Data Collection

The researcher collected responses from participants through a one hour interview session. The interview was conducted at most basic level, a conversation with the participant (Kvale, 1996). Kvale defines qualitative research interviews as an attempt to uncover and to learn more about the world through the eyes of the subject while also attempting to unfold the meaning of peoples' experiences, and to discover their lived world prior to scientific explanations. For this study, the researcher used open-ended questions. Patton (2002) outlined the criteria for open-ended questions. According to Patton, the researcher is responsible for drafting the working and sequence of questions before the start of the interview. The questions must also be asked in the same fashion for all participants. By allowing respondents to answer the same questions the researcher can have an increase in the comparability of responses. Patton also stated that using open ended questions also reduces the chances of interviewer effects and

bias. For the purposes of this study, the researcher will utilize open-ended questions in order to ensure comparable answers and reduce bias.

In regards to the interview protocol, it was the goal of the researcher to create an efficient method for interviewing participants so that the responses are authentic and comparable. According to Turner (2010), one of the popular areas of interest in qualitative research design is the interview protocol. Turner stated that interviews provide “in-depth information pertaining to participants’ experiences and viewpoints of a particular topic” (p. 754). In addition to constructing effective research questions, the researcher created a plan of action for preparing for the interview, selecting participants and also a pilot test. McNamara (2009) suggested that proper preparation for interviews is critical so that the researcher can maintain an unambiguous focus as to how the interviews will be conducted.

Interviews were conducted in a public setting. Three of the interviews were conducted on the participants’ respective campuses, one was conducted at Starbucks and the rest were conducted at the home of the participants. The researcher conducted the interviews in this manner to assist with maintaining privacy and to also maintain confidentiality within the context of a public setting. All of the interviews were audio recorded for transcription purposes. At the conclusion of the interviews, the researcher asked the participants if they would be available for a one hour follow up interview at a later date so that the researcher could review the transcript with the participant to ensure the accurate information was captured. The researcher also offered the participants the option of emailing them the transcript via a secured email so that they are able to review the information for accuracy. All of the participants stated that they would prefer a follow up email in lieu of an additional interview as it would be more convenient. The researcher

informed the participants that if they changed their mind that a follow up interview could be scheduled at their convenience.

Table 2. Interview Questions

Interview Question 1	Can you describe any obstacles related to succeeding in school that you have faced since you have aged out of foster care?
Interview Question 2	How do you handle the obstacles that you face?
Interview Question 3	Can you describe to me your journey as a student?
Interview Question 4	What does obtaining a college degree mean to you?
Interview Question 5	Can you describe the relationships do you have with peers and staff on campus?

The interviews focused on the ways in which the foster care alumni work towards achieving a college degree and the conflicts they feel serve as barriers to their educational goals. The researcher followed an informal, qualitative interview process. This included a preplanned list of initial questions to establish basic knowledge, (age, year in school, length of time in foster care, etc.). Some of the questions asked included “Can you describe any conflicts related to succeeding in school that you have faced since aging out of foster care?” and “How do you handle the conflicts that you face?” The researcher also asked follow-up questions based on the guiding interview questions that will be directly related to the stated purpose of the study. Upon the arrival to the interview area, each participant was debriefed regarding the purpose of the interview. The participant was also be given an additional opportunity to consent to participate in the study.

Data Management

The researcher used an audio recorder during the interviews to capture the information given by the participant during the interview. Upon completion of the face-to-face interview, the

audio file was transferred to the researcher's password-protected computer immediately after the interview (before the researcher leaves the site) and was saved to a password-protected folder on the computer. At this point the file was deleted from the audio recorder. In addition, interviews have been transcribed as soon as possible after they take place, and the audio files were deleted as soon as they are transcribed. Only the researcher, Chair and Institutional Review Board (as needed) will have access to the transcribed interviews; only the researcher will have access to the audio files. The researcher used headphones to listen to the audio at home and listen to the transcript multiple times in order to document and gather themes from the data. The confidentiality of the participants was kept at all times. The data and information from the interview will be secured in a locked file cabinet in the home office of the researcher with only the researcher having access. The files will be kept for 36 months and after that point will be destroyed by shredding and paper copies of the files and deleting all files on the computer.

Data Analysis

The data analysis began as soon as the first set of data became available. All of the interviews were transcribed by the researcher for the study. The researcher transcribed the data verbatim, listening to the recordings three times each to make sure all of the data significant to the study was accurately captured. During the first review of the data, the researcher listened to ensure the recordings matched what was written by the researcher. The researcher filled in any gaps that may have been present due to a missed word or a moment that was not captured during the initial transcription.

In phenomenology, there is a specific, structured approach to analyzing the data (Creswell, 2007). The researcher used the following steps as laid out by Moustakas (1994) to analyze data: bracketing, horizontalization, organizing common qualities and themes, and

constructing textural description. The use of horizontalization involves laying out all of the data and treating all of the data as having equal value. The data is then organized into clusters or themes (Merriam, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). Next, the clusters and themes were synthesized into a description of the texture which will then be examined using imaginative variation. The imagination variation is the process of viewing the data from various perspectives or different angles to fully capture the perspective of the participant (Merriam, 2009). Finally, the textural description was used as foundation for the structural description. As explained by Moustakas, the structural description will present a picture of the conditions of the foster care alumni pursuing a college degree and present the essence of their experience. The textural and structural descriptions were generated for each research participant using the same steps for each set of data.

Bracketing

The process of setting aside ones assumptions and biases about a study is known as epoche (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas describes the process of epoche as follows:

Epoche is a Greek word meaning to refrain from judgment, to abstain from or stay away from the everyday, ordinary way of perceiving things. In the natural attitude we hold knowledge judgmentally; we presuppose that what we perceive in nature is actually there and remains there as we perceive it. In contrast, Epoche requires a new way of looking at things, a way that requires that we learn to see what stands before our eyes, what we can distinguish and describe. (1994, p 34).

Because of my previous work with foster care alumni, it was critical to have epoche present during the interview and while searching for meanings behind the experiences of the participants. During the study I went through the process of setting aside any prejudgments that

may have existed that could impact the outcome of the study. I opened each interview with an unbiased perspective and maintained that approach through the process of data analysis. The following is the autobiographical statement that I drafted prior to the start of the study. The summary was to outline any prejudices that may be present and the additional information that could impact the interpretation of the study.

I received my Bachelor of Science in Psychology from Florida State University and Master of Public Administration from Strayer University. I have a professional background in child welfare. I have worked as an Information and Eligibility Specialist for Community Based Care of Central Florida (CBC). CBC is the lead agency overseeing foster care and adoption services in Orange, Osceola and Seminole Counties. I have also previously worked as a Family Case Manager at One Hope United and have volunteered as a certified Suicide Intervention Trainer for Heart of Florida United Way. During my year of service with AmeriCorps I volunteered as a Program Organizer for Kairos Prison Ministry International, Inc. In 2013, I organized a step team for female youth at Great Oaks Village, a group home for foster children in Central Florida. In addition to organizing performances, I also host workshops on life skills for the young ladies. My current studies of interest include child welfare, social movements, and conflict analysis and resolution. As a professional in the field of child welfare, I have seen firsthand the negative and positive outcomes of foster alumni and the importance of gaining conflict resolution strategies. I have observed many of the young adults to have the ambition to go to college after completing high school but running into many conflicts that negatively impact their ability to move forward and achieve collegiate success. I have shared my personal information so that the reader can fully understand any biases that may have

impacted or shaped the approach to the study (Creswell, 2007). Because the research design will be using a phenomenological frame, the study required the researcher to examine and set aside his or her assumptions and biases about the research topic.

The bracketing process was based upon the researcher's own experience as a professional in child welfare and how their experience affects their perception of the participants and the responses given. The prejudices and assumptions of the researcher were bracketed and temporarily set aside so that the researcher can explore the consciousness itself (Merriam, 2009). The use of bracketing helped to provide clarification regarding any bias regarding child welfare that the researcher may have that may affect the data analysis. By doing so the researcher was able to address any biases that were present so that study could be completed through an unbiased lens (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009; Moustakas, 1994).

Horizontalization

Following the process of epoche and bracketing, the researcher entered the stage of transcendental-phenomenological reduction. "In transcendental-phenomenological reduction, each experience is considered in its singularity, in and for itself. The phenomenon is perceived as fresh and open. A complete description is given of its essential constituents, variations of perceptions, thoughts, feelings, sounds, colors, and shapes" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34). It is through the transcendental-phenomenological reduction process that the researcher was able to form textural and structural descriptions of the transcripts. This is due to the fact that transcendental-phenomenological data reduction allows the researcher to capture the essence of the data (Moustakas, 1994).

In order to capture the essence of data, the researcher used horizontalization as a method of data reduction for the study. This analysis procedure involves the development of significant statements (Merriam, 2009). It is described by Moustakas as the step in which the researcher lists every significant statement related to the topic and gives it equal value (1994). Using Microsoft Word 2013, the researcher highlighted meaningful statements and inserted comments by the statement to help identify horizons for further analysis. During this process the researcher reviewed the statements from the interview on the topic of being foster care alumni and working towards a college degree. The researcher listed the significant statements and developed a list of non-repetitive statements that highlighted their experience. The researcher repeated this process for each interview and reviewed each document to ensure that no significant statements were overlooked.

Textural and Structural Description

For the next step in the data analysis, the researcher wrote a description of the “what” the participants experienced with the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). This process is called *textural description* and is described by Moustakas (1994) as the step in data analysis where the researcher provides a description of the meaning that individuals have experienced. A textural description was written for each participant. While each participant had their own unique journey as a foster care alumna, the researcher was able to detect a theme that was present from the interviews. For each participant, the researcher wrote a brief summary of the participant’s journey and what their life has been like since aging out of foster care. The researcher indicated whether the participant has started college and if so, how long they have been in their program.

After the textural description was created, the researcher used imaginative variation in order to bring structure to the qualities. Moustakas (1994, p. 99) describes the steps of

imaginative variation as varying the frames of reference and the perspectives, employing polarities and reversals. Moustakas stated that the goal of imagination variation is to discover the underlying and triggering factors that contribute to the experiences. Through the imaginative variation process, the researcher was able to construct the structural themes on the phenomenon. In order to achieve imagination variation, the researcher clustered the structural qualities into themes.

After labeling each horizon for the study, the researcher reviewed each document and began the clustering stage of data analysis. The term cluster refers to categories that share some commonality in regards to a particular issue (Westbrook, 1994). During this step, the researcher grouped the highlighted statements into themes and removed overlapping or repetitive statements (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher completed this process by opening a new Word document and copying the highlighted statements and comments so that the new document could serve as a basis for the textural and structural descriptions. The researcher made efforts to capture the experiences that related to them facing conflicts while pursuing a college degree.

Through the use of imaginative variation, the researcher was able to form the structural description of the experiences reported by the participants. Structural description is defined as a “vivid account of the underlying dynamics of the experience, the themes and qualities that account for how feelings and thoughts connected with the phenomenon are aroused, what conditions evoke the phenomenon” (Moustakas, 1994, pp. 122, 135). For this process, the researcher searched for examples that had been formed that could serve as structural descriptions of the phenomenon in the study. These examples were copied from each transcript and placed in a new Word document that was labeled as the Structural Description of the interview.

The final step of the data analysis process involved the integration of the textural and structural descriptions. Moustakas (1994) stated that in the phenomenological model the structural essences of the imaginative variation are integrated with the textural essences of the transcendental phenomenological reduction. The two components are integrated so that a textural-structural synthesis of meanings and essences of the phenomenon or experience could then be investigated. This integration then serves as the root of the phenomena being uncovered and is ultimately what the researcher as worked to capture.

Validity and Credibility of Findings

For a study to have validity in a qualitative study, Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that the research must establish the trustworthiness and authenticity through the “naturalist’s equivalents” (Creswell, 1998, p. 197). In order to capture these elements, Creswell and Miller (2000) provided strategies that are frequently used in qualitative research to gain validation. One of the strategies listed included the method of triangulation. In triangulation, the researcher utilizes multiple and different sources of data, methods of data collection, investigators and theories to provide corroborating evidence (Ely et al., 1991; Erlandson et al., 1993, Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1980, 1990). By recruiting a sufficient number of participants, the researcher was able to complete the triangulation process. Between 5 to 25 individuals is recommended for phenomenological studies for accurate data saturation (Creswell, 1998; Polkinghorne, 1989).

For the study, the researcher used demographic data of the participants to conduct triangulation. This included the gender, age and school status of the participants. The information was gathered using a demographic form that was completed during the interview. The researcher also used the varying perspective of the participants for triangulation. O’Donohue and Punch

(2003) recommended the method of cross-checking ones data for regularities through the use of multiple sources. The triangulation of the data involved the cross checking the perspectives of the participants. The information was cross checked for regularities, bias and distortions. Additionally, the researcher used the triangulation of methods of data collection for the study. This included checking what a participant stated during the interview against what has been observed in documents relevant to the phenomenon of interest. After completing the transcriptions, the researcher searched for common themes. Afterwards, the researcher reviewed the literature review to determine if there was a consistency between the literature and the themes that had been detected.

Creswell and Miller (2000) also presented the strategy of clarifying researcher bias from the outset of the study for validation. Clarifying researcher bias is critical so that the reader understands the researcher's position and any bias or assumptions that impact the research question (Merriam, 2009). To complete this process, the researcher commented on past experiences, biases, prejudices and orientations that may have influenced the interpretation and approach to the study. The researcher has also provided a biographical sketch so that the reader could understand the connection between their professional background and their justification of the study.

Additionally, the researcher created a clear and transparent audit trail that covered the process of the data collection. The audit trail allows for readers of the study to trace through a researcher's logic and determine whether the study's findings may be relied upon as a platform for further enquiry (Carcary, 2009). Koch (2006) stated that the trustworthiness of a study may be established if a reader is able to audit the events, influences and actions of the researcher, while Akkerman et al (2006) stated that role of an audit trail is to represent a means of assuring

quality in qualitative studies (Carcary, 2009). The researcher maintained an audit trail through bracketing, maintaining the interview transcript, providing information on how horizons were identified and grouped into clusters as well as the coding process. All of the items listed contributed to the structural description and how the essence of the experiences of the participants was captured. By completing the process of the auditing trail the reader has the ability to determine how the researcher came to depict the meanings behind the experiences of foster care alumni pursuing a college degree and the conflicts that they face.

Chapter summary

The researcher for this study interviewed 10 foster care alumni who spent time in foster care. The participants were interviewed about their experiences of working towards or desiring to obtain a college degree. Using a phenomenological research design, interviews were conducted with the participants using the same predetermined interview questions. Data was derived from the interviews for analysis through a qualitative lens using transcendental phenomenology. The goal of the data was to provide more insight as to the perception of foster care alumni and the conflicts they believe serve as barriers to achieving their collegiate goals. The next chapter of the dissertation will discuss the results of the study.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

This chapter provides a summary of the findings by the researcher. The chapter will discuss the themes that were uncovered through the transcripts and their relation to the research questions. Quotes from the interviews were used to support the themes gathered. The individual textural descriptions are located in Appendix G for readers who wish to access more information on the participants. Overall, the interviews captured the experience of transitioning from foster care to independence and the obstacles that follow when pursuing a college degree. Most of the participants indicated feeling isolated and unsupported during their journey while others indicated additional difficulties throughout the process.

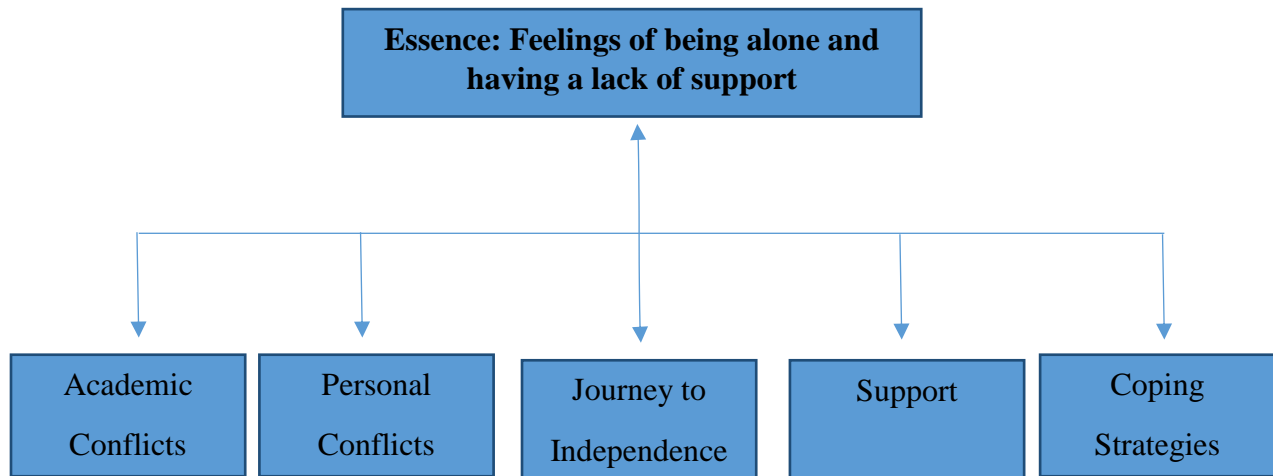
This phenomenological study examined the conflicts that foster care alumni face when they are working towards obtaining a college degree. The researcher interviewed 10 participants between the ages of 18 and 23 who have spent a portion of their childhood in foster care. All of the participants are currently working on a 2 or 4 year degree or plan to enroll into college in the fall. All of the interviews were recorded and transcribed by the researcher. To protect the confidentiality of the participants, the data was transcribed using pseudonyms for their names and places of residence.

The interviews were conducted at a local coffee shop or at the homes of the participants. In an effort to build rapport, the researcher asked the participants to give a little background on themselves. This was not focused on their time in foster care, rather their current demographics. While some of the participants were more reserved at first, they began to give more information as the interview progressed. It is also worth noting that the younger participants did not give as detailed responses as the older participants. However, the some of the younger participants also

began to give more information once they realized that the focus was more on their current status rather than the trauma that they experienced in foster care.

The researcher used bracketing, horizontalization, clustering, textural descriptions, and structural descriptions for the data analysis process (Merriam, 2009). There were 5 themes that emerged from the data. The 5 themes include the following: 1) Academic Conflict; 2) Personal Conflict; 3) Journey to Independence; 4) Support; and 5) Coping Strategies. These themes will be discussed to explain how they are supported by the theories listed in the literature review and how they answer the research questions posed by the researcher. A figure of the themes is found below.

Figure 1. Thematic structure of the experiences of foster care alumni pursuing a college degree.

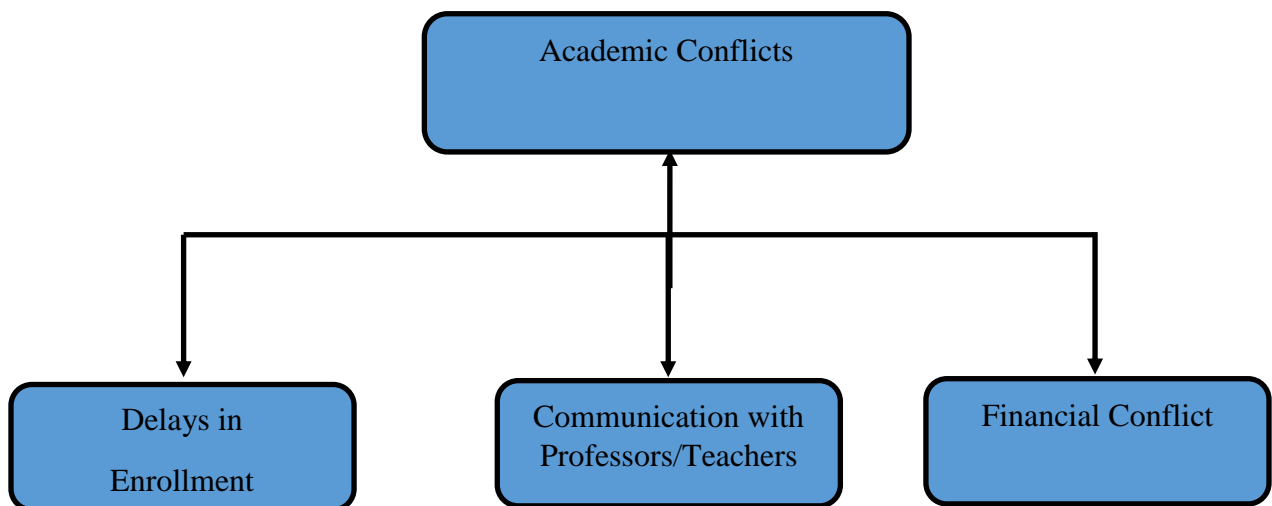


Theme 1: Academic Conflicts

In the first theme, the participants spoke about the conflicts that they have faced in while working on reaching their collegiate goals. This theme provided better understanding as to what conflicts foster care alumni face while pursuing a college degree and also uncovered how they would describe their college experience. The theme of academic conflicts was broken down into three sub-themes that were found to be recurring (see Figure 2). For the participants who are

trying to gain access into college, many reported their frustrations with facing delays with enrolling into college. Two participants reported that the college entrance exam was found to be a major barrier due to lack of guidance on preparing for the test and anxiety while taking the test. The second sub-theme found was the breakdown in communication between the participants and their professors. The participants reported that they believe the breakdown in communication resulted in them not passing their classes and facing the risk of being expelled from school. The third sub-theme discovered was the issues of financial aid. Many of the participants stated that while they did not have to worry about the cost of tuition and received numerous scholarships, some reported taking a semester away from school because they felt that they could not afford to go to school full time while also working to cover their basic needs such as food and shelter.

Figure 2: Sub-themes under Academic Conflicts



Sub-theme 1: Delays in Enrollment. The majority of the participants spoke about the enrollment process into college and how the process was very confusing for different reasons. College entrance exams, lack of knowledge about the college application process and choosing the right schools were the most prevalent reasons for the delay in enrollment. One participant

stated that she would like to start school in the fall but she is having difficulty with the college entrance exam known as the SAT:

They don't really give you a lot of time to take the test and so every time I take it I start to freeze up and it's not really fair because I study for it and when it's time to take it I don't really feel like I'm ready for it. When I'm taking the test I look at the clock and that's all I can think about is how much time I have left. And then when they say "You have 15 minutes" that's when I just start guessing and I just put whatever. (Rose, 18 years old).

Rose's comments support the notion that standardized tests contribute to the reasons for a delay in enrollment. Emerson and Lovitt (2003) stated that foster children have been found to score significantly lower than their non-foster peers on standardized tests. During the interview, Rose indicated that her biggest concern was obtaining a score on the SAT that would allow her access to a local college. Her frustrations also highlighted Chickering's theory and the need for student support. Rose stated during the interview that she believes having a tutor or mentor to help her with preparing for the test would help build her confidence.

In regards to the college admission application, several of the participants stated that the process was confusing for them and that they felt intimidated. A common pattern uncovered was that many of the participants felt alone in the application process. Others stated how they missed application deadlines that would result in the delay of them enrolling into school. One of the participants described the application process from their perspective in this statement:

When I go online to try and start it I feel like there's so much information that I have to put down then I start getting confused. It's not like I've applied for college before so I don't know what I'm doing. And because I don't have a mom and dad like other people that you can just call for help I feel like I'm having to do this thing on my own. It's almost like you really

want to just say ‘eff it’ but then you know if you don’t apply for school then you have to worry about being kicked out of the IL program. I want to go to college but I just feel like I can’t even turn the application in so how am I going to actually make it in college? That’s when I start to doubt myself and I know I can’t do that. (Ryan, 18 years old).

Ryan’s comments support the notion of social capital. Putnam’s concept of social capital is that having personal connections and relationships are a valuable resource that can impact an individual’s social or economic status that can be used towards achieving their goals (Putnam, 2000). His comments on feeling alone during the application process highlights the importance of having a strong network that could support him. By having a strong support network, Ryan could possibly receive more help when completing the application. The strong network could include the use of a college liaison, mentor, or guidance counselor.

Sub-theme 2: Communication with Professors. For the participants that are enrolled in school, many stated that they have faced the risk of being expelled from school due to their grades. They feel that part of the reason they have poor grades is due to the poor communication that they have with their professors. Some felt that many of the professors were uncaring of their situations and would unfairly grade their work. Others felt that the professors were intimidating and uninviting. One of the participants described the communication with one of their professors in this statement:

My relationship with my professors is a little rocky. I don’t really like one my professors in particular because I feel like he’s always giving me a hard time. I get along with my other professors but this one. Like I have tried to talk to him about my situation and let him know that I may be a little late to class sometimes because I’m waiting on the bus or I have to leave early to go to work and I feel like he holds it against me. Right now I have

a D in that class and I already know if I don't pass that class that I'm going to end up having drop out because my GPA is already too low. I have tried talking to his man in person and I feel like when we did talk he was just rude and disrespectful and tried to talk to me like I'm a little boy. I was also thinking about just dropping out of the class and retaking it but the only problem with that is that I would have to wait all the way to next spring before I can take it again. I don't really know what to do. (Pamela, 19 years old).

Pamela's comments also support Chickering's theory and the importance of a supportive student and teacher relationship. Chickering's theory (1969) addresses the need for faculty interaction, peer interaction and the need for the student to develop a sense of purpose and value while attending college. During her interview, Pamela often talked about how she felt discouraged and that her teacher was not seen as a source of support. The importance of social capital can also be noted in Pamela's comments. Having a support system could possibly help her resolve her conflict with her teacher. One of the participants who are still working to complete their high school diploma added the following in regards to communication with their teacher:

They help me with my school stuff but I wouldn't say that they're like in my personal support system. To be honest I just feel like I'm my own support system because if I don't do what I need to do then I'm not going to reach my goals. (Sharon, 18 years old).

This statement supports Vygotsky's Social Development theory. Vygotsky believes that a strong community has a positive impact on an individual's ability to learn (Vygotsky, 1978). Sharon's statement supports the notion that having a weak social network can serve as a barrier to achieving post-secondary achievement. The theory emphasizes the critical role that interaction with the community played in cognitive development. Vygotsky theorized that having a strong

community would positively impact the individual's ability to of making a learning opportunity meaningful (Vygotsky, 1978).

Sub-theme 3: Financial Conflict. All of the participants indicated that their finances were a source of conflict while in school. Financial conflict is defined in this study as any situation where money serves as a source of stress (lifeline.org, 2015). A common thread among the participants was the fact that they felt their financial aid still did not fully cover their basic needs. As a result, many of the participants indicated how they had to decide between remaining in school and obtaining a full time job. Other cited poor budgeting on their end as the source of their financial issues. One of the participants described their situation in this statement:

Well for me the biggest issue is money. It's like you go pick up check from the office and then it's pretty much up to you how you want to spend it. And then after that sometimes you think okay I'm getting ready to buy this thing and you go ahead and buy it but then when it's time for you to buy something that you really need you're like "oh damn" and then you realize you don't have the money to spend because you've spent it on this other thing that you really didn't need in the first place. And then you have to go to people and ask to borrow money but that doesn't really work because it's not like you have family or anybody that you can call when you need to borrow money. Trying to save up money is hard so that's a big issue. And it's frustrating because when you have paid all of your bills then you want to spend a little bit on yourself like getting your hair done or going shopping. So then you start to think "Do I put this money into my bank account or do I go ahead and get my braids?" and it's just a hard decision. (Nelah, 20 years old).

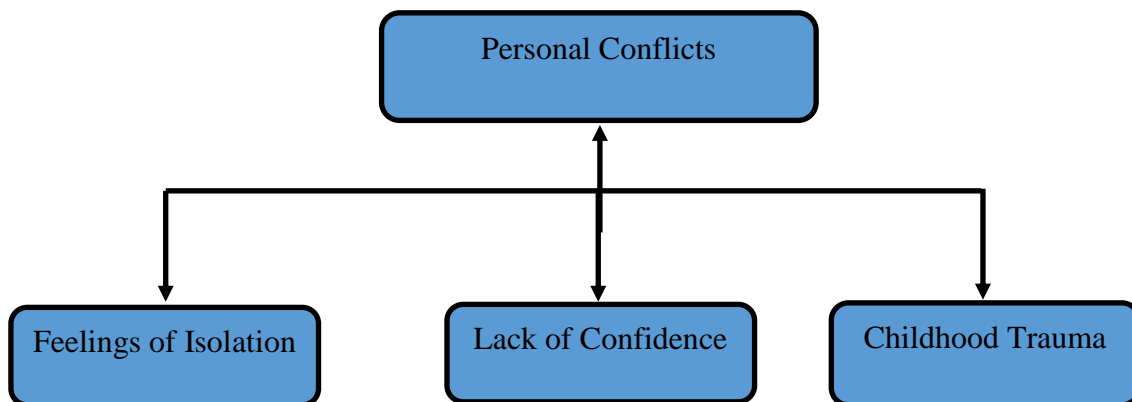
The statement given by Nelah supports Burton's Human Needs theory. Burton's theory includes factors such as feelings of control, security, justice, stimulation, response, meaning,

rationality, and esteem and recognition (Christie, 1997; Danesh, 2011). Nelah begin to feel as if she didn't have control over her finances. The feelings of frustration can serve as a barrier to success. While Nelah had a stipend that would cover her basic necessities, she still felt frustrated because she did not feel well equipped to manage her finances.

Theme 2: Personal Conflict

All of the participants in the study spoke on their personal conflicts and the affect that it has had on their college experience. This theme included various aspects of their internal struggles, such as feelings of isolation, lack of confidence, and feelings of trauma from their family or foster care. This theme seemed to answer the research question of determining the negative experiences of pursuing a college degree as well as how personal conflicts impact their overall experience as foster care alumni pursuing a college degree. A figure of the sub-theme is listed below:

Figure 3: Sub-themes under Personal Conflicts



Sub-theme 1: Feelings of Isolation. Some of the participants reported feeling isolated on campus and not having a deep connection with the staff and peers on their campus. Many stated that they never gained the skill of building lasting relationships because of the inconsistent relationships that they had in their lives as foster children. This feeling of isolation caused many

of them to lose motivation to want to continue with school. As an example, the statement by one of the participants was given below:

It is just frustrating because in foster care you don't really get a chance to build a network of people that are always going to be there for you and kind of serve as people that can guide you in life. You never really get a chance to build relationships that can last and have people that can hold you up if you feel like you're needing help. I feel like I'm catching up with making those relationships because it wasn't until I got to college that I was hooked up with a mentor that is consistently there for me. (Brittany, 23 years old).

Another statement was given by one of the younger participants who have recently enrolled into college. They stated that they have not been able to connect with their peers on campus and it has caused them feelings of depression to the point that they are thinking of dropping out of college. Their statement is listed below:

I think for me it would be nice if I could find at least one or two people that I could talk to on campus. All of those people talk about missing their home or parents or even just talk about going home for the holidays and for me I can't relate to them. It's almost annoying because I wish I had other people that I could be with on holidays. For Christmas I had was pretty much by myself because I couldn't get a ride to my old group home. It makes you feel like nobody at your school even cares about you. (Pamela, 19 years old).

Both Brittany and Pamela provided statements that support the notion of feeling isolated when there is a lack of support system. Chickering stated that when given a strong support system, students are able to better learn how to identifying and processing both positive and negative feelings. He also stated the following: students become emotionally independent from

the need for reassurance or approval from others. A conflict can occur when there is lack of balance between independence and affiliation (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Both ladies stated that the lack of an emotionally supportive system can create feelings of isolation and negativity.

Sub-theme 2: Lack of Confidence. Some of the participants reported how their lack of confidence causes a barrier to them being successful in college. Many of the participants stated that being labeled as a ‘foster child’ has caused them to doubt themselves due to the stigmas that follow foster children face. The participants stated that they feel because of their lack of confidence causes them to lose motivation for going to school and finishing their degree. The most relevant statement to this sub-theme was given by the following participant:

It is some days that I feel like I can’t do this. I feel like there I’ve had so many people tell me that because my mom and dad were crackheads that’s all I’m gonna be too. There are so many people even people at my group home that told me that I was just trouble. It’s like some days I think about what they tell me and it makes me not even want to go to class. I mean yeah I’m a black male that’s’ from the hood but that doesn’t mean I’m trouble. And honestly it gets to me sometimes. (Tyler, 18 years old).

Sub-theme 3: Family/Foster Care Trauma. All of participants referenced their childhood as part of their personal barriers towards obtaining their degree. When asked to tell more about themselves, the researcher noticed that almost all of the participants started with story about their childhoods and how they ended up in foster care. Many of the participants stated how events from their childhood affected them emotionally drained with feelings of hopelessness at times. Some of the participants stated that college is very difficult for them because they have yet to deal with the effects of their trauma. The participants stated that they have felt feelings of frustration, anger and sadness because of their trauma. They have also

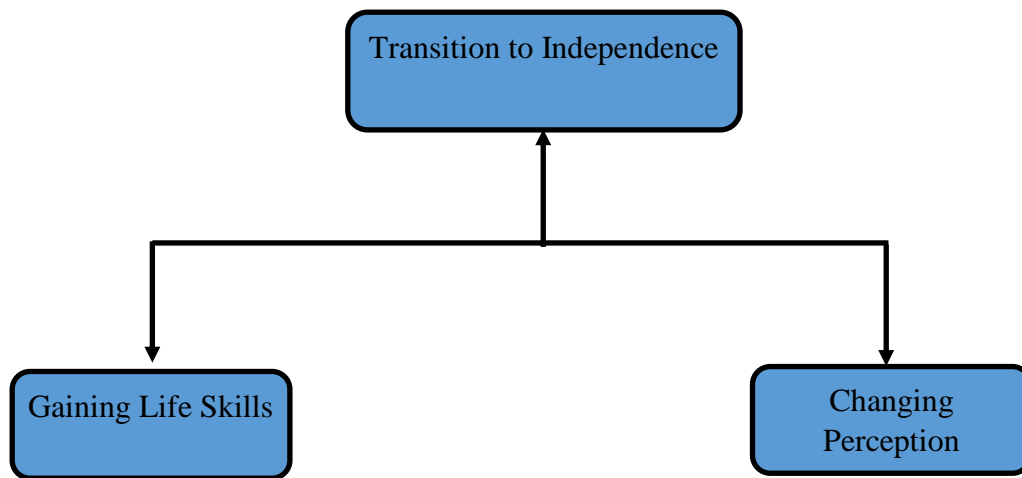
indicated that they One of the participants explained that she experienced physical abuse as a child and ended up living in a group home after her mother was no longer able to care for her or her siblings. The participant stated that the trauma she faced affected her mental health and she experienced serious bouts of depression. She stated that her struggles with her trauma have also caused her to have a mistrust of people in authority. The statement on the matter is listed below:

I have a really hard time respecting people of authority. It makes me really mad when an older person tries to tell me what to do or when they get an attitude. I know part of the reason why I feel that way is because of the abuse I felt from my stepfather and my mother. It is difficult for me to trust adults because I feel like so many have lied to me. Now that I'm older I know I need to let go of that anger but it's hard. And it's even harder because you know the professor is not being mean on purpose in the moment I don't care.

Theme 3: Transition to Independence

While the participants have talked about how their academic and personal conflicts have negatively impacted their college experience, they also discussed the positive aspects of their academic pursuits. All of the participants described how their journey to independence has helped them to decide to stay in school. This theme provides information on the positive experiences of foster care alumni pursuing a college degree. The two sub-themes that emerged on this topic include gaining life skills while in college and how college has changed their perception of the world. A figure of the sub-theme is listed on the next page.

Figure 4: Sub-themes under Journey to Independence



Sub-theme 1: Gaining Life Skills. Some of the participants stated that since they have turned 18 and have started their transition into adulthood, they feel that they have gained life skills that have helped motivate them to stay in school. The life skills that participant felt they gained included the ability to budget better, as well as important tasks such as learning about their health insurance network. Some of the participants stated feeling that their transition into adulthood has helped them mature and feel more responsible. One of the participant described her college journey and described the benefits of gaining life skills:

I would say that my journey has been a blessing because it has led me to want to help others in help those who are struggling. I feel like my situation has made me gain life skills that I didn't know before like budgeting and learning how to cook and do for myself. I know that I can help others and that I have been given the gift to help people see the light when there is darkness around even though I have changed my major I think it is for the best and it will be worth it because it is what I truly want to do. I want to use the struggles that I have had to go through to help someone so that they don't have to feel like they're alone or that no one understands what they are going through.

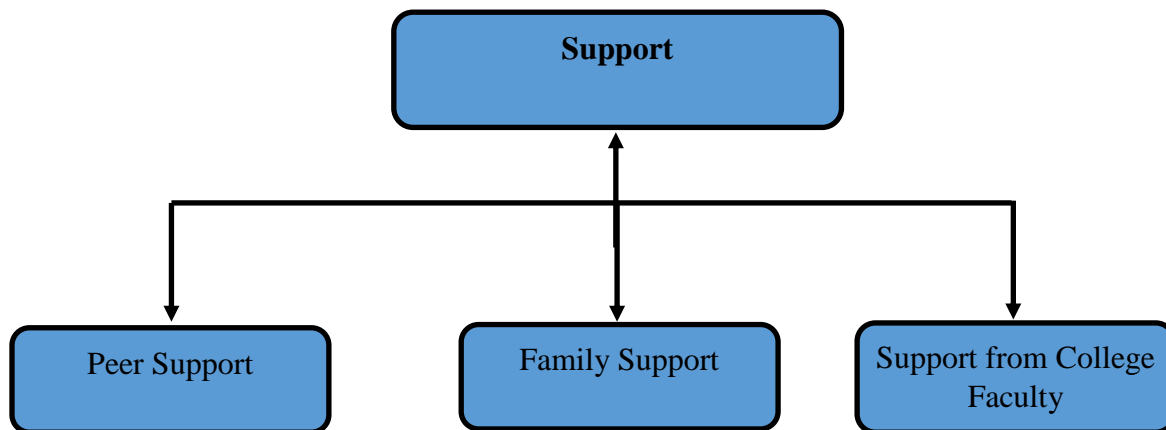
Sub-theme 2: Changing Perception. Many of the participants spoke on how they felt their perception of the world has changed since starting college. In response to the question of how they would describe their college journey, many of the participants stated that feel when they first started their journey, they felt intimidated by the thought of going to school and were weary of building new relationships. Some of the participants stated that when starting college they had a more negative perception of the world and those around them. One participant described in more detail how he was distrustful of people and how college helped him to create a more positive outlook. His description of his experience is listed below:

When I first started going to Valencia, I didn't really want to talk to anyone. I really didn't feel like I could connect with any of those people because they would judge me as soon as they learned about my past. But since I've started I feel like I have met more people that I can trust and that the world isn't all bad. (Sharon, 18 years old).

Theme 4: Support

All of the participants indicated how the presence or the lack of support affected their academic goals. Most of the participants reported how they often would seek their peers as their major source of support. However, in regards to family support many of the participants indicated how the lack of family support created conflict for them. The participants also elaborated on the presence of support from college faculty and the impact on their college experience. This theme provided more answers to the research question of the conflicts that foster care alumni face while pursuing a college degree. A figure of the theme with the sub-themes is listed on the next page.

Figure 5: Sub-themes under Support



Sub-theme 1: Peer Support. A common theme found in the responses was how the participants relied on their peers in foster care for support. Many reported being able to see their friends as a source of support more so than those that they felt were in authoritative roles in their lives. This included their current and former mentors and foster care family. A common reason behind was due to the fact that the participants viewed their peers as being more consistent in being present as compared to many of their mentors, caseworkers and teachers who they felt did not provide consistent report. A comment on the topic by one of the participants is listed below:

Most of my close friends are at the group home. I talk to them the most because we are all going through the same thing and I know when I talk to them they will understand. A lot of other people who are only looking from the outside in just look at you and try to feel sorry for you but my friends at the group home don't see it that way because they're going through the same thing as me (Tyler, 18 years old).

Sub-theme 2: Family Support. While most of the participants spoke of peer support in a positive tone, many spoke of family support with a negative tone. Many of the participants spoke on how they felt there was a lack of family support and its absence resulted in them facing more

struggles. Many stated that they felt if they had more family support, they would feel better and more motivated for working on their college degree. A statement by one of the participants on family support is listed below:

I would say that my journey has been somewhat a lonely one. It's hard when people talk about their family and knowing you don't have anyone that you can call and go to when you're in trouble. I feel like I would have been able to go to college sooner if I had a mom or dad in my life that I could go to with help on things like money or even a place to stay. I mean I'm used to being independent and I'll manage but like I said I think it would have been a lot easier for me if I had some family in my corner. (Jennifer, age 19)

Sub-theme 3: Support from College Faculty and Staff. In regards to feelings of support from school faculty and staff, some of the participants stated that their feelings towards the faculty were mixed. Many stated that they felt comfortable going to the school for professional advice but not for anything else. Many felt that their professors were not empathetic towards their situations. However, many of the participants stated that they made efforts to use their college faculty as a resource for obtaining their degree. One of the participants described their experience in the statement below.

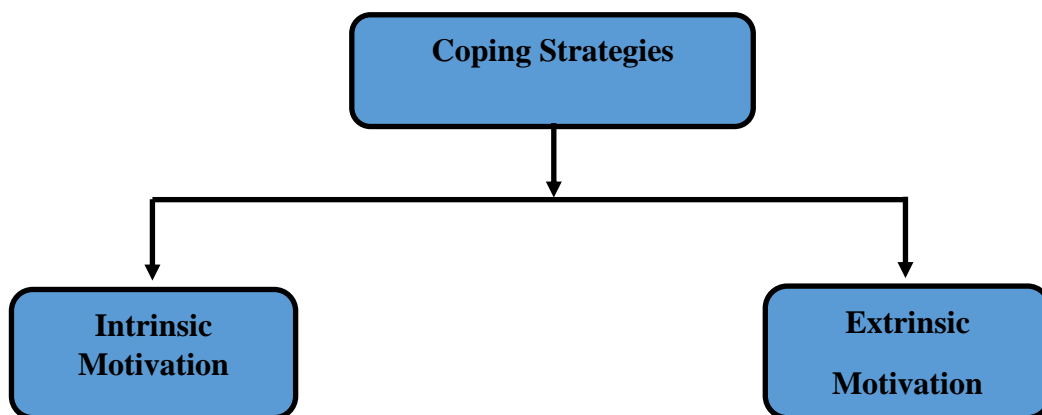
I'm always in their faces! Any time I have question about my work or anything I give them a call. I have a few that are mentors for me now and so they are helping me with figuring out what I want to like if I want to go to grad school or whatever. That's a lesson that I learned that if you don't reach out to people for help no one is going to go out of their way and reach out to you. You have really have to clear your own path and I pretty much did that. I am still doing that now because like last semester I just lost focus and I was almost to the point of failing one of my classes. I was never making all A's but I

always had A's and B's and sometimes C if the class was hard. So for me to get a D or and F is unacceptable. So anyway when I got my grades back from one of my assignments and it was a D I reached out the professor and talked to them over the phone and then I met us with them in person. They helped me with the assignment and they even let me resubmit it and now I'm not going to fail the class because I went from a D to a C on the assignment. And on top of that now that same professor is helping me with my career and things for when I'm done with FSU. (Brittany, 23 years old).

Theme 5: Coping Strategies

The last theme that was uncovered from the data was the coping strategies that the participants developed in order to resolve their personal and academic conflicts. This theme answered the research question on the matter of coping mechanisms. The researcher broke the coping strategies into internal and external motivators. The figure for the sub-themes is listed below.

Figure 6: Sub-themes under Coping Strategies



Sub-theme 1: Intrinsic Motivation. The intrinsic motivators can be behaviors that are emotionally rewarding (Cherry, 2015). Many of the participants reported that they used various types of intrinsic motivators to cope with their personal conflicts of past trauma and financial stress. For example, one participant stated that she uses her religious faith to cope with her personal conflict of feeling inadequate and lacking confidence at times. She also stated how she uses the network at her church as mentor for support. She elaborated in the response below:

I owe everything to God and all of the things that He has done for me. He has been there for me. I think it was not for my I would not be the person that I am today. I have my church family that I talk to whenever I am overwhelmed and they are great mentors. There is one particular lady who is like an aunt to me and pray together when I feel down. But really though I try not my problems take over because I know that if I could make it through my childhood than I can make it through anything (Jade, Age 22).

Another participant also indicated how she uses intrinsic motivators to deal with her feelings of loneliness:

When I'm feeling alone and depressed and I feel like I am ready to drop out of college, I start to meditate and do yoga and pray until I start to feel better. I know it sounds corny but I really feel like when I'm calm it is so much easier to think about my goals and focus on where I want to be instead of where I am now. I know that doing yoga won't put more money in my bank account but it helps me when I'm feeling down and so I think it's so worth it. (Gloria, age 19).

Sub-theme 2: Extrinsic Motivation. An additional pattern that was uncovered was the extrinsic motivators that some participant reported using to resolve their academic conflicts. Extrinsic motivation occurs when an individual is motivated to perform a behavior or engage in

an activity in order to earn a reward or avoid a punishment (Cherry, 2015). Many of the participants view obtaining their college degree as a reward and stated that even with their personal conflicts, they would push through and become more focused on studying and attending class so that they can successfully complete their classes. A participant made the following statement:

I have pretty much had to do this on my own and it's like I've been fighting my entire journey and I'm proud of where I am now. No matter what I'm going through, I am going to work to finish school because I feel like I deserve it and especially because I know I can do it. (Gloria, age 19).

Gloria's comments on feeling motivated to achieve her goals support Burton's theory of human needs. . The third order of Burton's needs model involves internal motivators such as spiritual needs and purpose (Danesh, 2011). Gloria is able to feel motivated to finish college because she has a sense of purpose and a goal of obtaining a college degree. The Student Development theory is also supported by Gloria's statement. Chickering's theory states having a sense of purpose while also interacting with peers and faculty can impact their college experience. Because Gloria has a sense of purpose, she feels capable and motivated to achieve her goal of becoming a college graduate.

Chapter Summary

The researcher uncovered 5 themes from the data collected for the study. The themes uncovered included personal conflicts, academic conflicts, coping strategies, support, and journey to independence. The researcher addressed each theme and provided sub-themes for each theme. The researcher also used quotes from the interviews to support the themes listed. The next chapter will provide a conclusion of the study and address the implications of the study.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications of the Study

Introduction

This chapter will provide an overview of the findings as well as an interpretation by the researcher. This chapter will first discuss how the data answers the research questions presented in the study. The chapter will also incorporate the theories from the literature review to provide the theoretical framework for the discussion. The chapter will also discuss the limitations of the study. Additionally, the researcher will provide recommendations for future research. Finally, this study will address the implications of the study and its importance to the field of conflict resolution.

Overview of the Findings

This phenomenological study uncovered the conflicts that foster care alumni face when pursuing a college degree. A conflict is created when there is an expressed struggle by one who perceives incompatible goals or scarce resources as causing interferences in achieving their goals (Hocker & Wilmot, 1980). Based upon the data yielded from the participants, conflict occurs for foster care alumni when their basic needs are not met and when they feel their support system is inadequate. The findings of the study uncovered what the participants felt were conflicts that impacted their ability to have a successful transition into adulthood as well as their ability to meet their collegiate goals. The findings uncovered many sub-themes under the larger themes of academic conflict, personal conflict, journey to independence, support and coping strategies. The sub-themes support the theoretical and contextual framework presented in Chapter 2. Participants identified the conflicts that they face as well as their supports and coping strategies through their school, peers and social supports.

The Role of Academic Conflicts

All of the participants indicated academic conflicts as preventing them from being successful in their collegiate pursuits. This theme provided answers to the following research question: *How would foster care alumni describe the conflicts they have faced while working towards a college degree?* The sub-themes that emerged from the academic conflicts included delays in enrollment, communication with professors and financial aid.

Delays in Enrollment. Many of the participants stated that the enrollment into college has been a major obstacle for them. College entrance exams, lack of knowledge about the college application process and choosing the right schools were the most prevalent reasons for the delay in enrollment. Academic struggles have been a major reason for limited college access and delayed enrollment. Emerson and Lovitt (2003) stated that foster children have been found to score significantly lower than their non-foster peers on standardized tests. In regards to theoretical support, Vygotsky's Social Development theory appears to resonate with this sub-theme. Lev Vygotsky's Social Development Theory emphasized the critical role that interaction with the community played in cognitive development. Vygotsky theorized that having a strong community would positively impact the individual's ability to make a learning opportunity meaningful (Vygotsky, 1978). Many of the participants felt that having a stronger sense of help from the community would have helped them gain the tools necessary to prevent a delay in enrollment in their school.

Communication with Professors. The participants also indicated that poor communication with the professors at their respective schools served as a barrier to their ability to be successful in school. Many of the participants stated that many of the professors were uncaring of their situations and would unfairly grade their work. Others felt that the professors

were intimidating and uninviting. This sub-theme addressed Vygotsky's Social Development Theory and its connection to the study. Vygotsky's (1978) theory of social development focused on children from an early age and theorized that in order for maturation to gain a cognitive level, a social component had to be present. Edward (2005) stated that the theory represented the important interaction between adults and children for a successful learning experience. Because the participants felt that they did not have a positive interaction with their professors, they did not feel as though they would be successful in obtaining their degree.

Financial Conflict. All of the participants indicated that financial issues have served as a big barrier to being successful in college. Many of the participant indicated that they often had to choose between working to meet their basic needs and attending school full time. The sub-theme was supported by Burton's Human Needs Theory. The Human Needs Theory is an approach that focuses on individuals' needs being met (Christie, 1997). The theory summarizes that when the basic needs are met, an individual is able to manage conflict more successfully and to prevent more conflicts from occurring in the future. Burton (1990b) states that if social conditions are the problem for an individual, then conflict resolution and prevention is possible by removing the sources of conflict in the environment. For the participants, many indicated that they did not feel that their basic needs were compromised at times and they often had to choose between working full time and focusing on school.

The Role of Personal Conflicts

All of the participants in the study spoke on their personal conflicts and its role during their college experience. This theme included various aspects of their internal struggles, such as feelings of isolation, lack of confidence, and feelings of trauma from their family or foster care. This theme seemed to answer the research question of determining the negative experiences of

pursuing a college degree as well as how personal conflicts impact their overall experience as foster care alumni pursuing a college degree.

Feelings of Isolation. During the interviews, some of the participants stated that they had feelings of isolation and not having a deep connection with the staff and peers on their campus. Many stated that they never gained the skill of building lasting relationships because of the inconsistent relationships that they had in their lives as foster children. The feeling of isolation caused many of them to lose motivation to want to continue with school. This sub-theme correlates with Chickering's first vector of his Student Development Theory. Chickering (1969) theorized dealt with the developing competence vector. In this vector it is believed that students achieve intellectual, physical, and interpersonal proficiency. In order to successful gain interpersonal competence, the student must acquire a sufficient level of social skills and gain the ability to be aware of and respond to others in appropriate ways. Because many of the students did not feel they gained the adequate skills to build lasting relationships while in school, many felt that they were not able to develop successfully as students.

Lack of Confidence. During the study having a lack of confidence was reported as a major conflict while pursuing a college degree. Some of the participants reported how their lack of confidence causes a barrier to them being successful in college. Many of the participants stated that being labeled as a 'foster child' has caused them to doubt themselves due to the stigmas that follow foster children face. The participants stated that they feel because of their lack of confidence causes them to lose motivation for going to school and finishing their degree.

This sub-theme is supported by the fifth vector of Chickering's Student Development Theory. The fifth vector addresses self-identity, and the ability for students to strengthen their self-awareness. This includes self-identification of race, gender, and sexual orientation for

example. This vector is critical because it allows the student gain a sense of purpose and confidence in themselves as they transition into adulthood (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). When this need is not met, a barrier to collegiate success is created.

Family/Foster Care Trauma. All of participants referenced their childhood trauma as part of their personal barriers towards obtaining their degree. Many of the participants stated how events from their childhood affected them emotionally drained with feelings of hopelessness at times. Some of the participants stated that college is very difficult for them because they have yet to deal with the effects of their trauma. This sub-theme is also supported by Chickering's Student Development Theory. In the vector that address emotions, Chickering believed that students are able to better learn how to identifying and processing both positive and negative feelings (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Conflict is created when the individual is unable to successfully identify their feelings so that they move forward with a coping strategy.

The Role of Transition to Independence

All of the participants described how their journey to independence has helped them to decide to stay in school. This theme provides an answer to the question of the positive experiences of foster care alumni pursuing a college degree. The Department of Children and Families (2007) reported there are currently about 6,000 youth and young adults are receiving independent living services in Florida. In this program, the young adult learn skills that contribute to their successful transition into adulthood. For this study, 8 of the participants being interviewed are enrolled in the independent living program. Consequently, two sub-themes that emerged on this topic include gaining life skills while in college and how college has changed their perception of the world.

Gaining Life Skills. A major sub-theme uncovered during the study was the topic of life skills by the participants. Some of the participants stated that since they have turned 18 and have started their transition into adulthood, they feel that they have gained life skills that have helped motivate them to stay in school. The life skills that participant felt they gained included the ability to budget better, as well as important tasks such as learning about their health insurance network. Some of the participants stated feeling that their transition into adulthood has helped them mature and feel more responsible. This sub-theme is supported by Burton's Human Needs Theory that states how conflict is resolved when basic needs are met. Danesh (2011) explained that the human needs theory basic needs are the first ranked in the three orders of needs. The first order of is based on the basic needs for human survival such as food and shelter. Many of the participants stated that they felt triumphant because they were gaining skills that would ensure their basic needs were met.

Changing Perceptions. Surprisingly, many of the participants stated that their college journey included a new outlook on the thought of obtaining a college degree and building new relationships. Many of the participants spoke on how they felt their perception of the world has changed since starting college. In response to the question of how they would describe their college journey, many of the participants stated that feel when they first started their journey, they felt intimidated by the thought of going to school and were weary of building new relationships. This sub-theme was supported by the Social Development Theory. Vygotsky believe that a strong community has a positive impact on an individual's ability to learn (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky also theorized that having a cultural influence on an individual can also have a positive impact on their ability to resolve conflict. By interacting with a community

and gaining a new source of support, many of the individuals stated that they felt more confident and more willing to overcome their struggles and continue their collegiate pursuits.

The Role of Supports

All of the participants indicated how the presence or the lack of support affected their academic goals. The roles of support ranged from peer support to support from their family or college faculty. Most of the participants reported how they often would seek their peers as their major source of support. However, in regards to family support many of the participants indicated how the lack of family support created conflict for them. The participants also elaborated on the presence of support from college faculty and the impact on their college experience. This theme provided more answers to the research question of the conflicts that foster care alumni face while pursuing a college degree.

Peer Support. Many of the participants reported peer support as their most reliable source of emotional support. The participants reported being able to see their friends at college and in their group homes as a source of support more so than those that they felt were in authoritative roles in their lives. This group also included their current and former mentors and foster care family. The participants often named mentors and friends as those who would help them when they needed assistance such as tutoring or money. The participants indicated that they viewed their peers as being more consistent in being present as compared to many of their mentors, caseworkers and teachers who they felt did not provide consistent report.

This sub-theme is supported by the Social Capital Theory. Putnam's concept of social capital is that having personal connections and relationships are a valuable resource that can impact an individual's social or economic status that can be used towards achieving their goals (Putnam, 2000). Putnam (1993) also states that lacking social capital can negatively impact an

individual's chances of reaching their goals because they are not privy to information about opportunities that are typically provided within social networks. It is interesting to note that for the individuals that reported having low social capital, many stated that they wish they had more social capital. Many stated that if they had a more reliable network of mentors and caseworkers, they would have the tools necessary to successfully obtain degree.

Family Support. Many of the participants indicated the lack of family support as having a negative influence on their college experience. While most of the participants spoke of peer support in a positive tone, many spoke of family support with a negative tone. Many of the participants spoke on how they felt there was a lack of family support and its absence resulted in them facing more struggles. Many stated that they felt if they had more family support, they would feel better and more motivated for working on their college degree. This sub-theme highlighted the risks of the Social Capital when one is lacking the necessary resources for success. Putnam (1993) also states that lacking social capital can negatively impact an individual's chances of reaching their goals because they are not privy to information about opportunities that are typically provided within social networks. Putnam argues that individuals that lack social capital are lacking a key component to resolving conflicts that may lead to greater problems such as poverty and isolation.

Support from College Faculty. There was a strong response to the research question on the support from college faculty. In regards to feelings of support from school faculty and staff, some of the participants stated that their feelings towards the faculty were mixed. Many stated that they felt comfortable going to the school for professional advice but not for anything personal. Additionally, a common response from many of the participants is that they felt that their professors were not empathetic towards their situations. However, many of the participants

stated that they made efforts to use their college faculty as a resource for obtaining their degree. This sub-theme is also supported by the Social Capital Theory. Social capital has been widely described as the value that is created by investing in relationships with others through processes of trust and reciprocity (Coleman, 1988). For the individuals who reported having more stable relationships in their life, they also reported having less conflicts and a more positive college experience.

The Role of Coping Strategies

The last theme that was uncovered from the data was the coping strategies that the participants developed in order to resolve their personal and academic conflicts. This theme answered the research question on the matter of what coping mechanisms were used by the participants and their conflict resolution strategies. The researcher broke the coping strategies into intrinsic and extrinsic motivators.

Intrinsic Motivation. The intrinsic motivators can be behaviors that are emotionally rewarding (Cherry, 2015). Many of the participants reported that they used various types of intrinsic motivators to cope with their personal conflicts of past trauma and financial stress. By gaining internal values such as spiritual beliefs, many participants were able to develop ways to cope with their personal conflicts of lack of confidence and feelings of isolation. This theory is supported by Burton's Human Needs Theory. The third order of needs involved internal motivators such as spiritual needs and purpose (Danesh, 2011).

Extrinsic Motivation. Extrinsic motivation occurs when an individual is motivated to perform a behavior or engage in an activity in order to earn a reward or avoid a punishment (Cherry, 2015). Many of the participants view obtaining their college degree as a reward and stated that even with their personal conflicts, they would push through and become more focused

on studying and attending class so that they can successfully complete their classes. This sub-theme is supported by Chickering's Student Development Theory. The theory stated that motivation and a goal is critical because it allows the student gain a sense of purpose and confidence in themselves as they transition into adulthood (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

Implications

The findings from this study seem to support the literature and theories presented in Chapter 2. Based upon the information given from the participants, conflict occurs for foster care alumni when their basic needs are not met. Many foster care alumni are at risk for this conflict because they are financially independent and often have to choose between school and work. While many state that they do not have to worry about tuition or housing due to being in the extended foster care program, many indicated that they did not have enough funds to fully cover all of their needs. The study also supported Vygotsky's Social Development Theory. There was an apparent difference between the individuals who were able to identify positive relationships in their lives versus the participants who could not identify one. The ones that identified positive relationships in their lives also reported having a more positive experience in college and more skills.

In regards to Chickering's Student Development Theory, the findings supported the seven vectors. The participants who were able to interact with their college faculty also stated having a sense of purpose and feeling more developed. Others who were not able to balance having support on campus or a feeling of purpose also reported having more academic conflicts. Finally, the data from the study also supported the Social Capital Theory. The participants who reported utilizing mentors, teacher and peers as resources felt more confident about staying in college and feeling more prepared about being financially and emotionally independent.

Limitations of the Study

There are several parts of the study that can be perceived as limitations. Due to the snowball sampling, the sample of participants do not accurately reflect the entire foster care alumni population. Furthermore, the majority of the participants interviewed were African American females. As a result there was a lack of diversity present in the sample. A second limitation of the study would be the structure of the interview questions. Because the researcher added follow up questions to each interview based upon the responses from the participant, the information may vary more than if there was a more structured question format that did not include follow up questions. Finally, the researcher focused more on the present conflicts of the participants rather than their past conflicts during the interview. As a result, the study does not fully discuss the different types of trauma that the participants dealt with during their childhood that may still have an effect on their conflict resolution skills.

Recommendations

There are three recommendations that are being suggested for future research. The first recommendation would be for a case study of one participant that closely follows them from their first year in college to their last is recommended. This would allow the researcher to be able to closely follow the timeline in which a participant encounters conflicts in college and pinpoint the struggles and success that impact their experiences as students. The second recommendation would be for a study to be completed on foster care alumni who have children and are working towards pursuing a college degree. Having a study on foster care alumni who have started their own family unit may impact their perception of their support system and whether they have more or less internal conflicts as a result. Finally, a comparison study on the policy changes and whether they have impacted the low numbers of foster care alumni with college degrees is

suggested. This would allow participants to determine if the new policy changes that took effect in 2014 have made a difference in increasing positive outcomes for foster care alumni. The most recent policy changes are the implementation of the extended foster care program and the change of health insurance coverage for foster care alumni. These studies should be examined to determine whether the age of 26 is the most appropriate age cut off for services of foster care alumni. The policies should also be examined to determine if the extension of foster care for 18 year olds impacts the rates of homelessness for foster care alumni. Finally, the policies should be examined to determine whether the new policies impact the rate in which foster care alumni are able to successfully gain employment or a college degree by the age of 25.

Conclusion

The goal of this study was to address the conflict that foster care alumni face when working towards a college degree. The study used provided both a contextual and theoretical framework to support the need for the study. The research used qualitative research to uncover the commonalities that may be present in the experiences of the youth and the meaning behind their attitudes. The study will be a contribution to the field of conflict resolution as uncovers the perceived contributors to academic and personal conflicts for foster care alumni who are transitioning into adulthood. Additionally, the study provided coping strategies used by the participants as tools to obtain their degrees. Finally, the study provides more information on the role of using support systems as a resource for overcoming obstacles.

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Appendix A. Consent Form (Next page)



MEMORANDUM

To: Erica Martin, MPA
Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences

From: Matthew Seamon, Pharm.D., JD *WKS for Dr Seamon*
Chair, Institutional Review Board

Date: January 7, 2015

Re: *Examining the Conflicts to College Retention of Foster Care Alumni* – NSU IRB No. 12221426Exp.

I have reviewed the revisions to the above-referenced research protocol by an expedited procedure. On behalf of the Institutional Review Board of Nova Southeastern University, *Examining the Conflicts to College Retention of Foster Care Alumni* is approved in keeping with expedited review category #6 and #7. Your study is approved on **January 7, 2015** and is approved until **January 6, 2016**. You are required to submit for continuing review by **December 6, 2015**. As principal investigator, you must adhere to the following requirements:

- 1) **CONSENT:** You must use the stamped (dated consent forms) attached when consenting subjects. The consent forms must indicate the approval and its date. The forms must be administered in such a manner that they are clearly understood by the subjects. The subjects must be given a copy of the signed consent document, and a copy must be placed with the subjects' confidential chart/file.
- 2) **ADVERSE EVENTS/UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS:** The principal investigator is required to notify the IRB chair of any adverse reactions that may develop as a result of this study. Approval may be withdrawn if the problem is serious.
- 3) **AMENDMENTS:** Any changes in the study (e.g., procedures, consent forms, investigators, etc.) must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation.
- 4) **CONTINUING REVIEWS:** A continuing review (progress report) must be submitted by the continuing review date noted above. Please see the IRB web site for continuing review information.
- 5) **FINAL REPORT:** You are required to notify the IRB Office within 30 days of the conclusion of the research that the study has ended via the IRB Closing Report form.

The NSU IRB is in compliance with the requirements for the protection of human subjects prescribed in Part 46 of Title 45 of the Code of Federal Regulations (45 CFR 46) revised June 18, 1991.

Cc: Dr. Claire Michele Rice
Dr. Ismael Muvungi
Mr. William Smith

Appendix B. Debriefing Form (Next page)



Consent Form in the Research Study Entitled

Examining the Conflicts to College Retention of Foster Care Alumni

Funding Source: None

IRB Protocol #:

Principal Investigator/Researcher:

Erica Martin
Doctoral Candidate
5401 Leighton Lane
Oviedo, Florida 32765
Telephone: (901) 438-0139
E-mail: ew486@nova.edu

Faculty Advisor:

Claire Michèle Rice, Ph.D.
Chair and Associate Professor of Conflict Resolution
Nova Southeastern University
Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences
Department of Conflict Analysis and Resolution
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33314
Telephone: (954) 262-3046
E-mail: clairice@nova.edu

For questions/concerns about your research rights, contact:

Institutional Review Board
Nova Southeastern University
Office of Grants and Contracts
(954) 262-5369/ Toll Free: 866-499-0790
IRB@nsu.nova.edu

Site(s) Information:

Site 1:
Principal Investigator's Home Office (Data Analysis)
5401 Leighton Lane
Oviedo, Florida 32765

Site 2:

Private Location of Participant's Choice (Interviews)

What is the study about?

You are invited to voluntarily participate in a research study to understand what conflicts are associated with foster care alumni who are working to obtain a 2 or 4 year college degree. The purpose of this phenomenological study will be to discover and explain the conflicts to postsecondary achievement for foster care alumni who are currently attending a two or four year university.

Why are you asking me?

You have been invited to participate, because you are one of approximately ten (10) adult, English speaking, foster care alumni, who lives in Florida, and has enrolled or would like to enroll in a 2 or 4 year university.

What will I be doing if I agree to be in the research study?

First, you will be asked to participate in the research study. Second, you will then you will be asked to meet with the researcher Erica Martin for a 1 hour interview. Next, you will verbally answer questions from an interview questions protocol that will be recorded using audio recording. During the research study interview, you may experience physical discomfort from sitting and asking questions. The researcher can provide breaks should you need to take a break. You may also experience emotional discomfort from the interview questions, though this may minimal. The interview questions may ask questions about conflicts that may be sensitive in nature. If these questions evoke emotional discomfort, you may ask that the research study interview questioning to conclude. The researcher will use any information collected at this point and will use this any information collected from you the research study results.

Is there any audio or video recording?

This research project will include audio recording of the face-to-face interview between you and the researcher. This audio recording will be available to be heard by the researcher and the IRB. The recording will be transcribed by the researcher. The recording will be kept securely in the home office of the researcher. The recording will be kept for 36 months and destroyed after that time. The researcher will delete each audio recording and shred all written documents. Any electronic documents will be deleted from the Principal Investigator's computer. Because your voice (or your image and your voice) will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears (or hears and sees) the recording, your confidentiality for things you say (or do) on the recording cannot be guaranteed although the researcher will try to limit access to the tape as described in this paragraph.

Initials: _____

Date: _____

Page 1 of 3

What are the dangers to me?

Risks to you are minimal, meaning they are not thought to be greater than other risks you experience every day. You may experience physical and emotional discomforts from sitting and answering questions about conflict. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, concern, complaints, wish to discuss problems, or talk to someone independent of the Principal Investigator, obtain information, or offer input, you can call either of the following office: Nova Southeastern University Institution Review Board (IRB) office at (954) 262-5369; or Faculty Advisor – Claire Michèle Rice, Ph.D. at (954) 262-3046.

Are there any benefits for taking part in this research study?

There are no direct benefits.

Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?

There are no costs to you or payments made for participating in this study.

How will you keep my information private?

To avoid confidentiality issues, researcher Erica Martin has established secure procedures to protect the identity of participants which may prevent potential harm. Only certain people have the right to review these research records, and they will protect the secrecy (confidentiality) of these records. These people include the Principal Investigator/Researcher, Faculty Advisor – Claire Michèle Rice, Ph.D., dissertation committee members, certain Nova Southeastern University officials, and the Institutional Review Board. The following procedures will be used to insure confidentiality:

1. The researcher will not use actual names for purposes of data analysis or for any aspect of the final published research report or any derivative publications that could be linked to the participant’s identity.
2. All electronic data will be saved in a password protected computer accessible only by the researcher.
3. All hardcopy information will be saved in a locked cabinet in the PI’s office.
4. If needed, pseudonyms will be used throughout the study and in the final text, with the exception of the consent form.
5. The researcher will seek the participant’s consent prior to sharing any information.
6. The researcher will inform the participants that all information will be kept for 36 months after the completion of the study.

IMPORTANT NOTICE:

All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. In addition, since the Principal Investigator is a doctoral student of Nova Southeastern University, Faculty Advisor Dr. Claire Michèle Rice may review research records. The NSU IRB and regulatory agencies may also review research records.

What if I do not want to participate or I want to leave the study?

You have the right to leave this study at any time or refuse to participate. If you do decide to leave or you decide not to participate, you will not experience any penalty or loss of services you have a right to receive. If you choose to withdraw, any information collected about you before the date you leave the study will be kept in the research records for 36 months from the conclusion of the study and may be used as a part of the research.

You may request that his/her data not be used:

You have the right to leave this study at any time or refuse to participate. If you do decide to leave or you decide not to participate, you will not experience any penalty or loss of services you have a right to receive. If you choose to withdraw, any information collected about you before the date you leave the study will be kept in the research records for 36 months from the conclusion of the study but you may request that it not be used.

Other Considerations:

If significant new information relating to the research study becomes available, which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you by the Principal Investigator.

Voluntary Consent by Participant:

By signing below, you indicate that

- this study has been explained to you
- you have read this document or it has been read to you
- your questions about this research study have been answered
- you have been told that you may ask the researchers any study related questions in the future or contact them in the event of a research-related injury
- you have been told that you may ask Institutional Review Board (IRB) personnel questions about your study rights
- you are entitled to a copy of this form after you have read and signed it
- you voluntarily agree to participate in the study entitled Examining The Conflicts To College Retention Of Foster Care Alumni.

Initials: _____ Date: _____

Participant's Signature _____


Date _____

Participant's Name (PRINT) _____

Date _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent _____

Date _____


NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY
Institutional Review Board
Approval Date: JAN 07 2015
Continuing Review Date: JAN 06 2016

Initials: _____ Date: _____

Appendix C. Participant Recruitment Form (Next page)

Title of Project:

EXAMINING THE CONFLICTS TO COLLEGE RETENTION OF FOSTER CARE ALUMNI

Funding Source: None

IRB Protocol #:

Principal Investigator/Researcher:

Erica Martin

Doctoral Candidate

5401 Leighton Lane

Oviedo, Florida 32765

Telephone: (901) 438-0139

E-mail: ew486@nova.edu

Faculty Advisor:

Claire Michèle Rice, Ph.D.

Chair and Associate Professor of Conflict Resolution

Nova Southeastern University

Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences

Department of Conflict Analysis and Resolution

Fort Lauderdale, FL 33314

Telephone: (954) 262-3046

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Institutional Review Board

Nova Southeastern University

Office of Grants and Contracts

(954) 262-5369

Toll Free: 866-499-0790

IRB@nsu.nova.edu

Site(s) Information:

Principal Investigator's Home Office (Data Analysis)

5401 Leighton Lane

Oviedo, Florida 32765

Private Location of Participant's Choice (Interviews)

Yola Pearson-Chelf

Manager, Independent Living Program

Community Based Care of Central Florida

4001 Pelee Street

Orlando, Florida 32817

RE: Letter of Intent for Doctoral Research Study

My name is Erica Martin and I am a Doctoral student at Nova Southeastern University. I am in the process of conducting research for my dissertation. My dissertation topic is focusing on foster youth alumni who have successfully completed high school and are currently enrolled or plan to enroll in a community college or four-year college or university. Through qualitative interview methods, my goal is to explore and address the perceptions of former foster youth about their postsecondary education experience and the barriers and strategies they have faced during their pursuit.

This study's primary research question will be: What are the lived experiences of academic achievement for foster care alumni who are pursuing or would like to pursue a two or four year college degree?

The secondary questions:

What are the negative and positive experiences of foster care alumni who would like to pursue or are currently pursuing a two or four year college degree?

How would foster care alumni describe the conflicts they have faced while working towards obtaining a college degree?


What strategies have foster care alumni created in order to overcome any current or previous barriers or conflicts?

I am requesting an email be forwarded to the potential participants inviting them to participate in the study. Any potential participant will then be given a consent form to read and sign, giving permission to participate in the study. All identifying information about a participant will be secured and kept confidential. Additionally, I will follow Nova Southeastern University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) policies and procedures.

Thank you for considering my request. If you have any questions, please contact me.

Sincerely,

Erica Martin, Doctoral candidate
Nova Southeastern University
Ew486@nova.edu
901-438-0139 cell


NOVA SOUTHEASTERN
UNIVERSITY
Institutional Review Board
Approval Date: JAN 07 2015
Continuing Review Date: JAN 06 2016



Institutional Review Board

Approval Date: JAN 07 2015

Continuing Review Date: JAN 06 2016



NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

Title of Project:

EXAMINING THE CONFLICTS TO COLLEGE RETENTION OF FOSTER CARE ALUMNI

Funding Source: None

IRB Protocol #:

Principal Investigator/Researcher:

Erica Martin

Doctoral Candidate

5401 Leighton Lane

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Site(s) Information:

Principal Investigator's Home Office (Data Analysis)

5401 Leighton Lane

Oviedo, Florida 32765

Private Location of Participant's Choice (Interviews)

Greetings,

My name is Erica Martin and I am a doctoral candidate at Nova Southeastern University. I am in the process of conducting research for my dissertation. My dissertation topic is focusing on foster youth alumni who have successfully completed high school and are currently enrolled or plan to enroll in a community college or four-year college or university.

I am seeking former foster youth to participate in an interview. The questions will be general in nature. The discussion will be on your educational experience. I will be asking you to share information about the events and experiences within and outside the school setting that have either supported or created barriers to your academic success.


I am seeking 10-12 participants to interview for two sessions, each approximately one hour. I am specifically seeking include individuals aged 18 or over, not currently in foster care, planning to attend a community college or 4-year college or university or are currently enrolled in either. All comments given will be confidential throughout the research process. All logs will be kept in a secure location. Additionally, there will be no written names or identifying information maintained in the study.

Interviews will be conducted in a public setting. This includes public library conference room, University of Central Florida library conference room or your respective college or university library. This will assist with maintaining privacy and to also maintain confidentiality within the context of a public setting. Interviews will be audio recorded for transcription purposes.

If you are interested, or would like more information, please contact me.

Sincerely,

Erica W. Martin
Doctoral candidate, Nova Southeastern University
Ew486@nova.edu
901-438-0139 cell


NOVA SOUTHEASTERN
UNIVERSITY
Institutional Review Board
Approval Date: JAN 07 2015
Continuing Review Date: JAN 06 2016

Appendix D: Transcriptions and Descriptions

Individual Textural Description

Jade

Background

Jade is a 20 year old black female that is a junior at the University of Central Florida. She is expected to graduate in 2016. She is a Communications major. She grew up in the Central Florida area and spent most of her childhood being raised by her aunt. She told me about how she ended up becoming involved in the foster care system and the affects that it had on her. “I have never met my biological father and when I was little I lived with my mother and stepfather. I am not sure what happened, but I remember seeing my stepfather hit on my mother. I remember hearing them one night and when I went to the front to see what was going on that is when I saw him hit my mom. Luckily my uncle was staying at our home and I went and woke him up and he broke the fight up. After that my mom took me and my siblings and we lived at a domestic violence shelter. A few years later my mom went to a mental institution and we ended up having to live with my aunt.”

Family Conflict

Jade had a cool tone when speaking about her family, in particular her tumultuous relationship with her aunt. Jade spoke of the past and current conflict with her aunt: “My aunt was pretty mean and would say things to me about my outfit. At first she said that I was dressing like a boy all the time. When I tried to dress up she asked me if I was trying to attract a pimp! I just felt like when I was living with her there was always some sort of drama and I didn’t want to live like that. Even now I don’t hardly ever talk to her because I am on my own path and I feel like she would only try to hold me back.”

Jade indicated that a motivator for her going to college and obtaining a degree was the benefit of gaining independence and not having to rely on her family for assistance. “It motivated me to find my own path so that when I turned 18 I wouldn’t have to live with her. I decided on going to UCF because it would be far but not too far from my little brother and sister. I don’t really have a relationship with my mother and neither do my brother and sister so I try to make sure I am there for them. Jade stated that she is also motivated by being able to show her younger siblings a positive path out of the foster care system through attending college. She stated that the conflict with her aunt has taken a toll on her relationship with her siblings so at the moment she feels isolated from her entire family. When asked for more details about her relationship with her mother, Jade stated that there have been failed attempts for them to reconnect and as a result she has not had any contact with her immediate contact since last year.

Financial Conflict

The experience that Jade has had attending college has had both negative and positive memories. Jade stated that her biggest problem has been having to deal with financial issues. Jade stated that she has a lot financial aid that covers her tuition but that she did not learn how to properly budget her money until her junior year in college. “When I was a freshman I definitely didn’t practice budgeting like I should have but I am better now. I also receive financial aid from the government and I am the recipient of scholarships so that helps. It’s just that you have to be careful how you spend your money because once it’s gone that’s it and I can’t just go and call people for money so I have to watch how I spend my money.” Jade stated many times how she felt because she was on her own that worrying about her finances carried a lot of stress because she didn’t have anyone that she could call if she was ever in a financial bind.

Interaction with Peers

In addition to worrying about her finances, Jade also stated that she changed her major during the fall semester and it came with certain barriers that she was not expecting. Her original major was Biology and she decided to change it to Communications because of her new goal of becoming a motivational speaker. “I started out as a biology major because when I was in high school I really liked science and I wanted to be a scientist. But now I know that God has given me a calling to become a motivational speaker and so I decided to switch my major to Communications.” Jade did not realize when making change that it would affect her sources of support on the campus. She stated that she had to start over with building her network. Additionally, she stated that due to being a predominantly white college, finding other African Americans on campus is already difficult so she felt that it became harder to find other people of color to meet. She notes though that she copes with trying to rebuild her network by becoming involved in numerous organizations on campus and using that strategy to gain more friends.

Coping Strategies

When asked how she copes with the stresses of family, finances and rebuilding her network, Jade stated that her deep religious is her biggest source. She also views her church family as mentors and goes to them for internal and external support. “I owe everything to God and all of the things that He has done for me. He has been there for me. I think it was not for my I would not be the person that I am today. I have my church family that I talk to whenever I am overwhelmed and they are great mentors.” When asked to describe her overall journey as a student, she stated that her journey has been a blessing and that her troubles have motivated her to want to speak to her children who have been in foster care. “I want to use the struggles that I

have had to go through to help someone so that they don't have to feel like they're alone or that no one understands what they are going through.”

Jade stated that she also uses the staff on campus as a source of support and a strategy for completing her degree. I actually talk to one or two of my professors and they give me advice on what I can do with my goal of becoming a motivational speaker and how I can reach that goal. You can email them and they'll return your email or you can meet with them after class. Even if you want to ask them about a grade you can ask them and they won't get an attitude with you or anything like that. I even have one professor that will let you turn in extra assignments for extra credit if you are on the verge of a C or something like that.

When asked what obtaining a college degree means to her, Jade the following: It means everything to me. To come from people like my aunt talking about me and telling me that I'm not good enough and not having my mom or dad to graduating from college is big. I hope that I can show my siblings that they can go to college too and they don't have to live on the streets or let people tell them what to do. I just thank God for being there for me and blessing me so that I could go to school. It is so much negativity in the world and Christians are being pushed to the side but I'm going to use my gift to spread God's word and to help people overcome their problems.”

Composite Structural Description: Integration of Structural and Textural Themes

Participant # 1

Structural Theme 1: Family Relationships

Textural theme 1: Relationship with Aunt

Textural theme 2: Relationship with Siblings

Textural theme 3: Relationship with Mother

Structural Theme 2: Financial Conflict

Textural theme 1: Financial Independence

Structural Theme 3: Interactions on Campus

Textural theme 1-Interaction with Faculty

Textural theme 2: Interaction with Peers

Textural theme 3: Limited interaction with peers of the same race

Textural theme 4: Building a new network

Structural Theme 4: Strategies to Overcome Conflict

Subtheme 1: Overcoming Financial Conflict

Subtheme 2: Overcoming Family Conflict

Subtheme 3: Gaining Sources of Support

Individual Textural Description

Brittany

Background

Brittany is a 23 year old black female that is a senior at Florida State University. She is expected to graduate in 2015. She grew up in the Central Florida. Brittany talked about her upbringing and how she spent most of her life in the foster care system. Brittany stated that a lot of her struggles with college are the side effects of things that happened while she was in foster care. Brittany stated that her biggest struggle deal are her finances, her lack of consistent support and her health. She said her biggest coping strategies include using her professors as resources, her friends and her motivation to obtain a degree. "My top issues have been budgeting, healthcare and a consistent support system."

Financial Conflict

Brittany stated that finances are a conflict for her because she is in constant jeopardy of not having money to pay for her basic needs and that threatens her ability to continue with school. Brittany stated that she has recently made the decision to move back to Orlando from Tallahassee. She is going to complete her degree at Florida State by taking her remaining classes online. In regards to her financial situation, Brittany explained that she has made some poor decisions financially. She elaborated on how she is currently paying for a new car that she isn't able to even use at the moment: "I just wish I would have had someone to talk to me sooner and to teach me how to be better with my money. I have a decent amount of money saved up now but it's like dang, just imagine how much I would have saved if I hadn't spent all that money on shoes and stuff. It's hard too, because I just recently just bought two cars. Like last year I bought a new car and then I totaled it. So I went out and bought another car but I've been having

problems with it and so now I've had to pay all this money for cars and I don't have anything to show for it. I rushed into trying a car and made a down payment without any guidance and so now I'm paying \$400 for a car that I can't even drive. I just feel like learning how to find car insurance, how to sign up for it and even just buying big items and getting the most out of my money, I just wish I would have had someone there that could have taught me all of that because I pretty much just went into it on my own. Learning how to budget would have helped a lot.”

Brittany stated that she wishes she would have had the opportunity for someone to teach her about wise financial choices. She feels that she would have been able to budget a lot earlier in her college career if she had learned sooner.

Sources of Support

Brittany stated that having an inconsistent support system is a conflict for her because having a lack of consistent support hurts her emotionally and negatively impacts her motivation to finish school. Brittany said that she takes a lot of pride in her ability to network and meet new people, but even with her efforts she has a hard time having a consistent support system. Brittany has no contact with her biological family nor does she speak to her foster mother. In regards to having an inconsistent support system, Brittany stated the following: “It is just frustrating because in foster care you don’t really get a chance to build a network of people that are always going to be there for you and kind of serve as people that can guide you in life. You never really get a chance to build relationships that can last and have people that can hold you up if you feel like you’re needing help. I feel like I’m catching up with making those relationships because it wasn’t until I got to college that I was hooked up with a mentor that is consistently there for me.”

Health

Brittany stated that her health has caused her to have to take a break from school in the past and it continues to serve as a barrier to her obtaining her degree. Brittany stated that she has a rare heart condition and has numerous appointments a month so that doctors can monitor her condition. This has affected her school and work schedule. She stated that she has had the condition since middle school, but that her foster mother did not take it seriously and did not take her to the appointments that were made. Brittany stated: "I have had a heart condition since I was in middle school. But because my foster mother didn't take it seriously I didn't care about it either. All I knew is that I wanted to play sport, I wanted to play basketball and I didn't think my condition was serious enough that I shouldn't play. So my senior year I didn't get approved to play because I didn't pass the physical. So when I got to college I was really on my own and it was up to me to keep up with my doctor appointments. Like I've been pretty much on my own since I was 16 because my foster mother pretty much let me do whatever I wanted to do. I first went to USF and I started passing out all the time. It got so bad that I couldn't go to class because I was afraid that I would pass out. I started feeling sick all of the time and I knew something wasn't right."

Additionally, trying to manager her health insurance and figuring out how to navigate through the system was also difficult for Brittany. She stated that her main reason for moving back to Orlando from Tallahassee is due to her not being able to locate doctors under her insurance in the Tallahassee area. Brittany stated that she would have to drive almost two hours to her doctor's appointment because the doctors in Tallahassee were not in her network. She stated that it negatively affected her college career because she would have to miss a day of work and class just to go to one doctor's appointment.

Coping Strategies

Brittany stated that she has yet to figure out the best strategy to deal with what she feels are barriers to her success. She said the following: “It really depends on the issue itself. A lot of times I’ll just ignore the issue and put it off until the next day if I can. I know that’s not the best way to handle it but because I have so much going on that’s really sometimes the only way I can deal with my issues. If it’s not that big of an issue I just let it go.” Brittany indicated that she does have a mentor that is helping her with learning better budgeting skills and she also accompanies her to her doctor’s appointments.

Summary

Overall, Brittany describes her college journey as a big learning experience. She said the following: “I would say that this journey has been a lonely one but still good because I have been able to come this far and get my AA and now I’m about to get my Bachelor’s degree. Because I have pretty much had to do this on my own and it’s like I’ve been fighting my entire journey and I’m proud of where I am now.” She feels like she is lonely because she has not had a consistent support system but she is feeling proud of herself for her being close to reaching her goals of obtaining a college degree. Brittany stated that she plans to use the lessons that she learns to help other children in foster care so that she can help them learn the lessons that she wishes she would have learned earlier.

Composite Structural Description: Integration of Structural and Textural Themes

Participant # 2

Structural Theme 1: Financial Conflict

Textural theme 1: Lack of budgeting knowledge

Textural theme 2: Meeting basic needs

Structural Theme 2: Foster Care Trauma

Textural theme 1: Relationship with foster mother

Structural Theme 3: Health

Textural theme 1-Impact of health on grades

Textural theme 2: Lack of knowledge about health care system

Textural theme 3: Limited support of health problems

Structural Theme 4: Strategies to Overcome Conflict

Subtheme 1: Overcoming Financial Conflict

Subtheme 2: Dealing with Trauma

Subtheme 3: Gaining Sources of Support

Individual Textural Description

Rose

Background

Rose is an 18 year old black female that is a senior at a high school in Central Florida. She is expected to graduate in 2015. She plans to attend Valencia Community College in the fall. Rose stated that she grew up in Orlando and has had limited contact with her parents. She stated that she spent about 4 years in foster care and currently resides in the group home for young adults that are enrolled in the extended foster care program. The participant stated that her biggest sources of conflict include her lack of confidence and knowledge about college entrance exams as well as having a lack of personal support.

College entrance exams

When asked about her biggest source of conflict, the participant indicated that she has been having academic struggles. Her biggest barrier into college has been successfully completing her college entrance exams. When she spoke on the matter, she stated the following: "They don't really give you a lot of time to take the test and so every time I take it I start to freeze up and it's not really fair because I study for it and when it's time to take it I don't really feel like I'm ready for it. When I'm taking the test I look and the clock and that's all I can think about is how much time I have left. And then when they say 'You have 15 minutes' that's when I just start guessing and I just put whatever." When asked if she was receiving support to help pass the test, Participant replied the following: "Yeah it's been helping somewhat but it's still like whenever it's time for me to take the test I start to get anxious and then I just start guessing so I don't really know what to do about that."

Personal Support

Brittany also stated that she has experienced feelings of loneliness while trying to finish high school and enroll into college. She stated that her college experience has been harder due to not having a strong support system: “I have a few people that I consider to be my friends but I don’t have too many people in my circle. There are a couple of people who are in the same program that I’m in that I hang out with. I’ll talk to them while I’m at school. A couple of them want to go to either Valencia or UCF and a couple want to go somewhere else so we talk about school together.”

Rose stated that she feels God is her only consistent supporter:

“...even when I can’t talk to anyone else, I know that I can go to God any time of the day. I try to pray when I first wake up and before I go to bed. I used to pray all the time when I would feel like running away because everyone was getting on my nerves. I don’t really get to go to church that often because I don’t have a ride but I listen to gospel music on my phone when I start feeling stressed. Like that is really what I first do when I’m feeling overwhelmed. At the end of the day so many people just come and go in my life and I feel like God is always going to be there for me like He’s been my whole life.”

Coping Strategies

The participant was asked how she handles of her feeling of being unsupported and her anxiety concerning her college entrance exams. In regards to the exams, the participant stated the following:

“I’m trying to study harder. It’s hard because I am working too so when I get out of school I head straight to work. Then when I get home I don’t really feel like trying to do much of

anything else except chill and hang out with my friends. That's why I'm glad the school offers tutoring because at least I can get some studying done during the day time."

She also indicated that in regards to her feelings of having little support, she is content with having a deep spiritual faith to fill the void of being close with her family or having a strong support system.

Summary

When asked to describe her college journey, Rose stated the following:

"It would be the start of a new beginning for me. I've been through so much and I feel like going to college after I graduate would give me the opportunity to better myself. I really want to help other people one day so especially kids that are in my position that don't have parents in their lives. I already know that I want to be successful and I want to be able to go to college so I can get a good job and not have to depend on anyone but myself. I want to go to college and major in psychology. I want to be a counselor and talk to people about their issues and help them figure out their problems like I've been working to figure out mine."

Composite Structural Description: Integration of Structural and Textural Themes

Participant # 3

Structural Theme 1: Academic Struggles

Textural theme 1: College Entrance Exam

Structural Theme 2: Personal Conflict

Textural theme 1: Feelings of isolation

Structural Theme 3: Personal Support

Textural theme 1: Lack of Support

Structural Theme 4: Coping Strategies

Textural theme 1: Spiritual faith

Textural theme 2: Motivation to work harder

Individual Textural Description

Tyler

Background

Tyler is an 18 year old black male that is a senior at a high school in Central Florida. He is expected to graduate in 2015. He is planning to attend college in the fall but he is unsure of which college he wants to attend yet. When asked about his major conflicts that have affected his pursuit of going to college, he indicated that his biggest conflict has been learning how to become independent and having feelings of frustration.

Independent Living Skills

Tyler stated that his biggest struggle has been working towards gaining independent living skills. When asked for an example on the matter, he said the following:

“Getting up in the morning is hard because you don’t really have anybody here making sure you’re up and getting ready to go to school. You have to go pretty much on your own because we’re basically adults so I’m late all the time. My teacher told me that if I miss anymore school then I may not graduate so I try to get up and make it.”

Tyler also discussed being labeled as a “foster kid” and how it has affected his confidence as a student. When asked to describe his journey as a college student, he said the following: “It’s been bumpy. I have a lot of stuff going on and I get frustrated but I try to push through it because I know May 21st is right around the corner and I really want to graduate so I can prove others wrong. People always talking about because I’m a foster care kid and I’m black then I’m not going to make it and I’m just going to end up in prison or on the streets or something so I really want to show everybody that I’m better than that.

Support

When asked to describe his support system, Tyler spoke highly of both his peers and faculty: “I’ve got a really good strong support system from the people at my school. They help me so when I’m there they stay focused on graduating motivating me and motivate by telling me to do better. That I can do it. The teachers are real cool and they help me with trying to turn in my assignments and if I have a question they’re good about answering and they don’t get an attitude with me for the most part.”

He also stated the following:

“Well the people at my school are always telling me to work on doing things better like making it to school on time and working on figuring out what I want to do after I finish school. I have godparents too. They help me with trying to budget my money and they even helped me to figure out my bank account after my case worker helped me set one up when I was getting ready to age out.”

Summary

Overall, Tyler described the biggest challenges for his journey as a college student to be those related to learning how to manage his life skills. He is eager about graduating in May and enrolling into a college in the fall.

Composite Structural Description: Integration of Structural and Textural Themes

Participant # 4

Structural Theme 1: Independent Living Skills

Textural theme 1: Learning to self-motivate

Textural theme 2: Moving beyond label

Structural Theme 2: Support

Textural theme 1: Peer Support

Textural theme 2: Faculty Support

Individual Textural Description

Nelah

Nelah is a 20 year old black female that is in her first year at Valencia Community College. She is expected to complete her AA in 2016. She stated that she was in foster care from the age of 14 until she turned 18. She stated that she used to fight with her mother and that is how she ended up in foster care.

Financial Conflict

When asked about barriers that affected her academic pursuits, Nelah stated the following:

Well for me the biggest issue is money. It's like you go pick up check from the office and then it's pretty much up to you how you want to spend it. And then after that sometimes you think okay I'm getting ready to buy this thing and you go ahead and buy it but then when it's time for you to buy something that you really need you're like "oh damn" and then you realize you don't have the money to spend because you've spent it on this other thing that you really didn't need in the first place. And then you have to go to people and ask to borrow money but that doesn't really work because it's not like you have family or anybody that you can call when you need to borrow money. Trying to save up money is hard so that's a big issue. And it's frustrating because when you have paid all of your bills then you want to spend a little bit on yourself like getting your hair done or going shopping. So then you start to think "Do I put this money into my bank account or do I go ahead and get my braids?" and it's just a hard decision.

Support System

Nelah also indicated her support system and the inconsistency of her circle. She stated the following:

Well because I'm always having to start over with meeting new people it just makes everything 10 times harder like for instance I don't really know who I can talk to what to do when

I'm done with school like if I'll be able to stay here or if I'll have to get an apartment. It's like certain things I wish I didn't have to worry about and I wish I could just focus on going to school instead of having to worry about things that other young people don't have to really worry about. At any moment your caseworker or someone can get a promotion and while it's good for them it's bad for me because I'm thinking great now I have to meet someone new and since I'm shy it's hard to have to retell your story and try to figure out if they're genuine or if they're even going to be your caseworker for longer than 3 months. Like for them it's just a job but this is my life! Sometimes people help you just because it's their job but not necessarily because they care. Even the mentors will come but a lot don't stick around that long so you don't really want to trust them. And even where I'm living here at the group home there are people who come for a day with gifts or presentations but you feel like they're only there to take pictures of you that they can post and feel good about themselves and meanwhile they're not really helping you the way that you hope for them to help you. Like you have people that you literally will only see once a year at Christmas when they drop off presents and then you won't see them again for another year. And like I get that people have lives and I'm not saying I want people to hold my hand because I can take care of myself but I feel like it would be nice if you had people in your life who will be there consistently instead here one day and then they're going on with their business. You know that people work but there is not that much work in the world that you can't take the time out to come here and to be honest people make time for what they feel they need to make time for and really if they wanted to be here then they would be here without any issues and without it being an emergency before they decide to come here.

Summary

Overall, Nelah was optimistic about obtaining her college degree. While she has had to face financial conflicts and an inconsistent support system, Nelah stated that she is determined to obtain her degree. She stated the following: “My journey has been one that has taught me that I can handle anything.

I know that when I graduate in the future I am going to be so proud of myself because I did it on my own.”

Composite Structural Description: Integration of Structural and Textural Themes

Participant # 5

Structural Theme 2: Financial Conflict

Textural theme 1: Spending control

Structural Theme 2: Support

Textural theme 1: Consistent support system

Textural theme 2: Role of mentors

Individual Textural Description

Ryan

Background

Ryan is an 18 year old black male that is completing a GED program. He is expected to obtain his GED in the upcoming weeks and plans to enroll into University of Central Florida in the fall. He stated that he working on his GED plans to attend the University of Central Florida in the fall. Ryan stated that he grew up in Orlando and has spent most of his life in foster care. When asked about the conflicts that he feels he has faced, he stated that his biggest issue has been gaining college access.

College Access

When asked about gaining college access, the participant stated that he feels the application process has been his biggest barrier. He elaborated on the topic:

When I go online to try and start it I feel like there's so much information that I have to put down then I start getting confused. It's not like I've applied for college before so I don't know what I'm doing. And because I don't have a mom and dad like other people that you can just call for help I feel like I'm having to do this thing on my own. It's almost like you really want to just say 'eff it' but then you know if you don't apply for school then you have to worry about being kicked out of the IL program. I want to go to college but I just feel like I can't even turn the application in so how am I going to actually make it in college? That's when I start to

doubt myself and I know I can't do that. I've been talking to some of the people here who are already in college and they told me that they would help me with the application but the ones who said that they would help me are always busy so we haven't really connected yet.

Support System

When asked about his support system, Ryan stated that in regards to support from his teachers, he felt that he did not view them as a resource. He made the following statement:

“To be honest I don't really get along with most of my teachers. I feel like a lot of them see me and try to give me a hard time. Like a lot of them will have attitudes for no reason and I just get tired of it. Sometimes I don't even feel like talking to them and it's just hard because I know I need them for things like my recommendation letters. I just don't have that kind of connection with them.” Ryan stated that he would go to his friends for support before he would go to a person in a position of authority:

“My entire life I have been moved around and I have had to deal with mean teachers, mean foster families and even some mean mentors. I don't even feel like when it comes to older people that I can go to them for help. So when I need some help on something I usually just talk to my own friends. I know that they are going to be there while a lot of the mentors or caseworkers will only be there for a few months.”

Coping Strategy

When asked about how he copes with the struggles of gaining college access and how he would describe his journey on trying to gain access, Ryan stated the following:

“I just really motivate myself to keep going because I know that no one else is going to motivate me. I'm just going to keep it moving and do my own research on the applications. They

are going to have a few people come here for a workshop next month so I'm planning on going to it."

Composite Structural Description: Integration of Structural and Textural Themes

Ryan

Structural Theme 1: Enrollment

Textural theme 1: Completing college application

Textural theme 2: Assistance on completing application

Structural Theme 2: Financial Conflict

Textural theme 1: Financial Independence

Structural Theme 3: Supports

Textural theme 1-Interaction with Teachers

Textural theme 2: Interaction with Peers

Structural Theme 4: Strategies to Overcome Conflict

Textural theme 1: Self-motivation

Individual Textural Description

Jennifer

Background

Jennifer is a 20 year old Caucasian female that attends Seminole State College. She is in her first year and plans to finish her program in 2016.

Relationships

When asked about challenges that have affected her journey as a student so far, Jennifer stated the following:

“I would say that my journey has been somewhat a lonely one. It’s hard when people talk about their family and knowing you don’t have anyone that you can call and go to when you’re in trouble. I feel like I would have been able to go to college sooner if I had a mom or dad in my life that I could go to with help on things like money or even a place to stay. I mean I’m used to being independent and I’ll manage but like I said I think it would have been a lot easier for me if I had some family in my corner.”

Jennifer stated that she still has contact with her siblings and that she has been able to connect with them and also views them as a source of support. However, she also views her siblings as a source of conflict because she is constantly helping them. She stated the following:

“I still talk to my brother and sister and we see each other like once a month. I have even lived with them for a few months. It is hard though because they are not interested in going to college and I don’t feel like they understand or respect me being in school. They will ask to borrow money and when I tell them I can’t afford to give them money, they get upset because they think I’m getting all of my bills paid because I’m a college student. It is so frustrating

because I really want to keep in touch with them because they're my family but at the same time it's almost like they are a distraction."

Financial Conflict

Participant7 stated that even though she is good at budgeting her financial assistance, she still feels stressed due to her finances. On the topic of working and attending school, Jennifer made the following comment:

"It's not like you have someone that you can call when you need to borrow money. And I like I said other people are always asking me for money because they think I have plenty of it. I working at Wendy's and so I'm having to rush out of class and rush to work and sometimes it is so overwhelming. I just wish I could focus on going to school without having to work to pay for my extra bills like my cell phone. And I know that it's partly my fault because I do like to shop but I just wish I didn't have to feel stressed all of the time about money."

Interactions on Campus

When asked about her relationship with her peers and college faculty, Jennifer stated that she didn't see her peers on campus as a source of support but that she does view her professors as a valuable resource. She made the following statement:

"I don't really have a lot of friends on campus but that's mainly because I'm always working and so I don't have time to really build a lot of friendships. I do have a good relationship with my professors especially the ones for the classes that I am taking this semester. For instance I am always email them if I have a question about an assignment or if I'm going to miss class and they respond pretty quickly. I haven't told anyone about my background because I don't like the way people treat you when you tell them that you grew up in foster care. But when it comes to school

stuff I feel pretty comfortable talking to my professors and going to them for support and help with my assignments.

Coping Strategies

When asked about coping strategies, Jennifer stated that she deals with her financial conflict by trying to put herself on a big budget. She stated that she makes a list of her bills at the beginning of the month and figures out how much she has left over as spending money after her bills are paid. She stated the following:

“I’m really motivated to finish school so I can really start my career. I know that if I keep pushing myself I’ll get there. Even though it gets lonely sometimes I deal with it by going to church when I have time off and I pray all of the time. I know that God is with me and I’m going to get through this. I am not going to let my past get in my way.”

Composite Structural Description: Integration of Structural and Textural Themes

Participant # 7

Structural Theme 1: Relationships

Textural theme 1: Relationship with Biological Family

Textural theme 2: Relationship with Peers

Structural Theme 2: Financial Conflict

Textural theme 1: Financial Independence

Structural Theme 3: Interactions on Campus

Textural theme 1-Interaction with Faculty

Textural theme 2: Interaction with Peers

Structural Theme 4: Strategies to Overcome Conflict

Subtheme 1: Overcoming Financial Conflict

Subtheme 2: Overcoming Family Conflict

Individual Textural Description

Pamela

Background

Pamela is a 19 year old black female that is a freshman at University of Central Florida. She is expected to graduate in 2015. She indicated that she has been in foster care since she was a preteen and currently resides in a group home for the participants of the extended foster care program. Pamela shared her background, saying that she was initially removed from mother and stepfather due to domestic violence. She stated that after she was placed in foster care she begin to act out and run away from her group homes. She stated that when she was reunified with her mother, the relationship was strained and she was placed back in foster care after her mother refused to pick her up from the juvenile detention center.

Feelings of Isolation

Pamela stated that she feels she has moved on from acting out behaviorally, but she feels that it is too late to repair the relationship with her family. As a result she feels that there is a deep personal conflict that stems from not being close with her family. She made the following quote on the topic:

“I think for me it would be nice if I could find at least one or two people that I could talk to on campus. All of those people talk about missing their home or parents or even just talk about going home for the holidays and for me I can't relate to them. It's almost annoying because I wish I had other people that I could be with on holidays. For Christmas I had was pretty much by myself because I couldn't get a ride to my old group home. It makes you feel like nobody at your school even cares about you.”

Interactions on Campus

Pamela stated that she has made efforts to build a new network on campus with her peers and staff. In regards to building new relationships, Participant stated the following:

“I’m trying to build new friendships on campus. I have a few people that I meet up with for study groups. It actually helps a lot because we text each other if we need help with an assignment or if one of us ends up missing class we can share notes. I never thought I would be the type of person that would be trying to meet new people but since I’ve started school I feel like I am seeing a new side of the world that isn’t always negative. I mean my life is far from perfect but I love being at school.”

She described her relationship with the faculty as being rocky. She stated the following:

“My relationship with my professors is a little rocky. I don’t really like one my professors in particular because I feel like he’s always giving me a hard time. I get along with my other professors but this one. Like I have tried to talk to him about my situation and let him know that I may be a little late to class sometimes because I’m waiting on the bus or I have to leave early to go to work and I feel like he holds it against me. Right now I have a D in that class and I already know if I don’t pass that class that I’m going to end up having drop out because my GPA is already too low. I have tried talking to his man in person and I feel like when we did talk he was just rude and disrespectful and tried to talk to me like I’m a little boy. I was also thinking about just dropping out of the class and retaking it but the only problem with that is that I would have to wait all the way to next spring before I can take it again. I don’t really know what to do.

Composite Structural Description: Integration of Structural and Textural Themes

Participant # 8

Structural Theme 1: Personal Conflict

Textural Theme 1: Feelings of Isolation

Structural Theme 2: Interactions on Campus

Textural theme 1-Interaction with Faculty

Textural theme 2: Interaction with Peers

Structural Theme 4: Strategies to Overcome Conflict

Textural theme 1-Building new relationships

Individual Textural Description

Sharon

Background

Sharon is an 18 year old black female at Valencia Community College. She stated that she has lived in Orlando, FL her entire life and that she has not seen her parents since she was 16 years old. She stated that she currently resides in the group home for foster care alumni but plans to move into an apartment in the fall.

Relationships

Sharon stated that she has had a hard time connecting with the staff on her campus and feeling fully engaged into school. She has lost a lot motivation for going to school. Sharon made the following statement:

“I have a really hard time respecting people of authority. It makes me really mad when an older person tries to tell me what to do or when they get an attitude. I know part of the reason why I feel that way is because of the abuse I felt from my stepfather and my mother. It is difficult for me to trust adults because I feel like so many have lied to me. Now that I’m older I know I need to let go of that anger but it’s hard. And it’s even harder because you know the professor is not being mean on purpose but in the moment I don’t care.”

Changing Perception

Sharon stated that while she is continuing to deal with gaining trust of people in authority, she stated that she is working to improve her outlook of her environment so that she can have a more successful transition. She has started seeing a counselor and she has maintained a positive relationship with two mentors. She made the following statement: “When I first started going to Valencia, I didn’t really want to talk to anyone. I really didn’t feel like I could connect

with any of those people because they would judge me as soon as they learned about my past. But since I've started I feel like I have met more people that I can trust."

When asked what obtaining a college degree means to her, Sharon the following: "For me to finish college and obtain a college degree would be a big deal. It would be the biggest accomplishment of my life. When I was younger I was depressed a lot and didn't think that my life mattered much. Being able to be on my own and make it without having to rely on anyone."

Composite Structural Description: Integration of Structural and Textural Themes

Participant # 9

Structural Theme 1: Relationships

Textural theme 1: Relationship with College Faculty

Textural theme 2: Relationship with Peers

Structural Theme 2: Perception

Textural theme 1: Changing perception

Structural Theme 3: Coping Strategies

Textural Theme 1: Intrinsic Motivation

Individual Textural Description

Gloria

Background

Gloria is a black female that attends a local university. The Participant asked that her school not to be named in the study. She stated that both of her parents went to prison she consequently ended up in the foster care system. She stated that she was raised by her aunt while her brothers and sisters went to live with her grandmother. She stated that she has maintained contact with both of her parents but she is really closer to her father than her mother because she is “more disappointed in her”.

Interactions on Campus

Gloria stated that she has had a positive experience in regards to interacting with her faculty and peers. She stated that she has an open line of communication with her professors and she feels that it helps. She has been able to maintain a high GPA and she credits her constant communication with her professors so that she understands the assignments. In regards to her interaction with her peers she stated the following:

“I have met a lot of really nice people since I’ve started school and I have even joined a few organizations. I’m super active on campus and so it can get hectic sometimes but I feel really happy when I’m there. It’s like when you’re in school you are in a totally different world.

Coping Strategy

I plan on going to law school or going getting a job that allows me to help people when I graduate. I don’t know how I’m going to do everything but I’m motivated because I don’t have to worry about tuition just making sure I keep my grades up. Finishing school and helping others especially those that are in foster care would be my biggest accomplishment. So that’s what

keeps me going. Dropping out of college isn't an option and I am definitely going to get my degree.

Composite Structural Description: Integration of Structural and Textural Themes

Participant # 10

Structural Theme 1: Relationships

Textural theme 1: Relationship with Aunt

Textural theme 2: Relationship with Siblings

Textural theme 3: Relationship with Mother

Structural Theme 2: Interactions on Campus

Textural theme 1: Interaction with Faculty

Textural theme 2: Interaction with Peers

Structural Theme 3: Strategies to Overcome Conflict

Textural theme 1: Motivation

Biographical Sketch

I received my Bachelor of Science in Psychology from Florida State University and Master of Public Administration from Strayer University. I have a professional background in child welfare. I have worked as an Information and Eligibility Specialist for Community Based Care of Central Florida (CBC). CBC is the lead agency overseeing foster care and adoption services in Orange, Osceola and Seminole Counties. I have also previously worked as a Family Case Manager at One Hope United and has volunteered as a certified Suicide Intervention Trainer for Heart of Florida United Way. During my year of service with AmeriCorps I volunteered as a Program Organizer for Kairos Prison Ministry International, Inc. In 2013, I organized a step team for female youth at Great Oaks Village, a group home for foster children in Central Florida. In addition to organizing performances, I also host workshops on life skills for the young ladies. My current studies of interest include child welfare, social movements, and conflict analysis and resolution.